

## The Goodness of God 4-21-02

An Air Force study showed that we forget 95% of what we hear in 72 hours. Right up front, I want to share with you the 5% I would like you to remember, so that Thursday morning you will still be able to remember it. God is good, all the time and all the time God is good. It is sometimes said as a very short responsive reading. I say, "God is good," and you respond, "all the time," then I say "And all the time," and you respond, "God is good." Practice- and then say it like we mean it. If we really believe that it will change our lives.

In AW Tozer's book *Knowledge of the Holy* he wrote, "The whole outlook of mankind might be changed if we could all believe we dwell under a friendly sky, and that the God of heaven, although exalted in power and majesty, is eager to be friends with us." Let me say that again but apply it to us personally. Your whole outlook would be changed if you could believe you dwelt under a friendly sky, and that the God of heaven, although exalted in power and majesty, is eager to be your friend.

Good – it is a word we so often use without contemplating all that it means. When asked to define God many would quickly respond, "God is love." But a much more common expression in Scripture is, "God is good." Just as where there is genuine *agape* love we know God is involved, so when we find real goodness, God is present. The problem today is our understanding of what is good. We put our own definition on 'good', such as a personal preference or desires. Good is so much more than our subjective and selfish perspective. Genuine goodness is all of the attributes of God. Here again we must change our definitions to conform them to the reality expressed in the word of God. God is good in everything He does. His justice is good – His mercy is good, His love is good, His faithfulness is good. All the attributes of God are good and His goodness is faithful, loving, righteous, and holy... He is good. Just as He is love, He is good. In fact, the standard for goodness is God.

I find at least 13 declarations in Scripture that read, "God is good!" These declarations are found in every section of the word of God, history, poetry, major and minor prophets, Gospels and letters. When Solomon dedicated the Temple the people and priests sang, "God is good and his love endures forever." They were focussing on two attributes of God, His goodness and His love. I suppose you could also add immutability because of the word 'forever'. When the psalmist wrote of his difficulties, he reminded himself that God is good. Even the weeping prophet declared in Jeremiah 33:11 that God is good. Jesus told the rich young ruler, "God alone is good". And Peter, restored, forgiven, impetuous Peter, 1Peter 2:3 says, "...the Lord is good."

Consider these Scriptures:

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)<sup>11</sup> *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

Psalms 73:1,28 (NIV)<sup>1</sup> *Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart...<sup>28</sup> But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.*

John 10:10 (NIV)<sup>10</sup> *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

Psalms 16:11 (NIV)<sup>11</sup> *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

He sounds like a good God doesn't He? Jeremiah said God has good things planned for us. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that God has planned for us to do good things, and He provides the

gifts and His life within you to do those good things. God has made a way for you to participate in His goodness (2Peter 1:3-4). All true goodness is of God, but He has made a way for you to experience His goodness personally. He has made it possible for you to share in His goodness. If we could grasp the truth of this, that God is good and is directing our lives into good things with good results, it would change our entire outlook on life.

God even orchestrates the opportunities for you to use the gifts He has given you. Sometimes we miss them when He brings them into our paths, and we realize we missed them. But then, many times He orchestrates another chance to do that thing He had planned for us. Finally when we step into that good thing that He orchestrated and use the gifts He has given us, and see His life flow through us, we experience a wonderful sense of fulfillment, awe, and an overwhelming joy. It was all of Him, yet He lets us be a participant, and He rewards us eternally for just walking into the plan He laid out in front of us. It seems to me like He is just looking for ways to lay up heavenly rewards for us. I can't imagine a better God.

How do I know God is so good? I look at Jesus. He said, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father". When the Pharisees brought the woman taken in adultery to Jesus, what was going on in their minds? Allow me to speculate a bit. Jesus showed the mercy and love of God. That is why the rabble was so attracted to Him. The Law is clear that adulterers are to be stoned. I imagine they were thinking here was a chance to pit the mercy and goodness Jesus so often displayed against the clear judgement of the Law. Now they could show everyone He was opposed to the Law. Of course Jesus knew their hearts, but the goodness of God extends to them also. As Jesus wrote on the ground I think He was asking the Father, "How do I show them that they also need to repent?" And the Father was faithful to give Him the answer that showed the goodness of God, by exposing their condition. "Let the one without sin cast the first stone."

Then there is the first appearance of Jesus to the disciples after the resurrection. If I were the one that conquered death and held all power, I would probably have said something like, "Thanks a lot guys! I emptied myself for you cowering blockheads. Three years I poured into you guys and showed you I would stand by you, but the first sign of serious trouble and you all run and hide. And you Peter, "I wont deny you Master, I will die with you" and the same night your cursing that you never knew me! You're all fired – I'll start again on another 12. Isn't that what you'd of said?

