

Is God Really Good

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[0 : 00] So, is God really good? Is God really good? At some point, we've all asked that question to ourselves. But it is an age-old question. Philosophers and cynics and sages through the centuries have asked this question, and they stated something like this.

If God is all-good and all-powerful, how come there is evil in the world? I mean, if he's all-good, then it must mean that he's not all-powerful.

Or, if he's all-powerful, then it must mean that he's not all-good. You can't have it both ways. But it's not merely an academic question.

As I said, everyone at some point in their life has asked it. It's a deep and at times a heart-wrenching question. Because all of us have had hard and painful things happen to us.

And so, if you're asking that question here today, you're not alone. You're surrounded by people who have gone through, and in fact are going through, very deep waters.

[1 : 08] And many of us can affirm, even though it's through a season of tears, that God is indeed good. But we first want to look at, does science give us an answer?

Can science give us an answer to the question, is God really good? Or is there meaning out there in the universe? And so, maybe you're here, and you don't believe in God, and you're trying to look at, or trying to look for answers without looking at the scriptures, or without looking at him.

And if you're coming from a modern Western perspective, there's only one sort of avenue available to you, and that's the avenue of modern science. And many feel that modern science has managed to answer this question in a way that gets rid of God.

But if you think about it, it's not actually that simple. You don't get rid of the problem of evil by getting rid of God. Now, the famous evolutionist Richard Dawkins, he gave this answer that goodness and evil are meaningless human constructs.

I'm just going to quote from him, from one of his books. In a universe of electrons, selfish genes, and blind physical forces, that's the universe that we can see, some people are going to get hurt.

[2 : 22] Other people are going to get lucky. And you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice.

The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.

End quote. But just to highlight those last lines that he talks about, he thinks, and many scientists will say, the universe, the world that we live in, including ourselves, has no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, and that there's nothing but pitiless indifference.

Imagine trying to live a life based on those truths. I don't think it's possible. I don't think they believe it. Because they don't go around living their life as if nothing means anything.

Certainly not to themselves. However, in one sense, Dawkins is right. If there is no God, then nothing is meaningful. Nothing makes sense.

[3 : 39] But not just your pain, also your joy, your hopes, your dreams, your very being. Any purpose in life, nothing makes sense.

There's only brute force, brute chance, and a random clash of electrons that looks meaningful but actually is not meaningful in the modern scientific mindset. You're just a gene replicating machine in the mind of Richard Dawkins.

I don't know about you, but that is a far from satisfactory answer because I don't think I'm just a machine. And I do feel joy and pain and things like evil and good.

But as we saw last week, we can't just look at the world around us and find the answer. We need the subtitles, as we saw. What we need is God's word.

We need God explaining this whole situation to us from His perspective because God's word is a much surer guide to reality than what our minds can think or what our feelings tell us.

[4 : 42] So we're going to spend some time looking at the goodness of God. The goodness of God. And what we discover in the Bible is that God is literally defined by His goodness.

So turn along to Exodus 33 or look it up on your phone just to give you some context while we get there. We're at an incredible part of the story of the Bible in Exodus.

We've got Moses having led God's people out of captivity, out of slavery. We looked at this in our church some time ago. The plagues, the Passover, the incredible miracle of the parting of the Red Sea.

All real events, by the way. And Moses is now meeting with God at Mount Sinai. And he wants to know just who is this being that has come to rescue them.

And he asks God, he says, Let all your glory pass before me. So Exodus 33, verse 18, Moses says, Now show me your glory.

[5 : 49] So he's meeting with God up on Mount Sinai. They're having a long chat. At the end of it, Moses says, Show me your glory. And God says, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you.

So what Moses is going to see, or what we're going to hear about, is all of God's goodness. And then he goes on to define it as his mercy, his compassion, his grace.

And we'll have a look at those things in turn. I will proclaim my name in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy. I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

But there's an edge to it. You can't actually see me and live. There's a distance. There's a problem between man and God. Which, by the way, only Jesus is able to fix. But then in Exodus 34, when God actually walks past him, Exodus 34 verse 5, The Lord came down in a cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord.

I mean, that's an incredible moment in history. The God of the universe comes down and stands in front of a man and says, Okay, I'm going to show you who I am. And he passes in front of him, proclaiming, The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

[7 : 27] And sin. Yet, he doesn't leave the guilty unpunished. So there's an edge to knowing God because there's this problem between God and man.

But nonetheless, God shows Moses all of his goodness. And it's this rich aboundingness in wonderful things. If anyone comes to us and says, This is who they are, you immediately want to be their friend.

Now, so the first thing to notice is that when God says, I'm going to let my goodness pass in front of you, he then gives him his name. The first thing God says is, I am Yahweh. I am the Lord.

