

God is Good 2-16-06

God is good, all the time, and all the time, God is good. Once more like you believe it. Let me ask you if you really believe it? All the time? Tell me you never doubt the goodness of God? We get so caught up with daily life and the circumstances we find ourselves in that we can forget to consider this wonderful attribute of God. In some painful situation in life, you have probably thought of 1Thessalonians 5:18 that commands us to give thanks in everything. I know I have wondered how I was supposed to give thanks considering how everything seemed to be against me. Can you relate?

Here is my goal this morning. I want the Scriptures to so convince you of the goodness of God that you will have a hard time doubting it, instead of a hard time believing it. Wouldn't you like to be convinced that the Sovereign God of the universe who has all power and knows everything and is present everywhere is completely and thoroughly good? Think of the serenity, the peace of mind, and the confidence you would have if you were completely sure that your Father who is always with you is always seeking the best for you. (Jeremiah 29:11)

If we are mature people of faith, we get our mind set from the Word of God. So let's look at what the Bible says about the subject. Here is my favorite, because it is so succinct. Psalms 119:68 (NKJV) *You are good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes.* There it is! Now we can all go home. Wouldn't it be nice if we were so teachable from the word? Let's confirm it in the mouth of two or three witnesses. Psalm 119 is probably from Ezra, so let's see what David says. Psalms 86:5 (NKJV) *For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.* Maybe we'd be more convinced if Jesus told us. Matthew 19:17a (NKJV) *So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.*

If we are truly people of faith, we will take this clear teaching from the word and interpret our circumstances in the light of it. But since our spirit is willing but our body is often weak, we face difficulty and try to make sense of it by trying to figure out what possible good could come of it. (Matthew 26:41) There is nothing wrong with that. It may help to change your attitude toward it, but we should believe even when we can't see. Jesus said you would have a special blessing if you do that. Raise your hand if you would like a special blessing from God? ... in the form of a trial you can't see any good in? We want the blessing; we just want it to come some other way.

Sin can produce devastating results in our fragile lives. There are things in which we could search the rest of our lives and never see any good, things like a molestation from a family member or family friend, betrayed friendship in the form of slander or theft or the unfaithfulness of a spouse, an illness that causes one to be handicapped or dependent on medication. I've had some of these and I'm sure many of you have too. Evil begets evil. The ripple effect from the first action causes harm to others in wave after wave. I've been on the receiving end and the giving end of painful situations and wondered where is the good God that I read about in the Bible?

We have to distinguish between what God allows and who God is. John 10:10 (NKJV) *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* We know from Scripture that theft, death, and destruction are Satan's calling cards. God's calling card is life in abundance. We should never attribute the work of the Destroyer to God. I think that is what Jesus was talking about when He spoke on the unpardonable sin. (Mark 3:29) Put the blame where blame is due. Tragic things take place and people ask, "How could God allow this to happen?" It is a legitimate question. "Why did God do this?" is not a legitimate question. How could God allow it is easily answered. He does not keep us from sin or its consequences. In His love and grace, He has given us the right to choose how we will behave. If He forced us to be good, people would be complaining about being slaves of a heartless God.

How could He stop our bad choices without making us all robots incapable of doing as we choose? When we are free to choose good or evil, we will at times choose evil and innocent people will suffer. Does that change the fact that God is good? Absolutely not! In fact, those that love God and are called according to His purpose can know that even the effects of the evil choices of others will somehow work together for good in their lives. (Romans 8:28) You may not be able to see it, but you can know it will.

Let's look at a few examples from the word of God. My favorite is Joseph. See Genesis 37-50) I love that story. Joseph was his dad's favorite. He had some unusual dreams that predicted he would rule over his household. Because of that, his brothers all hated him. They decided to leave him in a pit to die. About that time a caravan came along headed into Egypt. They sold him into slavery. He worked faithfully in the house of Potiphar. The wife of Potiphar thought he was quite a hunk and tried to seduce him. When he wouldn't give in, she felt scorned and so she yelled, "Rape!" Joseph went to jail. He was faithful there too. Sometimes we forget the time span that is taking place. He was 17 when the story began. This is probably seven years later. Just one of these things would be devastating. He never did anything to deserve any of it. Would you hang on to your faith in God? Would you believe God is good after those betrayals?

Finally he got an opportunity. The prison took in two of the Pharaoh's servants. They had dreams. Joseph had a gift of interpretation of dreams, and so he asked the one who would get his job back to plead his cause to Pharaoh. The dreams came to pass, the servant was restored and finally... The servant forgot to tell Pharaoh. Do you still think God is good? Years later, a total of about 7 years a slave and another 7 in prison, and Pharaoh had a dream. Finally... the butler remembered Joseph.

Where was God? Why did God allow all that evil to take place to poor, innocent Joseph? Let's let faithful Joseph tell us in His own words to his brothers. Genesis 50:20 (NKJV) ²⁰ *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."* Joseph could see God working in spite of the evil of man. God cares about people, so He worked through all the evil toward Joseph to put him at the right place and the right time to save lives.

