

Thou Art Good and Doest Good

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Tonight, I want to talk to you on this 119th Psalm, verse 68. Thou art good and doest good. Teach me thy statutes. The psalmist is talking to God, and he says, Thou art good and doest good.

Now, it may seem odd, but this is not a Thanksgiving sermon. That is, I had not planned to preach a Thanksgiving sermon. I'll speak Thursday morning, but this fits in, and so since it fits in, I want to explain that this is not an effort on my part to wrestle up a Thanksgiving sermon. This has been on my mind for quite a long time, and I want to talk about the goodness of God tonight as being the ground of our hope. And if you will believe what I tell you, and if you will ask God to illuminate your mind, it could change your whole life tonight completely.

And I'm so convinced that this is true that I want to ask God yet that He'll help us, because if I can't say it right and you can't hear it right, then we'll not get it. And if we don't get it, of course, it's one more sermon that's gone down the drain. But if we get it, it can change the whole course of our lives from tonight on. So, let's pray.

Now, blessed Lord, by the energizing of the Holy Spirit, make the truth to be a living one. Lord, we pray tonight that Thou would open our minds. We're here in this building tonight, the 18th of November, 1956, and all around us ebbs and flows the tide of modern civilization, overhead and all around us. And Lord, Thou knowest that those who will sit here tonight won't be here very long. So, help us now that we may listen, not for passing days and changing moons and passing years, but forever.

Holy Ghost with light divine, shine upon this heart of mine, and shine upon the heart of these thy children and those who may be here out of the kingdom. And oh, we pray Thee that Thou help us to believe what Thou sayest about Thyself. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now the Holy Spirit here states a cardinal truth. He says that God is good. And though this is found in a psalm, I want you to notice that it is not a poetic flourish. It is a hard, sound statement of eternal truth. God is good. And it is therefore of critical importance to us all, and it is vitally important that we know what God means when He says about Himself, or has the psalmist say by the Spirit, Thou art good.

Now let's do a little defining. That's always boresome, but I hope we won't be boresome with it. What the Spirit is saying here is not that God is righteous or holy, though God is both righteous and holy in infinite degree and in perfection. But that is not what the Spirit is saying here.

When we hear the words, God is good, we think that God is morally good, that He's holy, that He's righteous. He is all that. But that is not what the Spirit says here. He says something else altogether. It would not be particularly encouraging to us to have us told

that God is holy, because it would only show what vast and all but infinite gulfs there are between us unholy creatures and a holy God. But when he says God is good, then there is encouragement there.

Now I'd like to toss that around a bit longer in order that we might be clear on it, so nobody will go out and say Mr. Tozer said that the Bible didn't say that God was righteous nor holy, only that he was good. Suppose I was talking about some person of our acquaintance, and I said she is very intelligent. And somebody fired up and said hold on there now, she's good looking. Well, I said I wasn't thinking about good looks at the moment, I was thinking about intelligence, and I said she was intelligent, but I didn't say she wasn't good looking.

And so, when the man here by the Holy Ghost says God is good, he isn't saying that God is not holy. He isn't saying that God is not righteous. He just is not saying that God is holy or righteous, but he is saying that God is good. And thus you see that good here means neither righteous nor holy, though elsewhere it is taught that God is both.

Now that's what it doesn't mean. Now what does it mean? It means that God is full of kindness and favor and mercy, that God is good-hearted and of good will.

Now I looked up the word "good" here as it's used about God to find out what the Bible did say, what this word does mean. And you know it is one of those words that is so full of meaning that it makes our English language stagger. It means that God is bountiful, that he is cheerful, it means that he is merry and glad and gracious and joyful and kind and sweet and ready.

Now all of those meanings are in the word "good" in Hebrew so that it takes all of those meanings to put it into our English. Thou art good and doest good. Thou art bountiful and doest bountifully. Thou art cheerful and doest cheerfully. Thou art merry and doest merrily. Thou art glad and dost labor in thy gladness. Thou art gracious and doest graciously. Thou art joyful and doest joyfully. Thou art kind and doest kindly.

Now it means all that and I suppose it means a good deal more, but it means that God is kind and favorful and merciful, that God has a good heart toward us, that he is a person or a being of good will.

Now back in the Old Testament, the man of God, Moses said this. He prayed, O God, show me Thy glory. Back in the 33rd of Exodus, and he said, I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory. And God said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee. Now we have a request for the glory of God to be manifest, and God answering by saying, all right, I will make My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the nature of Jehovah. Now in the 34th chapter, Moses took up the stones into the mount, and the Lord descended in a cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

Now this is the goodness of the Lord and the glory of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, that will in no means clear the guilty, but visiting the

iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, and the third and the fourth generation.

