

"THE GOODNESS OF CHRIST"

I. Introduction

- A. The first table blessing that I learned as a child consisted of three simple phrases: "God is great, God is good, and we thank him for this food."
1. It is important for us to spend time pondering the fact that our God is both great and good.
 2. We must not allow our commitment to the biblical teaching on God's absolute sovereignty to cause us to lose sight of his absolute goodness.
 3. The English Puritan Stephen Charnock offers some helpful thoughts on this when he writes, "God is the highest goodness, because he does not act for his own profit, but for his creatures' welfare, and the manifestation of his own goodness. He sends out his beams without receiving any addition to himself, or substantial advantage from his creatures."
 4. Charnock continues by saying, "God hates no creature; no, not the devils and the damned, as creatures; he is not an enemy to them, as they are the works of his hands. A true and proper enemy is one who simply and absolutely wishes evil to another; but God does not absolutely wish evil to the damned; the justice that he inflicts upon them, the deserved punishment of their sin, is part of his goodness." [*Works*, vol. 2, p. 284]
 5. God's greatness and his goodness are not in opposition to one another but are in perfect harmony with each other.
- B. While the greatness of Christ is certainly in view in this text from Luke's Gospel, this passage also presents us with a wonderful picture of the goodness of Christ.

1. As we study this passage today, I want us to see two things that it teaches us about Christ's goodness.
2. First, we will see our Lord's determination to save sinners.
3. And second, we will see our Lord's willingness to save sinners.

II. Christ's Determination to Save Sinners

- A. We begin by looking at verses 31-33, where the emphasis is upon Christ's determination to save sinners.
 1. Luke tells us that some Pharisees came up to Jesus and warned him to leave the region because Herod wanted to kill him.
 2. They were referring to Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who ruled over Jesus's home region of Galilee and over Perea, the region in Israel that was on the eastern side of the Jordan river.
 3. There are a number of reasons to think that these Pharisees were not being truthful here.
 4. While it is true that John the Baptist had been beheaded under Herod's orders, Herod only did this because he put himself in a situation where he had to do it.
 5. We are told in Mark's Gospel that Herod feared John, knowing that he was a holy and righteous man.
 6. And while Herod had put John in prison, he kept him safe until Herodias figured out a way to force him to have John killed.
 7. The Gospel writers also tell us that when Herod heard about the great signs and wonders that Jesus was performing, he concluded that Jesus was some kind of reincarnation of John.
 8. So given Herod's superstitious outlook, it does not seem likely that he would be plotting Jesus's death.

9. Moreover, most of the Pharisees were so antagonized by Jesus at this point that they were looking for a way to get rid of him, so it does not seem likely that they would truly be concerned for his safety.
 10. In light of these factors, these Pharisees probably told Jesus that Herod wanted to kill him because they wanted Jesus leave Herod's territory and go to Jerusalem.
 11. If they could get Jesus to go to Jerusalem, they could marshal their forces, trump up some charges, bring Jesus before the ruling council, and then hand him over to the Romans and demand that he be put to death.
- B. Jesus is not phased by this news of Herod's alleged desire to have him killed.
1. Neither is he phased by the schemes of the Pharisees.
 2. He simply tells them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.'"
 3. In that culture, the term 'fox' was not used in the exact same way that we use it today.
 4. Jesus was not saying that Herod was sly and cunning, but that he was base and destructive.
 5. We only have to remember that it was Herod who put John the Baptist to death to understand why Jesus would hold Herod in such low esteem.
 6. As far as what Jesus tells the Pharisees to say to Herod, his point is simply that he is going to keep on doing the things that he has been doing until he has completed all that he was sent to do.

7. Jesus knows he has nothing to fear from Herod, because he knows that his death will take place in Jerusalem.
 8. Until his work is finished, no one can touch him.
- C. Now of course, Jesus spoke these words with a prophetic foresight of coming events.
1. He knew the time and circumstances of his death.
 2. He knew that he would soon be crucified in Jerusalem.
 3. While are not given this kind of foresight, this does teach us something about the boldness that we can have when we trust in God's providence.
 4. When you know that your times are in the Lord's hands, you can walk with confidence at all times, even in the face of things that would otherwise inspire fear and anxiety.
 5. Don't worry about what might happen.
 6. What might happen is in the Lord's hands.
 7. Focus instead on what God, in his Word, calls you to do.
 8. And as you do this, remember that God is all-powerful.
 9. Even when it looks like being faithful is likely bring trouble upon you, God is able to keep that trouble from you if it is his will to do so.
 10. But if it is his will to bring you through that trouble, then you would be foolish to think that you can prevent something that God has decreed.
 11. Consider these words from Psalm 112: "Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!... He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the

LORD." (Ps. 112:1, 7)

12. That is the attitude that we see Jesus displaying in this text.
 13. He was not afraid of bad news, because his heart was firm.
 14. Here are some helpful reflections from J.C. Ryle on the example that this provides for us: "To cultivate this frame of mind would add immensely to our peace. How many of our cares and fears are about things which never come to pass! Happy is that man who can walk in our Lord's steps, and say, 'I shall have what is good for me. I shall live on earth until my work is done, and not a moment longer. I shall be taken when I am ripe for heaven, and not a minute before. All the powers of the world cannot take away my life, until God permits. All the physicians of earth cannot preserve it, when God calls me away.'"
- D. The place in this text where we most clearly see Jesus's determination to save sinners is in his use of the word "must" in verse 33.
1. He says that he "must" continue carrying out his ministry until he has accomplished all that he was sent to do, and he knows that this will mean dying in Jerusalem.
 2. The word "must" declares that this is a matter of necessity for him.
 3. Nothing is going to deter him from what he came to do.
 4. Why was this the case?
 5. What was it that made Jesus so determined?
 6. His determination is rooted in the the eternal pact that was made between the members of the Godhead concerning the salvation of the elect, the pact that we refer to as the covenant of redemption.
 7. In this pact, God the Father gave a people to Christ, and Christ agreed to do all that was needed to secure their redemption.

