

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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Matthew 19:17 “The Goodness of God”

Intro. People say they believe in God, but have no idea who it is that they believe in. Too many people follow private religious hunches rather than learning of God from His own Word. Others entertain misconceptions about Scripture, which give rise to wrong beliefs about God. Others mix in beliefs about God borrowed from other religions. But folks, we do not get to decide what kind of God the God of the universe is. He is who He is, and we cannot change anything about Him.

So what is God like? I believe God has revealed Himself to us. We see some of His glorious attributes in creation, such as His wisdom, power, and His righteous judgment. He has revealed Himself more completely in Scripture. Here we have a full picture of the attributes of God.

Today I’m going to talk about the goodness of God. On a day when hurricane Irma is wrecking havoc in Florida, that may seem to be an untimely topic. The devastation of hurricane Irma is only a problem for those who believe in a Santa Claus god, whose only attribute is goodness or love. The God of the Bible is good and loving, but He is also just and righteous. These attributes do not contradict each other but work in harmony with each other, and I hope you will see the connection later in the message.

Today, the primary focus of my message will be on the goodness of God. However, I will also deal with say difficult issue of how God can be good and still explain why there is so much suffering in this world.

So I won’t want to begin the message by exploring my basic premise:

I. GOD IS GOOD!

There are a number of statements in Scripture that affirm this truth about God. I will start with the words of Jesus in our opening scripture. He said to the rich young ruler in Mt. 19:17, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.” Since we were created in the image of God, we can see *reflections* of the glory of God’s goodness in people. In the recent tragedy of hurricane Harvey, we have seen how people can be good to one another. However, the goodness of God is unique, according to Jesus. He is *perfectly* good, without any evil whatsoever. Since God is immutable His goodness never changes. Divine goodness is self-caused, infinite, and eternal. There is no comparison between the goodness of God and the goodness of man.

Another statement regarding the goodness of God is found in Psa. 107, a psalm extolling the goodness of God. He says in v.1, “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy [*hesed*] endures forever.”

The goodness of God is the drive behind all the blessings He bestows upon us daily. The goodness of God causes Him to be full of good will toward men. By His nature God takes holy pleasure in the joy and happiness of His people.

A king who did not believe in the goodness of God, had a slave who, in all circumstances would always say “my king, do not be discouraged, because everything God does is perfect. He

makes no mistakes!” One day they went hunting and along the way a wild animal attacked the king. His slave managed to kill the animal, but could not prevent his majesty from losing a finger. Furious and without showing his gratitude for being saved, the nobleman asked, “Is God good? If He was good, I would not have been attacked and lost my finger.” The slave replied: “My king, despite all these things, I can only tell you that God is good, and he knows why these things happened. What God does is perfect. He is never wrong!” Outraged by the response, the king ordered the arrest of his slave.

Later, the King left for another hunt, this time alone. He was captured by savages who engaged in human sacrifices. On the altar and ready to sacrifice the nobleman, the savages discovered that their victim did not have one of his fingers. According to them, only a whole person with all his/her parts intact could be offered to the gods. The King without a finger was deemed an abominable sacrifice for their gods. So they released the King.

Upon his return to the palace, the King authorized the release of his slave. He received the slave affectionately. God *was* really good to me! I was almost killed by the wild men, but for lack of a single finger, I was let go! But I have a question: if God is so good, why did he allow me to put you in jail?” The slave answered, “my King, if I had gone with you on this hunt, I would have been sacrificed instead because I have no missing finger. Remember everything God does is perfect. He is never wrong. He made you keep me in jail so I would not be with you on the hunt.” [from an email].

The whole outlook of mankind might be changed if we could all believe that we dwell under a friendly sky and that the God of heaven, though exalted in power and majesty, is eager to be good to us.