In other words, all the happy, gracious, kind, merry heart of God can't in any wise violate His justice. So, if people will not believe it and will not accept it and will not avail themselves of it, then God warns them also that a part of his nature is justice. But it is significant that when Moses said, show me Thy glory, he said, all right, I'll show you my goodness, as if the goodness of God were the glory of God in a manner that nothing else would be.

Now you see, my friends, it all depends upon how you approach God and from what direction. To an angel in heaven, I suppose, the mercy of God would not mean as much as to a sinner on earth, for an angel in heaven does not need the mercy of God because he has not sinned. But a sinner on earth needs the mercy of God, and therefore, the glory of God to a sinner would be the goodness and the mercy of God, whereas the glory of God to an angel in heaven might be the holiness of God. God's glory is what He is to somebody that needs Him, and so we people need Him.

Now God, I say, is full of kindness, and he's bountiful, and even the word beautiful is here, and God is cheerful and fair. And it's the nature of God so to be that is God is one of goodwill. Now I want you to hear me that there is no cynicism in God. There is never any sensitiveness and never any resentfulness and never any sulkiness in God. God is always good-hearted and friendly. God is never on the defensive. He is open and frank and candid and cheerful.

If we could always go to God with that understanding, it would change our whole lives, my friends. It would change our lives. It would put a different complexion on everything that happens to us. It would make our sicknesses tolerable. It would make distress and tribulation and affliction easy to bear. It would make prayer a great pleasure. It would bring us to God with a lot of difference.

You see, we read about sin and we get scolded for sin so much, and we ought to be. We get scolded for sin until we get a conception of God as being a one who is extremely hard to please and very sharp and somewhat inclined to be cynical, and that He's quite sensitive and likely to be resentful if you don't say it right, or if you don't kneel right or if you eat the wrong thing or wear the wrong thing or do something that offends the Lord. Now, that's just exactly opposite. God, it says here, is joyful and He's cheerful.

So, you're not dealing with a sulky, heavy-browed God. You're dealing with a God who is kind, and then the word ready is in there. I don't know what the word ready is in there for unless it means that God is there ready to be kind and ready to be gracious and ready to be bountiful. So, He's a ready, God, and He's benevolent and cordial and gracious. Now, that's the way to come to God.

But you say, Mr. Tozer, you don't know how bad I am and how evil I have been. Well, your evil doesn't change God's nature any. It changes yours, but it doesn't change His. You see, what God is, God always was, because God is immutable, and therefore there never has been any change in God. God did not become bountiful. He did not become cheerful nor merry nor glad nor gracious nor kind. He always was merry and glad and

gracious and kind, and He will never cease to be glad and gracious and merry and kind, because He cannot change. I, Jehovah, change not.

Change and decay in all around I see, but I see no change in God. It's unthinkable that God should change. Therefore, if God ever was kind, God is still kind. And if God is kind now, God will always be kind, so that you may be certain of that.

Now you say, well, that's true, and it's true about good people, and God will be kind to good people, and he'll be gracious to good people. Did you ever stop to think that that's just exactly reversing the facts? God doesn't need to be gracious to good people, if you were any. He doesn't need to be gracious to angels. He only needs to be gracious to people who need grace.

And now, it isn't something that God does, as a man goes on a vacation, or a woman bakes a cake, or a student goes to school. It isn't something that God does. It's something that God is. Thou art good, he says, and the result of what God is, He doeth good. And now, not only is God immutable, but God is eternal. He always was like that. He always will be like that, to time out of mind.

And then the kindness of God and the goodness of God are perfect. That is, there is no improvement possible. If all of the angels in heaven, the holy angels and seraphim, with their six wings and all the cherubs and all the watchers and holy ones, were to gather at what we'd call the summit down here, and were to pool all of their holiness and all of their goodness and all of their moral intelligence, there wouldn't be even remotely possible that ever there should be an improvement suggested in God Almighty. Because God, being already perfect, can't improve.

And God, being immutable, can't get worse. That is, He can't get less kind than He is, and He can't get less gracious than He is. And then it's not only perfect, but infinite. Now, all this goodness of God is infinite. What does it mean? It means that it has no limit to it anywhere.

A man is like a little field. A good man is like a little field. And after you've trampled around over him a little while, you have trampled over all of his, all there is of him. Because there's a fence around a man where we're finite.