God. God himself is good. Or is goodness. In fact, the English word God is a contraction of the word good.

That's how we get the word God in English. That's how closely they're related together in the English mind when they wrote the Bible from the Hebrew and the Greek. They're like, Hmm. So in the Hebrew, God's name or God's designator is Elohim.

[8 : 32] In the Greek, it's Theos. And they're actually like, Okay, but those are Greek and Hebrew. How do we talk? Well, you know, when we read the whole story, you know, this being is good. Ah, okay. Well, we'll call him good. And that's contracted to the word God.

This is why we have it in his name. Because this is who he is. On top of that, God is a God of mercy. What that means is he's a God who acts to save people who need his help.

He's a God who acts to save people who need his help. This is the great story of rescue and redemption and salvation in the Old Testament. The Jews are slaves under the harsh regime of the Egyptians.

They cry out to God and God says, Yes, I can't take this anymore. I need to come and help you guys. He's also a God of compassion. He's a God who feels their pain, who feels people's pain, and is moved to save and help them.

That's what compassion means. He's not just acting according to a contract. He's not a policeman. He's not doing his job.

[9 : 47] He's like any mom or dad that hears their child crying out for help. You just get that gut-wrenching, Oh no, I've got to go and save them. That's how God feels about people in trouble.

And then he's a God of grace, a God who shows favor, who gives his people more than what they need. But whatever is given is a gift with no thought of being paid back.

He just liberally gives stuff because he likes to do it. He's also a God that's slow to anger. Slow to anger.

He's not quick to anger. He's patient. The Greek says it's got the word he's macro patient. You know macro when you go shopping for Christmas presents?

If you have to, the ones that Santa doesn't deliver, if the other kids are gone, we're safe. You've got a macro because it's big. God is macro patient. He is big patient.

[10:50] Big time patient. Yeah, he gets angry because sin bothers him because it bothers his creatures.

It bothers, he knows it bothers us. He knows it does bad things and damages people. That's why it bothers him so much. He gets angry. But it takes generations for him to get there.

Not like us. It takes me, this is confession time, it takes some people a very short amount of time when they drive their car out of their driveway to get angry with the other people on the road.

It takes God generations before he starts hooting his horn. The problem is because he's a God, when he does that, you feel it. And so what you need is a God who's abounding in kindness and love.

Now depending on your translation, in verse 6, his mind says he's abounding in love and faithfulness. Now that love and faithfulness or loving kindness, depending on your translation, is one single Hebrew word.

[11:59] This talks about God's covenantal love. And it's the thing that binds all of these things that God is together. His goodness, his mercy, his compassion, his grace, his patience, are all packed together in this word of loving kindness or loving faithfulness or covenantal faithfulness.

God's covenantal love. What that does, the reason it binds all these things together is that it shows God is fully, fully committed to overturning the problem of evil and to show his goodness.

In fact, he's so committed that as Christmas teaches us, he's willing to send his only son into the world to pay the ultimate price to make sure that you can experience these good things that God is in your life to get rid of this problem of sin between him and his people.

As Psalm 34 says, God wants his people to taste and see that the Lord is good, to have a deep experience of his goodness and his love and his mercy and his compassion.

Doesn't that sound like a way better option than blind, pitiless chance? So if you're looking at the problem of evil and is there any good in the world, science can't get you there.

[13:22] I would much rather want to know this being that has acted in time and space to bring goodness into the world. but there's this problem between man and people.

We've seen it in the text. Moses can't get too close. In fact, he can't even really see God as he really is and God says he is going to punish people and so we need to look for the goodness of God not just in and of himself but the thing he does at Christmas time sending Jesus into the world and so we've got to look for the goodness of God in Christ.

The goodness of God in Christ. Now, but before we get to Jesus, we need to understand what the problem is that he came to fix. God is good. I don't know what your experience of the world is.

I don't think the world is good at all. Now, when I say at all, I don't mean there's nothing good about the world. There's a lot of good things about the world. I'm just intensifying it.

The world is definitely not all good. God is good but the world doesn't seem to be. But, the Bible tells us that God originally made the world good but that something went wrong.

[14:34] there's this badness or evil in the world. It's not working like it's meant to work. But what's important is that creation wasn't made bad. It went bad.

It's a very important concept to understand. The world wasn't made bad. It went bad. And the reason for that is not God but us, his creatures.

There's an old TV show Men Gone Bad. It was a TV show. Ladies, you probably know what we're talking about. Men Gone Bad if you've married to one for any length of time.

I think one of the greatest sins apparently that men can commit is not leaving the toilet seat down. A cause of a huge amount of problems.

In one of the counseling books I read once, a married couple stayed together but they divided their house down the middle. They literally built a wall down the middle. Too expensive to get divorced.