Now I want to share two thoughts which will help explain the goodness of God:

A. His Goodness Is Seen in His Other Attributes – When the biblical writers call God “good”, they are thinking in general of all those moral qualities associated with His goodness, such as the fact that He is gracious and compassionate. For example, in Ex. 33:18 Moses ask God, “Please, show me Your glory.” Then in v.19 God said, “I will make all My goodness (*toob*) pass before you. . . . I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” In Ex. 34:6 God adds that He is “merciful. . . , longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” Actually, the Hebrew word translated “goodness” is *hesed*, a reference to faithful lovingkindness. The fact that God connects that quality with “truth” shows that His faithfulness is tied to the truth of His promises. Furthermore, because God is good, He is tenderhearted, kind, friendly, loving and sympathetic. Within the cluster of God’s moral perfections there is one in particular to which the term “goodness” points, namely His generosity. Generosity means a disposition to give to others in a way which has no mercenary motive and is not limited by what the recipients deserve, but consistently goes beyond it.

B. His Goodness Satisfies Us – Psalm 36:8 says, “They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.” Psalm 23 extols the goodness of God. David says in v.1, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” In other words, “I have all that I need.” Then he says in vv.5-6, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy (*hesed*) shall follow me all the days of my life. . . .” Psalm 107:9 says, “He satisfies the

longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness.” In Jeremiah 31:14 God says, “And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness.”¹

Now as we continue to reflect on the goodness of God, let us consider next:

II THE TRUTHS OF GOD’S GOODNESS

I want to share three truths about the goodness of God:

A. God Is Good to All – If God is good by nature, then we should expect that God would be good to all. Psa. 145:9 says, “The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies² are over all His works.” The cause of His goodness is in Himself. Since His goodness is expressed regardless of merit, He is good to all. In Mt. 5:45, Jesus said “your Father in heaven... makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Likewise, Jesus said in Lk. 6:36 that God “is kind to the unthankful and evil.” Likewise, speaking of God’s goodness to the nations, the Apostle Paul said in Acts 14:17, “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” Everything that sustains and enriches life is a divine gift from the good hand of God.

God is even good to the animals. Psa. 36:6 says, “O LORD, You preserve man and beast...” Jesus said in Mt. 6:26, “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”

B. God Is Especially Good to His People - The mercies of God on the natural level, however abundant, are overshadowed by the greater mercies of spiritual redemption. Psa. 31:19 says, “Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men!”

I believe that a survey backs up that truth. The June, 2003 edition of *Christianity Today* reported that 66% of Americans “strongly agree” that they are very happy with their life. 84% of Evangelicals “strongly agree” with the statement.

C. God’s Goodness Does Not Negate His Righteous Judgment – Turn in your Bible to Rom. 11:22, “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God...” The crucial word here is “and”. Both are attributes of God. Furthermore, the word Paul uses literally means “cutting off”. It denotes God’s decisive withdrawal of His goodness from those who have spurned it. Yet most people today reject the wrath of judgment and instead believe in a god of indulgent benevolence without any severity. Modern men are not going to give up their “enlightened” adherence to the doctrine of a celestial Santa Claus.

Yet the Santa Claus theology carries within itself the seeds of its own collapse, for it cannot cope with the fact of evil. Just looking at the world today, apart from divine revelation, we should be more inclined to believe in the wrath of God than the goodness of God. We see devastation from hurricanes, earthquakes, disease, and so forth. The only way to save the liberal view of God is to dissociate Him from these things, and to deny that He has any control over

¹ Likewise, Psalm 145:15-16 says, “The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

² Hebrew, *racham*, compassion, literally a reference to the womb or gut.

them; in other words, to deny His omnipotence and lordship over His world. When trouble comes, therefore, there is nothing to do but grin and bear it.

Furthermore, apart from the truth of the wrath of God, Christianity simply dies off. For the substance of Christianity is faith in the forgiveness of sins through the redeeming work of Christ on the cross (1 Cor. 2:2; 15:3). But on the basis of the Santa Claus theology, atonement is actually needless.

