

Good

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[0 : 00] Good evening everyone, it's really good to have you with us this evening. I think there are a few visitors, you are particularly welcome. As Danny said, we're continuing our series looking at This is Our God, and we're looking at Our Good God this evening.

Some of you may know it, I'm a big fan of the Kindle e-reader. I find it portable, convenient and flexible, and for me that outweighs the benefits of having paper. A lot of the features of the Kindle try to replicate what you can do on paper, and one of them is the highlighting feature.

So if you're reading a book, you might go through and underline a passage or get your highlight route, so you can be reminded of it when you come back again later. And you can do the same thing on the Kindle, just highlight the passage, and it will remind you that this is something that's important to you.

What you can also do with the Kindle is see what passages other people have highlighted. So you can go in and find a list of the most common passages in the Bible or any other book that people have chosen to highlight to be reminded of.

So I thought I'd do that. I did it for the NIV for the edition I've got on my Kindle. And I thought the top two, the two most popular verses, were quite interesting. So in second position is Romans 8 and verse 28, which says, And then in first place, the most popular highlight in the NIV at least, is Jeremiah chapter 29 and verse 11.

[1 : 33] And it says, So my not very scientific analysis suggests that, at least for readers of the NIV, one of the things that they want to be reminded of is the goodness of God.

Two verses that very much bring before us the good plans that God has for his people. I think that probably is true of most of us as well.

The goodness of God, the fact that God is good, is something that is really important to us and a great encouragement in our lives. But we have to ask ourselves, what do we mean when we say God is good?

The word good is very common in the English language, and it's used in all sorts of different ways. So when we say God is good, what exactly do we mean?

Let me put up a quote from the theologian Bruce Milne, a very interesting book on doctrinal theology, Know the Truth. And he says this, God's goodness is a perfection which can be classed equally under holiness or love, and as such underlies the impossibility of separating these two attributes.

[3 : 01] Take a second to think about that while I keep talking. But Bruce Milne is saying that goodness encompasses both God's holiness, which we looked at last week, and God's love, which we'll be looking at in more detail next week.

And if you want to understand what it means that God is good, you have to bring these two elements of his character into it. I think we can maybe say that God's goodness is how his holiness and his love are seen in practice, how they make a difference in our lives.

Now, if you were here last week, you may remember when Graham talked about God's holiness. He talked about God as being set apart and perfectly pure. I think it's probably the second of those that Bruce Milne is thinking of at this point.

The God who is perfectly just, upright, righteous, who can't tolerate sin. And God's goodness must be based on God's holiness, on the fact that he can do no wrong and that he can tolerate no wrong. Now, God's love, I'm sure you'll have an understanding of. Do come back next week if you have any doubts about it. But it's these two things, I think, that we have to look at. One is the God who doesn't do any wrong. The other is the God who loves us and who demonstrates his care for us.

[4 : 28] Let's examine this a bit further, looking at some of the passages and verses that we've looked at already, maybe one or two others as well. The verse in Romans chapter 5, Romans chapter 5, verse 7, that says this.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But then verse 8, God commends, demonstrates his love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died, died for us. So I think what this verse is saying, if I've read it right, is that goodness goes beyond righteousness.

So Paul is saying it's very unlikely to anyone want to die for someone who's just righteous, who kind of was a holier-than-thou kind of person. It's more likely, though still unlikely, Paul says, that they might die for a good person.

So goodness, if we take this verse, has the element of righteousness, but goes beyond that and is reflected in care, in love for others.

[5 : 33] If we take the passage that Sabina read to us from the Gospels, of the rich ruler who came to Jesus and asked about eternal life, and Jesus says, why do you call me good teacher?

There's no one good except God. And I think he carries that thought forward into the following verses, because the ruler is able to say, well, I'm an upright person.

I've obeyed the commands. Now, undoubtedly, he hadn't completely obeyed the commands, but perhaps he was an upright person relative to other people. But what Jesus highlights then is, yes, you may not be doing much that's actively wrong, but are you really showing love for God and love for others?

