

## GOD IS GOOD AND JUST

PSALM 107:1, et al

Here's the first prayer you may have ever learned to pray: "God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for our food." Remember? Have you ever realized food is just one example of the fact God is good? Think of your favorite food. Steak perhaps. Or Thai green curry. Or pizza. Or ice cream. That's one of mine! Or homemade apple pie. God could have just made one substance we'd eat as a kind of fuel. Instead He's given us a vast and wonderful array of foods. Food is an evidence of God's goodness. It's an example of God's superabundant goodness and generosity. The world is more delicious than it needs to be. God went over the top. We don't need the variety of food we enjoy, but He gave it to us out of His matchless goodness.

We're in the midst of a message series with this title – *What's Most Important About You? What You Think About God*. Who you believe God to be – or not to be – affects every part of who you are and how you live your life even if you're oblivious to how. So, today I'd like you to think with me about what the Bible means when it says God is good and God is just. Those are two of His attributes and an attribute is just something the Bible tells us is true and real about God's character or nature. I'm convinced God's goodness and God's justice complement each other like two sides of the same coin. One informs or reveals the other. You can't fully understand one without the other. And not only do we want to understand God's goodness and justice biblically, but we also want to try and answer the question, "So what?" What difference does God's goodness and justice make in how we live out our lives today or tomorrow? So, let's start here....

## WHAT GOD'S GOODNESS MEANS

It means God is kind-hearted and gracious toward all people. Like other messages in this series, I'm going to mention a bunch of Bible verses in today's message rather than focus on just one passage. All of those references are listed on the message notes in the worship resources for today on our website. The Bible proclaims God's goodness over and over again. Ps. 107:1 (NLT) says, "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever." Ps. 119:68 (NLT) says, "You are good and do only good." God is loving, benevolent, and compassionate. And because He's also infinite and eternal, everything about Him is infinite and eternal. So, God is good eternally and infinitely. There's never been a time when God wasn't perfectly good and there never will be. You and I can be good at times – maybe even for impressive stretches of time. But sooner or later all of us will do or say something less than good. Or, we'll fail to do something we should have done. But, like the song says, God is good all the time and all the time God is good.

I like what someone said about God's goodness. God is good to all in some ways and to some in all ways. On the one hand, God has been good to everyone who has ever lived in some ways. Theologians call it common grace. We all share many demonstrations of God's grace in common. We all share many demonstrations of God's goodness. He's given us a beautiful world in which to live. He's given us life. He's provided food, clothing, and shelter. He's given other people to love us and people

for us to love. Ps. 145:8-9 (NLT) puts it like this: “The LORD is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. The LORD is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation.” True, He hasn’t given out exactly the same blessings and benefits to every person who’s ever lived, but He’s been good to everyone in numerous ways. You take approximately 23,000 breaths every day, but when was the last time you thanked God for one of them? The process of inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide is a complicated respiratory task that requires physiological precision. We tend to thank God for the things that take our breath away and see in them examples of His goodness. Well and good! But maybe we should thank Him for every breath we do take as well! We take many priceless gifts of God’s goodness for granted, don’t we?

So, it’s true, God is good to all in some ways. On the other hand, God is good to some in all ways. Who are those people? His children – those who love Him and have had their relationship with Him restored by faith in His Son, Jesus. In addition to giving us common grace – blessings of many kinds - God has given us special or saving grace. God has given us the gift of an eternal relationship with Him. And when you have a relationship with God, you truly have all things – everything! You lack nothing of any value when you have God. James 1:17 (NLT) says, “Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father.”

The Bible says God is good. That means God wants to bless and please those who love Him. I realize that sounds a bit odd – God wanting to please us. But didn’t Jesus imply that when He compared God to a father who loves to please his kids? In Mt. 7:11 (NLT) Jesus said, “So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.” If you’re a parent, you know it’s a lot of fun to do things for your kids they enjoy and make them happy. As the ultimate Parent, God enjoys blessing His children, too. Dt. 30:9 (NLT) says, “The LORD your God will then make you successful in everything you do.... [T]he LORD will... delight in being good to you as he was to your ancestors.”

Ps. 34:8 (NLT) is an interesting verse, “Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!” It implies if you want to live a truly positive life, it’s essential to believe in God’s goodness. Life and living is meaningless without God or without a God who is good. That doesn’t deny the presence of evil in this world or the reality of suffering. We’re living through a terrible time right now in this pandemic. And, of course, it makes people question both God’s presence and His goodness. But, what’s the alternative? If there’s no God or if God isn’t essentially good, then life becomes hopeless, meaningless, and essentially unlivable in the face of evil, suffering, and pandemics. The Bible never denies the fact there’s much that’s bad in this world, but it steadfastly proclaims that nothing bad has the power to separate us from God’s love and goodness ultimately. Not a pandemic, not suffering, not evil, not even death itself. God’s goodness gives us a reason to live every day enthusiastically and joyfully. Don’t you hear that in a verse like Rom. 8:38 (NLT)? “And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor

demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.”

