

Is Jesus Good?

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[0 : 00] Okay, so the kids have got a worksheet which is related to the theme of what we're doing as well today, which is the question about God being good, because this is part of a series that we've entitled Unbelievable.

So we've been looking at different questions, put it in the morning, about Jesus' character. Is he real? Is he a bigot? We looked at last week, and is he good today?

Because these are all the kind of questions people ask. I'm sure they ask a lot more, but at least these are some of the questions that people ask. And in the evening, we've been looking at more personal questions and relating them to the gospel.

Are you hurting? Are you empty? And then this evening, by looking at the resurrection, but the question is, are you hopeless? And so today we're looking at the death and resurrection, morning and night, if you can come this evening.

That's fantastic. You can, because obviously Easter Sunday is a Sunday when people around the world are remembering the resurrection of Jesus.

[1 : 02] And the resurrection, it kind of goes together, doesn't it? You can't have the resurrection unless you have the death. And Sunday morning is magnificent because of Friday afternoon.

Good Friday it's called. And that's an interesting question in itself if you're not a Christian. Why do Christians call Friday and what Jesus was crucified a good day?

And it's challenging to think about that because it was both a brutal day, but also a magnificent day when we understand and know why Jesus did what He did.

But the implications of that question, is Jesus good, is really significant. I think for all of us, if you say yes to that, then it's very significant because there's implications.

And if you say no to that, there are also implications. So I would, I'm encouraging people who are not Christians to examine Jesus. That's really what we've wanted to do in this series.

[2 : 04] We wanted to encourage people to examine who Jesus is, rather than maybe making a sweeping stereotypical rejection of what you've heard about Jesus.

We wanted people to examine Him for Himself. So in a context like this, with that question, is Jesus good then? Definitions are very important, aren't they?

So it depends on how you define good, therefore, doesn't it? There's lots behind a question like, is Jesus good, but definitions are very significant.

If your definition of good is different from mine, which it very probably will be, then on what basis can we make any statement about God's and Jesus' goodness? And I think that's a very big challenge for the society in which we live, especially as God is banned from the public square or denied altogether.

If life is just explained in purely materialistic terms, then isn't it just up to everyone to decide what's good and bad and what's right and wrong? That nobody is the right to tell anybody else because there's no fixed standard and there's nothing that is absolutely good or evil.

[3 : 18] But I think we find that way of thinking holds within it a basic inconsistency, doesn't it? You know, who does define? Who can say there is good?

Can there be such a thing as goodness? And if you say yes, then are you arguing for a standard goodness for everybody or is it just something that you decide for yourself?

It's difficult, isn't it? I do think the society we live in leaves as many questions as it does answers with God out of the picture. Is it just basically the majority who decide what's good or those with power or those with influence?

Maybe it's a fearsome minority, those who shout loudest that decide what is good and what is evil. And it's interesting in the society which does espouse individualism and diversity and individuality

that there is a really scary kind of dogmatism rising up.

A group think that denies anybody the right to think differently or to have a different standard of goodness in their lives.

[4 : 30] But I think in our own lives, in the way we live our lives, the experience of our lives in our being as it were, we sense good and evil and good and bad.

It's kind of, it's both instinctive and it's also learned. It's something that we feel just comes from within us but we maybe learn it from our surroundings, our family and our culture.

And it might be distorted, it might develop along different paths. But there is that, we do have, it can't be explained maybe philosophically or morally, but we do have a sense of good and of what is right.

Now that good, however you define it, we would also admit is badly bruised, isn't it? The world we live in, goodness is badly bruised.

You know, why is there so much badness if goodness is so good? Why would you pick up an evening news or watch Reporting Scotland or any world news and see so much bad news, so many tears?

[5 : 49] Why do people choose to do so many hurtful, selfish things that none of us would describe or qualify as being good?

Why are we drawn in our own characters to crime thrillers and to war films and to violence on the screens? Why do we love rebels, bad boys and sassy girls so much?

Why do we choose so often to eat and to drink and to smoke and to inject bad things into our lives and into our bodies?

Why do we often choose the wrong company, damaging friendships and lovers if good is so important to us in our own lives?

And I think part of the answer to that, which we don't really have time to go into in much detail at all, but part of the answer to that is where there is good.

[6 : 46] In the world in which we live, where there is good, there will always be evil. There will always be bad. That's a reality. And evil is a problem of the human heart and continues to be a problem of the human heart.

And in a spiritual realm, which we believe in, there is a realm of darkness and a realm of evil that is very real, even though it's unseen.

And that therein lies the problem that we face as a humanity and as a world, that there is good, but there is also this tremendously potent and powerful evil.

And that leads me on into the question, is Jesus good? Because you can only really look at that question in the light of the opposite assertion that He must be bad.