There are many more stories if you look for them and try to place yourself in their shoes. Daniel was taken into captivity as a boy, made a eunuch, trained in the ways of

ungodly mysticism, and through it all he remained faithful to God. He was a faithful servant to the king of the power that did all this to him, but was still thrown in the lion's den. How could God allow all that? It's so unjust... of man. It resulted in the conversion of a king and the Lord knows how many others. We are still inspired by the story today. That is a part of the fruit of Daniel's suffering.

Then there is Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail. Sitting in stocks, backs shredded from Roman whips. How could God allow it? They were just trying to share the Good News. Interesting term! But they weren't complaining, they were singing praises to God! Do you think they might have understood something about the goodness of God that we just don't quite get? Then comes this earthquake. How could it get worse? But the earthquake opened their stocks and the prison doors. (Acts 16:22-26) The jailor, his whole family and probably most of the other prisoners found eternal life in Jesus. God turned the injustice of man into the founding of the Philippian church. Just think what a loss it would be if we didn't have the letter to the Philippians.

But the greatest of them all is the injustice that happened to Jesus. Jesus, though all God, was all man. Did you ever enter into the pain of the betrayal of those men He had trained for three years? Did you ever walk with Him through those mock trials, the beatings, the insults, and the flogging? And finally to be brutally hung on a cross, gasping for air, in unbearable pain? Where is the goodness of God? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34)

You know the goodness of God that came from that injustice of man, because you have received of the goodness that came from the cross. The injustice of man was turned into the justice of God for the sins of the world. Let's face it, most of the time we don't have a clue about what all-knowing God is up to. Do you think the disciples in their wildest dreams could have looked at their Master hanging on the cross and said, "In everything give thanks"? We can now. Now we know it was for us. Now we see the purpose and thank God for it. But so often we stand where the disciples stood, looking at some tragedy and can find no reason to be thankful, no good in sight, and no reason to be hopeful.

I don't know if today I can say with any certainty why I suffered in some of life's circumstances. You probably have wondered why God allowed certain tragedies in your life as well. Moses stood on the mountain just before his death and though he knew of the goodness of God, I can't imagine him thanking the Lord for not being able to take the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. It was His life's work, and there he was right at the gate, but he couldn't enter. (Deuteronomy 34:4-5)

There are those examples in Hebrews 11 of men and women who died not receiving the promises. Yes, I said, "not". Hebrews 11:35b-39 (NKJV) *And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.* ³⁶ *Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.* ³⁷ *They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented--* ³⁸ *of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens*

and caves of the earth. ³⁹ *And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise...*

They didn't see the good that resulted from the suffering. Imagine those that loved them watching their painful deaths. Certainly at the time they did not see the goodness of God that would result from those calloused acts of violence toward the people of God. Yet, they knew that by enduring they would obtain a better resurrection. Resurrection in Christ is good, but there are better resurrections for those that endure. Do you want a good resurrection or a better one, even if it means suffering?

Suffering for Jesus is a gift. Listen to Philippians 1:29. *For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...* It is granted to you on the behalf of Christ. What an honor to suffer for our Lord who suffered so much for us! That's why Paul and Silas were singing in jail.

I get a little frustrated with the attitude we have in the USA. I think we all need to go spend awhile in third world conditions. How many of you have been on a Mexico missions trip? We often excuse our behavior attributing it to some difficulty in our life. Our brothers and sisters around the world are suffering in ways we can't imagine. Compared to them we come up with such pathetic excuses.

When I was preaching in Bombay, I preached on this passage, Philippians 1:29. After the sermon, one of the pastors met with my guide and told how convicted he was. He and his wife and two little girls live and minister in the slums of Bombay. Some 2 million people live in the smelliest, filthiest conditions you can imagine. This pastor was going to ask for enough money to build his own temporary dwelling there. He and his family would spend the night with anyone in the slum that would take them into their shack for the night while he shared the Gospel with them. This was in the rainy season. He told the translator that this message made him realize it is a gift from God to suffer. He didn't want the money to build his own shack. He wanted to keep suffering in this way, because he now saw it as a gift from God.

As the translator started telling me the story, tears rolled down my cheeks. I just thought how pathetically selfish I am when so many people have so little. This pastor had so much joy on his face realizing that his suffering was a gift from God. How does our generous heavenly Father feel when we whine about our mate or give our condition as an excuse for sin?

We take so much for granted. The goodness of God showers down on us daily. In the USA, it is more like a flood of goodness and we whine like the Israelites in the wilderness. Aren't you thankful that the sky is blue and the trees are green? Those are the most pleasant colors to the eye. Imagine if food was painful to eat. Necessities of life are almost all a pleasure. What if it hurt to breathe? What if you lived a hundred years ago when the average life span was late forties? How many of you would already be dead? I would! We've got the word of God in our hands with study helps and cross-references. Do you realize how many people were burned at the stake for having a single hand-copied book in the New Testament?

