

In His Image: Good & Just

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[0 : 00] So, I don't know if you've had COVID impact your world directly. We had a brush with COVID this week ourselves.

Michelle, by the end of the day on Monday, had... Now, don't panic. The end of the story is good, so don't panic. I'm not raging with COVID virus standing up here.

By the end of the day on Monday, Michelle had a pretty bad sore throat. Tuesday morning, she woke up. It was worse. So, she talked to her principal and said, I don't think I should come in. And she said, neither do I. And she said, Edmonton Public Schools has a COVID testing facility. So, it's downtown, and she sent her there. So, Michelle had the swab up the nose, desperately uncomfortable COVID test.

And then we waited. And waited. And by Thursday morning, I reached out to Vern, and I said, we need a plan B.

[1 : 03] Because I said, I don't think it's wise for me to be at church on Sunday, mask or not, if we don't know a test result. And he said, you're right.

So, we had a plan B. But then yesterday morning, out of the blue, I hear cheering from Michelle. And it's not because she's happy to see me. She's cheering because she got an email saying, clear.

Completely clear. She still feels terrible. But it's good to know it's a cold or the flu. Not something more serious. So, dodged one.

So, God is good, and he's watching over us, and he's keeping us safe. Not just us, us, but all of us. Last week, as we began our new sermon series called In His Image, Reflecting God, We recognize that as human beings, we have been created in the image of God, or as the Bible says, in His image.

And an important aspect of being created in God's image is the fact that we exhibit many qualities or attributes that can be seen in God Himself.

[2 : 18] Do you remember what these attributes are called? So, I preached this online as well, and it's very difficult to try and get audience participation when you can't have any.

So, it was a challenge. But do you remember what those attributes are called? And now, don't panic. I'm not saying, give me the list of all ten. But not those specific ones, but the category in which these ones that we're studying now are grouped.

Does anyone remember? Do you remember that they're loving? Thank you. Thank you, Kathy. That is good. So, the category, they're called God's communicable attributes. And that's not something we use in everyday conversation, right? Unless a communicable disease, I suppose, is one.

But last week, we considered that God is holy and loving. Do you remember that? God is set apart. And He also calls us as His people to be set apart as well.

[3 : 26] Because we're called to be His people who live in the world, but are called not to be of the world. That distinction is important.

Another question for you. Do you remember from our sermon last week? This is easier. How many different Greek words are used in the New Testament to specifically define the concept of love?

Do you remember how many? I'm seeing hands. I'm hearing words. Four is correct. And many of you will remember Noel, our good friend who used to attend Braemar.

Noel would preach occasionally, and he would give out points, bonus points. I don't know what the points are redeemable for. He and I never decided. Vacation, perhaps. So those are good for points.

And for bonus points, can anybody remember the specific word the New Testament writers used, the Greek word, to refer to the love of God? Nice.

[4 : 29] Agape. Very good. This agape love, the way that God loves us, we learn is the same way that God calls us to love others.

So that's without hesitation, without deliberation, without previously weighing what's in it for us. Well, I got to think about it.

I'll get back to you. It's not like that. We are called to reflect God's holiness in the way that we love others. So this morning, we're going to be looking at two of those new communicable attributes, those qualities of God, as we consider that God is good and he is just.

And spoiler alert, our entire worship set focused on the goodness of God. God is good. All the time. Pretty good. God is good. All the time. Amen. It's language that we speak, right?

[5 : 42] We know that. God is good. And as Christian... Vern, stop. As Christians, we immediately recognize that, right?

That's those three words and that leader response kind of interaction. We recognize that God is good. We say it in our prayers.

We sing it in our worship songs, as we did this morning. We hear about it in sermons, as we will this morning. But what does it actually mean to say that God is good?

Well, let's back up a bit and look at our own understanding, our own everyday context for it. What does it mean to and for us when we say that something is good?

Do you recognize that goodness or the degree to which we consider something to be good is often associated with a scale? Because so many things in our lives are rated or ranked.

[6 : 49] They're measured. They're mulled over. We're often asked to formally consider the value of something in a survey, aren't we? On a scale from 1 to 10, please rate your experience with the following.

Any number of things. From your experience at Walmart. It's on your receipt. The electronic voice lady tells you. Fill out the survey. If you're having your furnace cleaned.

If you're considering buying a car or eating at a restaurant. We're asked to rate our experience. And that scale that we're given often begins with 1 being the worst.

And then 10 being the most mind-bogglingly insane amazing experience we've ever had. And I think most of us probably go, it was really good.