But God, being infinite, there are no limits and no boundaries anywhere. All that God is, God is beyond all possibility of the human mind to conceive, and there is not a mind in the wide world that would be able to even grasp how kind God is, and how good He is, and how gracious He is to people, and how ready He is to be gracious and merry and kind to people, and open and frank and candid to people, and good-hearted and friendly. Nobody can conceive that because they have to work with finite minds.

It's just like taking a pail to the Atlantic Ocean and trying to dip it up. You can dip up a pailful, but you can't dip up the Atlantic Ocean. And so, we come to God and say, God, Thou art kind; how kind art Thou? And we take our little minds and dip into the goodness of God and say, how good art Thou? And we come up with a pailful, but it hasn't taken any out that God can give and never lose. That's the wonderful thing about

God. He can give and still have it just as much as he had before. God can pour out mercy on the whole wide earth and still not lose any mercy.

If a man worth a billion dollars, if that man exists, if he's worth a billion dollars and he gives away a million, he's that much the poorer. If he gains a million, he's that much the richer. But God can give away grace and still not be any less rich in grace. You can refuse His grace and still God won't have any more grace because God can't have any more grace than He has now because He has an infinite grace, which is boundless and limitless.

And there isn't any way possible for God to have any more kindness than he has now. But somebody says, didn't Jesus, when He died on the tree, didn't that make God gracious and kind to us? No, it's exactly the other way. Christ died on the tree because God was gracious and kind, not to make God gracious and kind.

When Jesus died on the cross, it didn't make God anything. It enabled man to come to God, but it did not change God even in one particular. God was bountiful and cheerful and fair and merry and glad and gracious in order that Christ might die on a tree. And he raised him from the dead for the same reason. And he set him at his right hand for the same cause.

Now God's goodness is the source of all blessing. You hear this, my friend, I said it can change your whole life. Why did God create? Why did He make us in the first place? He made us in the first place because He was bountiful and beautiful and cheerful and merry; because God had a good heart and was kind and friendly and wanted to see people. He wanted somebody He could look at that would reflect His glory.

And so out of His kindness, God made people and out of His grace. And why then did He redeem us when we fell? For exactly the same reason. There was no burden laid on God. There was nothing put on God from any direction, no pressure, no moral pressure. Even a president or a prime minister or a king or a queen, they have pressure put on them, political pressure.

Businessmen have political pressure put on them. And even though they're relatively free individuals, they still have pressure put on, but never God. Nobody ever put pressure on God. It's just impossible. It's unthinkable. It's totally unthinkable that anybody could come to God and say, now God, if you know what's good for you, you'd better redeem these people. Why, God could snuff out creation as you could blow out a candle. God could hurl all the worlds down into vacuity and emptiness.

There was no pressure on God, but redemption flowed up out of the goodness of God. God was good and kind and cheerful and sweet and joyful and ready to help us and wanted to help us. And so, He thought up redemption for us. And why does God forgive people? Does He forgive them because of something they do?

I heard a sermon on purgatory today by a Father Flanagan, I think they called him. And he explained the position that some people take about purgatory. He said why it's unthinkable that a man should continue in sin until late in life and then be forgiven of his sin and die and not have to be punished for his sin. Well, what he needs to do is to

read a good Catholic translation of the book of Hebrews. That's all I'd recommend for the brother; just read a good Catholic translation of Hebrews and Monsignor Knox's translation of Hebrews and he'll get the answer to all that.

But God forgives. Why does God forgive? Because you suffer? No, God forgives because God is ready and bountiful and cheerful and merry and glad and gracious and of goodwill and kindhearted. And there isn't any sulking in God. And there's friendliness in God and an accessibility and cordiality. That's why God forgives. And it all flows up out of God's heart. And none of it comes from you and me. Why does God wait for that? Why, the Bible says he waits that he might be gracious.

Some of you have waited a long time to become Christians and you think God was pretty slow. And you say, well, I must not have been too bad because God didn't punish me. He didn't send judgment.

That isn't the way to look at it, brother. It was God's kindness that didn't punish you. For it says here in the book of Hebrews, the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. It wasn't that you weren't bad, but it was that God was infinitely gracious and kind.

And why does God keep his people? Oh, I wonder why it is necessary for us in order that we might believe we're kept. I wonder why it's necessary for us to invent doctrines and logic in order to have the doctrine that we're secure. Can't you believe you're secure because God is good and doesn't change? And that God being always friendly and candid and open and ready to help you and always having an infinite amount of mercy and kindness and grace that you're kept for that reason. And it flows up out of God's heart and it doesn't flow from any other direction.

