

“God’s Goodness”

Mark 10:17-30, Psalm 22:1-5, 89:1, 118:24, Genesis 1:31 & Matthew 27:46

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Prayer for Understanding Holy God, Word made flesh, let us come to this word open to being surprised. Silence our agendas; banish our assumptions; cast out our casual detachment. Confound our expectations; clear the cobwebs from our ears; penetrate the corners of our hearts with your word. We know that you can, we pray that you will, and we wait with great anticipation. Amen.

Lies are heavy. The truth is you belong to a good God. God is with you. God loves you. The truth sets you free.

God’s goodness is abundant, eternal, continuously growing. God’s goodness overflows creating, sustaining, and expanding a good cosmos. **Genesis 1:31 “God looked over all God made, and God saw that it was very good!”** Humanity enjoyed paradise with God. Perfect love for self, love for all people and love for God. Everyone belonged. Goodness enjoyed by all.

Humanity sinned. Sin is separation. Sin is damaged relationships. Sin hinders our love of self. Sin hinders our love for each other. Sin hinders our love for God. Sin is a fog that conceals and distorts. God, God’s love, and God’s goodness are still present and expanding, however we struggle to perceive the goodness. Some separation is the result of our actions and inactions. Some separation is the result of others. Today in addition to sin being humanity’s action and inaction sin is also a state of separation. Sin creates shame, fear, and blame.

When the cooling evening breeze was blowing, God was patiently waiting, eager to enjoy an evening walk with humanity, to play, laugh, and rejoice together. Humanity hid for we felt shame for our sin. We feared that our sin would cause lasting separation to our relationships. When God asked about our shame and fear, humanity blamed others, circumstances, and creation.

Sin is a lie. God’s goodness is all powerful. God’s goodness will mend every relationship. Each person will perfectly love themselves. Everyone will perfectly love each other. Everyone will love God.

One of sin’s lies is death. The lie that a person is lost. The lie that a love has ended. God’s goodness resurrects every person. Every love endures forever. We all belong to God and each other. We will all live with God, and each, for eternity able to savor every love, every joy, we have experienced in the past and an infinite amount of new loves and joys in the future. There is no end to any goodness. Every goodness expands forever. Here on earth, we are only able to perceive snippets of goodness.

Separation anxiety arises from the lie that wants us to believe that God is not with us, the lie that when a parent puts their child on the bus at kindergarten that a season of love has ended, the lie that when a young adult moves out to live on their own that a season of love has ended, the lie that a damaged relationship is a loss of all that was good about that relationship.

Sin’s lie of separation is awful. Psalm 22 expresses the pain. **Psalm 22:1-15 NLT “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. Our ancestors trusted in you, and you rescued them. They cried out to you and were saved. They trusted in you and were never disgraced. But I am a worm and not a person. I am scorned and despised by all! Everyone who sees me mocks me. They sneer and shake their heads, saying, “Is this the one who relies on the Lord? Then let the Lord save them! If the Lord loves them so much, let the Lord rescue them!” Yet you brought me safely from my mother’s womb and led me to trust you at my mother’s breast. I was thrust into your arms at my birth. You have been my God from the moment I was born. Do not stay so far from me, for trouble is near, and no one else can help me. My enemies surround me like a herd of bulls; fierce bulls have hemmed me in! Like lions they open their jaws against me, roaring and tearing into their prey. My life is poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, melting within me. My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.”**

The truth is God is always with us. **Romans 8:38 “Nothing can ever separate us from God’s love.”** There are at least 25 times in both the Old and New Testament when God promises, “I will never leave nor abandon you”.

Yet life at times is painful, arduous, bleak, overwhelming so the lie that one is alone, unloved, outcast, diminishing, seems like the truth.

Jesus is fully God and fully human. God's goodness is incarnate in the flesh in Jesus, yet the lie of separation hid God's loving presence with Jesus on the cross. Jesus cried in agony: **Matthew 27:46 "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"** Lies are heavy. The truth sets us free. The truth is we all belong to a good God. God is always with us. God has and will always love us completely and perfectly. God's goodness is all around us and in us. Every joy and love flows from God's constant presence and constant goodness. The wonderful moments of life give us the tiniest perception of the glory of God's goodness that everyone will enjoy for eternity.

Most people, maybe all people, struggle to always believe that they are loved by God, that God is with them always and all of us will enjoy complete joyous, loving unity with God and all people. Most people try to overcome the lie of separation by doing what they think is good. When we try through human effort, in any form, to earn goodness we have it backwards. Goodness flows from God. Goodness is a gift freely given. We call this grace.

Good works are important. They make this already, not yet time, that we live in more like heaven. Every good work comes from God. It is God's goodness, not our good works, that is saving the world.