8. Right? Do you ever say 10? Is it ever perfect? It's hard to say. But when we consider that scale then from 1 to 10, 5 suggests that it's average.

[7 : 57] Right? It was fair. Adequate. Decent enough, I guess. It was good. But have you ever recognized God's goodness scale?

Because we see it early on in Scripture as an inherent quality of God. The Bible says in Genesis 1 verse 3. And God said, let there be light.

And there was light. God saw the light was. And he separated the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good, Genesis says.

Light and darkness. And God saw that it was good.

Then, capping it all off with the creation of humanity, the creator of all things stepped back to look at all that he had created.

[9 : 09] And in Genesis 1 verse 31, God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Friends, that's God's definition. His perspective on something being good.

We may also consider the idea of something or someone being good in the context of virtue or morality.

Right? When we have stories that include villains who do the worst things imaginable. We want our heroes to be brave, heroic, and selfless.

We want them to do good. And hopefully we learn from a young age, or it's even modeled for us, that goodness is a virtue.

[10 : 05] That can sometimes be a cliché even. But it's a desirable quality for any decent and moral human being to have. Because we recognize immediately that the opposite of doing good, of being good, is at the best, kind of a selfish, self-interested, bitter experience.

Or at the worst, the intentional pursuit of causing harm, of doing evil. Okay, I'm not going to mention, even though the weather outside is frightful.

I won't mention the season or the specific holiday just yet. Because we'll get there in a few weeks. But at a certain time of year, we even sing, you better be good for goodness sake.

Right? So speaking of that expression, do you see that somewhat, it's kind of an anemic sense of goodness again? A little bit bland?

Our view of goodness can be bland, for sure. Somewhat plain and kind of vanilla. And no offense to people who like vanilla. And then for goodness sake, right?

[11 : 24] We say for goodness sake, not as a declaration of something's value. It's not something that we usually say to express virtue or encouragement to treat other people the way we're called to treat them.

We don't say, for the sake of goodness, I will treat you thusly. It's often an expression of frustration, right? It's Christian profanity a lot of times.

Oh, for goodness sake. Right? The dishwasher, I dumped something the other day in the fridge and went, oh, for crying out loud. For goodness sake. Right? It's just, it's annoyance.

It's exasperation. It's not about goodness at all, really. It's an expression of frustration and our lack of control in a situation, for goodness sake.

But we recognize that God is, by nature, inherently good. God, as we read in scripture, he can't bear sin.

[12 : 29] He hates sin. He hates evil. But he loves sinners. The writer of the psalm says, over and over, and we can have discussions about, didn't David write all the psalms?

Well, it's another conversation for another time. Yes, many. Others wrote some others, perhaps. But the writers of the psalm say, over and over, in 106 verse 1, 107 verse 1, you can check me on all these.

118 verse 1 and verse 29. 136 verse 1. These psalms say, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. Recognizing the goodness of God is where these psalms begin. The goodness of God, his holiness, other qualities of God are his primary characteristics.

Our response to God being good, then, is to worship him for all that that means, God's goodness, means to us and for us.

[13 : 45] All that that means to the rest of creation, what it means to our calling to do and reflect goodness as his children, as people who call on the name of God, as people who call themselves Christ followers.

We are called to be and to do good. I believe that even as Christians, we may also tend to recognize being good or goodness as a personal choice.

Can you relate to that ever in your life? Can you perhaps remember or recognize a situation or a conversation where you knew the right thing?

You knew the good thing and what that was to do or to say. But you chose to not act. You chose to not speak up or you chose to not step in.

We talked last week about loving others, even those who we may deem to be unlovable based on our own measurements.

[15 : 02] We talked about loving others no matter the cost, just as God loved us. Loves us. Yes, doing good can be a personal choice.

but it's also not something we should pick or choose to do at a whim if we feel like it or we don't because it's what we're called to do.

It shouldn't be optional. We are called to be good because our God, the one who created us, is good.

Do you have a personal sense of justice? What I mean by that is does it make you frustrated or angry or annoyed when injustice is done to people who can't stand up for themselves?

To people who can't defend themselves against someone else or against a system in which they feel marginalized or neglected? Justice.

[16 : 17] It's a particularly appropriate word, I think, in today's culture because we're recognizing, I believe, more and more that there really seems to be no such thing as a level playing field.

There doesn't really seem to be a true sense of justice for all. human systems of power favor those who have power, leaving those who don't have power without a seat at the table often.

