

Life of Goodness: The Fruit of the Spirit

Micah 6:6-8

November 24, 2019

(Thanksgiving Sunday)

Some years ago, a fire broke out in a hotel in Chicago. Flames and smoke blocked the normal escape routes. Some people on the tenth floor went out on a balcony to escape the smoke. The heavy smoke followed them as they came out of the room. They could not breathe inside, so, they came out, But it seemed that they were trapped in the balcony. No one could reach them. They were too high, And they were too afraid to go back inside. It looked like they were doomed.

However, one young man in the group braved the smoke and went back inside. Fortunately, he found an exit to a fire escape.

Courageously, he went back to the group and said to them, “Follow me! I know the way!” Through the smoke and flames he led the group to safety. They all came out uninjured. One person in the group said later: “You can’t imagine the feeling of relief and joy we felt when that young man came back for us and said, ‘Follow me! I know the way!’”

We know another person who said something very similar. He said to his disciples, “Come, follow me!”¹ “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”² Jesus, the Son of God shows us the way to true life.

We have been talking about the Fruit of the Spirit in the past few weeks. As we continue in that series, we will be focusing on goodness today. Goodness is a quality of the Fruit of the Spirit. It is a character that is formed in us as a result of being obedient to the Lord.

So, what is it that God requires of us? Prophet Micah gives us guidance. He said, “The Lord has shown you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.”³

Prophet Micah says that God is the one who shows us what is good. God is the one who reveals what “Good” is. Goodness is not a matter of our conscience. It is a matter of revelation. Only God determines and reveals what good is, And that is “to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God.”

¹ Matthew 4:19a.

² John 14:6a.

³ Micah 6:8.

First of all, goodness is reflected in fairness and justice. A righteous person does what is just and fair. Our actions reveal what is in our heart and repeated actions define our character. There is a wonderful code of conduct that is often attributed to John Wesley which is:

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.⁴

Doing what is good, right and just all the time and in all circumstances is important. Because each of our actions carries a message. A feminist theologian Hyun Kyung Chung, once said, “The Bible is a reference; you are the text.” We say the Bible is the Word of God. But what Hyun Kyung Chung is saying is that we and our actions are the message, or at least the interpretation of the biblical message. Our actions and the way we live must interpret the message of the Bible.

In other words, we are constantly sharing the message of God with our actions, far more than with our words. We and our actions are the only Bible some people will ever read, And they read us all the time.

Saint Francis of Assisi once said, “Preach the gospel all the time; if necessary use words.” In other words, our actions are the message, And they need to be the message of God. This is why we need to do good all the time and in all places.

Second, goodness is reflected in practicing mercy. The Hebrew word for mercy is *hesed*. It is used about 250 times in the Old Testament. It has been translated as mercy, kindness, lovingkindness, goodness, grace, AND a few others.⁵ Micah says that God shows what is good and what God requires of us. It is not only to do justice; but also to love mercy. We are not only to “be merciful” but also to “love mercy” – to “love being merciful.” When you love being merciful, mercy becomes your life style. It becomes your character. You are not just being merciful once in a while, But mercy becomes your character.

I heard about an employee who was caught stealing money from his company. He was brought before the president of the company. He did not know what would happen to him. The very best he could hope for was to be fired. The worst could be a prison sentence.

⁴ <https://um-insight.net/blogs/kevin-watson/wesley-didn%27t-say-it%3A-%22do-all-the-good-you-can-...%22/> This quote has been attributed to John Wesley. However, Kevin Watson, an assistant professor at Seattle Pacific University has argued that it wasn't John Wesley who said it.

⁵ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=h2617>

The president of the company looked at the employee and asked, “Please tell me the truth. Are you guilty?” “Yes, I am,” said the clerk. “I have been embezzling for several years.”

After a moment of silence, the president said, “If I press charges against you, you will go to jail. You know that, don’t you?” The man nodded. “I want to ask you a question. If I forgive you and keep you on this job, can I trust you from now on?”

This employee said, “Sir, if you will forgive me and give me another chance, I promise you with all my heart and soul that you can trust me. I will NOT violate you.” Then the president said, “You are the second man who fell and was pardoned. I was the first. I, too, committed a crime just like yours a long time ago. The mercy I have shown you is the mercy that I had received. May God have mercy on us both!”

That president knew what it was to love mercy, because he received mercy before he knew the value of the mercy. He wanted to show that mercy to his employee and wanted him to experience the value of it.

Third, goodness is reflected in walking humbly with God. A person who walks humbly with God is the one who recognizes that his existence, success, and significance depend upon God’s provision.

We are who we are because the Lord has provided us abilities to do various things and opportunities to actually do them. When we recognize that, we become humble and thankful.

Goodness comes from gratitude. When we are thankful, truly thankful, we become humble before God and that humbleness is expressed in kindness and goodness.

In Luke chapter 17, we find a story about ten lepers who were healed by Jesus. When the lepers came to Jesus, they cried out saying, “Jesus Master, have mercy upon us.” Jesus said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” In the Old Testament times and even in Jesus’ days, the priest were the public health officers. If a person had been cured from an infectious disease, he had to present himself to the priest, and the priest had to declared him “clean” before he could return to his family and to the community. I am sure the lepers were puzzled by Jesus’ command. They were not healed. Nothing was changed. They probably wondered how in the world they could go to the priests and ask them to examine them to see if they were healed? Yet they believed his word and did what Jesus commanded.

On their way to the priests, something happened to them. We don't know what exactly happened; but something happened. Luke simply says, "As they went, they were healed." All ten were healed, but only one came back to thank Jesus. And he happened to be a Samaritan, a foreigner.

Ninety percent of the people did not come back to thank the Lord. Amazing, isn't it? Ninety percent of the lepers did not thank the Lord. Is this these lepers isolated story?

According to a Gallop Poll, nine out of ten American families will not even say a prayer when they sit down to eat their Thanksgiving feast. The ninety percent of American families will not thank the Lord for all his blessings. The lepers' ingratitude is the American story.

In his book, "A Window on the Mountain," Winston Pierce tells of his high school class reunion. A group of the old classmates were sharing their memories of the good old days. One man, named William Stidger, mentioned that he was particularly thankful for Mrs. Wendt, for she more than anyone had introduced him to Tennyson and the beauty of poetry. Someone said, "Why don't you send her a thank you note? I am sure she will appreciate that." So, William Stidger wrote a letter of appreciation to Mrs. Wendt and addressed it to the high school. The letter was forwarded to Mrs. Wendt. About a month later the man received a response. It was written as follows: "My dear Willie, I cannot tell you how much your letter meant to me. I am now in my nineties, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely, and like the last leaf of fall lingering behind. You will be interested to know that I taught school for forty years and yours is the first letter of appreciation I ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning and it cheered me as nothing has for years. Willie, you have made my day."⁶

Because of this experience, Willie thought of other people he was thankful for and sent them a letter of appreciation as well. This experience made him live each day with thankfulness. Living with gratitude truly helped him to be humble before God and those who helped him to mature. It also helped him to live a life of goodness.

Let us remember the words of Apostle Paul: "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God for you."⁷ In this season of Thanksgiving, may your hearts be filled with gratitude! And may that gratitude lead you to live a life of goodness!

⁶ From Brett Blair's Sermon, "Giving Thanks Before Thanksgiving", www.esermons.com

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.