Or actually, is the main thing in your life the riches that you have? Righteousness must be accompanied by love. Goodness is holiness alongside love, when we think about God's goodness. Or look at the other way around. Is it enough just to love people? If I love people, does that make me a good person? We might in our society say someone's good because they do lots of good works.

[6 : 47] But again, love by itself isn't enough. There's from Jeremiah that we read, where God is making great promises to his people, that he has good plans for them, plans to prosper them in the future.

But if we look at the context of that, it's in the context of God's judgment, of God's righteousness. Because the people are going to be in exile for 70 years, and then says, God, you will turn to me, and you will get all the benefits that I have promised.

Or Romans 8, the other verse that we highlighted, that talks about God works everything for good for those who love him. The context of that, if we read on a verse or two, is about people being transformed into the image of Jesus, of being justified before God.

In other words, alongside the love that is there, there is also God's justice, God's holiness. So God's goodness combines both his holiness and his love.

Let me then put up a statement. I think one of the other who have taken this read have done something similar. So here's where we're going this evening, the things I want to talk about as we think of our good God.

[8 : 06] God is good. This is evident through his actions, his gifts, and his commands. And his goodness never changes. God is good.

God's whole character is good. It's not that God is good sometimes and not good other times. God is always good.

And that's the point Jesus is making, I think, in the passage from Luke, when he says, there is no one good except God. We can all do good things.

We can all show love and concern for others. And yet by nature we are not good. By nature we are sinners who have rebelled against God.

And God is the only one who is truly good. And how do we see this? We see this, I'm suggesting, through his actions, his gifts, and his commands.

[9 : 09] So what are the actions of God? Let me just highlight two. God is our creator. God made the universe and everything that's in it. And if we read through Genesis chapter 1, we find again and again God comes to the end of the day and he looks at what he's made and he sees it is good.

Or he sees it is very good. God has made his creation good. Now this is, I suppose, another quality of goodness, the quality of excellence to be able to do things well.

But it is also, I think, when it says what God made is good, it means that it's more than just functional. It's not just in this world that we have food to eat.

We have food to eat that, by and large, we can enjoy and gives us satisfaction. We can hear. We can hear music, as God has created our ears and the world around us so that we can hear and can enjoy things.

We can see, we can look around us, and we can see the beauty of nature. And God's creation is not just functional, it's beautiful, it's there for our enjoyment, and it gives him pleasure too, the fact that he has made something, he's made everything, and it is good.

[10 : 35] Psalm 100 verse 3 that we read earlier, Know that the Lord is God, it is he who made us, and we are his, we are the sheep of his pasture.

Our God is good, and he has shown it through his creation. And if we knew nothing else about God, but what we can see in creation, then we should still be attracted to him.

Romans chapter 1 and verse 20, Paul says, For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so people are without excuse.

In other words, just looking at creation should lead us to believe in a God who is great, in a God who is good. But of course, we can look beyond that when we think about God's actions.

And we think of God not just as our creator, but as our saviour. And God's greatest action was in sending his son into the world to be the saviour of the world.

[11 : 47] He sent the one who is most precious to him to live a life of poverty and to die on the cross for our sakes. And that action demonstrates above everything else the goodness of our God.

It satisfies his holiness in that reparation was made for sin, the punishment that was due for sin has been taken. And it demonstrates his love, the love that was willing to give the one who was most precious to him for our sake.

God is good and his goodness is shown in his actions. Then God's goodness is shown through his gifts. Now two ways again for that.

God gives us what we need physically. I suspect few of any of us will go away this evening and won't have a shelter, a warm bed, food to eat and all that we need for our daily lives.

And much more beyond a lot that can give us additional pleasure that God has given to us. Our God is a God who gives and gives and gives more than we could ever need.

[13 : 05] And he also gives to us spiritually. He gives us spiritual gifts that will help us to be fulfilled in our lives, will help us to serve others, to show goodness to others that God has shown to us and that will help us to serve him as we should.

