

The Goodness Of God

First Hymn *by Henry Lyte (T by John Goss 1800-80):*

- 1) Praise my soul the King of heaven, to His feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me his praise should sing?
Praise Him, praise Him, hallelujah, praise the everlasting King!
- 2) Praise Him for his grace and favour to our fathers in distress;
Praise Him still the same for ever, slow to chide and swift to bless:
Praise Him, praise him, hallelujah, glorious in His faithfulness!
- 3) Father-like He tends and spares us, well our feeble frame He knows,
in His hands he gently spares us, rescues us from all our foes,
Praise Him, praise Him, hallelujah, widely as His mercy flows.
- 4) Angels help us to adore him, ye behold Him face to face,
sun and moon bow down before Him, dwellers all in time and space:
Praise Him, praise Him, hallelujah, praise with us the God of grace!

Prayer:

Dear Father, we can indeed only praise you, with our first consciousness of you each day, and this day is a new day, with a new consciousness of you. We are realising afresh your constancy and faithfulness. We thank you for this day, and this time together, and ask that you lead us in our worship, that it may be acceptable to you. And we ask this in our Saviour's name, Amen.

Readings:

- Psalm 104:1-24
- 1 Peter 1:3-9

Hymn 2 by Henry Baker (T Dominus regit me John Dykes 1823-76)

- 1) The King of love my Shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never,
I nothing lack if I am His and He is mine forever.
- 2) Where steams of living water flow, my ransomed soul He leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow, with food celestial feedeth.
- 3) Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, but yet in love He sought me,
and on His shoulder gently lay, and home rejoicing brought me.
- 4) In death's dark vale I fear no ill with Thee, dear Lord, beside me,
thy rod and staff my comfort still, Thy cross before to guide me.
- 5) Thou spread'st a table in my sight, Thy unction grace bestoweth,
And O what transport of delight from Thy pure chalice floweth.
- 6) And so through all the length of days Thy goodness faileth never,
Good Shepherd may I sing Thy praise within Thy house forever.

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Prayers:

Dear heavenly Father, we are amazed and humbled that you deign to want our fellowship with you, your creatures, and also that you want us to bring our prayers to you and indeed all our worship, and now it is our privilege to bring our requests and our petitions to you. We are conscious of the troubles of human making that are in our world, and which our modern media bring so immediately to our notice. We see little change in the attempts by Russia to take over and subjugate Ukraine, and pray for the continued resilience of those people to withstand what looks like the bullying attitude of that larger and aggressive neighbour. We join our prayers with those of the rest of the world to ask you for the continued strength and support of the free world for that resistance Ukraine have shown. We know many in that land believe in you and wait on you for your kindness and goodness to come to their aid. Bring your justice and righteousness to bear, and reward their faith as they continue to look to you. The Middle East we know has been the site of trouble through most of recorded history. We thank you for a brief cessation of hostilities, knowing that the prevailing attitudes have not really changed, and we cannot believe that any human agencies with even the best of intentions, will bring.

true peace, and that is our prayer again today - that you will act to bring your answer to their problems, knowing that only you can do so, and that lasting true peace will only finally be known when the Prince of peace appears. We look forward to that great day, and ask that until that time, those there that look to you will be encouraged, and persist to trust you and look for your will.

And we ask these our prayers in the all-prevailing name of Jesus, the Christ, Amen.

Message: The Goodness of God.

The famous humanist J.S. Mill concluded “The God whom our ancestors worshipped could not be both *good* and *omnipotent*”! He was not the first to believe that, but at least he was honest in expressing his opinion. His view was that “nature” was horrible! C. S. Lewis of Oxford, my mentor over the last 60 years, became an atheist in his early adulthood, like a significant number have done during their university years, and at that time he also used the pain and suffering he saw in the world as his chief argument *against* a good and loving God. He thought his way through many philosophies, but eventually ran out of arguments against Christianity, and became a believer again. And it was *then* that he wrote his first book “The Problem of Pain”, initially citing the case used by many opponents of the Faith “If God were good, He would wish to make all His creatures perfectly happy, and if He were almighty He could do it! But we are not happy. Hence God must lack goodness, or power, or both.”

But he was to change this view! Once he came to see that we were a “spoiled” species, at odds with God, self-centred and rebellious against Him, he appreciated that God had had to bring this fact to His creature’s notice and that *pain* was required! Why, you ask? His short answer to that is ...“because we need it”! He writes: “We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupiditiesBut pain insists on being attended to! God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world....it gives the only opportunity the bad man can

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have for amendment. It removes the veil; it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul.”

