

Look No Further Than God

Psalm 107:1

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My name is Matt Bohling, and I serve as an interim preacher and consultant of the session. We are making our way through a series called *Behold Your God* which is a series on the attributes of God. So, this morning we're going to do part one of, what I think is, a two-parter. We'll have to see how it shakes out, but I think it'll be a two-parter on the goodness of God. There're many texts to fit a bulletin, an outline in there. It's not a Presbyterian three-point sermon, but a Presbyterian five-point sermon. This morning I will still endeavor to be fairly short. We'll see how that goes, but if you're a note taker, that white space is likely to be filled with scripture references. So, I encourage your use of the pen.

Why would we study the attributes of God? Here's what J.I. Packer says (teacher from previous generation) it's what we were made for: to know God. What aim should we set for ourselves in life? To know God. That's what the 'ology' is. It's the knowledge of God, of *Theos*, which is the Greek word for God. God's goodness, amazingly. And you might not have thought of this yet, but you might have noticed, if you listen to me preaching at all, that I like to be provocative and make you think about things that you wouldn't have thought of before. Amazingly part of God's goodness is to reveal Himself to us in the scriptures and the gospel and amazingly to want to know us. That's kind of a big thought, but I think we easily lose big thoughts like that in day-to-day life. How do we not do that? How do we keep thriving as Christians living our lives as broken people, in a broken world, with all kinds of challenges?

Over time the Lord has convinced me from His word that thankfulness can take you a long ways. thankfulness can take you a long ways. Well, if that's true, what enables us to be thankful? Consistently heartfelt, deep, profound, life-changing, daily, even moment by moment, thankful. Well, it is a true, daily sense of God's goodness. That I can wake up in the morning and I can say this, 'We'll ponder in a little bit. You are good, and so, You do good,' to God. All right.

We're taking Psalm 107 and verse 1 as a root verse that we're going to kind of orbit around. Let me read it and we'll pray.

Psalm 107:1

*Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for His steadfast love endures forever! [ESV]*

Let's pray together.

Father, if we're honest, we hesitate to affirm this. We have so many things that we wish were different in ourselves, in others, in the world. We so often see what is not, instead of, what is. And so, we hesitate to affirm both that you are good and that you're doing good, particularly to us. Would you help us, Holy Spirit, to repent? Would you help me to repent of that? Would you, Father, put your goodness on display from your word? And convince our hearts, Holy Spirit. who's given us this word? That indeed you are good, and you do good. Do this for your glory and for our joy and gratitude. In Jesus's name, amen.

There's a lot of different ways that we see God's goodness. Let me give you sort of the structure of response that God calls us to from Psalm 107 and then we're going to kind of dive in serially to some different ways that God puts his goodness on display for us. In the scriptures, Psalm 107 and verse 1. Oh, give thanks to the Lord. This is a common refrain of the way that the psalms begin. Serves in many ways like our call to worship does in service, right. It calls us to give thanks to the Lord. Well, in this particular case, why are we called to give thanks to the Lord? This fundamental response of the Christian life. Why are we called here to give thanks? And we're told it's because the Lord is good. He is essentially good. I preached the series once before in the church I pastored in West Seattle. And so even though I'm sort of re-preaching things that I did before, I'm re-reflecting. Because it's some years ago and I think that my reflection this week on God's goodness, and listening through some sermons, and reading some stuff is. I think that we hesitate to affirm this, because we know that it's not true completely of ourselves. The affirmation that we'll look at later is that You are good, and You do good. And we look at ourselves and we go. Man, I really struggle to do good and if I'm honest with myself, I know I'm actually not good. And so, we reflect the wrong way. We reflect our experience onto God and assume that He struggles in the same ways that we do. When indeed he does not. He does not. Oh give thanks to the Lord for he is good. He is essentially good. He is only good. He is not good mixed with he is only good and that permeates all of his other attributes. One of the hardest things about learning about the attributes of God is they're all interrelated at the same time. They're not sort of like additive. So if we think about what we looked at last week, God is eternally good. He didn't become good. He's not becoming good. It's not that he was good. And now he's not. Or that he isn't now, but he's going to be. He has always been good, essentially good.