[15 : 30] They just stayed together. And when they eventually got to a pastor and he asked them what is the problem? And he worked out that the man kept on buying his own soap. He didn't buy the soap for the wife and this caused a huge division.

Men Gone Bad. But you know, men, we also know what I'm talking about. It's not just the men that have gone bad. Women have also gone bad. I'm just going to clear my throat now.

I've been told, I've never experienced this myself, but apparently a lot of married men, none from this church, have said on occasion that they find it really difficult to have a very straightforward logical argument with people.

Well, we all know that people aren't good. There's goodness in us, but there's also a lot that's not good in us.

Of course, it's not just humans that have gone bad. Everything in creation is affected by the problem of sin, this thing that happened that went, that took God's original intent in a good creation and just twisted and warped it.

[16 : 50] Things don't work properly anymore. Not even our cells, particularly, well, our cells, I mean our bodies. So, here's a picture of a good cell, a human cell.

It's one of the, one of the most incredible pictures taken of the cell. Can you, just the detail in there, I don't know what it, there are people here who knows what's going on there, but that's inside one of us.

Someone, it was, I think it was in Time Magazine and they said it looks like an amusement park. It looks like fun. Look, we should be having fun there. But I mean, clearly you can see design and it looks like it's working well.

Here's a cancer cell. that just looks evil. That's just nasty. And so, this is why we have the problems we have in this world.

This is why we say the world isn't good. Because everything in creation has been twisted and maimed and corrupted by this problem of sin. Not just our human bodies, but our minds.

[17 : 55] Minds that plan evil. Our hearts. Hearts that lust after things that they shouldn't. Our mouths. Lives lies to cover up the things we've done wrong. The list can go on.

At least the Bible takes seriously that the world has gone wrong. If you remember what Darwin said at what I quoted at the start, he said, no, there is no such thing as evil. It just looks evil. Cancer that kills you?

Ach, it's not really that bad. It doesn't actually mean anything because you don't mean anything. That doesn't sound like a compassionate anything. The God of the universe cares.

He doesn't want to see cancer in the world. He doesn't want to see people corrupted and hurt and hurting others. He wants to change it. That's what he sent Jesus to do.

And so I just want to look at two things in the Christmas story. That's why we have Christmas. Well, we have Christmas because God sent Jesus into the world but we'll look at two things that the Christmas story helps us to know that God is good.

[19 : 04] And so two things stand out in the story of Jesus that helps us. The first, I'm just going to quote it from Matthew 1.21. We'll often hear it in the Christmas story. The angel is explaining to Mary who Jesus is going to be and he tells her what to name him.

His name will be Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. He's going to make bad things good. And that's it.

This is the, that sentence, Jesus will save his people from their sins is, that's the God of the Old Testament. The God of compassion and mercy and grace and loving kindness forgiving the sins of his people.

In fact, in that Exodus passage, it's got three words for sin. Forgiving, he says, he maintains love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

You know, the Jews had a, they got many words for sin and God is like, yeah, it doesn't matter what kind of sin, I'm going to forgive it. I'm going to send Jesus and because of what he does, I'm going to, I'm going to forgive it.

[20 : 18] Forgiving the sins of all his people, of all who would come to him, but especially of those who don't deserve to have their sins forgiven.

And this is wonderfully expressed to us in the passage we read from Ephesians. So you might want to turn there, but a section of it will come up on the screen. Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus.

Paul is writing one and a half thousand years after God made those promises to Moses. And what's interesting is Paul is writing to Jews and to non-Jews.

Yes, the Jews expected God to have compassion on them because God said he would, but God never made promises in that way to people who aren't Jews. And yet here's a church that the apostle Paul is writing to.

He says, hey, you guys are one of us now. The God that has compassion on us, he's decided to have a compassion on you. And you go, well, we don't deserve it.

[21 : 20] He says, yeah, I know you don't deserve it. That's what I'm like. So he says in chapter 2, Ephesians 2 verse 1, as for you, meaning you pagans, you guys sitting here at St. Mark's, you can put your name in there, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.

So he's describing the problem in the world, jaded, lifeless, just going through the motions, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts like the rest, like everyone, like all of humanity.

We were by nature deserving of God's wrath because of the rubbish way we've lived our lives. It just takes a touch of honesty and a touch of humility to see that this is true.

And then the great change in time and space and human history and the great change that can happen in your life if Jesus is in it. Verse 4, but because of his great love for us.

God who is rich, abounding in mercy, he loves to give it out. It's like us at Christmas time. It's so nice to give Christmas presents to kids. It's like, it's the nicest thing.

[22 : 40] So now it's my family I've got to give Christmas presents to and they're all grown up and I'm like, yeah, you don't really deserve these gifts but I'll give you something. It's much nicer to give gifts to little kids.

God is like that with everyone. Yeah, just take the steak and it's going to be so much fun. Rich in mercy, he made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions.

