

Audio file

[Study 13 The Greatest Gift of God 2126gsm_james_1_v16-17.mp3](#)

Transcript

00:00:00

Please turn with me in the Scriptures to the Epistle of James in chapter 1 and reading from verse 16 down to verse 22.

00:00:12

James chapter 1 and reading from verse 16.

00:00:17

Do not err, my beloved brethren.

00:00:23

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.

00:00:28

and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

00:00:38

Of his own will he begat us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

00:00:48

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

00:00:58

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

00:01:02

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

00:01:19

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

00:01:27

and the Lord will add his blessing to the reading of his word my friends this morning we're going to focus on verses 16 and 17 and we're going to look at this passage of Scripture under the title

the greatest gift of God the greatest gift of God what is it well friends we know what God's greatest gift to this world is it's not a thing

00:01:57

It's the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

00:02:00

The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 15, Thanks be unto God for his indescribable gift.

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Another translation of that same Greek text is unspeakable or an indescribable gift.

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Jesus Christ is the greatest gift

00:02:24

that God has ever given to this fallen, sinful, decaying world.

00:02:33

But what is the greatest gift that God has given to an individual?

00:02:38

Who is God's greatest gift or what is God's greatest gift to us here this morning who are believers, who belong to God?

00:02:51

Well, the greatest gift that God has ever given us

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James writes about here in verse 17.

00:02:59

Sorry, verse 18, Of his own will begat to us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

00:03:11

The greatest gift that God has ever given an individual who belongs to him is the new birth.

00:03:19

What is the greatest gift that God has given to lost, helpless sinners like us?

00:03:24

who once upon a time walked in the broad road that led to destruction.

00:03:28

It is the new birth.

00:03:31

Without the new birth, we could not call on God in prayer as His children.

00:03:37

We could not know His blessings in this life as His children.

00:03:42

We could not even know His sustaining help in trial, difficulty, and storms of life without being born again.

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You might be surprised to hear that, because today the new birth is just seen as just another part of Christian terminology.

00:04:07

But without the new birth, none of us would be here.

00:04:13

Think about that.

00:04:15

None of us would be in this place unless God was either doing a work in us

00:04:22

or had already planted the life of grace within our souls.

00:04:29

Now, James does something very interesting here, because in the previous section, and we saw this last week, we looked at the God of all goodness, and we learned five things.

00:04:43

I mean, we'll just remind you, first of all, God is the source of all good.

00:04:48

Secondly, God's goodness is not mixed with error.

00:04:52

Third, our God is a gracious Father.

00:04:56

Fourth, God's gifts are given and never recalled.

00:05:01

Fifth, God's good gifts come to us through our Mediator, Jesus Christ.

00:05:09

And so following on from that, we're going to now look at this passage with a different lens, if you like.

00:05:16

We're going to focus on the God

00:05:19

first of all, and his excellency, and his immutability, and then the gift that he gives, the new birth.

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So we'll deal with the first part quickly, and we'll focus on the third point a little more detail.

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But first of all, the excellency of the author.

00:05:39

Look at these verse.

00:05:41

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.

00:05:51

And cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

00:06:00

And I want you to notice this, every good gift and every perfect gift.

00:06:10

It sounds poetic, doesn't it?

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Perhaps James here is reciting a well-known phrase that was used by the apostles to describe God.

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And if that is so, then we have here, as it were, the exact words that might have been used in prayer or in worship in the early church.

00:06:39

Every good gift

00:06:41

and every perfect gift.

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This gift and giving, it's very interesting.

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It speaks, really, of a certain application.

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The good gift comes from a gracious God.

00:07:06

Good gifts come from a God of grace.

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And in this little phrase in verse 17, the word gift is used twice.

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The first sentence, the first Greek term, speaks of the act of giving, the grace of God.

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The second word,

00:07:32

which is a little further on, Every good gift is the grace of God.

00:07:37

The second word is Every perfect gift speaks of the thing given.

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You see, we might have thought that James was just repeating himself, but believe you me, there is no wasted words in the Word of God.

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Every word is important.

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So what we have here then is the grace of God

00:08:00

And the generosity of God is in the gift that God gives.

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You could put it like this.

00:08:09

This word, this act of giving, giving means useful and beneficial in its effects.

00:08:17

So the source of the good gift comes from a generous hearted God who is gracious and gives good gifts that will benefit us.

00:08:29

Now we've summarized it like this, friends, God's purpose and name in giving is for the benefit of his creatures, though most creatures don't realize it, but specifically for the benefit of his children.