A good theologian Geoffrey Bingham once stated “So many people are afraid of nature. They are scared of natural events, lightning, storms, etc. – they curse if it is hot, and if it is winter they complain of “foul weather”. Some say there are demons in sugar – “pure, white and deadly!” And there is death in salt! Are you surprised that those who reject God regard Him as harsh, judgmentary, and unjust? Why would they? My suspicion is that unbelievers “*have to*” regard Him that way, in order to justify to themselves their rejection of his authority and his standard. It is a self-justification of course – gives them an excuse for their opinion.

The Psalmist paints a beautiful picture of the Creation. He re-tells the account of Creation with a regal relationship of God to His world. It is of course good poetry: – God covers himself with light, lays the beams of his upper chambers in the waters, clouds are his chariots, the wind is his wings – and his messengers, and his ministers are flaming fire i.e. lightning! The waters were standing above the mountains (a clear reference to the Genesis story – this psalmist was a Jew – he believed the scriptural story of Creation). The firmament was the expanse which separated the waters of the earth from the waters of heaven – so “At the sound of your thunder they hurried away (what did – the waters!). The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to where God instructed them to be. Everything was orderly – God was in control! The lands and waters were fixed – the earth was a friendly place.

The animals were well provided for – God gave them streams and rivers. The earth was satisfied with the fruit of His works! The grass fed the animals, the birds were fed – Jesus comments on this much later “Your heavenly Father feeds them!” (“though you may notice, for instance with a Magpie, they work from dawn ‘til dusk collecting it! But they don’t make it – it is all there!) And the earth is also fruitful so that man’s labour is rewarded, he cultivates beasts and plants, he produces wine and oil, and bread, the controlling and using of the land! And all with great gladness! It is a beautiful picture! And it all fits – it reads as if the right places were made for them. And the moon determines the months, and the sun determines the days, and they control the lives of both men and beasts! The Psalmist was on such a roll that he couldn’t stop before v. 24! A summarizing statement would be – The earth is full of the loving kindness of the Lord! This is a psalm of rejoicing in the actions of God in Creation.

This is such a happy and joyous psalm – it is a paean of praise, full of the wonder and praise for what God has done. There is no fear or apprehension; there is complete trust in the Provider and it both starts and finishes with worship! There are none of the questionings of scientific theories – it is a reminder to me of the Proverb “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding!” (Prov 9:10) And I don’t need to remind you, in today’s world any-one who is ignorant of God’s word will not believe that! My father had a saying “A schoolboy on his knees can see further than a Godless professor standing on tip-toe!” Same point! And my father was not short on science – he was a senior engineer in ETSA. But he was informed by the word of

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God! So a Christian knows the goodness of God not because he has taken a punt, or worked it out cleverly, but because God has told us.

The truth comes by revelation, not deduction!

(And we need to continue to use reasoning faith, and not faithless reason!)

And the word of God tells us –

- Good and upright is the Lord, therefore He instructs sinners in the way.
- All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those
- who keep His commandments and His testimonies. (Prov 25:8,10)
- Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...
- taste and see that the Lord is good, happy is the man who takes refuge in Him. (Psalm 34:8)
- I believe I shall see the goodness of the lord in the land of the living (Ps 27:13)

Two eyes look out upon the world – one sees the world full of rottenness, mess, and catastrophic events! The Psalmist's sees “the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord” (Psalm 33:5) How do *you* see?

So seeing is NOT believing – *believing is seeing*, (more as God sees!)

As a matter of interest, what does the scripture say about the spontaneous goodness of man? *Nothing!* At least I can't find anything. There is plenty about the bad things and their source. (read Ps 14, Rom 3) – they come from the human heart!

Goodness comes from God alone! (Why is there anger if you say that?)

O there are many good things in our world, for instance – there is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – but these are all gifts of God – they are the fruit of the Spirit i.e. fruit of the tree in which the sap of the Holy Spirit is flowing. It is all His fruit! He *does* it.

But our subject is the Goodness of God – can I say 'tho that it is never much good having an argument with any one about God! Everyone has their own *g o d* made in their own image usually, so you are quite likely never to agree! But Jesus said that those who had seen *him* had seen *the Father* – that he was the exact image of his Father, so now we know what the Father is like, and He is clearly very *good!*

Now does anyone doubt the goodness of Jesus? I had a friend in 1st year of our medical course who did! He said to me “Jesus said ‘why do you call me good! Only God is good!’ ” But he read that as saying “...therefore I am not God”!

I remembered asking him “Why was Jesus not saying ‘You call me good – do you realize whom you are saying I am? And do you believe that?’” (Because that is the way I had always read that question!)

