

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Psalm 119:65-72

As it has been mentioned this morning we have been looking at the various characteristics of God in our morning service and the text, at least my starting place this morning is the 68th verse of the 119th Psalm. There are literally hundreds of texts I could use which deal with the goodness of God but this gives us two aspects of God's goodness. When the psalmist writes, "Thou art good and doest good." Now God's attribute of goodness, His characteristic of goodness is one that is like the others interrelated with His other attributes. In one sense when we say that God is good and that He is always good we mean that He is never bad. God never sins. God never does anything that is wrong. So according to this interpretation of the goodness of God or this aspect of the goodness of God you can see that God's goodness is closely related to His holiness, to His righteousness. But there is another sense in which we can say that God is good and that is because of His kindness, because of His mercy, because of His grace, because of His compassion, because of His love, because of His faithfulness, because of His patience, because of His longsuffering and at least in one of the passages it indicates that God is good because He is wonderful in His works. So in dealing with the attributes of God we could just as easily talk about His love or His grace or His faithfulness or His patience. All of these come under this heading and rather than take the time in our morning service to deal with each one of these individually I simply want you to have this in mind, God is good because He is all of these things and these are characteristics which refer preeminently to Him. You will never find them in their perfection like you will find them in God Himself. This is the attribute which gives us hope because if we were simply to talk about the holiness of God as we have but could not also talk about the goodness of God then understanding the holiness of God would be a terrible thing. And in the same respect because God is a God of holiness, God has to be a God of judgement, a God of wrath, a God of righteousness. And yet as we talk about those ominous subjects of the wrath of God, the eternal judgement of God upon sinners how wonderful it is to know that we are talking about a

God Who is also good. Even our English word God has been taken from the attribute of God's goodness. One writer has said, "Our Jehovah, the true God is superlatively good, good in the highest degree, good beyond all conception, and expression." And as you know from reading your Bible there are many statements in Scripture that are similar to the one that I have read to you this morning and the one that we read together just a moment ago. But this seems to sum up the teaching doesn't it, "God is good and God doeth good." If we could add one other idea to what is contained in this 68th verse we would find it in a passage like Psalm 54 and verse 6 where it indicates that God has a good name, the verse reads this way, "I will freely sacrifice unto thee, I will praise thy name O Lord for it is good." Now to indicate how vital a part the goodness of God is in the character of God let me remind you this morning of a prayer that Moses prayed when he went into the mount to receive the law from God for the second time. When he went up the first time and received the law written on the tables of stone then God told him that the people were guilty of idolatry and as he went down from the mount and found them worshipping the golden calf you remember he took those tables of stone written with the hand of God and he smashed them as an expression of wrath against the people of God. But he went back again and God gave him the law the second time. And Moses spending all of this time in the presence of God prayed this simple prayer when he said to the Lord, "I beseech thee show me thy glory." Now the glory of God is used all through Scripture as the expression of the whole manifestation of God Himself. What Moses was praying about was that he wanted to see God, he wanted to understand God, he wanted to comprehend things that had come to his own heart as the result of seeing the law. So he said, "Show me thy glory." And God's answer was expressed in these words, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." Now that is in the 33rd chapter of the book of Exodus. If you go into the next chapter which is a continuation of this story you will find this. "The Lord passed by before him," speaking of

Moses, "and proclaimed," now listen to this string of the attributes of God, "the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and the fourth generations." So when you look at this particular aspect of the character of God, God's answer to Moses' prayer, "Show me thy glory," is "I will make all my goodness pass before thee." And the goodness of God is expressed in His mercy, His grace, His longsuffering, His faithfulness, and in the fact that He forgives sin. Now again I must say as I think I have said every Sunday morning in dealing with the different aspects of the attributes of God, I feel somewhat frustrated because of the enormity of the subject. And you can find references to the goodness of God from Genesis to Revelation. And the more you look at these verses, the more you see how inexhaustable is the subject, trying to tell you about the goodness of God in 30 minutes is like trying to tell you about God in 30 minutes. But I want to take some of the things that are dominant in Scripture. Perhaps I am not picking the things that you would, but if I can just mention some of the things and point you to some of the passages that deal with this amazing subject perhaps in your own study of the Word you will pick this up and go on with it and spend time looking into the passages that deal with the goodness of God and meditating on these passages until the blessedness of this truth captures your own heart as it never has before.