00:08:50

What kind of gifts does this generous God, that's why we've looked at this word excellency.

00:08:56

What is this excellent?

00:08:57

Well, if you marked an exam as a teacher once upon a time, and you found very few mistakes in somebody's little paper-- maybe I'm taking a primary school here.

00:09:11

And the teacher felt they could only write excellent below their finished story.

00:09:20

Well, that would be quite an achievement.

00:09:24

I don't know whether you've ever had an excellent at the bottom of your work.

00:09:29

I know this.

00:09:31

If you had, and if you have, maybe you've had it recently.

00:09:35

Probably not written anymore, but probably putting at the end of it in type.

00:09:39

But if you have, then it spurs you on, doesn't it?

00:09:44

It spurs you on to achieve another excellent report.

00:09:52

Perhaps some of us have had an excellent school report after a year.

00:09:57

Most of us have never had that.

00:10:00

We might have, This needs to improve in whatever area.

00:10:07

But dear friends, you might smile, but God's gifts do not need to be improved upon.

00:10:17

They are excellent.

00:10:20

They are excellent in their character and they are excellent in their giving.

00:10:27

God would never do anything evil to His children.

00:10:35

And immediately someone will say, Well, what about the struggles I go through and the suffering I go through?

00:10:41

And I'm afraid this is not the message on that, but just let me say this, even in the struggles,

00:10:50

God gives us gifts to help us persevere in the storms of life.

00:10:59

This is the excellency of the good gifts.

00:11:04

And then secondly, if you noticed, there's the every good and every perfect gift is from above.

00:11:14

It's from above and cometh down.

00:11:16

And now we focus more

00:11:19

on the inestimable character of our Heavenly Father.

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If we've seen the excellency of God, now we're going to see that God's character cannot be estimated.

00:11:34

We cannot weigh it up.

00:11:37

We cannot understand it.

00:11:39

We cannot comprehend it.

00:11:41

It's so wide, we can't get round it, and so low, we can't get under it, and so high, you can't get above it.

00:11:52

God's character is beyond our greatest imagination.

00:11:59

He is so vast.

00:12:03

He's greater than the universe itself.

00:12:08

And this is the remarkable thing, that this God is so excellent, and so glorious, and so infinite, and so immutable, and that's the word we want to look at here.

00:12:25

He does not change.

00:12:27

That's what James does with two little phrases here.

00:12:32

He speaks about variableness,

00:12:35

variableness, it's a bit of a tongue twister, and shadow of turning.

00:12:44

We live in a variable world.

00:12:48

Our lives are so variable.

00:12:51

Even in scientific experiments, there is always the variables, but not with God.

00:13:03

There's no half measures with God, because He's our Father.

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He has indeed, here, James describes Him as the Father of lights.

00:13:21

What does that mean?

00:13:22

Well, we touched on this last week, but in ancient times,

00:13:28

Bapostals and the people of that generation, and perhaps even up until the last hundred years, would often look at the night sky and they would see these great, vast arrays of stars and galaxies, and they'd see the Milky Way.

00:13:49

And if you're in the southern hemisphere, you'll see a different aspect of the star-lit sky than you do in the northern hemisphere.

00:13:58

And that's one aspect, the father of lights, the creator of all lights, all lights, not artificial lights.

00:14:12

But God created the people who developed the artificial lights.

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Thomas and Edison, for instance, discovered electricity and there was a light bulb.

00:14:29

But what we need to remind ourselves here is that without God who is light, there would be no light.

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And that's in contrast to darkness.

00:14:44

Light, of course, doesn't always have to speak of physical light.

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It speaks of revelation.

00:14:53

And unless God had revealed His character to us in His Word and by His Spirit, we would never understand the Christian message.

00:15:04

It's also light is used in the Bible in contrast to falsehood or lies.

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In other words, when you read the Word of God, especially in the Psalms, sometimes the Psalmist is speaking of the Word of God as the light.

00:15:23

It is a light unto our paths.

00:15:27

It is the light that leads our way.

00:15:31

And of course, when the Lord Jesus was on earth with His disciples in the last night with His disciples in the upper room, He said, I am the way, the truth, and the light.

00:15:47

Truth there, of course, is truth in Himself.

00:15:52

and the light of God's truth is found in Christ.

00:15:59

This Father is the Father of lights.

00:16:04

He's a gracious Father.

00:16:07

He's a good Father.

00:16:09

He's a kind Father.

00:16:13

We are His children by the new birth.

00:16:18

Without that new birth, we could not be His children.