But Jesus says, "Peace – Go baptize and make disciples of all nations." Everything He came to tell the world He was entrusting to this group of failures. That is the goodness of God! And He is exactly the same with us. He has invested in us, and we fail, trying to do it all ourselves. But there He is again, speaking peace and giving us another opportunity. We stand where those disciples stood expecting a rebuke and He just loves us and tells us to go out and let Him do it through us the next time. He still trusts us to be a life He can live through. He still entrusts us to be the Good News bearers.

What kind of news? GOOD NEWS! Because God is good! "All the time" and "All the time" "God is good" Good news, that we are freed from the bondage of sin, made right with the Father. Good news, He is going to share His glory with us. Good news, we are going to rule and reign with Him. Good news, we are going to live eternally in the presence of a good God. Are you sensing just a bit of the wonderful goodness of God toward you? All we can see is just the edge of it – because it is infinite, perfect, and eternal.

Moses wanted to see the glory of God. He had met with God on the mountain, face to face, so to speak. It was time for them to leave Sinai, but Moses wanted to know God was with them. If God wasn't going then Moses didn't want to go. He desired to gaze upon the glory of God with his eyes. God gave Moses a fascinating reply. <sup>19</sup> *And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD...Ex 33:19 (NIV).* God covered Moses in the cleft of the rock and let Moses see just a glimpse, just the backside of the goodness of God. That was enough to make his face glow. If we could see just the backside of God's goodness our faces would be glowing – radiant with the reflected glory of God. An unveiled glimpse of God's goodness would motivate our entire life. We need to pray for a glimpse like Moses did. His goodness is everywhere if we will allow our eyes to be opened to see it.

If God is so good, why does He insist we do things His way? Sin is fun; Scripture acknowledges there is pleasure in sin for a season. But the season ends and then you reap the wages – death. It is the goodness of God that insists we walk with Him and put to death our old nature.

Isaiah 48:18 (NIV)<sup>18</sup> *If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.*

God is not a cosmic killjoy. He is not just trying to throw His weight around. He has instructions for us because His thoughts and ways are so much higher and holier than ours. He can see what is good for our lives and what is destructive. He is trying to keep the Destroyer from wreaking havoc in our lives. We do everything we can to justify some thing the Holy Spirit is telling us to walk away from. It is the goodness of God that insists we let those things go. Quit justifying sin! Forsake it and live in the goodness of God.

Look at the story of Creation. At the end of every day God said it was good. He can't do otherwise because it is His character. Why did God create Eve? Because it wasn't good for man to be alone, and everything He does is good. God withheld the tree of the knowledge of good and evil not because He was stingy or holding out on them but because He knew it would bring death. Satan tells us the same thing He told them, "God is holding out on you. It isn't really bad for you. God is just stingy and wants to keep it for Himself. God doesn't want to share it because you'll like it more than Him." His lies are an effort to get us to doubt the goodness of God. And when confronted by God, Adam justifies himself by blaming his wife and then ultimately God. "The woman You gave me..." It was a slap in the face of the goodness of God. "It is not my sin it is You, God," he implied. Everything good for Adam was in that garden. It was the perfect environment for man. But Eve was tricked into wanting more. What is more than perfect? Add to perfection and it will no longer be perfect. Satan seduced Eve into thinking there was more to have than what God had given her and that desire gave birth to sin.

I'll never forget when someone was teaching on that temptation. He was trying to say that Satan was pointing to the one thing God withheld from Adam and Eve instead of all the good. In the ceiling of that room were two rows of lights. One bulb was out so he used it as an illustration of his point. "Look at that one that doesn't work," he said, and immediately it came on. God vetoed his illustration. You see, God has not withheld any good thing from you. Romans 8:32 says if He did not withhold His Son, is there any good thing He would withhold? The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not good for Adam and Eve

because they were physical beings that would always be tempted by the knowledge. God withheld it because it was good to withhold it. It was a working light withheld. Everything in the Garden was good even the prohibition against eating of that tree. Satan's distortion was to get them to think the withholding of it was somehow a negative thing for them. What could have been further from the truth? The Father of Lies tricked her.

The goodness of God ejected Adam and Eve from that Garden so that they would not partake of the tree of life and then live forever in that fallen condition. Judgement, too, is the goodness of God. You would certainly not call a judge who let the guilty go unpunished, a good judge. All the attributes of God are good, including His justice.