This man was not a Christian – his father was a Jehovah's Witness. He was to become an academic – a Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry U. of A. But late in life, after significant illnesses including kidney cancer, CBAG for cardiac troubles, and 2 big strokes, this doctor, one of my best friends, became a Christian *in a small country church*, during an Easter service, when he heard what Jesus accomplished on the Cross! It was an

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answer to my prayers over 50 years! God is never in a hurry. 50 years was nothing to Him! It was one of the greatest joys of my life.

And not many can argue against Jesus – it is much harder to criticise *him*! Listen to his enemies ...

- Judas: I have betrayed innocent blood!
- Pilate: I find no fault in this man!
- Pilate's wife: Have nothing to do with that righteous man!
- Demon: I know who you are – the Holy One of God!
- Thief: this man has done nothing wrong!
- Centurion: Surely this man was the Son of God!

And his life and ministry were most powerful evidences of the truth of who he was, and why he had come!

If there had been any doubt about his *words*, as he said himself, we should believe him for the sake of his *works*! And who could criticize those!

Jesus said "the Son can do...only what he sees the Father doing". (John 5:19)

He also said very humbly "if I do not the works of my Father, then do not believe me" (Jn 10:37)

1) When he turned the water into wine, he did in a short space of time what God had *always* been doing, sucking up water into the vine, which converts it to grape juice, which then naturally ferments to make wine! When he fed the 5000, he multiplied a few fish into many, and a few products of wheat into many, as God had always done in every river and bay, and every field of harvest! (C.S.Lewis called these "miracles of the old creation"!)

2) But when he walked on water and stilled the storm he did what no-one had ever been able to do in this creation, except God himself! And when he raised Lazarus and Jairus's daughter from death he did what is impossible for modern medicine even now – he reversed death – it was more akin to a new creative act than anything else! (Lewis called these "miracles of the New Creation"!) Will such things happen in the New Creation, and be a part of the Kingdom of God? One day we will find out! Of course we will not need to raise the dead, as death will be no more!

And of course He intended much more than giving us miraculous bread; He said He himself was the "bread of heaven that gives life to the world!" (Jn 6:32-33)

And He made clear that unless a grain of wheat fall into the ground, and give up its own life, it would remain alone! But if it "gives up" its life in that way, it produces many new grains. So that is what He did – to produce many "sons of God", not only in Israel but throughout the world!

He was the living Bread, and He became the "First-born among many brethren"! He was the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep!

Is there any doubt about the goodness of God? Are there any things He has done, and given that are *not* good? Even his judgments are good! But of course nothing exceeds the enabling He gave us, when we were unable to fulfill his requirements

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of the law by our own abilities. When we fell short on the standards of His law, he gave us his very life, took our judgment, which was death, upon himself – who deserved no death – and gave us his life, which becomes for us Eternal Life, eternal in both quality and quantity, but essentially “beyond what we could ask or imagine”! Much of that is still ahead of us!

What does that cost us? Well, nothing, except our right to run our own life and do our own thing! We have to give all that to Him! It is free, but will cost us everything we have and are! Our gain of course will be unimaginably greater than anything we lose, but most of the world will think that cost is too great! His maths is so different from ours, isn't it? As has been famously said by Jim Elliott, who gave up his life for the Auca Indians in Ecuador in South America in 1952. Before he went, he said –

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, in order to gain that which he cannot lose!”
Amen.

Third hymn by George Briggs 1875-1959 (T Ode to joy Ludwig van Beethoven)

- 1) God has spoken by his prophets, spoken his unchanging word,
each from age to age proclaiming God, the one, the righteous Lord.
'mid the world's despair and turmoil one firm anchor holds us fast:
God is king, his throne eternal, God the first and God the last.
- 2) God has spoken by Christ Jesus, Christ the everlasting Son,
brightness of the Father's glory, with the father ever one;
spoken by the Word incarnate, God from God ere time began,
Light from Light, to earth descending, Man revealing God to man.
- 3) God is speaking by his Spirit. speaking to the hearts of men,
in the age-long word expounding God's own message, now as then,
through the rise and fall of nations one sure faith yet standing fast;
God still speaks, his word unchanging, God the first and god the last.

Benediction:

(As God directed Moses to say to Aaron to bless Israel):

The Lord bless you and keep you:
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you:
The Lord lift up the light of his countenance his countenance upon you,
and give you peace! Amen.

This service was prepared by Neil McIntosh (M.B.B.S. F.R.A.C.S.) for HopeNet SA