00:16:24

We were born twice as Christians, and we'll see more of that in a moment.

00:16:30

We can call unto God, let's be practical here, as our Heavenly Father, who has created the whole universe, the God of the universe, we can call Him our Father.

00:16:44

Of course,

00:16:46

This phrase is used by in religious terms and religious services, but only the true believer can say, God, our Father, O God, my Heavenly Father.

00:17:02

Without God intervening in our lives, without God planting the seed of life in our souls,

00:17:11

Without God awakening us and convicting us of our sin, we could never repent and believe and trust in Christ as our Savior and call God our Father.

00:17:26

We sadly underestimate this.

00:17:30

We don't live in a culture.

00:17:33

Perhaps some of us come from a culture where it was dominated by religion.

00:17:42

Religion that seemed to guide us in the right path, but we would never have known God as our Father.

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The performers, this is one of their greatest discoveries.

00:18:02

that the one who had not only put the sun and the moon and the stars in their place, but named them one by one, was their Heavenly Father.

00:18:24

Because He's our Heavenly Father, there is no variableness and there's no shadow of turning.

00:18:33

And everything, every gift God gives us,

00:18:38

is an excellent gift.

00:18:41

Now, lastly and thirdly, I just want you to notice in verse 18, Of his own will begat to us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

00:18:53

We've looked at the excellency of the author of good gifts, we've looked at the inestimable character of our Heavenly Father, and this one's much easier.

00:19:05

The most excellent gift.

00:19:08

It's an excellent gift of his own will.

00:19:12

Notice this.

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See how careful James is here.

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Of his own will.

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Whose own will?

00:19:24

Well, not James's own will.

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Because, of course, the context speaks of the one who is the Father of lights.

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And a little further on in verse 20, the righteousness of God.

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It's God who wills.

00:19:43

for a sinner to be born again.

00:19:47

There's a wonderful hymn in our hymn book, Thine eye diffused A quickening ray, I arose, went forth, the dungeon flamed with light.

00:20:03

Whose eye diffused the quickening ray?

00:20:07

Some of us may have sang that hymn, And can it be?

00:20:09

and thought what it should be say, Mine eye diffused a quickening ray.

00:20:14

No.

00:20:16

Wesley got it right.

00:20:18

God's eye diffused a quickening ray.

00:20:23

I don't know how to explain that in poetic terms.

00:20:27

It's perhaps he's trying to convey to us that God's sight and God's will

00:20:36

brought forth the quickening light in the soul of man.

00:20:42

A man who's-- many of us have read his book, Mr.

00:20:45

Scougal, wrote these words, The life of God in the soul of man.

00:20:56

It's God's will.

00:20:58

It's His sovereign will.

00:21:01

It's His will of purpose.

00:21:04

But it's also His will that cannot be changed.

00:21:10

God's will is that we should be born again.

00:21:18

Now, what does this word born again mean?

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Well, James used the word begati us.

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That's an interesting term.

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Literally, it means He birtheth us.

00:21:28

He birtheth us.

00:21:30

What does it mean to be born again?

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Well, here's some passages to read later.

00:21:34

John chapter 1, verse 13, John 3, verse 3, John 3, verse 7.

00:21:41

The Lord Jesus says, Ye must be born again.

00:21:48

God plants life in the soul of man and woman and children.

00:21:56

Are we too old to be born again?

00:21:58

No.

00:22:00

Are we too young to be born again?

00:22:03

No.

00:22:04

It's all according to God's will and purpose.

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There will be signs following.

00:22:11

But let me just give you 4 things that will help us.

00:22:15

First of all, this regeneration is a creative work of God.

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I don't know if we see it like this.

00:22:25

Yes, we rejoice in God creating all things.

00:22:29

But that God should create something in our little souls?

00:22:34

Yes, that's what God has done.

00:22:38

That's what God can do.

00:22:41

That's what God will do according to His will.

00:22:48

It's a creative act.

00:22:52

It's not an invention.

00:22:55

God creates life in the soul where spiritual life did not exist.

00:23:04

The natural man does not discern the things of the Spirit, nor can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.

00:23:13

So the Apostle Paul wrote, And the fact that we know God, and walk with God, and love God, is a proof that we have been

00:23:25

given life from God.

00:23:27

It's an invisible, silent, almost imperceptible work.

00:23:40

I don't believe anyone can say the moment they were born again.

00:23:46

I know many of us can say the moment or the time we trusted in Christ.

00:23:53

Most of the time they're quite close together, but it is a creative work.