I'm not trying to make you feel guilty. I'm trying to awaken your gratitude. What a difference it would make if we counted our blessings every day! We have so much goodness that we are numb to it. Then when a tragic thing happens because of sin or just living in a fallen world, we doubt the goodness of God. That is like withholding a birthday present from someone you support, feed, house and care for and having them doubt your goodness. Do you get it? We just really need to start seeing how good God is to us and start appreciating it. Then we are so much less likely to question the tragic things in life. Instead, we should thank God that He is with us through the tragedy and going to bring good out of it.

We need to believe in the revelation of the character of God and see it at work in our world. Our interpretation of circumstances should be based on the revelation in the Word. When we face difficulty, we try to make sense of it. We can try to understand it from our limited experience and knowledge or we can try to understand it in light of God's revelation. What does the Bible tell us about the nature of God? One of the great revelations was that which God gave to Moses the second time he came to Mount Sinai. Exodus 33:18-19 (NKJV)¹⁸ *And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."*¹⁹ *Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."*

Moses didn't want to go on without seeing the glory of God. God put Moses in the cleft of the rock. God is a spirit. What was it that Moses saw? Read verse 19 again and see what passed in front of Moses. It was God's goodness! It was a revelation of the goodness of God that caused Moses face to glow to the extent that the people had to ask him to cover it. (Exodus 34:29-30) You know those people with shiny faces? They are people who see the goodness of God everywhere they look.

There is another revelation of the goodness of God that we have already gone over this morning, the cross. Every time you are tempted to doubt the goodness of God, you should take another look at the cross. The Apostle Paul wrote that if God would not withhold his only Son from you, is there any good thing He will not give you? (Romans 8:32) Drink that in! Meditate on that. When you have a situation that baffles you and you can't see God in it, just remind yourself how much He has already done for you in the cross. Set Calvary as the backdrop to your circumstance and suddenly it takes on a whole different dimension. Difficulty becomes a path to a closer walk. Pain becomes a chance to relate to the sufferings of the One that loved you enough to suffer for you. Loss only helps us to relate to our Savior and others who suffer loss. It gives us a chance to minister to them with a much deeper capacity. (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

The more we see life through the revelation of Scripture, the more meaningful life becomes. The more purpose we find. If we will go deep enough, we will see, with the angels around the throne, that the whole earth is full of His glory. (Isaiah 6:3) Think back to our Exodus passage. What is the manifest glory of God? It is His goodness. The whole earth is full of His goodness. Jesus said that God sends His blessing of rain on the just and the unjust. (Matthew 5:45) Everywhere you look God's merciful goodness is overflowing into the lives of everyone.

When you begin to see it, when you start to realize what a gracious and good God we serve, if someone utters a complaint, it sounds like blasphemy. I hope you are starting to see why God was so hard on the murmuring of the Israelites in the wilderness. He delivered them from slavery, destroyed their enemy, visibly led them with His presence, fed and watered them, kept their clothes from wearing out and was taking them to inherit vineyards they didn't plant and homes they didn't build, and they whined all the way! How could they? How can we?

Has God delivered us from slavery to sin? Has He defeated our enemy? (1Corinthians 15:55-57) Is He feeding and clothing us on the way? (Philippians 4:19) Is He with us, in our midst? (Matthew 18:20) Is God taking us to a home we didn't build? (John 14:2-3) And we whine all the way! Doesn't it sound like blasphemy?

"But Pastor, life is so hard!" A big part of life's difficulty is our refusal to obey. Every command God gives us is for our good. We sometimes get the idea that God is a big killjoy in the sky trying to keep us from having fun. Listen to why God gave the law. Deuteronomy 12:28 (NKJV) *"Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God."* Why does He want us to obey? *That it may go well with you and your children after you forever.* If we really believed that obeying the LORD meant things would go well for us and our children forever, boy would we be obedient. The problem is that we listen to the enemy who entices us to think there is some good in disobedience. What does the enemy come to do? What did Jesus come to do? Who are you listening to?

Even letting us deal with the consequences of our sin is good for us. Imagine if we got drunk and never had a hangover? What if we committed crimes and never got caught? What if we lied and were never found out? The consequences of sin deter us from doing it again. That keeps us from going down a path of self-destruction. Are the consequences of sin good for us? You bet!

God is more concerned about your eternal good than your temporal happiness. That is because He is good. If an affliction is going to draw you to a better eternity, don't you hope He will bring it to you? (Psalm 119:71) He loves us too much to leave us in our condition. He'll do whatever it takes to get us to look and live. (Numbers 21:8-9)

With this perspective from God's Word, does it make a little more sense to you today to hear the command, *"In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you?"* What will you do the next time you are tempted to doubt the goodness of God? Life is full of trouble, because we live in this fallen world. (1Thessalonians 3:3) It's not about now. It's about eternity. It's about your walk with God and the heavenly battle over your soul. When that battle comes will you believe that God is good, all the time, and all the time, God is good? If you believe it, you can thank God for whatever He allows to come your way because you know the inevitable outcome. Amen?