Okay, we weren't looking for him. We didn't care. We were just doing our own thing. God doesn't wait for you to be good. You don't earn it. He knows that you don't, but he knows that you need it. And so he says, okay, here, he just throws it at you. It is by grace you've been saved. Here's his gift. Here's Jesus. And then on top of that, God raises us up with Christ, meaning gives us new life, shows us off to the whole world in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

if you've been changed by Jesus, people know. You just become this shining light in the world. You just become different. And people are drawn to that because so many people are struggling with pain and rubbish.

[24 : 01] We do as well. We struggle, but we've got an answer that is so compelling to others. is God good?

Yes, he's more than good. He doesn't give us what we do deserve and he gives us what we don't. And the fact that he's been faithful over thousands of years so that you can respond to his goodness if you're sitting here today or hearing this talk of the internet, all you need to do is just trust that it's true.

If you want this goodness, this mercy, this compassion, this loving kindness that, I'm not quite sure how, but transforms and changes our pain into something good, redeems all the bad things we've done, if you want that, all you have to do is believe it.

You just have to believe that about 2,000 years ago a little baby was born in a little town outside of Jerusalem called Bethlehem. He grew up and he died for you so that you can experience the goodness of God.

Jesus was really here and he really died and he really rose again. And that's the other aspect of Christmas that it's important to help us understand the depth of God's goodness.

[25 : 32] it's how Jesus saves us. It's how he turns evil into good because Jesus takes on the pain and the brokenness and the evil and the sin in the world and he takes it on at the cross.

There's a powerful artwork of Jesus first that compares Jesus first and his last breath. So that'll come up on the screen. So we all know what it's like to come into the world.

Well, when you're there you don't know. The doctors know and it's like the very first thing you experience pain in the world. In fact, that's how they know you've got life. If you're not breathing I mean, I don't know what they do these days but in the olden days they gave you a solid whack,

didn't they?

Wah! And you know what? Most of us keep crying that cry our whole life. Yeah. If only they told you, well, thank goodness they don't tell you life is like that.

But of course we don't stay that way. We smile and laugh and enjoy some of the good things in life. Jesus was born so that his last breath would look like his first.

[26 : 42] That tells us that Jesus knows about your pain because he went through it for you. The Bible tells us that on the cross Jesus took the punishment that was our due.

The evil that we've done. The good that we haven't done. The unintended consequences we've unleashed in the world. And he it's it like siphons into him.

He becomes this cosmic funnel that sucks up. He draws all this evil into himself. Into his death and he removes it from the world.

In Jesus God changes the trajectory of pain in the world. He makes it possible for there to be a different way of experiencing this world.

In Jesus' death and resurrection there's the promise that pain and loss doesn't have the final word. It doesn't last. It stings for a bit and that sting can be very severe.

[27 : 53] Especially if you're going through it. But like any loving father with their small child that gets a bee sting what we do what happens when you're a child and you got stung by a bee or you made a bee line for your dad or your mom and he takes the sting out.

And then he rubs something on to take the poison or if he does it like the movies he takes his pocket knife out cuts it open sucks it out and spits it out.

And then when the poison is gone and you're feeling bitter he gives you a lollipop you run outside and five minutes later you're having a happy time again. That is exactly what Jesus does on the cross for us.

Romans 8 talks about this promise of a new beginning but of realizing that there's there's lots of pain to go through.

Romans 8 says this Romans 8 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

[29 : 06] For the creation was subjected to frustration this world was subject to pain and turmoil not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God but hope that is not seen but hope that is seen is no hope at all who hopes for what they've already have but we hope for what we do not yet have and we wait for it patiently that's how we can know that God is good even though we go through pain God has been patiently waiting all these thousands of years for you to come to him and receive hope and comfort from the aches and pains of this world and so friend I want to invite you to come to Christ this Christmas trust in his answer to the problem of pain and evil there's no better answer to the problem of pain there's no better answer to the question is God really good well we've looked at one part of the answer to is

God really good but there remains a bit of a question he may be good but maybe he's not strong enough to thwart evil maybe evil and humanity are out of his control does chaos reign in God's world who ultimately rules the universe and so I want to invite you back next week as we look at is God really in control but for now I hope you can see that God is good and that you can trust him with your pain let me pray for us Lord Jesus we are so thankful that we've got Christmas Lord we are so sorry that you had to go through what you did but if you hadn't we would and Lord we need you in our lives we need this outpouring of your grace and your mercy and your compassion and your love

Lord we're so thankful that we know that we can have those things if we just ask it and trust you so Lord will you do that this Christmas for people who are in pain for Christians and non-Christians Lord we need it just as much as anyone else but do it in a special way for those who need to come to you and show them that you are good and that they can trust you Amen of God God God God God God God God God