

I would like to begin our message today by stressing that what we are learning about the character of God as revealed in Scripture can completely change the way we understand life and respond to events in our lives. If we truly believe what we have learned so far, that God exhibits steadfast love to those who are in covenant with Him, that He never changes, that He is faithful to His word, that He has all-power, is ever present, and knows all, then we should always have a good attitude about whatever comes our way (Psalm 56:11). We may not enjoy it, but we will trust that it is in His permissive will and will work for our good (Romans 8:28). We may be disappointed and even hurt, but we know good will come out of it. **This place of peace and calm assurance in God is what God desires for every believer, but we will never own it until our minds are renewed by the Word of God** (Romans 12:2; Psalm 119:165).

Today we will look at the goodness of God. This is another attribute that can change the way we interpret life's events. We have seen in God's self-description the attributes of abounding steadfast love and faithfulness. In that self-description, God declared that these are factors of His goodness. When Moses asked to see the glory of God, God said He would cause His goodness to pass before Moses. *¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.* Exodus 33:19

We can see in God's words to Moses that God sees His name and His goodness to be described by His attributes. What was revealed to Moses was more audible than it was visual. He saw a glimpse of the back of God (Exodus 33:23). He heard a description of the attributes of God. God is a spirit, so a glimpse of the back of God would seem to mean just a partial revelation of the glory of God.

There is a precedent here that runs throughout Scripture. God's revelation of Himself is primarily in language. Higher language ability is one of the main things that separates us from the animal world. While God does reveal Himself to our senses at times, His primary means of revelation is through language. Jesus said the Father is seeking worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). The mind and heart must be engaged or there is a lopsided kind of worship. Some will emphasize a physical revelation or feelings. Others will emphasize the Word and reject all manifestations of God. What we see here in Exodus is both but with the emphasis is on the revealed Word. Any manifestation must line up with God's Word. **If a sensory impression contradicts the revealed Word, it is to be rejected** (Isaiah 8:20; Psalm 138:2).

God told Moses His goodness would pass before him. Then, when God hid Moses in a cleft of the rock and covered him, He passed by proclaiming His name. In the verse we looked at from Exodus 33, God declared His goodness and a proclamation of His name would pass before Moses. These are revealed in a verbal description of God's attributes.

⁵ The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty..." Exodus 34:5-7a Just as we can say that the name of the Lord is the sum of His attributes, we could also say that the goodness of the Lord is the sum of His attributes.

God proclaimed in these verses from Exodus that His name and His goodness are seen in the facts that He is merciful, gracious, patient, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving, and just. Goodness is not just one of His attributes, it is the result of all of His attributes in their perfect state.

For example, the virtues we so desire to be manifest toward us would not be good if they were not bounded by God's justice (Nahum 1:3). If the guilty only received grace and patience and never faced the justice of God, God would be encouraging evil. If He were forgiving without some form justice being served, He could be called unjust. That is why the cross was necessary. If God was slow to anger but never angry with the atrocities of man, He would be guilty of being the god tolerant of evil that much of the world thinks He is. The balance of His attributes is goodness manifest for us to see and emulate by the power of His Spirit in us (Ephesians 5:1).

The goodness of God is mentioned in every portion of Scripture from the Torah to the letters of Paul. The national song of Israel declared this overarching virtue of God. *¹³ and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, ¹⁴ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.* 2 Chronicles 5:13-14 He is good! Why do you think they sang that chorus throughout their history? I believe it was to remind them to have that mindset. If they were experiencing His discipline, it was because He is good and His steadfast love endures forever (Psalm 119:75). If they were experiencing blessing, it's because of the same reasons.

Are you in a covenant relationship with Jesus? Did He shed His blood for you and promise you eternal life? Did He promise to never leave or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)? Then perhaps we need to sing this chorus regularly to remind ourselves of this truth which will change the way we interpret our circumstances. If I know what I'm going

through is the steadfast love of God expressing His goodness to me, I will have a much better attitude as I go through whatever it is. What a testimony that is to the world!

I often sing a song from the psalms in which the word "mercy" is used instead of "steadfast love," though it is the same word in Hebrew. *¹ I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.* Psalm 89:1 (KJV) Someone please write a catchy tune for Psalm 106, 107, 118, 136 verse 1: *¹ Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!* Sing to get your thinking straightened out by the Word of God and to remind yourself what is true. Someone might say we are being brainwashed. YES! We've been brain sullied by our sinful nature and the world's way of seeing life. We need to be brainwashed by the Word of God so that we see things as they truly are (Titus 3:5). God is good!

The world's "go to" argument against the existence of God is all the suffering in the world. They say, "If God is good then why is there all this suffering?" They don't ask why there is all the goodness in the world. They never ask why some are willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of others. Nor will they accept the Biblical answer which lines up perfectly with what we observe. The Bible says man is fallen, evil, self-centered and therefore the world is a mess, unjust, sick and often brutal.

When Malcom Muggeridge was asked what was wrong with the world his answer was brief and to the point. "I am the problem!" The unbeliever blames that all on God, but God tells us the truth. All goodness comes from Him (Psalm 16:2). We turned our backs on Him. Jesus said that the world would get so bad that it will become like the days of Noah, when the thoughts of man were only evil continually (Matthew 24:37). We are well on our way as a culture.

The Bible does not promote a Pollyanna attitude of ignoring the pain and suffering around us and just seeing the world through rose colored glasses. It tells us to mourn with those that mourn and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). That is good. We comfort others with the comfort we receive from God (2 Corinthians 1:4). We wouldn't receive comfort unless we endured difficulty due to the fallen condition of the world and man's disobedience to God. But the good God we serve comforts our hearts. We are instructed to think on what is good (Philippians 4:8), but that does not mean we will not be brokenhearted at times. God is near the brokenhearted because He is good (Psalm 34:18).