Well, how do we know? We're going to look at several different ways that psalm 107 points it out. How do we know that God is essentially good? His steadfast love endures forever. One of the things as I have gotten older, and as I've sinned more, is that I've grown to appreciate God's patience. This steadfast love because it's only this kind of love that could put up with me. So how do we know that God's good? Because He has this kind of steadfast love that's patient in the face of ongoing rebellion, ongoing ingratitude. The ongoing, my ongoing, judgment of God in his actions. He's good, because His love endures like that. Because it endures to me. Do you have that sense, well there's many other ways that we see God's goodness. And I want to, kind of, trip through a bunch of them for your benefit. These are the things that are highlighted to us.

We see God's goodness in creation. You see the points in providence, in our pains, if we put them in perspective, in redemption. And thus the encouragement that we look no further than God. So that's where we're headed, briefly sort of moving through these points. So we see God's goodness in creation, the kid's chorus, the little ditty that perhaps you taught your children or were taught. Encourages us to count our blessings. Do you? Is that only what kids do? Or could that be helpful for adults? Also, well, let's at least encourage that by learning about God's goodness, first, in creation. Let's see it in creation.

There's a little bit of background on goodness that I think is important for us to see. That when God creates, that the final stamp that gets on it. Do you remember Genesis 1:31? He does create something that's good. He creates something that's good, creates something that's good. He gets to the end. And He goes, that's good. That's very good. That's the matte translation. So, this marvelous formulation. I was listening to a sermon even this morning, getting ready. This passage from Psalm 119. You are good and do good. Teach me your statutes. You are good. It

encompasses God's goodness, encompasses all of His other attributes, as actually, all of them do together. So, it makes sense then when Moses asks God to show him His glory. This in Exodus 33:19. What God's reply is, when Moses says, 'hey, show me your glory.' Here's what God says, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you, my name, the Lord. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. We'll return to that in a latter portion of the series, that particular passage, and the bit of mystery there that it presents to our hearts. How it is that God shows mercy. For God revealing His glory is to show forth His goodness. They're correlated for God, for us, if we say show us Your glory. He says, 'let me show you my goodness. If you take that in, you'll see how glorious I am.' Which is why it makes sense that when God gets done creating, he says 'very good.'

It makes sense when you look in 1 Timothy 4:4. That here's the direction that we receive from God through the pen of the apostle, Paul, to Timothy and to us. Everything created by God is good because it comes from a good God. And all He makes is good. He makes no joke, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. What God creates is good, so the question is: do you see God's goodness in creation? He says, 'good, very good.' Broken for sure but still good. Do you receive God's gift of creation with thanksgiving? Do you do that every day? Is that why you say grace before meals? Because you have this profound sense of the goodness of god's creation? I was playing in the driveway this morning and enjoying the trees that planted either side of the driveway.

As you get to know me more, you'll find out that my background had been as a scientist. And so, I have particular interest in creation. I use an absurd amount of examples and illustrations from creation, because it's fascinating to me. The way that God made the world and the way he works in the world. And I have a passion for other people to be fascinated about it as well, because we tend to just skip over it in our busyness, and our driving, in our gadgets. We just skip over the beauty that's there, the goodness to receive. And yet you miss the opportunity to be thankful if you don't. Well let's marvel at God's goodness in providence. Providence is the idea that God is working minute by minute, meticulously, in the world. That God is working minute by minute, meticulously, in the world. Last week we pondered one of my favorite texts from Colossians. That in Jesus, everything coheres together. That we, you, and I would be, just be, jelly piles of atoms if Jesus did not hold us together. That's that moment by moment, marvelous providence that keeps things working the way God created them to work.

God's goodness revealed in providence extends to both humans and non-human aspects of creation. So, think of Psalm 104 and verses 27 to 28. These all look to You to give them their food. And due season, when you give it to them, they gather it up. When you open your hand, they are filled with good things. Psalm 145. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hands. You satisfy the desire of every living thing. That word, satisfy, is fascinating and penetrating. It's also very important. We'll consider that, some of that tonight, if you come out for the community service. It'll be down in the community room downstairs. But that that concept of being satisfied in God, with God, is super, super, important. So, we'll consider that some tonight, and in fact, we'll consider it again when I'm back in the beginning of May. We'll do an Easter sermon on Easter, but the beginning of May, we'll return to this goodness of God. Remember what Jesus says in Matthew 6 about God's providence related to the birds of the air, and the lilies of the fields. But if God so clothed the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown in the oven, will he not much more clothe you, oh you of little faith?