00:24:01

A man or a woman or a child cannot, how would I put this, earn this new birth, be worthy of this new birth, or even create this birth in themselves.

00:24:18

No preacher can't do this creative act.

00:24:23

No great evangelist.

00:24:26

It's the work, the divine work of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

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That's what the Lord Jesus was speaking to, this religious man in John chapter 3.

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So the first thing is it's a creative work.

00:24:43

Secondly, it's instantaneous.

00:24:46

It's instantaneous.

00:24:48

It's done.

00:24:50

It's done at once.

00:24:51

There are no degrees in it.

00:24:53

In sanctification we grow in grace, but a man or woman or child is born again at once.

00:25:03

They are not perfect.

00:25:06

They are not complete.

00:25:10

Some writers compare this work of regeneration to a conception of a little child in her mother's womb.

00:25:24

Of all the good gifts that God could give his children, this is the greatest gift.

00:25:32

Now, of course, I've already said this, but I will repeat it.

00:25:35

The evidence of the new birth is seen in the new life.

00:25:41

There are signs following.

00:25:42

Let me give you some of them, or maybe I'll give them towards the end.

00:25:52

Third, the true Christian, this regeneration act, means that he's a new creature.

00:26:05

This is so important in the day and age we live.

00:26:11

To be born again, says one great writer,

00:26:14

as it were, to enter upon a new existence, to have a new mind, a new heart, a new views, new principles, new tastes, new affections, new likings, new dislikings, new fears, new joys, new sorrows, new love, loves to things once hated, new hatred to things once loved, new thoughts of God and ourselves, and the world, and the life to come, and salvation.

00:26:45

Have we ever really thought about what God has done in our souls?

00:26:51

To enter upon a new existence, to have a new mind, perhaps you would like to say renewed, a new heart, a new views, new principles, new tastes.

00:27:04

Loving the things that you once hated and hating the things you once loved, does that describe us here?

00:27:14

Another man puts it like this, the power to set their heart right, to renew the springs of action, comes from God through Christ.

00:27:22

The sense of the infinite worth of the single soul and the work of God, even in a man at his worst, are the gifts of God.

00:27:34

God's will influences his activity.

00:27:38

It is by God's will that we are born again.

00:27:43

It is a creative act.

00:27:48

And it is an instantaneous act.

00:27:52

And it means that the man or the woman or the child is now a new creature.

00:27:58

But finally, it is a gracious act.

00:28:04

God giving the new birth to needy, helpless, hopeless,

00:28:12

tried, tested, struggling sinners.

00:28:18

This is the essence of the Gospel.

00:28:21

Oh, what amazing words of grace are in the Gospel found, suited to every sinner's case who knows the joyful sound.

00:28:33

Poor, sinful, thirsty, fainting souls are freely welcome here.

00:28:39

Salvation, like a river, rolls

00:28:42

abundant, free, and clear.

00:28:52

What a thing it is to be born again of the Holy Spirit, to truly have God's work in our souls.

00:29:08

We must never forget this.

00:29:13

God's action in the new birth

00:29:16

has not been influenced by anything in us or in anyone else.

00:29:23

You cannot be conferred with the new birth.

00:29:29

No one, no matter who they are or what they've done or what position they have, can confer the new birth on anyone.

00:29:38

You must be conferred by God.

00:29:40

But let me just be a bit more...

00:29:44

practical here.

00:29:45

What instrument does God use in this new birth?

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Well, He tells us of His own will, begeth, with the word of truth.

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The word of truth, of course, straight away.

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We now hear this phrase again and again, don't we?

00:30:03

The word of truth.

00:30:05

Peter describes this word as being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.

00:30:15

Paul speaks of the same word in this way.

00:30:18

Ephesians 1, verse 13, In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

00:30:28

To hear the word of truth, the Holy Bible, the teaching and the preaching of the word of God, God uses His word in granting the new births.

00:30:43

by His Spirit.

00:30:46

It's not just a mere reading of the Word.

00:30:49

We need the Holy Spirit to bring the truth of God's Word to bear upon our souls.

00:30:59

This truth is so important.

00:31:04

It's why God has always blessed preaching in the salvation of sinners.

00:31:11

You read about the great revivals of the United Kingdom, even in Scotland.

00:31:16

God used the preaching of the Word in the conversion of great companies of His people.

00:31:26

That's why the Bible is so crucial.

00:31:30

Now, somebody says, Well, I know someone who's converted without ever hearing a gospel sermon preached.

00:31:39

Ah, but you will find very quickly that they were reading the Word of God avidly.