And so, you know, the two opposites come together and it's a huge question. So I'm only going to offer a couple of pointers to you to consider this morning.

[7 : 50] And the first comes from a quote that Jesus gave to someone who came up to question Him. And the guy said, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus in reply said to him, why do you call me good? Jesus answered, no one is good except God alone. Now there you may think that He's denying the fact that He is good or that only God is good and He is not God.

But in the context that we find that, and in the provocative way that He's asking, He's basically saying, yes, you're right, God is good. Why do you call me good unless I'm God?

And it's one of the kind of subtle claims that Jesus makes both towards His divinity and towards His goodness and the goodness of God, which we sung about in the Psalms and which the Bible is full of.

He claims divinity many times in the New Testament, which of course is why Good Friday happened, because they wanted to crucify Him for His claims of being divine.

[9 : 00] And even in this chapter, He speaks about the resurrection. He speaks about His own claims to the resurrection in this chapter. And what is said here and what is said throughout the Bible is a message that God is good in His being.

He's inherently good. He is good through and through. He made a good world. He's the author, and He's the standard of goodness. Everything that is good comes from God.

He is good, loving, just and pure, and it's all so fused in together. And right from the beginning, the Bible is absolutely clear about the goodness of God in His character.

And therefore the problem of evil exists only in opposition to His goodness. So evil would never exist if it weren't for God, and if it weren't for His goodness, you simply can't have evil, let me look at it philosophically, you can't have evil on its own.

Evil doesn't exist on its own. It only exists in opposition to something that is absolutely good. It didn't pre-exist God, evil, and it wouldn't outlive God because evil is only a construct that comes from opposition to a God who is good.

[10:26] You can't have God without the possibility of evil. Now I'm not going to go deeper into that because that's the great question of the universe that many people in a sense remains on so, well, what is the origin of evil?

And ultimately, there's no real answer to that, but we do recognize that where there is a good God, the opposition to a good God will come in the form of evil, and you can't have God without that possibility because evil is a rebellion against God's good and sovereign and fatherly and loving rule. And it's a guilt in which we are all complicit. It's a guilt in which we are all complicit. You recognize and see that, that both the reality of good and evil have a spiritual genesis.

Science and technology can't explain good and evil, only observe it. So we're moving into a different field when we look at these matters.

So the question is, does it matter? Does it matter to you today? Easter Sunday, it's a lovely day, can't wait to get outside, get about the sun, get a picnic, we should just be over it quickly. And I'm sure that's true for all of you, but if it's made up, if it's all made up, the reality of God and Jesus and Easter and death and resurrection, if it's made up, no, it doesn't matter.

[12:02] It doesn't matter whether we come to a decision about it. If there isn't an ultimate source of goodness or evil, if there's not a standard, if it's just something that's evolving within and from ourselves, then we'll just need to battle on.

And we'll see who's voice shouts the loudest and which minority group is most offended or which largest corporation decides what's good for the rest of us, because we know how much money speaks.

Well, we'll just do our best and then we'll die and that'll be it over. So it doesn't really matter, ultimately. But if God is good, and if He's the creator of a good world, and He is good, pure and just, and we are made in His image, and there is a problem of evil that emanates and starts from our own hearts and separates us from Him and is the reason for our death and separation from life and from God.

If there is a spiritual realm of evil that is both personal and malevolent, if He speaks into our condition of separation from Him by coming and dying and rising again on the third day because of His deep, outstanding love for us, then yes, I would argue it does matter.

It does matter hugely. So briefly towards the end here, I want to define, try and define what I mean by God's, by Jesus' goodness, is Jesus good?

[13:29] My answer to that is yes, I think Jesus is good. I don't want to do it theologically, primarily, but I want to do it using the picture of friendship.

I mentioned the friendship and the question I was asking for the children about friendship because Jesus always used pictures to help us understand important theological truth.

And He uses pictures He knows we'll get that He knows we'll understand. And friendship is one of the ways He describes Himself and describes His goodness in terms of friendship.

And friendship is a great way, isn't it, to understand goodness? Friendship is a great way to understand goodness. All of us here, anyone could walk into church today and grasp the whole concept of friendship.

And often our very best, our goodest experiences revolve around friendship, whether it's marriage or family or just our best friends.

[14:38] The closest relationships we have that are good are these deep friendships. It's so key to life, isn't it? It's key to good company that we share.

One who understands me, someone who loves me, who's committed to me, who knows my life with all its mistakes and errors and failure, who sticks with me through thick and thin, is sacrificial.

You know, they used to say a friend in need is a pain in the neck. But I don't think that's true. A friend in need is a friend indeed, and there's that element of sacrificial commitment that friendship develops so much.

If we were to have, if we were to choose an epitaph for our grave stone, I think being a good friend would be a pretty good one.