And these gifts too are a sign of God's goodness to us. He doesn't need us. He doesn't need us to exercise the gifts that he's given us but he has chosen to give us these gifts so that we can glorify him and so that we can enjoy him and enjoy being used by him.

So we see God's goodness in his gifts. And then also thirdly, we see God's goodness in his commands. Romans 7 verse 12 says, The law is holy and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good.

And it may not seem so obvious that we see God's goodness through the commands he's given us. And yet is it not right that God has given us guidelines of how we should live our lives, how we are able to please him, how we are able to get the most out of being in this world.

One of the greatest chapters in the Bible, as well as being the longest in the Bible, is Psalm 119. And the great theme of Psalm 119 is that the psalmist loves God's word.

[14 : 35] He loves to go to his Bible, however much of it he had in those days, and to enjoy what God has said there. Let me reduce a few verses, verses 14 to 16.

The psalmist writes, I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees. I will not neglect your word. I delight in your decrees.

Do we take great delight in what God has given us through his word, the pathway to life that he sets out before us as we serve him and seek to obey what he has given to us?

God's commands, along with his actions and his gifts, are good and are beneficial to us. Our God is good.

[15 : 40] The key to that is that God's goodness never changes. It never fails. And even in the difficult times, even when life is hard and we're finding it's a real struggle, we can go to God

and we can rejoice in his goodness to us.

And that's the key difference between us and God. We can do an element of good, not on the level that God can. We can do an element of good in our lives. God constantly does good.

God is good. And where we are temperamental and very in the way we live, God never changes. Over the last three or four years, I guess, many of us have become familiar with the name Edward Colston. I think if you lived in Bristol before that, you would have been familiar with him, but not probably elsewhere.

Edward Colston, for many years, was considered a great hero in the city of Bristol. He was a great philanthropist.

[16:49] He built schools, he built hospitals, he built churches, he built homes for pure people, and he was seen as someone who was good. And they named streets after him, they named a concert hall after him, they put a big statue up in the middle of the city.

And then it emerged that Edward Colston had got his fortune through the slave trade. That because he was a slave trader, he was able to build by the vast amount of money and was then able to use it for good things.

And these days, he's probably best remembered because his statue was thrown into the harbour at Bristol, and all the call and everything named after him has been renamed. He was someone who did good in some ways, but also did bad in other ways.

And in a less extreme way, I guess we are all like that. We have some good things in our lives, we have some things that are virtuous, we have lots of things too that we're ashamed of, and that are certainly not good.

Our God is not like that. Our God is perfectly good all of the time. Now I say that with confidence, but if you went out into the street, there will be a lot of people who would disagree with that.

[18:13] The so-called new atheists would tell us if there's a God, which they say there isn't, but if there's a God, he must be really cruel and caring because of all the suffering in this world, and indeed all the suffering that those who trust in him suffer alongside everyone else.

Just because you trust in God, you're not exempt from suffering, and the atheists would then say, well, that proves there's not a God, or at least that he doesn't care for you if there is.

Now before we dismiss that out of hand, let's just take a second to reflect on the fact that Christians do suffer. In this world, Jesus says, you will have trouble, and that is certainly true.

If I look at this church, the church post-pandemic will be in many ways quite different from the church pre-pandemic because there are a large number of people who have been pillars of the church for many years who are now going through times of great suffering and are unable to be with us.

The names will mean something to some people or a lot to some people or nothing to others, let me list a few. The Wilsons, the McMillans, the Millers, the Greys, the Pontons, all in their families and not just one person generally, have suffered and are suffering a great deal.

[19:40] Does that then demonstrate that actually God isn't good all the time? That actually we shouldn't be saying God is good because Christians can suffer greatly.

Let's move away from the immediate local situation and let me introduce you to this couple. Their names are Joey and Rory and if you didn't get it from the name or the picture they're an all-American couple and very clean cut they're singers and came to prominence in one of these television music contests had some success following that and went to live on a farm and pursue their music alongside farming and were all set up to live happily ever after.