Wealth, influence, personal connection, social standing, these all seem to be factors that influence a person's right to or their likelihood of receiving justice.

Don't they? Human justice speaks of fair treatment and we hear that people are innocent until proven guilty or we hear in Canada the legal system says guilty, innocent within I forget exactly the terminology but just a clear sense of very complete innocence assuming innocence until guilt is proven there it is beyond a shadow of a doubt.

One legal system says beyond a reasonable doubt I believe that's the US and Canada says shadow of a doubt. So there's an inherent sense that justice will be served and it will be served fairly.

[18:05] And yet we hear the words no justice no peace. We may equate the sense that we have of justice with fairness right?

Fair treatment. You do something you should be treated accordingly good or bad. We hear the words justice has been served but do we always believe that it has been?

Personally I've lost count of the number of times over the course of my life that my blood has boiled over a clear sense that someone has been treated unjustly unfairly unkindly treated in a way that was just not right.

Justice. justice. It's also very either or right? It's very for some of you you'll understand what I mean binary. It's either just or unjust.

Black and white. Cut and dried. Unambiguous as a concept right? And circumstances or the treatment of an individual in a particular situation can really only be one of two things just or unjust.

[19:23] either justice has been served or it hasn't. It should be that simple. And there's a legal concept behind justice especially as we understand it in human terms because we think of the legal system, the justice system, right?

That's where that word takes us most often in our heads. A sense of right or wrong. A sense of someone having an understanding of the law or the rules and then someone else having a recognition that someone has broken them and needs to be punished, held accountable.

And without question, human justice can mirror a sense of true justice, I believe, but sadly it often falls short.

Human justice can be biased. It can be conditional. And prideful. And power hungry. Authoritarian. Because, friends, the unfortunate reality is that human justice is often tainted by sin.

So, I believe that it can be very hard for us to understand what true justice would be like because we have all of those filters that we bring. we have biases that we bring as we try to consider that God, our God, is simply just.

[21:01] Are you familiar with the book of Micah in the Old Testament? Micah was a minor prophet whose focus was to remind the people of Israel, to remind God's people that God's judgment is real.

Micah reminded the Israelite people and reminds us that God hates sin. He absolutely hates it. And he stands as the only righteous judge who can punish sin.

Only God can be the true judge over humanity because God is impartial. God judges only to the degree to which the offense requires.

Can you recognize that? God's justice is fair. It is unbiased. It is equal justice for all. The likes of which we can never achieve in human terms.

Because God also we recognize is sovereign. God is omniscient. God knows all things. God knows the circumstances of the offense better than any lawyer or judge ever could.

[22:28] God's justice is absolute and it is perfect. Friends, God's justice just is.

God's grace. But I want to recognize we don't often see a balance of mercy, certainly in human justice.

That's next time. Because God is also merciful beyond our understanding, beyond what we could ever possibly deserve.

And we're going to explore that in the coming weeks. Micah chapter 6 sets the stage for us as readers as though we're in a courtroom. I invite you to read it.

And over the course of that chapter, not only does it become clear that humanity stands guilty, but also that God alone is our judge.

[23:28] Throughout the book of Micah, we get a clear sense of God's anger towards sin. not sinners. And as God is the only true and perfect judge, we then come to our calling as it relates to justice.

The core theme of the book of Micah, I always say this, one of my favorite verses in the Bible. I seem to have a lot of favorites. The core theme of the book of Micah is summed up in Micah 6, 8.

It's on bumper stickers and t-shirts and coffee mugs everywhere. He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. He has showed you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. As one quote I read this week said, people have tried all kinds of ways to please God, but God has made his wishes clear.

[24 : 45] He wants his people to be just, merciful, faithful, and to walk humbly with him. In your efforts to please God, examine these areas on a regular basis.

In your efforts to please God, examine these areas on a regular basis. Good. good. It's been watered down to the point where it's a pretty bland descriptor in human language.

But I hope that this morning we've gained a new insight into it, into the richness that we can discover as we seek to be good as God is good.

As Psalm 100 verse 5 declares, for the Lord, your Lord, that's my emphasis, is good. And his love endures forever.

His faithfulness continues throughout all generations. Friends, may you have peace knowing that in the end God will work out your circumstances for your good.

[26 : 05] according to his will. And know that ultimately perfect justice will finally, ultimately be served by our all knowing and eternally loving God.

My prayer is that knowing these truths, that you're able to be free to let go of bad things that have happened to you in the past and to trust the fact that your good and just God will prevail on your behalf.

Let's pray. you know about your favor is have to