Whatever else we might want to summarize our life as being a good friend is pretty high up there. I would certainly argue it is in my understanding.

[15:44] So Jesus uses the concept of friendship, we'll come back to that in a minute. But I just want to say, okay, I know it's a bit different, okay? I know talking about Christ as a friend is a wee bit different for us to think about because most of our friends we can see for a start.

We know God is a spirit, we know that God's the Son Christ took on a body, that body died and that body was resurrected on the third day and then ascended to heaven, so He's in heaven, we can't see Him.

But believers believe by faith, not a blind faith, but they believe by faith that God is real and God is conscious and God is evidenced in creation and in our consciousness and in Christ and in the world in which we live.

He's real, He's not visibly tangible. So when I'm speaking about friendship, I'm speaking about a spiritual friendship, one we can't hold hands with them as it were.

It's not an ordinary friendship. And it's not ordinary in the sense that Christ is not like us. You know, to a greater or lesser degree, all our friends are like us in that we all fail and make mistakes and break promises and break trust and do good things and bad things in our friendships.

[17:10] God doesn't like that. So there is a difference in the friendship. It's not a friendship of equals at that level. He never does wrong.

He never lets us down. He never breaks his promises to us. It's a perfect love. We struggle with that. I struggle with that because He doesn't act on my terms and He doesn't answer the way I would expect and He's not like an ordinary friend because He's perfect.

And that's really difficult for us in many ways. Until we come to faith in Jesus Christ, it's a broken relationship.

It's an estranged friendship we have with God. And it's only Christ that can renew that friendship. So how is Jesus then our best friend? Well we read it, or Callum read it for us. Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friend.

[18:12] So Good Friday, culminating in Easter Sunday, is about the greatest love. He says, you know, there's no greater love than this.

Even in human terms, we know and we understand that. Although I don't suppose any of us have actually experienced that. I shouldn't say that because I don't know your own experiences. But it would be very rare for you to have a friend that is so deep and good that they would give their life for you.

But each of us as Christians know that in Jesus Christ. He's paid the ultimate price to renew our friendship with Him and with God.

He's the author of love. There is no greater act of love, no greater act of sacrifice than Jesus doing what He did in order to renew, recover, restore, reinvigorate a friendship that sin and our rebellion against God had broken and estranged us from.

So it's the deepest love. But it's also an act of great forgiveness. Jesus saw their faith. He said, friend, your sins are forgiven. I'm just picking out one or two verses from the gospels that speak about, or Jesus using the concept of friendship and linking it together.

[19:32] And we understand this element of friendship probably more than any you know, don't you, Winnad? The deepest hurts in life are always come from when a deepest friendship goes wrong.

That's where the, if you don't care a lot about someone and they offend you or they hurt you, then you kind of shrug your shoulders. That's life.

But when it's the deepest friendship, it's devastating. When you've committed and given your heart and soul to a person in friendship and you trusted them implicitly and you believe their promises and they betray you, it's the deepest hurt.

The deepest hurt of all, you know, they say that about the greatest divisions in the world, which is society, which we live, are not caused between strangers.

They're caused between those who are closest, families that have split apart, brothers and sisters that haven't spoken for years and years, neighbors, people who are closest to one another.

[20 : 41] And you know that friendship in that circumstance can't be healed, can't be put right unless there's forgiveness, unless there is that some level of an admission of guilt and a change of heart and a change of direction.

And that's where the crucifixion and the resurrection is so important and what it's all about because we can't put right what is wrong between ourselves and God.

Only God can do that. Only He can forgive our sins because He's paid the price for them Himself. It's a remarkable truth. And this thing, I dreamt I preached this last night, this bit, because it's not in my notes, okay?

And it's just this remarkable truth that Jesus, because I read something that triggered it, and that's why it's not an original thought at all in any way, but Jesus was the only individual person who has ever lived, who's completely innocent, innocent of any wrong doing whatsoever.

I'm not going to talk about the law of God, which is a law of love, loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and loving your neighbour as yourself. He fulfilled that absolutely. He was the utterly perfect individual, did nothing wrong in thought, word, or deed.

[22 : 02] And yet He had to pay the price of being someone who failed, someone who sinned because He was doing it in our place. The only person who ever lived who didn't deserve to die, and yet He died.

And He's the only person who has died. One hundred percent of people have died, including Jesus. One hundred percent. Everyone in this room will die.

Everyone who has ever lived before us will die, and that includes Jesus. But of all the billions of people who have ever lived, Jesus is the only one who's been raised from the dead in His own power to defeat death and never die again.

The only one. That's the utter and complete uniqueness of the gospel claim. There's no other gospel like it. There's no other claim like it. It is utterly and completely and devastatingly uniquely different.