God is good in all that He is and does (Psalm 119:68). That does not mean that everyone will like what He does. When the Children of Israel were at the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army penning them in, the cloud that guided them went behind them. He was light to Israel and darkness to the Egyptians (Exodus 14:19-20). We see that His goodness is manifest to those who are in covenant with Him but His wrath on those who rebel against Him. Remember, the Egyptians had ten clear signs that God was the

true God and demanding the release of Israel. How hardhearted does one have to be to charge between two walls of water into a sea? The darkness that separated the Egyptians from their former captives was God's goodness to Israel, but it was His justice upon Pharaoh's army. When man reaches the limit of God's grace, which I believe we can say is man's own persistence in crossing the point of no return, the wrath of God is the manifestation of His goodness.

Pharaoh standing before those walls of water is a perfect illustration of the choice all people must face. Will I yield to the loving grace of God or harden my heart past the point of no return (Exodus 10:28)? Will I admit that He has shown me more than enough signs that He is real and invites me to partake of His grace, or will I go on saying, "My will be done!" Will I join with the people of God by faith, or join the cynical that declare it all to be coincidence and march headlong between the walls of water?

As I promised, we will look at this attribute as demonstrated by Jesus. Was His every word and deed goodness? He healed all who came to Him (Matthew 12:15). He set people free from demonic possession. He spoke the truth even knowing it would eventually mean His execution. He cleared out the corruption in the Temple, which freed people to be able to afford sacrifices. He raised the dead widow's son and the brother of the two sisters so they would not be destitute. He prepared His disciples for what was to come by warning them. He taught in a way that corrected all the false interpretations that had developed to that time so that the people could know the truth. He was the friend of sinners, guiding them to repentance (Luke 7:34).

But the greatest act of goodness was the fact that He chose to come and be our sacrifice that we might be acceptable to God (John 15:13). By willingly taking our sins upon Himself, He made it possible for us to be recipients of the Holy Spirit who transforms our lives and prepares us to be the bride of Christ. And look at His goodness on the cross. Even in agony he cared for His mother and the thief next to Him (John 19:26-27). He bore the wrath of God upon our sins so that we could receive His righteousness. There has never been goodness demonstrated to that extent. That is sacrificial love (Romans 5:8). He feels all that we feel and sympathizes with our weakness (Hebrews 4:15). He will never leave or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6). He is coming again to receive us to be where He is, forever in His loving presence (John 14:3). He so anticipates that day that He won't drink the fruit of the vine, a picture of celebration, until that day comes (Mark 14:25). We can't even imagine the good things He has prepared for us who love Him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

You have heard the expression that if it sounds too good to be true it probably is. Well, let me assure you that Jesus is the exception to that rule! He is good! He is so good that it is impossible to imagine anything or anyone who is better.

But let me give one more word of warning. His goodness means He will be just. Like the Egyptian army was separated from Israel, there will be a separation of the sheep

and the goats in that last day (Matthew 25:32). We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He will send those on His left to judgment. That is because He is good. Imagine the chaos in heaven if it were not so.

Do you realize that the wicked would be miserable in heaven? Heaven is all about adoring and worshiping Jesus for all His goodness. The wicked would hate that. For them, it is all about them. Attention on another would be miserable for them. They would be pleading to escape what we see as our hearts' desire. There must be a separation if God is good. There must be a separation if God is just. In rejecting the goodness of God, they chose that which is evil and will not be dissuaded.

But what should the goodness of God mean to us today? It should mean that we desire to do what He commands because it is good for us. ¹³ *and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?* Deuteronomy 10:13 The extra incentive to obey is that He tells us what is good for us (Deuteronomy 12:28). His goodness means that even when I sin, He will teach me the right way. ⁸ *Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.* Psalm 25:8 His goodness means that He will answer us when we call. ¹⁶ *Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.* Psalm 69:16 It means He will forgive me when I seek forgiveness. ⁵ *For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.* Psalm 86:5 And it means that we should be good in all that we do in the same way God is good, loving what is godly and hating what is evil. The fruits of the Spirit are a demonstration of the goodness of God, for the Father and the Spirit are one (Galatians 5:22-23). Take a time to consider how good God has been to you and how grateful you should be.

To choose to follow Christ is to choose goodness. There are people who have done horrible things in the name of Christ, but that is not following Christ. A follower of Christ loves God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and their neighbor as their self (Matthew 22:37-40). That is goodness! Having traveled in third world countries, I find that it is the Christians who are serving others and trying to improve the world's standard of living and health. It is Christians sacrificially giving their time and resources to help the needy both physically and spiritually. That is a demonstration of the goodness of God. Right where we are today, there is a need for that goodness to be manifest, but first we need to receive Him in our own heart and experience the goodness of forgiveness for all who repent of their sins. He will do that because He is good and His steadfast love endures forever. How would God have you express His goodness to someone in need?

Questions

- 1 Why is it important to have our minds renewed by God's Word?
- 2 How are goodness and the name of the Lord related?
- 3 What is God's primary means of revealing Himself to us?

- 4 How do the attributes work together?
- 5 How can singing help renew our minds?
- 6 What is the problem with the world?
- 7 Is God good to all?
- 8 How did Jesus demonstrate goodness?
- 9 What does God's goodness mean to you?
- 10 How might you express God's goodness in a new way?