

ALIVE: The Marks of a Christian
“God is Good: All the Time...”
Goodness: Psalm 107

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.
- 2 Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story— those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,
- 3 those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.
- 4 Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle.
- 5 They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away.
- 6 Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.
- 7 He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.
- 8 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind,
- 9 for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.
- 17 Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.
- 18 They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.
- 19 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.
- 20 He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.
- 21 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind.
- 22 Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.
- 23 Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters.
- 24 They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep.
- 25 For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves.
- 26 They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths;
in their peril their courage melted away.
- 27 They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits' end.
- 28 Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress.
- 29 He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.
- 30 They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven.
- 31 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind.
- 32 Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.
- 43 Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.

Introduction

Years ago, there was a study done on mothers and their hopes for their children. Tony Campolo would cite it in his lectures and sermons. He was a professor of sociology at Eastern College and the University of Pennsylvania. “When Japanese mothers were asked, ‘What do you want your children to be when they grow up?’ there was a single answer: successful. When American mothers were asked exactly the same question, ‘What do you want your children to be when they grow up?’ there was one answer over and over again: we want our children to be happy.” Campolo would then say, “You have to understand, my father was from Sicily. He really didn’t care whether I was happy. If you’d ask him, what do you want your son to be when he grows up? He would have answered with one word: I want him to be good. I want him to be good. ‘Surely goodness and mercy should follow him all the days of his life that he might dwell in the

house of the Lord forever.’ To become good. God wants to help you to become good, and without Him, you can’t pull it off.”

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness” and today, “goodness.” In the fruit of the Spirit, this word *agathos* describes a person being of good character having a beneficial effect on others. Psalm 107 describes God as this person. And God’s goodness is love in action. Psalm 107, verse one: “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his covenant love, his lovingkindness, his *hesed* endures forever.”

I. God is Good to All

One of the simplest statements about Jesus came from the apostle Peter. “He went around doing good” (Acts 10:38). And, of course, the Lord wants “doing good” to happen in and through our lives as well.

God’s word often distinguishes between God’s common goodness (all the blessings of life available to all people) and his special goodness (blessings having to do with the salvation of believers). Such as: every drop of rain, every star-filled night, every bit of food, every good night’s sleep, every minute of health the Bible says are gifts from the Lord for Christians and non-Christians alike. Too often all of us take the goodness of God for granted.

In his letter, James writes, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights” (James 1:17). There’s a popular call/response saying: I say, “God is good” and you say, “All the time.” I say, “All the time” and you say, “God is good.” (Give it a try...)

In his letter, Paul writes, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people” (Galatians 6:10). Methodist founder John Wesley wrote Wesley’s Rule. “Do all the good you can/ By all the means you can/ In all the ways you can/ In all the places you can/ At all the times you can/ To all the people you can/ As long as ever you can.”

On July 4th each year, as parties and celebrations of various kinds explode, I often think of the famous quote by 19th century French political scientist and historian Alexis de Tocqueville. He said, “America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.” He also wrote, “The American Republic will endure until the day Congress discovers that it can bribe the public with the public's money.” (Tocqueville: political scientist and prophet?)

II. The Good News of God

After the first verse, “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever,” Psalm 107 goes on for 42 verses on the special blessings God has for his people. “Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story— those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.” The King James renders it, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!”

In verses 4, 10, 17 and 23, the psalm illustrates a common process God uses to bring salvation blessings to his people. First, there's a crisis; then a cry for help; then a description of the Lord's rescue; and then a call to give thanks.

Verses 4-9: Crisis: "Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away."

Cry: "Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,"

Rescue: "and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle."

Call: "Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things." God is good (all the time), All the time (God is good).

Verses 17-22: "Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death.

"Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,

"and he saved them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.

"Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy."

Verses 23-32: "Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep. For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves... in their peril their courage melted away... they were at their wits' end.

"Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,

"and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven."

Typical of the praise and music of the day, the chorus is sung again: "Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders. Psalm 118 joins the opening of Psalm 107, "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever."

What's been your experience in life with this important process? I've had a crisis or two or three or ten! I've called out to God for help. Quite often the Lord brings resolution or healing, redirection or amazing help. But how often do I "exalt God" in church or "praise him" at a session or presbytery meeting?

Harvard professor of social ethics Robert Coles wrote a book titled *The Moral Intelligence of Children*. In it he tells about Marian, a student of his from several years ago. She was working her way

through college by cleaning the rooms of her fellow students. Maybe they knew she was a fellow student, maybe not. But no matter how high their test scores, again and again they didn't hesitate to be rude toward her. One day she was not so subtly propositioned by a young man she knew to be very bright.

She quit her job and thought about quitting school altogether. Full of anxiety and anger, she went to see Dr. Coles. She said, "I've been taking all these philosophy courses; and we talk about what's true, what's important, what's good. Well, how do you teach people to BE good?"

The biblical answer to the question isn't education but conversion. Goodness comes from God. Goodness is the fruit of the Spirit. The light of goodness dawns in the heart only when God shines it there.

Conclusion

The psalmist concludes with verse 43: "Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD."

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people" (Galatians 6:10). "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9). "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so."