God has demonstrated His goodness at the cross of Jesus supremely. In the person of His Son, Jesus, God Himself endured the cruel mockery and ridicule of His enemies. He endured the actual crucifixion – one of the most agonizing, dreadful, painful ways to die. Why did God do it? Sin needed to be punished, so God Himself paid sin’s penalty in Jesus’ death. Rom. 8:32 (NLT) provides the implication, “Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won’t he also give us everything else?” The obvious answer to that question is, “Of course God will!” The cross is the supreme declaration of God’s goodness. 2 Cor. 5:21 (NLT) explains why it’s such good news for us, “For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.” Anytime you’re tempted to doubt God’s goodness, focus once again on the cross. God is very, very good. But, to make sure we think about God’s goodness biblically, it’s important to reflect on...

### **WHAT GOD’S GOODNESS DOESN’T MEAN**

It doesn’t mean God exists to meet our needs. Yes, God desires to bless and please His children, but let’s not get the wrong impression. Some people – perhaps it’s done unconsciously – end up acting and thinking as if God’s purpose is to make them happy, solve their problems, forgive their sins, and ensure them a place in Heaven. This is thinking of God as the ultimate Santa Claus. Perhaps parenting is a good analogy. All of us have seen moms or dads who give us the impression they exist for their kids – no discipline, no guidance, and no leadership. We know good parents love to please their kids – true enough – but they also insist their kids go about living life the right way. And if their kids refuse or rebel, truly good parents will impose appropriate discipline until they conform. God treats us much the same way. One way God encourages us to live life His way is to allow us to experience the pain of living life our own way. He disciplines us. That’s what makes Him a good God. Dt. 30:10 (NLT) puts it like this, “The LORD your God will delight in you if you obey his voice ... and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.” Do you hear the condition?

God’s goodness doesn’t mean He overlooks sin and evil. Think about it. If God did overlook evil such as slavery, or child abuse, or genocide, how could He be truly good? When goodness tolerates evil, it’s no longer good. When goodness winks at injustice, it’s no longer good. You hear that assumption when God Himself says in Ex. 34:6-7 (NLT), “The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty.” God’s goodness is full of integrity. God somehow combines goodness and righteousness perfectly.

God’s goodness doesn’t ever mean He accepts or approves of anything less than what is perfectly good. All of us occasionally do what’s right and good. But none of us do what’s good literally all of the time. Realizing this is true, we then try to play the comparison game. We compare our version of goodness with other people’s version

and assume this is somehow acceptable to God. Best selling author Max Lucado says he tried that comparison tactic on his mother. She'd tell him his bedroom wasn't clean and he'd ask her to go with him to look at his brother's bedroom. His room was always messier than Max's room. "See there, Mom, my room is clean. Just look at my brother's room!" This strategy never worked. Mom would walk Max down the hall to her room. When it came to a clean, tidy bedroom, Max's mom was absolute goodness. Her closet was just right. Her bed was just right. Her bathroom was just right. Compared to her bedroom, Max's bedroom was just wrong. She would show him her bedroom and say, "This is what I mean by clean." When it comes to being both good and right, God points to Himself and says, "I'm the standard, not human beings' version of what's good. I'm what it means to be truly good."

Here's something else about what God's goodness doesn't mean. It never means He will overlook your rejection of Him. What does the Bible mean by rejecting God? It means we refuse to know God, love God, or serve God. At some point, it also involves rejecting Jesus and what He did to restore and make possible a relationship with God. It's believing the cross doesn't matter or that Jesus is optional. It's the mistaken belief God will accept us on our own terms. When people reject God, it truly is the greatest sin and evil imaginable. And because God is truly and perfectly good, He can't simply ignore that rejection and still be truly good. In the little, obscure book of Nahum in the Old Testament, we find that principle clearly stated. "The LORD is slow to get angry, but his power is great, and he never lets the guilty go unpunished.... The LORD is good, a strong refuge when trouble comes. He is close to those who trust in him. But he will sweep away his enemies." (Nahum 1:3, 7-8 NLT) In the New Testament, we hear the same assumption in Rom. 11:22 (NLT), "Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness." When we reject God, we make ourselves His enemy and a good God can't overlook that greatest of all sins. So, God is good. But, God is also just.

## **WHAT GOD'S JUSTICE MEANS**

We can't separate God's goodness from His being just. When we say God is just, we mean He upholds whatever is right and fair. They go hand in hand. They're indeed two sides of the same coin. The Bible equates the two: goodness and justice. Ps. 92:15 (NLT) says, "The LORD is just! He is my rock! There is no evil in him!" The Bible also tells us God is the ultimate judge; therefore, He must uphold whatever is fair, just, and good. In Ps, 75:7 (NLT) we read, "It is God alone who judges; he decides who will rise and who will fall." Heb. 12:23 (NLT) adds this thought, "You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things." In our culture, judges have only limited power and influence. But in the Bible, the king of a country was often the one and only supreme judge. His word was final. By calling God the Judge, the Bible implies He alone has all authority and power in the universe. He upholds all that's right, fair, and just with wisdom and discernment. Furthermore, because God is by definition eternal, infinite and perfect, then His justice is also eternal, infinite, and perfect as well.