00:31:47

They had this almost, as one man described it to me, an insatiable hunger for the Word of God.

00:31:53

So much so, now this dear man brought his Bible to work.

00:32:01

And for six months, he read his Bible as much as he could because he could not get away from it.

00:32:11

Thankfully, not everyone has to go through that experience.

00:32:15

But again, that shows God's sovereignty.

00:32:18

Some people are in churches that the Word of God is discounted and disregarded, but there are some, even in those positions, who will have a Bible and they'll read it.

00:32:31

Think of those abroad in persecuted lands.

00:32:34

They can't meet on the Lord's Day morning in a quiet place to hear the word of God preached.

00:32:42

But they have the word of God, we trust.

00:32:46

That's why the word of God is so important and so crucial in the preaching and in the bringing of the regeneration or new birth to a soul.

00:33:00

God always uses his word to bring the new birth.

00:33:10

And how do we know what's true and what's false?

00:33:14

We read the word.

00:33:19

But lastly, I just want you to notice one last thing here.

00:33:21

The first fruits, why is James using this?

00:33:25

This is, by the way, a lovely description of a new believer, or of a person who's born again of God's Spirit.

00:33:34

Look at this in verse 18, and with this we'll close, the kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

00:33:42

Well, here James is using an illustration from the Old Testament, from the times of people of Israel.

00:33:51

One example is found in Leviticus 23, verse 10.

00:33:55

And I'll just read that for you.

00:33:57

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come unto the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest unto the priest.

00:34:13

The first fruits.

00:34:14

What does this mean?

00:34:16

Well, these were the first fruits that would be harvested in the promised land, in the land of Canaan.

00:34:25

They will be brought, sorry, harvested, then they will be brought before the Lord and offered to Him, as one man puts it, as his own peculiar possession.

00:34:38

This is the thing that really struck me.

00:34:41

We are like the first fruits of God's harvest.

00:34:46

That's what James is saying.

00:34:48

You're part of the first fruits.

00:34:53

James is telling his readers that God has brought them forth as His children to be His own special treasure or to be His first fruits.

00:35:05

Of course, literally we're no longer the first fruits, because the first fruits of the Lord's work of regeneration have already come, but we are part of that great harvest.

00:35:19

God has done an astonishing thing.

00:35:23

Let me just read another verse that comes to my mind.

00:35:29

The Lord is the first fruit.

00:35:33

Who is the first fruits of the resurrection?

00:35:36

First Corinthians 15 verse 20, Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept.

00:35:47

So what have we learned this morning?

00:35:50

Well, first of all, we've learned that God's will, God's gift is excellent because He's an excellent giver.

00:35:58

Secondly, we've learned that He's an inestimable Father.

00:36:02

There is no way of estimating who God is or His gifts.

00:36:08

And third, we have seen just a little of the excellency of His gift of the new birth.

00:36:15

What are those signs that I mentioned earlier?

00:36:19

first of all, as that writer said, there will be loves.

00:36:24

The things we love now, we hated once, and the things we once loved, we now hate.

00:36:31

Well, if we boil it down, we could put it like this.

00:36:33

First of all, there's a love for God, for Himself.

00:36:40

Secondly, there's a love for Christ, and a desire to know Christ.

00:36:47

and a longing to know Christ, a longing to know Him.

00:36:51

Third, there's that deep desire to read God's Word.

00:36:56

That's not a religious thing.

00:36:59

That's a God-given thing.

00:37:02

And fourth, there is that real yearning to know God for ourselves, the excellency of God's gift.

00:37:15

Is the regeneration our new birth?

00:37:19

Has God done that work in our hearts?

00:37:22

Let us pray.

00:37:24

Our gracious God and loving Father, we're so thankful for all thy mercies to us.

00:37:29

Oh Lord, we pray for any here this morning who are listening.

00:37:33

Oh Lord, we pray that indeed thou wouldst grant them that great gift, that great gift of the new birth, even some, Lord, maybe

00:37:42

born again, and we pray soon they will come to faith in Jesus Christ, trusting in the finished work of Christ.

00:37:49

We know, Lord, that that is the purpose of the new birth, that sinners born again of the Spirit of God will repent and believe and trust in Christ alone as their Savior.

00:38:02

Oh Lord, we pray for Annie here.

00:38:04

We pray, Father, even now, take away all distractions, all hindrances, all obstructions,

00:38:11

and bring them, O Lord, into thy family.

00:38:14

We pray, Lord, hear our prayers for Jesus' sake.

00:38:18

Amen.