8. Jesus was determined to do all that he had undertaken in that arrangement because it was his delight to do the will of his Father.
9. As he says in the Gospel of John, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." (John 4:34 ESV)
10. And he was also determined to finish his task because of the love that he has for those he came to save.
11. As he says elsewhere in John's Gospel, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13 ESV)

III. Christ's Willingness to Save Sinners

- A. We turn now to the last two verses of our passage, where we see Christ's willingness to save sinners.
 1. The mention of Jerusalem causes Jesus to express a lament over it as the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to it by God.
 2. It is a sad irony that Jerusalem could be described in such a way.
 3. This was the holy city, the city in which the temple was located, the place where God caused his presence to dwell in the midst of his people.
 4. Yet this city was famous for opposing and murdering God's prophets.
 5. Jerusalem should have been the teacher of the world, but instead she rejected those whom God sent to teach her.
- B. Jesus continues his lament over Jerusalem by saying, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

1. This statement echoes a number of similar statements that God makes about Israel in the Old Testament.
 2. One of these is found in Isaiah 65, where God says, "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that was not called by my name. I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices" (Isa. 65:1-2 ESV)
 3. Again and again, God sent his prophets to Israel and called them to repentance.
 4. But again and again they refused to listen.
 5. Jesus is making the same point here.
 6. He is speaking as Israel's God, and he is lamenting the fact that these people whom he desired to take under the shelter of his wings would have none of it.
- C. Note the use of the terms "would" and "willing" in verse 34.
1. Jesus says that he would have gathered them under his wings, but they were not willing.
 2. This shows us that God is willing to save all who will come to him.
 3. The offer of salvation is held out to everyone, and those who refuse it do so because they are not willing to receive it.
 4. Here we see how the Bible teaches both divine sovereignty in salvation, and human responsibility when it comes to responding to the offer of salvation.
 5. Listen to the way J.C. Ryle explains this: "Our SALVATION is wholly of God. Let that never be forgotten. None but the elect shall be finally saved. 'No man can come unto Christ except the Father draws him.' (John 6:44.) But our RUIN, if we are lost, will be

wholly of ourselves. We shall reap the fruit of our own choice.”

6. In other words, those who refuse to come to Christ are fully responsible for their unwillingness to believe in him.
 7. On the last day, no one will be able to point his or her finger at God and say, ‘I would have believed in Christ if you had not prevented me from doing so.’
 8. While it is true God is the one who creates faith in the hearts of believers, he does not create unbelief in the hearts of unbelievers.
 9. Fallen man bears the responsibility for his unbelief.
- D. We should also note that Jesus said that he was willing to bring the people of Jerusalem under his saving protection even though he knew the wicked things that they had done.
1. Moreover, he said this even though he knew that he would soon be put to death in that city.
 2. Here we see that the Lord is a compassionate and merciful God.
 3. He is a God who wants lost people to be saved, a God who is grieved to see people persisting in their wickedness and rebellion.
 4. We too should have compassion and mercy towards sinners, remembering that we are no better than anyone else.
 5. We too should be grieved when we see people turning a deaf ear to Christ and his gospel.
- E. Another thing that we learn from Jesus’s words here is that while the gospel offers an impregnable refuge to all who take shelter in Jesus, there is no other place of refuge.
1. Most of the Jews rejected Jesus’s offer of refuge, and as a result their house was forsaken by God.

2. Jesus's words here echo the warning of judgment that the Lord spoke through Jeremiah, saying, "I have forsaken my house; I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies." (Jer. 12:7 ESV)
 3. In Jeremiah's day, those words meant that the temple was about to be destroyed by the Babylonians.
 4. Jesus's words here in Luke mean that the temple that had been rebuilt would soon be destroyed by the Romans.
 5. The barren fig tree was about to be cut down.
- F. Our passage ends with Jesus saying of Jerusalem, "I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"
1. This is a citation from Psalm 118.
 2. In the context of that psalm, it is a declaration made by God's people to welcome their king as he approaches the temple.
 3. The Jews interpreted this verse in reference to the Messiah, as we can see by the fact that the crowds cited it when they welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, identifying him as the Messiah.
 4. That is not what Jesus is referring to in this text.
 5. We know that Jesus is not talking about Palm Sunday because the parallel to this passage in Matthew's Gospel places this saying of Jesus after the events of Palm Sunday.
 6. So what is Jesus saying here?
 7. Well, there are several ways that it can be interpreted.
 8. Some think that it means that the true Israel consists of all of those people, whether Jew or Gentile in ethnicity, who will welcome Jesus

as the promised Messiah.

9. Others say that this points to a mass conversion of Jews just prior to the return of Christ.
10. And others say that this is referring to the fact that the Jews in Jesus's day who rejected him will have to acknowledge him as Messiah when he returns in glory.
11. It is difficult to determine which of these interpretations is best.
12. What is clear is that those who refuse to acknowledge Jesus as the one whom God sent to save sinners are forsaken by God.
13. This underscores the point that Jesus made clear in the previous section of Luke 13: there is no other way of salvation apart from him.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Don't miss what this text shows us of the heart of God.
- B. The Lord is a good God, a God of salvation, a God who wants people to be saved, a God who is grieved when people refuse the salvation he offers.
- C. When Jesus Christ came into the world, he was determined to save sinners and he was willing to save sinners.
- D. This is why we can have the utmost confidence in him when he tells us that he will never cast out anyone who comes to him.