Paul goes on to explain in Romans 11:22 one example of how God was both good and severe, “on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.” God sent His own Son to Israel to be their Savior, yet they rejected Jesus, and even crucified Him. They rejected His offer of forgiveness. They persecuted His apostles and His church. And so God cut off the nation of Israel and extended his goodness and mercy to Gentiles who believed in His son Jesus, and formed the new people of God called the “church.” Paul then warned Gentile Christians as a group that if they become complacent and unbelieving, God will cut them off as well. The principle which Paul is applying here is that behind every display of divine goodness stands a threat of severity in judgment if that goodness is scorned. Paul said in Romans 2:4-5, “. . .do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering. . .?” If so, “you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” Those who decline to respond to God’s goodness by repentance, faith, and submission to His will, cannot complain if sooner or later the tokens of His goodness are withdrawn, and retribution follows.

Another example of the goodness *and* severity of God is found in Exodus 34:7, “keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” This is the truth about God, and you are living in a fool’s paradise to believe otherwise!

God has been so good to the United States of America. After two great spiritual awakenings in our history, we had become a mostly Christian nation. We have sent missionaries to many nations. We have been a force for good in our world. Yet if we continued to turn from God as we have the last 50 years, then we as a nation will experience more of God severity than His goodness. Wake up, America!

Finally, let’s apply these truths about the goodness of God as we consider together:

III. THE PROPER RESPONSES TO GOD’S GOODNESS

God is indeed good. So allow me to share five ways we should respond to the goodness of God:

A. We Should Repent of Our Sins and Be Saved – Turn back to Romans 2. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 2:4, “do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

When was it that Peter said to Jesus, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8). It was after Jesus blessed Peter with a large boatload of fish!

If we would be welcomed as the Prodigal was, we must come as the Prodigal came, in repentance. And when we so come, there will be a feast of welcome within, for God is good. Psa. 116:12-13 says, “What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.” Calvary is the measure of the

goodness of God. Lay that truth to heart, and receive the forgiveness of sins that He has provided by His sacrifice. Romans 10:13 says, “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

B. We Are to Be Good Like God - 3 John 11 says, “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God....” Goodness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). Rom. 15:14, “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness....”

This is why there is an emphasis on doing good works. Jesus said in Mt. 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Paul said in Romans 12:21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” In Titus 2:14 Paul says that we are to be “zealous for good works.” Then Titus 3:14 says, “And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs....” [See also Titus 3:8]. Hurricanes Harvey and Irma are giving God’s people the opportunity to show the goodness of God. I encourage you to give to our Disaster Relief offering. More from our church should be trained to go as Disaster Relief workers.

C. We Should Thank God for His Goodness - Psa. 100:4-5 says, “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.” Psa. 107:1 says, “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!” Then he says in v.8, “Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness....” That refrain is repeated three other times in that Psalm (vv.15, 21, 31).

Most of us know the hymn that says, “Count your blessings, name them one by one....” That is what we should do and give thanks to God for His goodness.

Someone wrote this little poem that makes the point quite well:

Thank God for dirty dishes
They have a tale to tell;
While others may go hungry
We’ve eaten very well.
With home, health, and happiness
I shouldn’t want to fuss;
By the stack of evidence
God’s been very good to us!

D. Since God Is Good Let Us Ask of Him - Jesus said in Mt. 7:11, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” He hears and answers prayer because He is good.

Do our prayer requests reflect that we truly believe in the goodness of God? If we did, wouldn’t we ask for much, rather than little? James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach....” That’s because God is good!

E. When Facing Trials, Trust in His Goodness - Psa. 36:6-7 says, “O LORD, You preserve man and beast. How precious is Your lovingkindness [*hesed*], O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.” In Psalm 107, which extols the

goodness of God, the Psalmist gives several examples of the Lord's goodness, including His deliverance from trouble (verses 6, 13, 19-20, 28).

Babbie Mason sang a song that includes these lines:

God is too good to be unkind
So when you don't understand
When don't see His plan
When you can't trace His hand
Trust His Heart.

Conclusion: So as you face one of the many trials of life, remember that God is good, and He desires to deliver you. So pray for deliverance, trusting in His goodness! Yet even if he doesn't deliver you from a particular trial, remember Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Also remember Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Sources: Stephen F. Felker, *Basic Bible Doctrine* (Training Course); J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Louis Perkhof, "The Attributes of God" in Millard J. Erickson, Ed., *The Living God: Readings in Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1971). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).