Now, the goodness of God is the ground of our expectation. That is, God being good, that's the ground of our expectation. Some people say, well, repentance, that makes you fit so that God can save you. Well, that was never the teaching of the Bible and it's never the teaching of the great evangelists and the great reformers, never. They never taught that repentance was a meritorious act or a series of acts which brought the mercy of God to you. They taught that repentance was a condition God laid down which you had to perform before the mercy and grace of God could reach you.

So, repentance is not a meritorious act. Remember that, that you could repent. Judas Iscariot went out and repented, but he died and went to hell to his own place. And all the repentance in the universe couldn't draw anything out of God or make God any kinder nor any more gracious, nor any friendlier, nor any better hearted. God is already that. So let's put repentance aside.

You say, do I not believe in repentance? I think you know I believe in repentance. Repentance is a condition which we meet in order that a God already wanting to be good to us can be good to us. And the man who loves his sin and hangs to his sin, the good, gracious God can't be gracious to him because he hangs to his sin. He turns his back on God, and he can't see God's smile. And repentance means turning around and looking at the smiling face of God. That's what repentance means.

But the man who hasn't repented, has got his back to God. How can a man who's looking away from God, see God's invitation, got His hand up in invitation or see God's smiling countenance. So, repentance is a turning around so that God, the good God can do what He's wanted to do from eternity. But it doesn't change God. It isn't meritorious.

Well, somebody else would say, if we just prayed long enough, if we just prayed long enough, if we prayed all night or if we prayed till midnight, or if we prayed seven days or nine days, surely God would answer. Well, my friend, remember this, that the man who prays the most of anybody I know in this generation is Tom Hare. And Tom Hare says, I don't believe in merit prayers. There's no merit in prayer. The merit is in God. And he's perfectly right. Prayer is not meritorious.

The Mohammedans pray and the Llamas over in Tibet, they pray, and people pray and pray and tell beads and pray, but there's no merit in it at all. The merit is in the goodness of God, you see, my brother. And prayer is simply the opening of the hand to take what God is giving us.

Now, if we won't open our hands, then God can't give us what He wants us to have. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. And prayer is merely the opening of the mouth. And the most wicked man in the world, if he'll open his mouth and his hand, God will fill them. If he'll turn around to God in repentance and open his mouth and his hand, God will fill them. Not because that man is good, for he is decidedly not, but because God is good in the sense in which we've mentioned it here.

And then, faith is not meritorious. Now, some people say, well, if I had faith enough, faith is meritorious. And there's surely some merit in faith. And if God saw faith in me, why God would bless me. Well, now, faith is confidence that God is good. That's the main thing that faith is. It's confidence that God is good.

Suppose that I wronged a man. Suppose that I wronged him very profoundly, very deeply. Suppose I slipped up on him in the middle of the night and wounded him, injured him, hit him and hurt him and put him in the hospital. But I knew the man. And I knew that he was gracious and kind and would forgive and wouldn't hold anything against anybody.

And suppose that I went to that man, had a little change of heart and said to myself, I've got to go to that man. I lost my temper and slugged him and put him in the hospital. And I'm sorry now. Now I'm going to go to him and ask him to forgive me. And knowing that man, I would go to him and say, please forgive me with full confidence that he would forgive. But would my going and asking for forgiveness be a meritorious act? Certainly not. The goodness would not lie in me. The goodness would lie in the man who forgave.

And so, faith is not a merit. It's not a virtue. It is not something if I have 50 cents of faith, I can get 50 cents of blessing. It is not a value received proposition. Faith is confidence that God is good and will remain good and never was anything else, but good. And that God is bountiful and cheerful about it and glad and gracious and joyful and kind and ready to be all of those things to me. And so, the goodness lies in God and all the merit lies in God.

Now suppose that my friend that had been my friend for half a lifetime and that I, in a burst of temper, slugged him as he walked down the street at night, suppose that I went to him in the hospital and asked him to forgive me. And it turned out that he not only forgave me but held my hand and wept with delight and then prayed for me. Why, who'd get the praise? Would somebody say, wasn't Tozer wonderful that he asked that man to forgive him? No. They'd say, wasn't that man wonderful that he forgave Tozer?

And so, my brother it is. When we go to God for forgiveness and have faith that he forgives, the merit isn't in the faith nor in us, the merit is in the good God. And through all eternity people will be singing songs and anthems to the God who is so kind and cheerful and cordial and friendly, that he'd forgive his worst enemy when he asked him to.