I have found, for myself, that little faith comes from little meditation. That if I seriously considered what God shows me in the scriptures, my faith would grow. God's goodness in providence is extended to all humans across the earth. Matthew 5:45. He makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. And we're told that this goodness of God, extended to everybody, is a testimony to both believers and unbelievers. Remember what Paul says in Lystra when he's addressing a group of unbelievers, people who didn't yet trust Jesus. This is Acts 14:17. Paul says, 'Yet He, God, did not leave Himself without witness, for He did good.' Well, how did He do good? By giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. This was the theme of the apostle Paul in Athens. You might remember addressing a different group of people who didn't yet trust Jesus. And he's contrasting there in Acts 17:24 – 25, is contrasting God and man, and the differences between them. Here's what he says. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man. Nor is He served by human hands as though He needed everything. As I'm sorry, excuse me, as though He needed anything. It's fascinating God is in need of nothing. Well, that's kind of a bountiful resource.

It goes on since He, Himself, gives to all mankind. Remember this life and breath and everything. That's what God's meticulous providence is like. That He gives life and breath and everything. What have you been given? Are you aware of it, profoundly affected by it? I was downstairs in the library and Marti. I met with Dick Stum this week for coffee and found out that Marti was the librarian, and so the library door was open. When I got Sunday School, I was like, old books. And so, I walked into the library and sniffed. Smells like old books feels like home. It used to be home. That's another story. Anyways in the library and up on the shelf was some books by one of my favorite professors from seminary, John Frame. The Lord was very kind to use God's word in the mouth of John Frame to change this old scientist's way of looking at the world. And I'm grateful because one of the things that God did in the time that I spent with Frame as a professor was to sort of break me of the way that I had conceived of the world and the way that it operates.

See. At least I, and maybe you, can tend to view things going on in creation as happening sort of automatically or mechanically. Like they just sort of happen instead of, or the very worst of it is, you know. I did that, right. I pulled that off, right. I'm not trying to diminish human agency or are working. What I am trying to poke at, just a little bit, is the scriptures give us absolutely, positively, no room at all. That any one of those single flowers in the driveway opens by itself. It does not have life in itself. It has life from God. And those flowers open at that curvature, and that beauty, by the personal, moment by moment, acting of God. We sort of throw around as, a sort of, cliché. You know. Every breath is from God. Well, what if that was actually true? That moment by moment, each heartbeat, each blink, each breath didn't just happen but actually was an individual, personal gift to you from God. That's what you are pushed towards by the scriptures; that God's goodness is that big, that personal, that constant, frankly, that good.

Packer points out, commenting on Psalm 145, the psalmist's point is: that since God controls all that happens in His world, every meal, every pleasure, every possession, every bit of sun, every night's sleep, every moment of health and safety, everything else that sustains and enriches life is a divine gift. And all of those gifts flow from God's goodness, from a good heart that created a good world that continually experiences God's goodness. And if we're aware of it, we're the recipients of God's goodness moment by moment. But do we receive those moments with profound gratitude for God's goodness? I hope that some of you can. And perhaps that I'm provoking that many of you will. But many people don't take in the world that way. Some can't,

and that's because typically, people have a hard time reconciling their pains and God's goodness. And so, let's spend just a little bit of time thinking about how to place your pains in perspective.

Pain in the world seems to put God's goodness in question for some people. This is general, right: war in Ukraine, suffering all over the world, right. And for other people, it's very highly personal: betrayal, slander, infidelity, early death, late death, chronic pain, sexual abuse, verbal emotional abuse, undesired divorce appearance. Or personally, I could keep going. Having spent some time with some of you, I'm aware of some of the pain people have in this room, some of the pain of people online. But there's certainly a lot of it that I couldn't possibly be aware of, and my concern certainly is to commiserate. Some of the things on that list are there because they're actually me. And they provide struggle to me: to believe in God's goodness. So, I certainly want to commiserate, but I also want to help you place your pains in the perspective of God's goodness. That would you consider that it's possible in the mind of God in his all-pervasive goodness that our pains have a place in what he's trying to do in the world, and what he's trying to do in us. Would you consider that as a possibility?