And that Jesus is saying that He took death and sin on Himself because we couldn't pay the price ourselves. We couldn't act and live perfectly and to renew that friendship.

[23 : 12] Our hearts rebel. They do wrong. We can do evil beyond anything we would ever admit. But all that wrongdoing is all punishable.

It's all against God and that Jesus took the price upon Himself. It's the act of greatest love, as He said. Greater love is no man than this, than He laid down His life for His time so that He could forgive us.

And the greatest thing we need is forgiveness in our lives with the living God who we will face one day. Friendship is also about loyalty. One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

That's the friendship that Jesus offers. That's the goodness of Jesus that He says, look, I'm not going to leave you. I'm not going to forsake you. I'm not going to give up on you. You may think that I have, you may not feel that I'm around, you may not sense my presence, but He says, you've come to me in faith and trust and I will never let you go.

And I will stick. Brotherly love can be a great thing, fantastic thing, and can be amazingly close.

[24 : 28] And one of the most terrible things must be to have to stand at the grave of your brother, knowing that that love has ended through death.

And Jesus says, that will never be the case. I will stick closer than the closest friend, right through death and on into eternal life. And lastly, about friendship, in terms of, I'm sure there's many other things we could say, but He's honest.

He says, faithful are the wounds of a friend. Wounds of a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. Again it's an ultimate goodness, isn't it?

That someone who, you know that in your lives, that's a mark for you, I'm sure, is a mark of me of a true friend, is someone who's honest with you and who loves you enough to warn you about the direction that you're going in your life.

That's real friendship. That's a mark of great friendship. And Jesus did that, and Jesus does that for us. Sometimes when He speaks to us in our hearts, He's exposing us to the core.

[25 : 30] Sometimes maybe you'll come to church and hear this sermon, you'll think, I never want to go back to that place again. He was just nagging down at my heart. And I hope I never nag, but it may be that I have no awareness, I guarantee you, I'll have no awareness of what God is saying

from His word to us, because God is faithful in that way, in a way that is sometimes hurtful, because faithful are the wounds of a friend, because He wants to stop us going down a road that's ultimately dark and damaging.

And that's how we know that Jesus our Savior, when we open the Word of God and we hear Him saying things to us and we say, He's telling me to change and move because He loves me and because He's honest, and therefore God is good, as He is the ultimate good friend we could ever have.

There's a music verse at the end of Psalm 8-8, and I conclude with this. It says, the darkness is my closest friend. It's an amazing Psalm, it's a very depressive Psalm in many ways.

Samus is describing the utter loneliness and despair he feels from any human friendship that he might have had, darkness there and despair. But even in that darkness, Samus is clinging on to God as his only hope, which is just, but he is clinging on to God as his only hope.

And it could be a terrible thing for you to be in a place where darkness is your closest friend. And that can be the experience for many people.

[27 : 13] And it is only ameliorated by knowing Jesus Christ as light and love and goodness, and the one who will take us through to complete healing. So Good Friday is a place where Jesus took the full experience not only of the betrayal of all his earthly friends, but also the forsakenness of his Father in heaven, and suffered the isolation of bearing the cost of our sins in order to offer us life and hope in the resurrection.

So today, he is risen, we say. He is risen indeed. And that changes everything. So all I ask you to do if you're not a Christian here today, if you're questioning or doubting or cynical or maybe skeptical, I would ask you to consider the claims of Jesus and recognize that all he asks you to do is acknowledge the problem of sin and darkness in your own heart, that friendship with you in heaven that's broken confess that sin that separates you from him and trust in the love of Jesus that he's paid the price so that you can know an unparalleled friendship with him in this life and on into eternity.

That's our experience of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we love him for that reason. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to love you more, not because somehow that will earn more favor with you.

We know we can't earn favor with you, that your salvation is a gift. It's full and free, that we are helpless before you, and we simply come and ask that we would understand and see more clearly that you love us and that you are honest with us and you are faithful to us and that you will not let us go when we put our hope and trust in you.

It's the greatest estrangement that's brought to an end. It's the greatest division that has ended with being engulfed in the loving arms of the Father who runs to us like he does in the picture of the prodigal Son and embraces us and says, this my child was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.

[29 : 33] May that be our experience. What we know to be our own experience as Christians, we long for that to be the experience of our friends, our neighbors, our family members, and those around us who don't know Jesus.

We want people to have all the kind of misconceptions that they may harbour against Jesus. We so want them to be destroyed and the arguments to be discerned and to see both the logical reality, the spiritual meaningfulness and the practical joy of knowing forgiveness and knowing our identity and knowing the purpose of this world and this universe in which we live is based and founded on a personal, real living God and that we're not just alone in this vast universe. For that we give thanks today in Jesus' name. Amen.