**God is Good (Part One)**

Why It Matters

This morning we are going to begin a series entitled “God is Good.” This is a declaration that we make often as a church and yet it can be either simple words, or it can be a statement of faith; God is good (All the time), All the time (God is good). What does that mean, why does it matter, and how should it affect our lives. This series I plan to take us through this year so we will be looking at it for the next five weeks. **(Boling’s on Dec 18th, and Special Christmas Service on Friday 23rd at 7pm)**.

As you know by now, I do teach from time to time on a topic, and my prayer is that as we go through this series it will help us celebrate our time of thanksgiving and coming together to celebrate the greatest gift ever given. I pray that it will help us all keep things in perspective especially as we find the environment of day a little bit on edge and there can tend to be the struggle of entitlement. And so this morning I want to look at **“why does it matter that our perspective of God is that he is good?”**

All of us in hear, who have all gone through different journeys of life, may perceive God differently. *I remember being raised in a pretty authoritarian home that much of my perception of God was framed by my experience; I knew that God loved me, I knew what he did on the cross, but my view of the goodness of God was skewed because I always associated God’s goodness with my being able to perform and do the right thing.* **Is God’s’ goodness conditional, limited, or withheld?**

* **It's important to see God’s goodness, and let the scriptures define it, because many times our perception is skewed.**

We tend to frame our perception of God’s goodness through our experiences, our emotions, and the estimation of others; but this may not give us an accurate or full picture of who God is. A great Bible Scholar by the name of A.W. Tozer once wrote in his book “Knowledge of the Holy”:

*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*

In other words, what we think about God is extremely important. **Why?** Because it determines the course of our lives. When it comes to the goodness of God, what we think about his goodness makes all the difference in how we live out our days. If we truly believe God is good, then we will walk in expectancy of his goodness, we will walk in confidence of goodness, and we will walk in faith that his goodness is in life circumstance somehow someway. A.W. Tozer, later in the same book wrote:

*We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is not only true for the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that compose the church.*

So the question this morning is **“how do you perceive God’s goodness?”** **Is God good occasionally, is he stingy with his goodness, is he good sometimes and bad other times? If we could take a snapshot of what we think about God today, what would it look like?**

I wish I could tell you that throughout my life I have been able to maintain a proper perspective of the goodness of God. Life happens, loved ones suffer, loved ones lost, things in life don’t pan out the way I want, struggles, misunderstandings, sin; all of these things can cause us to question the goodness of God. (*Dick Mills/Loss of Child*) I know that my comprehension of the goodness of God has been limited and so part of my life’s journey is to replace my once thought perspective of God with a greater understanding of who he is; it is an ongoing pursuit.

* **It matters how what we think about God’s goodness because it affects how we respond to Him**.

Whenever you study a topic, there is a hermeneutic (biblical study) practice called the law of first mention. In other words, a key to understanding the topic is to go to the first place that you find it talked about in scripture. We find it first mentioned in **Exodus 33:18-19**. Moses has just asked God for a personal guarantee that God will be with him and the people of Israel as they move forward in God’s plan. In **Exodus 33:15-19** we read:

*15 Then Moses said, “If you don’t personally go with us, don’t make us leave this place. 16 How will anyone know that you look favorably on me—on me and on your people—if you don’t go with us? For your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth.”*

*17The Lord replied to Moses, “I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favorably on you, and I know you by name.”*

*18Moses responded, “Then show me your glorious presence.”*

*19The Lord replied, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will call out my name, Yahweh, before you. For I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.*

Later in **Exodus 34:5-7** we read the event that happens:

*5 Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty. NKJV*

**How do we know that God is good?** God reveals himself and his goodness. **Psalm 103:7** tells us:

*7He revealed his character to Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel.*

What did God reveal about his goodness in **Exodus 35**; He is abounding in goodness. Understanding God’s goodness has to begin with a divine revelation of what he is like and what he has done, which then turns into experiential knowledge. It reminds me of **Psalm 34:8** where it tells us:

*8Taste and see that the Lord is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!*

In order for us to appreciate the goodness of God we need His perspective. “God, help me to see things the same way you do.” When we see things the way he does, and experience things from his perspective, we too will agree that he is good.

* **It is our limited perspective and experience that hold us back from resting in and celebrating his goodness.**

That is why we need God’s help. **Romans 12:2** tells us:

*Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

We need God’s help to see and experience his goodness. It is so easy to fall prey to the world’s perspective without God; they see God as a crutch, as a mythological being, as a scapegoat. They say he is not good because bad things happen to good people and vice-versa. Their perception of God is skewed because they take for granted the many things that God does on their behalf. This reminds me of Jesus when speaking with the Rich Young Ruler in **Mark 10:17-22**:

*17As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

*18“Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked. “Only God is truly good. 19But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.’\*”*

*20“Teacher,” the man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.”*

*21Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. “There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

*22At this the man’s face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.*

The rich young ruler called Jesus “good” and Jesus questions him. **Why?** Because down deep in his heart, this man didn’t believe in the goodness of God. **How do we know?** He was still relying on his own goodness, and wasn’t trusting in God’s. That’s why Jesus tells him to sell everything he has and give the money to the poor.

**Was this man relying on God’s goodness or his own?** “If I give away my stuff there won’t be anything for me. I have to take care of myself. My significance and my worth is in what I have and what I have done. If you truly are good, then you wouldn’t ask me to give it all up.” At times, we too as followers of Christ, act the same way. The goodness of God should manifest itself in how we live our lives and who we live our lives for. This world still relies on the goodness of self and the ability to provide for its own, all the while neglecting the unseen and undeserved goodness of God that is taken for granted.

* **As followers of Christ we need to expand our understanding of God’s goodness so that we can grow in our faith, our worship, and our hope.**

We cannot define God’s goodness with our limited experiences and perspective; we must expand our understanding in this area at all times. I have even read it this way (Bill Johnson):

God goodness is beyond our ability to comprehend, but now our ability to experience. One can twist it, pervert it, dilute it, and misrepresent it. But the one thing we cannot do is exaggerate the goodness of God.

So, in our pursuit of God, we are guaranteed to be surprised of truly how good God really is. And as we see it and experience it, as we taste and see, it will lead to even greater trust, greater worship, greater surrender to a God who is good and has the greatest of plans for our lives. The question is **“are we willing to allow God to redefine his goodness to us in way that is real and life altering?”**

If God is better than we think, then we must adjust our thinking and the tenderness of our hearts until we live conscious of both his nature and his presence. **Why does it matter what we think about God’s goodness?**

* + - * It changes our perception of God.
      * It changes our reaction to God.
      * It changes our ability to rest and celebrate God.
      * It changes our faith in God.

So as we prepare to enter into this topic of the goodness of God, may we do so open and ready. **Amen.**