We're encouraged to that viewpoint from Genesis 50:20. Of course we've been in this long section of Genesis about the life of Joseph, and we're now sort of at the ends. And that, my, Bible reading has recently gone through this, right. And we're sort of at the end of Joseph's life, and their dad's passed away and the brothers who sold him into slavery. We're a little worried. Dad's gone. He's gonna be kicked off. What's gonna happen to us? And maybe it was. Maybe it was languishing in jail unjustly accused, forgotten. What were those prayer times like for Joseph as he waited for God to fulfill the promise? Well we don't know what that wrestling looked like. We don't know what those prayers sounded like, but we do know what the yield of them was. And here's the yield. Talking to his brothers: as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good. Now note a couple things here. The frank admission of genuine evil, malicious intent, the frank admission. You meant it for evil. You are not good. You did not do good. You human brothers abide. As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good. So here side by side, and I don't have the perfect explanation for this, I'm just trying to tell you what God gives us in His word to help us wrestle well. Side by side with genuine evil malicious intent is God's goodness and they coexist. Most obviously we see this in the cross which we'll consider a bit more in a few moments and some more tonight, of course, over the Lord's table.

This passage, I think, is very, very helpful. You see other kinds of testimonies, other kinds of places in the scriptures. But it's very important that we hold on to texts like this in our most difficult circumstances. You think of the life of the apostle Paul, and you can read of all the things that happened to him. Lots of evil happened to him, but as he writes in the book of Romans, as one who had genuine malicious evil committed against him, tons of it. It's that Paul who says: and we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who were called according to His purpose for those, whom before knew that He set his love on ahead of time. He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that He might be the firstborn among many, many brothers. And those whom He predestined, He also called. And those He called he also justified. And those whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? For Paul, he could put the two of these. For Joseph, for Paul, they could put the two of these side by side.

I was reminded this morning as I was reviewing my sermon in Hebrews 12. That we're taught there, whoever wrote Hebrews. Maybe we'll learn in heaven, maybe we won't care. You know that pain in our lives, many times this discipline from the Father. And it's the proof of his love. It's not meant to put His love in doubt. It's meant to be the proof of His love. And I would

say that most all of my pains caused by me, or caused by others, caused by a broken world, they have been used by God profoundly in my life to shape me to be more like Jesus. That's what we're meant to own here. Your pain, if you will, if you can bear to hear this, is proof that God is for you. That he's using even evil done against you to conform you to Christ so that he might, through you, advance his purposes in the world. Why do we have trouble with this? I'd have trouble with this. We tend, proudly, to think that we know better than God. Let's just be honest. We tend proudly to think that we know better than God. And think that we small, frail, limited, merely sinful creatures, that we have the grounds to accuse Him of wrongdoing when, actually, he's the only one who is good. People come up to Jesus in the gospels Hey, good teacher, and he goes, 'Oh hold on. Just hold on there for a second. There's only one who's good, and that's God.

We've talked some about pain that comes from outside of us. Let me talk to you, just for a second, about pain that rises up from within us, that we create for ourselves. And I'll just pick one that troubles me and perhaps troubles you. There's a pain that comes from the inside for us and it's called envy. This tends to put in our minds the goodness of God in some question, because we envy something, and we have not received it. And we're wondering: is God good? Because I have not gotten that which I think will make me finally happy. And so, we envy someone else's success, their prestige, their status, their position, their influence, their recognition, that they get. The job they have, the gifts they have, the spouse they have. Their marital state, good, bad, indifferent, single, divorced, married, we envy their life stage. You see, we think we deserve something, and we haven't gotten it. I think envy is a sin that we think rarely about our culture. Just says well that's getting ahead. That's the American dream. That's what everybody should be. It actually cultivates you.

Ever thought about advertising? What's the point of advertising? It's to create discontent. Most of our culture exists to create discontent and envy. And these are these are acids that eat away at our belief in the goodness of God They functionally, we begin asking. Well, sure God; but you know, what have you done for me lately? You aren't being good to me in the way I want. And so, I disagree that you are fundamentally good. In our pride, we elevate that which we think will make us happy, but we don't have. And this is a quiet, but nonetheless powerful force in our hearts. It's a silent, but sinful protest against God's goodness. You aren't being good to me. And so, I'm not going to believe that you're good. I know what will make me happy and you are not delivering it. This envy reveals itself in thanklessness. It reveals itself in a lack of generosity, not simply money. Money's easier to get out of Americans. Time and energy. That's almost impossible. We respond as we perceive. We've been given. Yeah God. Hey, I mean, if you're going to be stingy with me, I know what to do with that. We say to ourselves, because we're either not courageous enough or we're or we're not foolish enough to say. It's, 'God, do you really care about what I think will make me happy?' This envy isn't an asset, friends. It's a hurt we generate on ourselves from the inside. And it keeps us from this profound thankfulness that ought to flow from us, because of who God is. That He is good, and so, He does good. My point in covering providence, first, is that hopefully, you have a blessings list that is so endless, that this envy that I find in my heart, and perhaps you find in your heart, can be suppressed. I'm going to spend. I need to move on. But I'm going to address the emptiness of that kind of thinking, anyhow. That something in creation could finally satisfy us when we ponder this attribute in a month's time. And I'll even do that a little bit tonight. Let me leave you with this thought, on this point. We'll move on to two much briefer points, because I'm keeping you a long time.