And then Joey was diagnosed with cancer and it wasn't either a short sharp cancer or a cancer which got better over time.

It was a cancer which lasted for a couple of years. She suffered a great deal of pain both from the cancer itself and from the chemo. Here's one thing that her husband Rory said when you see someone with so much faith go through something so painful you wish that somehow God would exempt them from so much heartache and pain.

Maybe we can identify with that thought. Anyway, after a couple of years Joey lost her battle with cancer and she passed away leaving her husband Rory with a two-year-old daughter with Down syndrome and quite a number of valid challenges I won't go into.

[21:11] One of our closest friends was a songwriter and wrote a very personal quite sad song about her suffering and her death. And for our purposes tonight these are the two key lines in it.

The song says I don't believe that Jesus that you love so much would put you through such pain. Take a thing to think about that. What the song is saying is that Joey loved the Lord Jesus but either he couldn't or he wouldn't save her from the pain.

And so the songwriter says, I think he's concluding, she can't have a saviour who is good all the time who really loves her. Rory recorded that song as a direct with Dolly Parton but actually it wasn't his own sentiment.

He was doing it recognising the honest feelings of a friend but it wasn't the way that he felt. Here's what he said. Just because things don't work out the way that you hoped they would doesn't mean that God isn't still in charge.

It's still his plans and not ours. So I don't feel like my faith has wavered at all. You see the difference between these two viewpoints.

[22 : 31] One is looking at the suffering of the person and concluding from that there isn't a God who cares and is able to help. There isn't a good God. The other is starting from the point of view that there is a good God.

That we know God is good but we don't always understand his ways. And so although we can't understand the suffering that many people go through and it's not for us in this life to be able to understand it yet we can cling on to the confidence that God is good.

God cares for us. The difference is how we view things. Do we start from the viewpoint that says I know God is good and we'll come back to why in a minute I know God is good therefore there must be a reason for what's happened.

Or do we start from the viewpoint that says this thing's happened it's terrible that proves there isn't a good God. So how do we know that God is good?

Well we know it for the reasons I said earlier. We know it through his creation we know it through his daily provision for us and we know it above all through the Lord Jesus. Our good God our saviour God Jesus was willing to suffer much more than we ever will.

[23 : 56] And the confidence that we can have in his goodness comes primarily from our knowledge of Jesus and the fact that he went to the cross he took the punishment for our sins and he demonstrated there in an absolute way the goodness of God.

A couple of verses on from the verse in Romans that we quoted earlier it says this he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things.

So no matter what the storms of life may be no matter how much pain we may experience or see other people suffering no matter how much we may pray for something and it seems that God hasn't answered our prayers certainly not in the way that we expected.

We can still be confident that our God is good and even in a time of suffering we can experience his peace and we can know that although we may have a thorn in the flesh that we have to endure yet his grace is sufficient for us.

he never leaves us he's never not there for us and everything that happens ultimately will fulfill his good purposes.

[25 : 27] God is good and we need to hang on to that in every aspect of our lives. As the psalmist said in what we read earlier the Lord is good and his love endures forever.

his faithfulness continues through all generations. Let's pray together. Father we thank you that you are a good God.

We thank you that you are a God who cares for us in every aspect of our lives. And although we may not always understand your ways we thank you that they are always good and they are always right.

Thank you for your holiness that you are so far above us in your purity and your greatness and your majesty. And we thank you for your love for the love that sent Jesus to be our saviour and to die on the cross for our sins.

Help us to understand more of your goodness. Help us to rejoice in it. And when the time of trial comes as it will for all of us help us nevertheless to be able to continue to have confidence that you are a good God and that you care for us that you never change.

[26 : 50] Thank you for your presence as we've looked at your word together. We pray you'll be with us now as we come to remember the Lord Jesus together. We give you thanks in his name. Amen.