So let me mention several things this morning in the time that we have and I trust that the Lord will use them for His own glory in all of our hearts. First of all when you look at this subject of the goodness of God you find that God's goodness is evident in all that He does. And I would like to stress with you that little word all. Now when we go through our lives and I am speaking primarily this morning as Christians we have certain things that we like and we have certain things that we

don't like. Certain things that we would enjoy more of, certain things that we would like to avoid at all costs. We don't particularly enjoy the trials and the testings and the difficulties of life. But the Scriptures make it clear that God is good in all that He does and that though there may be something that the Lord will bring me into or things that will come into my life that I don't like and I don't understand and things that may cause me a great deal of misery, yet one of the joys I have as a Christian is to know that God has in all of these circumstances something that is good. Now Paul expressed that when he gave us that verse in Romans 8:20, that, "God works all things together for good to them that love, to them who are the called according to his purpose." So as I said in one of the messages previously in dealing with the attributes there is a sense in which, when you think of things from God's standpoint there is nothing bad that can happen to a child of God. Now I am not talking about our foolishness and our sin and our unbelief and all of these but even in these what you and I are responsible for bringing upon ourselves, God in His sovereign power and grace and because He is a merciful, good God can work all things together for good so that the result is what He wants it to be. Now listen to these verses in Psalm 145. "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great mercy," and notice how he uses the word all, "The Lord is good to all and his tender mercies are over all his works." So as our text says this morning the Lord is not only good but He does good. And we have a tremendous testimony to this fact when we begin to read our Bibles. And you pick up the book of Genesis and you read the story of creation and you find this word good many times in that first chapter. When you get down to the last verse of Genesis 1:31 you look and this is what you read, at least in the first part of the verse, "God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good." Now you see that sets the tone for all that God does. If you are talking about His work in salvation, why it's far more wonderful than any of us anticipated when we first came to know the Lord as Savior. When Joshua stood and reviewed what God had done in bringing the children of Israel into the Promised Land he said, "there fail not anything

of any good word which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel all came to pass." And oh how wonderful if you and I could get that marvelous truth into our hearts.

The second thing that I would like to mention. Although God is good He is absolutely free and sovereign in the exercise of His goodness. Now by this I mean He doesn't have to be good to anyone. We do not deserve His goodness. We forfeit that by virtue of the fact that we are members of the human race under divine judgement. Plus the fact, and I feel sure that most of you would agree with me in this, that there have been so many times in all of our lives when we have either ignored God or we have scorned His ways, we have sinned against things that we knew were the will of God so that we would have to come to the place where we say we are utterly undeserving of the goodness of God. If you can deserve grace or if you can deserve mercy or if you can deserve goodness, then grace is no longer grace, mercy is no longer mercy, and goodness when you think of it in this connection is no longer that which God exercises according to His own will. All of this is made perfectly clear in a couple of verses that I read to you just a moment ago. But let me just repeat this from Exodus 33 where God says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." So that when you experience the goodness of God, when you experience His blessings day after day, when those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ come to a greater understanding of the wonders and glories of salvation remember that God has given us all of these blessings not because He had to, but because He chose to and because He delights in manifesting His goodness to the unbeliever as well as to the believer. Because the unbeliever is the recipient of God's blessings in many, many ways every day. So this truth is not presented in Scripture to make us careless or sinful, thinking that God is good and that He is only good but one that should humble us, one that should make us deeply grateful and one that ought to fill our hearts with the greatest amount of hope.

Now it is to this attribute of God, and I am speaking in the third place this morning, that we owe our salvation. Will you take your Bibles and turn to the book of Romans, the second chapter. We have been studying Romans on Wednesday night and though it has been several weeks since we started, possibly you remember this or you remember it from your own study of Romans on other occasions. The second chapter and the fourth verse where Paul says asking a question, "Or despiseth thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." Now we could add to that, and I am going to ask you to turn to this passage if you will in the third chapter of Titus, another very important passage dealing with salvation. Titus 3 beginning with verse 4, now perhaps you ought to look at verse 3 so we could all be reminded of what we used to be and that makes the reason that verse 4 is written as it is. "We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." And the only thing that you can say about us in that category is that if we got what we deserved we would get nothing but the judgement of God. Now look ^{at} verse 4, "But after the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Now you see all these words that are used throughout the Scriptures as being synonymous with the goodness of God, the kindness of God, the love of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God, you can't talk about our salvation unless you talk about the goodness of God, because if God were not good and if God had not seen fit to manifest that goodness in sending the Lord Jesus Christ for you and for me, there isn't a person here this morning who would know God or be able to rejoice in His salvation. Man does not initially ask to be saved, it wasn't man's idea, it was God in His wonderful goodness and grace and to Him belongs all of the glory.