Nobody will ever say, wasn't Saul of Tarsus wonderful that he asked God to forgive him? But they will say, wasn't God wonderful that He forgave Saul of Tarsus? Nobody in heaven yonder will ever say, wasn't Mel Trotter wonderful that God pardoned him? No, but they'll say, wasn't God good to forgive Mel Trotter? So, the merit lies in God, you see my brother, in the nature of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

So, when you go to God in prayer, why, don't look at your lapels to see if there's any dust on them, and don't check your wheat to see if it has been perfect, because if you do, you'll be looking to yourself for merit and virtue. And it's never found there, it is found in the God out of whom it flows continuously. What does this mean to us? Well, it brings many a text out and makes it flower.

I've quoted, the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. That's what the man of God meant when he said, the goodness of God; it isn't that you're good, it's that God is good. And then in the Psalm 107, oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful work to the children of men. And then especially that verse in Psalm 23:6, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

Now, surely has two meanings. Surely means possibly, I hope so, as when we say, oh, surely, he'll be there. Oh, surely she won't fail us. Oh, surely that didn't happen. Oh, surely it couldn't be that way. That has a note of uncertainty in it, a quavering plaintive note of uncertainty. We'll say, oh, surely that man will do so-and-so. That means I hope so, but I'm not sure.

But that's not the meaning of the word here. The word here means of a surety, of a surety, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. Of a surety, the God who is beautiful, bountiful, cheerful, merry, and fair, and glad, and gracious, and joyful, and kind, and sweet, and ready to pardon, in whose nature there is no sensitivity nor sulkiness, who's never on the defensive, but who's always open, frank, candid, and cordial. Surely that God shall be with me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Now, there was a man who believed that he was secure, but he based his security upon the fact that the gracious, good God would be with him till he died. And he knew if He was with Him till he died, it would be all right after he died, and he wouldn't have to go

to purgatory either. For purgatory implies that there must be some virtue in me in order to bring the blessing to me.

But New Testament teaching is, and Old for that matter, that the goodness is in God, and I am just the poor sick man. The merit is in the physician, and the disease is in me. And all he wants is for me to come with my disease, and he feels bad if I don't come with my disease. And if I don't come with my disease, it'll kill me, and He can't help it because he's given me free moral agency. And if I don't want to come, I don't need to come.

But if I come with the disease, we call sin, I can be delivered from that disease, and nobody will say, wasn't that poor sick man wonderful tonight? But they will say, isn't God wonderful that He delivered that poor man?

Now you see, don't you? Now, I'm not sure I've made this clear. This is burnt on my heart like a glowing shekinah for several days. In fact, I should say three weeks. And I sat here wanting to preach that sermon so bad I was nearly blowing up while our brother preached that week. I sat back here and wiggled my thumbs and waited it out because I wanted to preach on the goodness of God.

Well, now about forgiveness. You, my brother, want to be forgiven. You've done something you shouldn't do. And you, you want to be forgiven. Well, how are you going to be forgiven? Where is that goodness coming from? Where is it going to flow out of? You're going to have to fix yourself up until you're good enough for God to save you? In that case, eternity will swallow you as the ocean swallows a canoe. And you will never be forgiven. You will carry your disease down with you.

If you'll say, God is good, and He's never been anything else but good, and I'm sorry that I ever thought He was anything else but good and realize that forgiveness flows out of the goodness of God. And there isn't anything, as Lady Julian says, that no heart of a man, nobody anywhere could even conceive how much God loves us and how tender God is toward us. And she's perfectly right, as I've proved tonight from the Scriptures.

But you say, I was to blame, I was to blame. Why? The great Danish preacher, Kierkegaard, says this. He says that even if your sense of sinfulness is so acute that you not only admit you've sinned, but you feel in order to punish yourself, you want to help God find more sins that you've done. If you turn on yourself with ferocity and say, I want to show God what a sinner I've been. I hate myself so bad, I want God to know what a sinner I've been, he says it still doesn't mean a thing. He says it's the love of God that covers our sins. Love covers a multitude of sins. And so, Jesus, when He died on the cross, He died that He might forgive us out of the goodness of His heart.

And then there's deliverance. Deliverance, what kind of deliverance? Well, deliverance for whatever kind of deliverance you need. Deliverance won't come because you're nice, it won't come because you memorize Scripture, though I want you to memorize Scripture. It won't come because you love great hymns, though I want you to love great hymns. It won't come because you go to prayer meeting. Well, I want you to go to prayer meeting. Deliverance will come because God is eager to deliver you. It burns in God's presence. God's hunting you up. God's following you. Surely, goodness shall follow you all the days of your life. Amen.