

Goodness and Faithfulness in Jesus

M.W. Bassford
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Introduction.

- A. As we continue to consider Galatians 5:22-23 in our morning lessons, we once again encounter another word that's hard to pin down: the word "goodness." In our everyday speech, we might well refer to a pizza as good, a football team as good, and God as good, yet by this, we mean three very different things.
- B. In all these cases, something is good when it meets a standard. A pizza is good when it tastes the way a pizza is supposed to taste, a football team is good when it plays the way a football team should play, and God is good because He always acts in the way that righteous beings should act. That means, friends, that we ourselves are only good when we live up to God's standards and fulfill His purposes for us. That's goodness.
- C. Faithfulness, by contrast, is a much easier word to define, most likely because modern American culture doesn't use it a whole lot. About the only time we normally see it used is when someone describes an adulterous man as unfaithful to his wife. This lack of usage, though, actually points to a serious problem. We are not a faithful culture. We don't value living up to commitments that we have made. Even in law school, I can remember professors talking about the idea of efficient breach of contract. Basically, this says that when you have made a contractual promise to someone, but you would lose money if you held up your end of the bargain, you should walk away and not perform your part of the contract. That's the way the world around us thinks. People don't care about remaining true to their word. All they care about is short-term advantage.
- D. Despite these problems of confusion and lack of interest, goodness and faithfulness are two virtues we are called to apply, and in these, as in all things, our example is Jesus. Jesus displayed goodness by always living up to God's standards and faithfulness by remaining committed to what is right. If we want to go to heaven, we need to strive to be like Him in these things. Let's look, then, at goodness and faithfulness in Jesus.

I. Goodness.

- A. The first way that we see goodness exemplified in Jesus is in **DOING GOOD**. This is the way that the goodness of Jesus is described in Acts 10:38. At first glance, this point might not appear to be particularly enlightening. After all, we're basically using the word to define itself. However, once we dig a little deeper, things become clearer. What this tells us is that goodness doesn't sit on the couch and watch TV all the time. Goodness does things. Look at how this passage describes Jesus. He was first anointed by God, given a mission and abilities to use to carry out that mission. Then, He took what He had been given and did what God wanted Him to do. Throughout His entire ministry, He actively sought to carry out God's will.
- B. Does that description apply to us? Like Jesus, do we work to use our gifts to please God? Or is our goodness in potential form only? Imagine, friends, that as Christians, we were required to fill out a time sheet every week that logged the hours we spent doing God's work. What would our time sheets look like? Would they show a steady, daily pattern of working for the kingdom, or would they show four hours of assembly each week and nothing else? I know that all of us have lives, all of us are busy, but as my dad likes to say, "People always have time to do what they want to do." What does our use of time say about what we want? Do we want to serve God, or do we want to serve ourselves? Are we doing good, or are we doing nothing?
- C. Another primary way that we see goodness in Jesus is in **SOWING GOOD SEED**. Matthew says as much in Matthew 13:37. This, of course, comes from the parable of the wheat and the tares, and the good seed is what creates the wheat. This idea of the seed is one of the most used in the New Testament, and we know from numerous passages that the seed is the word of God. Jesus, then, is sowing the word.
- D. If we truly want to be disciples of Jesus, we need to be sowers of the word too. We need to be people who are constantly looking for ways to plant the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of those around us. This doesn't have to be any big deal. After all, not all seeds are the size of a coconut. There are any number of things we can do, from handing somebody a sermon outline to inviting them to services to just talking about God and the Bible in a normal everyday conversation. The results are up to God, but the effort is up to us.
- E. Goodness also appeared in Jesus in **CONFESSING HIMSELF**. This is how Paul depicts the actions of Jesus in 1 Timothy 6:13. You might remember that about six months ago, we looked at this incident in some detail, the time when Jesus told Pilate that He was the King of the Jews. When Jesus made that confession, He knew it was a death sentence. He knew that Pilate would have to kill Him once He declared His kingship. Jesus, however, didn't let that knowledge deter Him. He made the good confession because it was the truth.
- F. Likewise, friends, we cannot be shy about confessing Jesus. All of us who are Christians have had to do this. Typically, though, that confession is not made in intimidating surroundings. It's a much easier thing to say when we're surrounded by Christians who long to hear us say it than when we are in the presence of those who are indifferent or downright hostile to our Lord. Nonetheless, people around us need to know that we're

Christians, no matter who they are. They need to know who Jesus is and why we serve Him. We can never be ashamed of our Savior, because if we are, He will be ashamed of us.