The fourth thing, over and over again in Scripture the subject of the goodness of God is the basis for exhortations that we praise the Lord. I had intended before this morning to go through my Bible in the Old Testament and count the number of times that you find in the Old Testament the statement that we are to give thanks to the Lord for He is good because His mercy endureth forever. This expression seems to have been originated by David when he was rejoicing in the goodness of God and anticipating the building of the temple. And it has become something of a refrain that you find over and over again in the Old Testament, an expression that the children of Israel were very familiar with. If you read a passage for example like Psalm 118, the chapter just before the one from which we have taken our text this morning, you will find that it begins this way, "O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good because his mercy endureth forever." And then after going through the whole Psalm he comes to the end and he sounds this same note again, "O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good for his mercy endureth forever." So that as he reviews the goodness of God he wants the children of Israel to know that the response that should come from our hearts as we learn more about the goodness of God and we see His goodness in salvation and we see His goodness in providing for us and we see His goodness in keeping, is that our hearts should overflow with thanksgiving and praise. That's the reason we bow our heads at the table before we eat. That's the reason we pray in the morning, that's the reason we pray before we go to sleep at night. The psalmist says in another place, you will find this in Psalm 68:19, "Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits even the God of our salvation," and then you have that Hebrew musical marking, the word Selah which as far as we know meant that in singing this they were to pause, there was a break and in reading it, it simply means that you need to stop and let that get into your heart and digest that truth, think of it and come to the place where you do what the psalmist says, "Bless him because he daily loads us with his benefits." What a tremendous exercise it would be for every single one of us at the close of any day before we go to sleep

just to sit down and write down all of the blessings in detail that we have experienced during that day. The blessings we have received from the Word, the way that the Lord cares for us, the way He protects us, the way He guides us, the food that He provides for us, the blessings that we enjoy in our family relationships and with the people of God. Why you just begin to mention all of these things and they are called to our attention in the Scriptures because you and I are so prone to take all of these things for granted. But the cry of Israel and the cry of the Word of God in the Old Testament is, "O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good because his mercy endureth forever."

Fifth, the attribute of God's goodness gives us our greatest hope in times of trial. Now I had several passages of Scripture that I was going to read this morning but I am going to cut them down to one. Will you turn to Psalm 27. Now most Christians know what it is to be tried. We know what it is to have difficulties. Sometimes it's physical, sometimes it's spiritual, sometimes it's in our relationships with others, sometimes it may be financial. There are many, many ways in which we are tried. But when you read about the goodness of God in Scripture you will see that this gives us our hope. And I won't take the time to read Psalm 27 but perhaps sometime today you would like to do this and see how the psalmist in this Psalm seems to feel forsaken by God, verse 9, he seems to be forsaken by his parents in verse 10. He is surrounded by his enemies according to verse 12. All of this has drawn his heart to the Lord and brought him to the place where he just really has one desire, this is David pouring out his heart, "One thing have I desired of the Lord," verse 5 he says, "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavillion." But notice what helped him and held him, verse 13, "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." And then he says this, "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and he shall strengthen thy heart, wait I say on the Lord." Now that is the kind of a verse that will really bring encouragement to you. Enemies, forsaken

by parents, it seems that God has even hidden His face, everything seems to go wrong, there is no outlook as far as circumstances are concerned. Even though David says, "the one thing that I want is to dwell in the house of the Lord that I may behold the beauty of the Lord and inquire in his temple and it almost seems like the Lord is pushing him away and saying, "No, not now." And he comes to this wonderful place where he says, "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." And you know there are going to be times in our lives when you and I are going to say the same thing and when nothing but the knowledge, the assurance of the goodness of God will hold us in our times of testing. It is a marvelous hope that God has given to us.

Let me mention one other thing. It seems like almost every Sunday I have been drawn back to the 23rd Psalm. And I go back to that this morning for just a brief reference, the psalm ends, doesn't it with this last point that I want you to see. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Now what does this mean. Well it means that the goodness of God is inexhaustible. Jeremiah said in Lamentations 3, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed because his compassions fail not, they are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness." Now I don't think anybody here would be foolish enough to think that the reason you are in the trial or the testing that you are going through and may feel so hopeless about it is because God's goodness has been exhausted. It could never be. In fact David said in the 23rd Psalm that "His goodness and his mercy are going to keep after you all the days of your life." Regardless of where you go or what you might do or the intensity of the difficulty. You can never get away from God and the manifestation of His marvelous goodness. Joseph Hart whose name you may not recognize and I didn't know it until I saw this hymn that he wrote during his lifetime, he lived back in the early 1700's and he has written this hymn that I want to close with this morning. I think I used it once before, it is extremely difficult

to find it in any hymnal and yet it just seems to bring together the truth that I have been seeking this morning to present to you. Just two verses but how rich and how wonderful the truth. Mr. Hart wrote:

How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable friend.
His love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end.

Tis Jesus the first and the last,
Whose spirit shall guide us safe home.
We'll praise Him for all that is past,
We'll trust Him for all that's to come.

Or in the words of another hymn which we do sing quite often:

Come thou fount of every blessing
tune my heart to sing thy grace
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.

"O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good, for his mercy endureth forever."

"He is good and he doeth good," always and under every circumstance.