

The Goodness of God. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 6 July 2011.

As you know, for some time now we have been looking at a few aspects of God's character. This week we are thinking of the Goodness of God. And there is certainly no shortage of scripture texts which speak of this.

For example, the book of Psalms issues us with the summons, 'Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good',¹ and then, addressing God, says, 'You crown the year with your goodness'.² Towards the close of the Old Testament, the prophet Nahum declared, 'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble'.³

But, if I had to choose one text to leave with you today, it would come from the longest Psalm – from Psalm 119. In verse 68, David addresses God with the words, 'You *are* good, and you *do* good', as David sees God's goodness expressed in His works.

And we find that God's goodness is emphasised right from the Bible's opening chapter, which speaks of the original creation of the heavens and the earth. There we read no less than six times concerning God's handiwork that 'God saw that it was good'. Indeed, the chapter concludes with the statement that 'God saw *everything* that He had made, and behold it was *very* good'.⁴

And ever since that great creation event, God has continued to display His goodness in the way He cares for and provides for His creatures.

One psalm points out that, in His goodness, God provides for the *beasts* of the earth ... both for (a) domestic animals, causing, it is said, 'the grass to grow for *the cattle*',⁵ and for (b) wild animals – 'the *young lions* roar for their prey, seeking their food from God'.⁶

And, in His goodness, God provides, not only for the beasts but for the *birds* of the air. 'Who provides for the raven its prey', God asked Job, 'when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?'⁷ Well, we all know the answer to that one – as the psalmist insisted elsewhere, it is 'the Lord' who 'gives to the beasts their food, *and to the young ravens that call*'.⁸

And, in His goodness, God provides not only for the beasts and the *birds* but also for the *fish* of the sea. 'Yonder', the psalmist said, 'is the great and wide sea, teeming with things innumerable, living things both small and great ... these all look to you, to give them their food in due season ... you open your hand, they are filled with good'.⁹

And, of course, God provides not only for the beasts of the earth, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, but also for *mankind*, showering on us regular natural blessings without discrimination – a point to which our Lord Himself drew attention when speaking to His disciples about their Father in heaven: 'He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust'.¹⁰

The apostle Paul taught the pagans at a place called Lystra that God 'did not leave Himself without witness, in that He *did good*, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness'.¹¹

Yes indeed, as the New Testament assures us, 'every *good* and perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father'.¹²

The text I quoted earlier – 'You are good, and you do good' – came from the pen of David. And it was David who, in another of his many psalms, observed that 'the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord'.¹³

Well then did the writer of Psalm 107 exclaim four times over, 'Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness'.¹⁴ And most certainly we should be grateful for all the blessings God gives us.

Some time ago I read of one church where the pastor (a Bill Hargreaves) had been ill for several weeks. When the gentleman recovered, the church bulletin carried the intriguing statement, 'Give thanks, for God is good, and Pastor Hargreaves is better'. Taken literally, that was *some claim* they made for Pastor Hargreaves. For the impression given was that, though God was good, Pastor Hargreaves was even better. But we know what they meant.

But we also know that not everyone is like Bill Hargreaves ... that not everyone who is ill does get better ... that there is a tremendous amount of suffering, pain and sadness in our world. And over the centuries many have struggled with the question *why*, *if* God is good, the world which He made should contain so many things which are bad.

I do not pretend to have any easy or complete answers. But what I can tell you is that the world in which we live – where all is certainly not good – that this is *not* the world as God made it at the first. For, courtesy of the devil and of the first man and woman, sin entered the world ... bringing in its train the most dreadful consequences, and introducing into man's vocabulary a host of new – and ugly – words ... words such as sorrow, curse and death.

Alas for us, we live in a fallen world – a world defaced and marred by sin – a world of suffering, pain and separation.

I've brought with me one copy of a booklet entitled, 'Why would a good God allow suffering?' – published by some people who produce Our Daily Bread. If anybody would like to borrow this short booklet – it is only 32 small pages – please ask me at the close.

I know that many here will know the name 'Corrie ten Boom'. During the Second World War, Corrie, her 84-year-old father, and her sister, Betsie, were put in the dreadful Ravensbruck concentration camp for hiding Jews in their home in The Netherlands. Her father and Betsie both died there.

Some time after her release, Corrie ten Boom wrote the following words, 'Often I have heard people say, "How good God is! We prayed that it would not rain for our church picnic, and look at the lovely weather!" Yes, God is good when He sends good weather. But God was also good when He allowed my sister, Betsie, to starve to death before my eyes in a German concentration camp. I remember one occasion when I was very discouraged ... telling Betsie that I thought God had forgotten us. "No, Corrie," said Betsie, "He has not forgotten us. Remember His Word: "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him"'.¹

As we noted earlier, God's goodness extends to *all* His creatures, but God's goodness and love are especially revealed in His dealings with the human race – with sinful men and women.

But just how great *is* God's love for us? By way of answer, I think of the words of the apostle Paul, 'God commends His love to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'.¹⁵ For it is only at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ that we can ever measure just how good God really is.

I leave the last word with David, 'You, Lord, *are good*, and ready to forgive – abundant in mercy to all those who call upon you'.¹⁶

Footnotes

¹ Psa. 135. 3.

² Psa. 65. 1.

³ Nahum 1. 7.

⁴ Gen. 1. 31. When God had noted one thing which was not good, namely that man was alone, the Lord immediately made woman to be a companion and counterpart for man, Gen. 2. 18, 21-22.

⁵ Psa. 104. 14.

⁶ Psa. 104. 21.

⁷ Job 38. 41.

⁸ Psa. 147. 9. The Lord Jesus pointed out that 'the birds of the air ... neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns (that is, they make no long-term provision for their future – whoever saw a raven drive a tractor or a combine harvester?), and yet your heavenly Father feeds them', Matt. 6. 26.

⁹ Psa. 104. 25-28.

¹⁰ Matt. 5. 45.

¹¹ Acts 14. 17.

¹² James 1. 17.

¹³ Psa. 33. 5.

¹⁴ Psa. 107. 8, 15, 21, 31.

¹⁵ Rom. 5. 8. The word 'commends' means to introduce someone or something as worth knowing, Rom. 16. 1.

¹⁶ Psa. 86. 5.