

“HOW GOOD IS GOD?”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Psalm 34:8; 106:1-2; 119:68; Luke 18:18-19; Galatians 6:9-10

Introduction.

Yesterday was a lesson in God’s goodness.

First, the trees that fell didn’t hurt anyone or damage our house or the church. Second, Doug Honcoop brought his chain saw and a couple of young, female assistants to clear a path to our front door. Third, the Bunn’s graciously gave me electricity and internet and a place to study and write my sermon, and dinner on top of that. Fourth, when their generator ran out of diesel Bill Brouwer happened along and filled the tank.

Isn’t God good? There is an old, popular saying in Christian circles: God is good all the time and all the time, God is good. It rolls off our tongue so easily as to sound trite and cliché. We usually say that when it’s obvious God is good, so obvious that it doesn’t take any faith to say it.

Is God really good and is He good all the time? What about all the bad things that happen in our world and in our lives? What if God had not done any of those good things yesterday, would He still be good?

Let’s start with that foundational truth, God alone is good.

God is good.

Luke 18:18-19 And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
19 And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”

Really, is no one good except God? Nothing is good in itself besides God, and nothing or no one else is good perfectly. Whatever good is in creation is from the creator. So when you see something truly good, you are seeing a glimpse of God or of the hand and presence of God.

God alone is good, God is the ultimate and final standard of what is good. All that God is and all God does is worthy of approval. And good is whatever God approves.

The goodness of God refers both to His being and to His behavior. As a good tree gives good fruit so a good God cannot produce anything corrupt or rotten.

The goodness of God is seen and experienced in a myriad of ways, in His love, mercy and grace; in His kindness, compassion and generosity; in His patience, long-suffering, forbearance and slowness to anger; in His faithfulness and trustworthiness.

It is the goodness of God that inclines Him to be gracious, kind, benevolent, patient, long suffering, tenderhearted, sympathetic with our flesh and weaknesses. It is the goodness of God that lies behind every one of His blessings.

The cause of His goodness and kindness is Himself, nothing outside of Himself, nothing in us. He hears prayers and answers because He is good and for no other reason.

God is consistently good.

James 1:16-17 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

God is the fountain of all good. All the good we know and see and experience in this world flows from the inexhaustible fountain of God.

God is always good, He doesn't know how to be anything but good. There is no shadow, no dark side, no hint of evil or malice or meanness or nastiness.

God's goodness is unchangeable (without variation), infinite (without limit), perfect (without flaw or defect), and eternal (without ending). God has never been kinder and can never be less kind.

Matthew 7:11 If you then, who are 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!

From creation on, what God does is very good. The Psalmist repeats it over and over again.

God's Greatest Good.

God is good in Himself. The very first outward manifestation of His goodness was in giving existence to all things. God's goodness is first seen in creation.

We know from Genesis that *creation* is very good. In fact, God's goodness is a proof against evolution. Evolution says creation came about by fits and starts, trial and error, good things and bad things over millions of years. No, God created and it was good from the beginning. Psalm 104, 106 and 107 give praise to God for His goodness in creation, and the goodness of all His actions toward His people.

And His goodness extends to all creatures in creation.

Psalm 145:15-16 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. 16 You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

God has given us senses to experience His goodness and then satisfies every need. He has given us palates to enjoy food and drink, and senses to take in a world full of sights and sounds and smells.

The *cross* is better yet, the greatest good. That's why the Gospel is call good news.

Christ's death on the cross demonstrates God's greatest goodness, nothing in history before or since comes close. This is the summum bonum, the highest or greatest good. The most innocent person on earth endured the greatest suffering for all the sins of the earth.

If you want to find a measuring stick for the goodness of God, use the cross.

II Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

Romans 5:8 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Christ's life and death on earth was to show us how great is the goodness and kindness of God toward us. Christ shows us how God is willing to act toward sinners and how He is willing to treat sinners. He is not cold or aloof or hardhearted or indifferent or unmoved.

The greatest good of all is His free offer of salvation to those who do not deserve it, at the tremendous cost of the death of His own Son.

The purpose of God's goodness.

Romans 2:4 Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Do we presume on God's goodness? Do we assume it? Do we think lightly of it or not at all? Do we fail to consider the true worth and value and goodness of God and all He does for us? Do we have a clear picture of the riches of God's kindness, the riches of all His benefits?

Every person on earth has experienced the abundant goodness of God.

Matthew 5:45 For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

God provides all we need and have, life and health and strength, food and water, shelter and transportation, His creation to enjoy, people in our lives who love us and whom we love.

What kind of response has God's goodness produced in us? Are we indifferent? Are we forgetful? Are we daily thankful for every good and perfect gift from God?

When we fail to be good, let us humble ourselves before our God who only and always treats us with goodness despite us.

The goodness and kindness of God is meant to turn our hearts to *repentance* and to *thankfulness*.

Knowledge of God's goodness is cause for worship and cause for giving thanks.