What sets us free from our awful moments is God's goodness. Our good works do not set us free. Sometimes our good works become a hindrance to God's free flowing goodness. This happens a lot through religion. Somehow we get the idea that we need to earn heaven, that we need to do certain things for God to love us. Remember the truth. God is always with us. Nothing can separate us from God's love. Whether you are striving to love yourself or beating yourself up, God loves you. Whether you are trying to love everyone or not, God loves you. Whether you strive to live a wholesome life or are wild, rebellious, mean, angry, God loves you. Whether you believe there is a God or not, God loves you. Whether you go to church or not, God loves you. Whether you are baptized or not, God loves you. Sin wants you to believe in separation within yourself, separation between people and separation from God. Every separation is temporary. Separation from God is an illusion for God is always with us. God always loves us.

Sin wants us to believe that we can earn God's love, that there is something we need to do, or say, or believe. When one starts thinking they can earn God's love this can give rise to comparisons, into good, better, best thinking, into binary thinking, that there is a right way and a wrong way instead of "both" and "and" thinking. At its worst comparisons grow into judgements, my way is right, and your way is wrong, be like me. I am going to be ok because I am better than those people over there. All of this creates more shame, fear, and blame making more separations between us that God's goodness will mend.

In our gospel lesson a person was striving to earn God's love by keeping all of the commandments. He calls Jesus good for he has seen Jesus unite every separation. **Mark 10:17-18 "As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good."** If this man discipled and we could grasp this the truth that only God is truly good, then the lesson could end right here. Eternal life is a gift given by God's goodness. Jesus knew this man was trying to earn eternal life by keeping the commandments. The man is centered on people doing good in order to get the best. The man is focused on action and reward. The man is oblivious to grace. Jesus tries to get through to this man by meeting him in his beliefs. Jesus said. **Mark 10:19-20 But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'**" **"Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."** Having met this person where he is at, Jesus now identifies a striving of this man that Jesus knows he will not be able to achieve. Perhaps this will enable him to realize that eternal life is not earned, rather freely given. **Mark 10:21-22 Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** Jesus tells him there is one thing he lacks, treasure in heaven. Jesus is trying to help him perceive the treasure, God's goodness, heaven, which flows from God into the cosmos. The treasure, God's goodness flows into each of us enabling us to keep the commandments, enabling us to be generous with our money, enabling us to follow Jesus. Unfortunately, the man could not perceive God's goodness, God's presence with him, God's love for him just the way he was. **Mark 10:22 "At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions."** Jesus now teaches that it is impossible to buy eternal life or earn eternal life. There is nothing we can do, be or believe to earn eternal life, God's goodness, or love. **Mark 10:23-27 "Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!" This amazed them. But Jesus said again, "Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"** The disciples were astounded. **"Then who in the world can be**

saved?” they asked. Jesus looked at them intently and said, **“Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.”** Everything is possible with God. Every goodness flows from God. Peter misses the point entirely. Similar to the man, Peter is thinking the disciples and he can earn eternal life, God’s love, and the good things of life by giving up stuff and following Jesus. Peter is stuck in quid pro quo thinking. Is my sacrifice worth it? What is my reward? **Mark 10:28 Then Peter began to speak up. “We’ve given up everything to follow you,” he said. “Yes,” Jesus replied, “and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life.”** Jesus is meeting Peter where he is at. Peter and the disciples will receive all of the goodnesses mentioned. Perhaps they need to believe that their sacrifice and following Jesus is what is earning goodness for their wellbeing; in the meantime until they discover that **“only God is truly good,”** and that it is humanly impossible to earn eternal life, rather all goodness is a gift from God. God will freely give eternal life to everyone.

Lies are heavy. The lie that you somehow need to earn God’s goodness. The lie that you need to make yourself lovable. The lie that you, that we, need to clean up the mess of the world ourselves. The lie that separation will continue. The lie that a love can be lost. Lies make it difficult to receive God’s goodness. Jesus came bringing God’s goodness. Jesus pointed out God’s goodness, taught Goodness and revealed goodness. Jesus is God walking with humanity, in the flesh, like God walked with humanity in paradise before the lies of separation. God walked with humanity in Old Testament times but for the most part humanity was oblivious to God’s loving presence. God is walking with you through the Holy Spirit right now. God loves you. God will be with you and love you for eternity. All of us will be united and enjoy God’s glory for eternity. God walks with us to fill us with abundant life. These truths set us free.

Unfortunately, on earth, for most of us, the lies repeatedly veil the goodness. Most of us journey through cycles of. **Psalm 22:1 and Matthew 27:46 “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” and Psalm 118:24 “This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it.” Psalm 89:1 “I will sing of God steadfast, everlasting, love.”**

God is good. The goodness in us, the goodness in life, flows from God. The lie of sin obscures the goodness. In the end, God’s goodness gives us glorious eternal life. Here on earth, there are moments, hopefully many moments, when the goodness breaks forth in your life. Jesus came bringing the goodness of heaven to prove God’s loving presence with us. Jesus died and rose from the grave to prove love endures forever, to show that death is a portal to eternal life where every separation is banishes and all belong, rejoicing in complete unity with self, all people and God. This truth disperses the lies and enables us to experience abundant life.

Lies are heavy. The truth is we all belong to a good God. God is with us. God loves us. The truth sets us free.
Amen