- G. Finally, the goodness of Jesus appeared in His **DYING FOR OTHERS** . This is part of His self-description in John 10:11. It seems like this idea of virtue expressed in the death of Jesus keeps on coming up through all the fruit of the spirit, and I suppose that shouldn't surprise me. It's quite obvious why this action of Jesus is described as good. The standard that God set for Jesus required Him to die for the sins of others, so that's what Jesus did. He lived up to the expectations that were placed on Him as the Good Shepherd.
- H. Likewise, God expects us to die for others. This, of course, is not a literal death, but it is still a very demanding one. If we want to imitate the goodness of Jesus, we have to lay our lives down and give them to others. Christianity isn't about selfishness and doing what we desire. It's about living for others instead.

II. Faithfulness.

- A. Just as Jesus exemplifies goodness, though, so He also exemplifies faithfulness. One of the first ways He exhibited faithfulness is by **RESISTING SATAN** . This facet of faithfulness appears in the account of Matthew 4:8-10. Satan literally offered Jesus the world, but Jesus turned Him down because He was devoted to God.
- B. Don't think, friends, that Satan is going to appear in bodily form to us and offer us the world straight out, but he is certainly going to try to lure us from our loyalty to God. Remember, friends, the worship of Satan can take many forms. The libertine and the drug addict are Satan worshipers, but so too are the lover of money, the workaholic, and even the man who loves his family more than he loves God. All of those things can become gods that we put before the Almighty. There are only two sides to the spiritual conflict, friends, God's and Satan's, and if we're not serving God only, we're serving somebody else, sometimes without realizing it.
- C. The way that we avoid this trap is by remembering that when we were baptized, we promised to put God first, and then by living up to that promise. Faithfulness to God is like being faithful to our husbands or our wives. It requires from us the constant understanding that we don't belong to ourselves anymore, that we don't get to make choices that would otherwise be appealing. It requires from us constant watchfulness, to make sure that our hearts are not being seduced, and it requires the willingness to give things up to keep the promise.
- D. On the positive side, Jesus also showed faithfulness by **OBEYING GOD** . We see Him doing this, among many other places, in Matthew 16:21-23. Jesus has just explained to His disciples the difficult truth about His destiny: that He is going to be unjustly killed by the Jews and the Romans. Peter, with the best intentions in the world, becomes an instrument of Satan and tries to persuade Jesus to do otherwise. In return, Jesus rebukes Peter sharply. At this point of Jesus' ministry, there was nobody unhappier about what was going to happen next than Jesus was. Jesus wasn't any more overjoyed about the prospect of being crucified than we would be. However, He knew that it was God's plan from the beginning, and He was going to obey God.
- E. We need to have that same attitude in our lives. We need to be willing to affirmatively do what is right, no matter what the personal cost is. Folks, God hasn't added anything new to the Bible since any of us became Christians. When we made that commitment, we had all the information about what the Lord would require. That means that when God tells us to do something we don't want to, we need to buck up and do it anyway.
- F. In addition to this, the faithfulness of Jesus manifests itself in **BEARING WITNESS** . Look at the way that He is described in Revelation 1:5. This designation means that whatever Jesus saw from God and received from God, He fully revealed without exception. He had seen the truth, and He shared it fully.
- G. We need to be the same kind of witness in our lives. Not surprisingly, this idea of "bearing witness" is one that the denominational world gets all wrong. Whenever you hear someone on TV "witnessing" about Jesus dying on the cross, they're using the word incorrectly. They can't witness about things that happened in the first century because they didn't see them, and neither can we. What we can bear witness to, however, is the way that Jesus works in our lives today. Sometimes, we fall prey to a kind of Church of Christ deism, and act like God has been sitting back since the first century, just twiddling His thumbs till the day of judgment.
- H. What a miserable view of Christianity that is! Sure, God doesn't use signs and wonders to confirm His word any more, but He does work powerfully in the life of every Christian every day, and we need to bear witness to what He's done for us. He answers our prayers, comforts us in our distress, helps us to become better people, and leads us to grow up in all things into Christ. How do we know that God has done those things for us? Well, every good thing given and each perfect gift is from God, so if it's good, we know God did it. Let's count our blessings, friends, and let's talk about those blessings with others. Let's bear witness to the work of God.
- I. Finally, though, we see the faithfulness of Jesus shown in **HELPING OTHERS** . Rather unusually for this sermon series, this is something that Christ does now during His reign in heaven rather than during His time on earth. Consider, for instance, the Hebrews writer's depiction of it in Hebrews 2:16-18. He is a faithful High Priest. That means that whenever we are tempted and need His help, He is there to help us.
- J. We too should be faithful toward those around us who need our help. Our baptism is not just a commitment to God; it's a commitment to other Christians too, and that's also something we need to live up to. When we think about Christ's help for us, His brothers and sisters, it should move us to help our brethren too.

Conclusion. If you want help in finding goodness and faithfulness in your life, come to God today.