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Gratitude is our payment for goodness. Gratitude for the common grace experienced by all mankind, and for the special grace experienced by God's children. How often do we forget to thank and praise God and show our gratitude for all He has done, faithfully and consistently?

God is sovereign and therefore the author of all blessings, express to God your appreciation for every blessings, for fresh air to breath, for clean water to drink, for every bit of sun and rain, for every day of health, for every night's sleep, for freedom from tyranny, for untold quantities of goods and resources, relatively inexpensive necessities in a great abundance, for so many of life's enjoyments.

Psalm 107 is just that, a Psalm written to give thanks to God for His good in four specific instances, each of which ends with:

Psalm 107:8 Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love [goodness],
for his wondrous works to the children of man!

Implications and Applications.

This truth concerning God should have several effects.

First, if God is so good, then we must be careful never to lay any blame on Him or accuse Him of any wrong doing or evil. We must never complain to God about His ways or actions in any negative way. No matter how we may judge a situation we must never even imply that God is not perfectly good in all He does.

Romans 8:28-29 We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.
For whom? Everyone? No, only for believers. No one else can claim this promise. God is good to all in some ways and to some in all ways.

Psalm 84:11 No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.

What does good mean? Success, health, happiness? Health and wealth gospel? No. Is goodness only the absence of suffering? No.

Does this mean that we have to call cancer or the death of a child or a murder good? No, Scripture warns us never to call good evil and evil good.

If God is all-wise and all-power and therefore able to cause everything that happens to us work out for our good, then *ultimately* everything will be for our good. The key word is ultimately. And the ultimate is to be conformed to the image of Jesus.

We all encounter disease, losses, tragedies, afflictions, heartache, injustice, yet God in His sovereign and perfect goodness is over all these things and in control of all these things and works in and through them for our greater good.

Is what God did to Jesus on the cross good? By what standard? All of Satan's evils will be turned upside down for God's glory and our benefit, and the cross is the greatest proof of this promise.

We judge God by our standards, and by the immediate, not the long view. God's goodness is based on God's goodness, judged by Him, not by us. We can't trust our sense of goodness and fairness and justice. Often God's goodness is most real when nobody is saying this is so good.

We need to learn and grow in our understanding of God's goodness and let Him change our understanding of goodness.

God often thinks that suffering and trials and afflictions are good for us because they create in us character and faith and hope and trust, things that will be useful in this life and in the life to come. His discipline of us is always for our greater good.

God brings suffering and trials and challenges into a church body for our long term blessing and benefit. There is great good when we see faith being built up and dependence on God growing and when we see the fruit of repentance, and the compassion and care of a congregation toward those in need.

Second, if God is so good, and so powerful to be able to use and make all things to be for good, then we must trust Him completely, fully and always.

In truth if our faith is full and strong, we should never be discouraged, because of the perfect and infinite goodness of God. Don't allow yourself to tolerate even a moment of unbelief regarding God's goodness.

We can be patient in our afflictions because of our confidence in the goodness of God. We can curb any envy over the situations of others.

Scripture makes clear that there is evil in the world, but that doesn't negate God's goodness or separate us from God's goodness.

Paul knew every trial and affliction and suffering known to man and he never doubted God's love and goodness (Romans 8).

But what about you? What if you are suffering? What if you have received bad news? What if you have lost a job or your marriage or a child or loved one? What if your life is one long heartache after another? What if it looks like everyone around you is better off than you?

Is this evidence that God is not good or that He doesn't love you anymore? No.

Paul prays that we will be able to comprehend how wide and long and high and deep is God's love for us (Ephesians 3:18-19).

It is wide enough to include Jews and Gentiles, to include high and low, rich and poor. It is long enough to stretch from eternity past to eternity future. From before the foundations of the earth He has loved us and He can never love us any less. It is deep enough to reach us in the pit of our sin, while we were dead in our trespasses. It is high enough to raise us up and seat us in heaven in the presence of Christ and give us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Third, seeing that all goodness is from God and seeing how good God has been to us, we ought to be good to others and share and pass on that goodness. Imitate God's goodness, be a small fountain of it.

This is an attribute we share with God, that we can imitate. We can do good to others. It is practical, relevant, daily.

Galatians 6:9-10 Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

When others treat us badly, let us be reminded to give thanks to God for His perfect goodness and that it is only His goodness that ultimately matters.

How does God treat His worst enemies, those who blaspheme Him and neglect or reject Him? He gives them sun and rain, food and drink, health and pleasure. How do we treat those who commit some small offense against us?

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

May God grant that His goodness becomes a truth we not only accept, but embrace, so that it becomes the perspective from which we view all of the events of our lives, the lens through which we see every situation and the motivation of our every action.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for the revelation of yourself and your goodness in creation and redemption. Help us to think about you and to think of you in the right way. Deliver us from being wrong about you because when we are wrong about you, we are wrong in the most important part of our existence. Open our eyes and hearts to your great goodness in every aspect of our lives for your glory.