Could I propose to you, that even if you had what you wanted, it wouldn't make you finally happy? See, you were made for God. And yes, you feel holes in your life. And in your

heart, and your aspirations, and your wishes, and you think something that God made that's good, ostensibly, can fill that hole. But it can't. You weren't made to be finally satisfied by something that God made, but to be satisfied by Him, by knowing Him, by being known by Him, by loving Him, worshipping Him, serving Him.

Well let's move on from begrudging God's generosity, which is what envy is. And let's figure out how to replace that with rejoicing. And let's briefly ponder the idea that we should rejoice in God's goodness in redemption. So, when we desire something we think will make us happy, it becomes the big thing to us. The way one teachers put this that I really, really love is: if only so, you fill in the blank. If only, they fill in the blank Then I'd be happy. Then I'd be fulfilled if only. What's your, what's in your blank? So that becomes the big thing to us and we sort of revolve around it. And we respond to God and others according to whether we get that or not. I'm trying to alert me, warn me, that when I do that, my perspective is often and you also. Because the reality is that the big thing in life is that this God, who made everything good, who is eternal goodness in Himself, who sustains you and me moment by moment, sustains everything, He gives us life and breath and everything else. The big thing is the God, who's like that, chose to enter into a painful broken world to save rebels against His goodness. That His goodness is bigger than our rebellion. We sang of it earlier, right. His mercy is more. That's a way His goodness displays itself. The biggest display of God's goodness as big as it is in creation and providence.

And it is big, but the biggest display of God's goodness towards sinners is Jesus coming to earth at all. His incarnation. Jesus, perfect living in our place. His willing death on a cross. His resurrection which we will ponder in a couple of weeks. His ascension. And even now His praying for us. Individually the work of Jesus that continues for you and me. That's the big thing. And when your mind goes towards what you're tempted to be the big thing, this is where you have to bring it back to, is to. The wonder of being, if assuming you're trusting in Christ, turning from your sins. Fundamentally of course, that's what a Christian is, right. They've stopped their belief that something in creation could satisfy them. You know that's why you sin, right. You seem to get something that you think will make you happy. And Christians are people, they've gone, yeah, giving up on that project. And that's repentance: to turn from worshiping something that's made. We looked at that a few weeks ago, right. And fundamentally turning back to God, and saying, 'You are worthy of worship, Jesus. I need you. I entrust myself to you.' That's fundamentally the daily lifestyle of Christians, right, for people who have, who are doing that ongoing. The way that's described in the scriptures is that they're in Christ and this is one way that this has been summarized. In Christ we inherit all things. What more could divine goodness do for us? What more could God give us than himself? And that's why, last, we should look no further than God.

I'm not going to do full justice to this. I promise to come back to it, but let me sketch a direction to make you hungry, hungry for the Lord's table tonight. Jeremiah 31 14 fascinatingly says this: I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, declares the Lord. There's the nugget. There's the trajectory. There's the direction. This is the way to head your hope, to look no further than God for satisfaction, is to be satisfied with God's overflowing goodness. Psalm 34:8. Oh taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. And, of course, the question comes up. In what do you take refuge? Is it Jesus that you take refuge in? If it's not, please don't leave here without exploring taking refuge in Jesus, finding satisfaction in God with somebody you've seen up front: Anthony, one of the other elders. Please talk to us. Well, we put a scratch in the surface. We'll explore this

more next month. Tonight and next month, encouragement that we have in the gospels to take refuge in our good God. And so let's pray that that's the case for us.

Father, you tell us that you are good, which is why you do good. Would you open our hearts to the possibility that this is true. That we wouldn't assume that somehow you're a slightly better human and struggle to do good, because you're not good. Help us not to impute to you the way that we are, but instead would we be overwhelmed with your goodness. That we might find ourselves profoundly thankful and wanting and willing to do good especially to other humans as you've been good to us. Help us we pray. In Jesus's name, amen.