We can look at solitary events and painful experiences and ask where the good was in them. It may not be apparent. Sin is certainly not good. Evil and its expressions in this world are not good. They are diametrically opposed to the good, and at times we feel the bite or sting of sin. Evil desires give birth to sin and sin matures into death. There is no good in that. We all experience the pain of the sin of others as it strikes our life with pain and sorrow. But our mighty Creator and Shepherd takes the situation, and as Ro 8:28 says, works good into our lives (the lives of those who love Him) through the experience. Even though you may not be able to perceive it, or understand it, you can count on it. We could go over all the Scripture about how difficulties are good for us but just recall:

James 1, "Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance."

You can't consider it 'all joy' unless you believe in the goodness of God, which will take the trial and through it add blessings, like perseverance, to your life. He will walk with you through the pain and bless your life with His presence.

The goodness of God is a dilemma to the world. They think, "If God is good then why is there evil, like war?" Why is there suffering and hatred? It is a legitimate question. But the Bible declares that it is Satan that has come to kill, steal and destroy, not God. That is Satan's opposition to God. People speak as if God has satanic desires. That is ridiculous when you consider all the goodness and blessing in creation. It is the goodness of God that made it nice to eat (for some of us too good); the goodness of God that made the predominant colors in the world the most pleasing to the eye. It is the goodness of God that made the variety of seasons. It is the goodness of God that we enjoy sleep and wake up to glorious sunrises. We are so enveloped in goodness that we end up taking it for granted. We are like spoiled children that expect constant goodness poured out and overflowing, and when it seems to stop for a second – a trial or difficulty – we forget about all the goodness and focus on that one thing that we don't like. That thing is good for us too, but at the moment we don't want it and so we pout and forget all the benefits we richly enjoy daily!

It is the heart of man lusting for control and power that brings most wars and their consequential suffering. If God brings wrath it is for justice and that is good. When man brings wrath it is his lust and indifference for the lives of others and that is evil. Man is becoming so lawless (another word for anti-Christ) that to slaughter millions of innocent babies is called a 'good' choice for the mothers. And then when the woman suffers anxiety and depression because of it they ask why would God allow that? Suffering comes from the sin of others but also from the natural consequences of our own rebellion against God. But today the idea of personal rights, the right to one's own happiness and pleasure, have thrown out the rights of the One who made us and lovingly gives us instruction.

The ranting of many against "what God allows" is really a cry against the evil of the human heart. Help them to see it, and that Jesus is the only solution to the evil and suddenly the confusion is over. Man is evil (contrary to modern opinion) and God is good. False teaching today is trying to turn that truth around in the minds of young people. Society blames conditions, circumstances, even God but never the heart of man. To do so would be declaring their need for a Deliverer. All men are born in rebellion toward God and His goodness. But God never changes. He is and He always will be good.

Finally, Ro 8:28 says He works all things together for good, to those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. There is evil in this world because of our own choices, and we suffer because of the sin of others. You have a fallen nature because of Adam. But God is going to take it all and work it all together for good in your life. What a difference this can make when you walk through difficulty and pain, to know that we live in the sight of a good God who has good planned for us. What assurance, what peace, when we cling to this truth! When our minds do not understand, we can know His thoughts are greater than ours and He never changes. His heart, forever in love, will have good things for you. What an attitude changer that should be! What a source of unending joy when we realize this is the awesome God we serve.

What is an appropriate response to all that goodness? The goodness of God leads us to repentance. We repent of our sinful thoughts and ways and yield our evil hearts to His good thoughts and ways. Take time today to get alone with God and thank Him for His goodness. Count your blessings! Have eyes to see His goodness all around you. Then consider what it means to forsake your evil thoughts and wicked ways and let His thoughts fill your heart so His good ways can be the way of your life.

We can't speak of the goodness of God without looking at its ultimate display on the cross. There, because He set His love on you, Jesus took your sin and all the punishment you deserved. He faced the justice of God for your sin, in your place. Divine unspeakable love – could goodness overflow toward you to any greater extent? Impossible!

Jesus looked ahead to the redemption of your body, your adoption as a son, and He saw it was good. So He took your place, and paid your debt. That is goodness to the infinite degree. Jer 15:11 (NIV)<sup>11</sup> *The LORD said, "Surely I will deliver you for a good purpose; He delivered me for a good purpose. He delivered you for a good purpose. Ps 84:11 says there is no good thing that He would withhold from those whose walk is upright. That can include a good difficulty. Whenever you are tempted to doubt the goodness of God, just see your difficulty with the backdrop of the cross. On the cross Jesus displayed clearly that He would go to any length for your good. His goodness will see you through.*

If you are struggling with trials and difficulties, consider how God is using them to grow you into His likeness. He loves you too much to leave you where you are. How can you cooperate with Him through the difficult times so He can transform your ways for your good? He is stretching out his hand to you. Will you answer His call and spend some time with Him today? You can be sure, that time will be good for you, for God is good - all the time - and all the time - God is good!