Because God is the ultimate Judge and being just is one of His essential attributes, it's obvious He must punish anything sinful or evil. He can't just excuse it, wink at it, pretend it doesn't matter, or wish it away. Do you know the meaning of the word "retribution"? Retribution is a one word definition of the idea we reap what we sow. Yes, God is incredibly patient, but retribution simply means God will ultimately reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But one day, perfectly and forever. You and I have real problems knowing enough to be truly just and fair, therefore, truly good. That's because we have limited knowledge and we're sinful, too. But God has all knowledge and He's absolutely holy. Therefore, God is able to be both perfectly just and fair as well as perfectly good at the same time. Because He is just, one day God will set everything exactly right and as it should be. Let me read an important passage from Rom. 2:5-8 (NLT), "For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will judge everyone according to what they have done. He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness." That pretty much says it all!

Earlier I said the cross of Jesus is the ultimate demonstration of God's goodness. It's also the ultimate demonstration of His justice. God didn't let my sin, your sin, or anyone else's sin go unpunished. At the cross, Jesus was punished for my sin, your sin, and everyone else's sin. God didn't violate justice at the cross; He established or demonstrated it perfectly. He confirmed and upheld justice. Sin earned a terrible penalty. Justice demanded the penalty be paid. God Himself stepped in and paid the penalty in the person of His Son, Jesus. In a sense, God took off His judicial robes, put on the clothes of a condemned criminal, and went to the electric chair for us.

The Bible makes it very clear God demonstrated His justice at the cross. Rom. 3:25-26 (NLT) says, "For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair.... God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus." God is both very good and very just. What Jesus did some 2,000 years ago at the cross gives you and me the ability today to live lives that are forgiven and now able to enjoy an eternal relationship with His Father. 1 John 1:9 (NLT) reminds us that because of the cross, "If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness." Again, in order to think biblically about what God's justice does mean, we need to understand...

### **WHAT GOD'S JUSTICE DOESN'T MEAN**

It doesn't mean God is ever cruel. True, the Bible refers to God's anger toward sin and sinful people. You've heard the expression "the wrath of the court," right? It means the judge imposed his or her sentence on someone who's guilty. It doesn't mean the judge was being hateful or unfair. God never loses His self-control when He administers His justice. It's always exactly as it should be – no more and no less. It also doesn't mean

God is impatient or eager to render justice. Over and over again in Scripture, we're told God is slow to become angry, slow to impose judgment, and patient beyond human comprehension. There's a wonderful insight into how God administers His justice in 2 Pt. 3:9 (NLT), "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent." But God's patience isn't infinite or eternal either. A day is coming when sin and evil in any and every form will be eradicated from God's universe.

God's justice doesn't mean something else. It never means God is ever unfair as to where we spend eternity. At the end of the day, people select whatever form of God's justice they prefer. On the one hand, you can choose to accept God's justice rendered at the cross. There, justice was rendered by God Himself making it possible for your eternal relationship with Him to be restored. By putting your faith in Jesus and what He accomplished, you accept the justice of God inherent in the cross. On the other hand, you can reject God's justice at the cross and try to substitute your own understanding of what it should be. You can attempt to justify yourself before Him. You can insist pridefully that your understanding of how best to have a relationship with almighty God of the universe should prevail even above God's own solution. By doing so, you self select Hell. Before Hell is ever inflicted by a just God, it's something people choose for themselves by rejecting God. Hell is the ultimate fulfillment of a person's own choice when it comes to how he or she chooses to relate to God. Yes, there is a very real choice to be made. And, by God's grace, may each of us be quick to choose the way provided by God who is both very good and very just.

Two young sisters, Abby and Flannery, went with their dad to get something fun to drink from an outside vendor. Abby got an apple juice and Flannery got a mango surprise. Despite their dad's insistence that he was happy to pay for their drinks, the two girls brought the contents of their piggy banks – a combined total of 80 cents. At the vendor's cart, Abby confidently insisted, "I want to pay for mine." The clerk rang up her purchase and said, "That'll be \$2.06." When she gave her coins to the clerk, he said, "Um, that's... that's not enough." The father felt a little tug on his sweater from his other daughter. He looked down and Flannery said, "I think I'd like to use your money." Whenever we think about what it means to have a relationship with God today for all of this life as well as for all eternity in a place called Heaven, it's best to conclude, "Dear God, I think I'd like to use Your goodness to have a relationship with You. Mine just isn't enough. And I'd like to choose the justice You've already provided through your Son, Jesus, to get into Heaven. My version of justice just isn't enough." And God in His grace always says to you and me,, "It's already done. It's covered. It's paid in full." God is both very good and very just.