



TIME OF GRACE®

Churchy Words Explained (and Why You Should Care): Good

Study Notes

Summary

If there's a word that seems simple to define, it's the word *good*. Good is, well, good. It's someone who isn't bad. But how you define *good* is gravely important. Are you good? Are we good enough? If not, how do we become good in God's sight? In this message, Jesus challenges our definition of *good* and calls us to the only way to be good enough to get close to God.

- Romans 3:12: There is no one who does good, not even one.
- Acts 11:24: [Barnabas] was a good man.
- Mark 10:17-27: ¹⁷ As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." ²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²² At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. ²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."
- What does this mean for us?
 - _____ isn't _____.
 - No one is Good because of _____.
 - Only _____ can make you Good.

Points to Ponder

1. Name three ways that a close group of Christian friends can prevent you from making the same mistake as the rich young man, that is, believing that something good is better than God.
2. Study Matthew's and Luke's versions of the rich young man and Jesus (Matthew 19:16-30, Luke 18:18-30). What do Matthew and Luke repeat from Mark's account? What details do they add?
3. While Jesus doesn't command every Christian to "sell everything," he does ask us to plan and prioritize generosity in our lives. Talk over your fears of giving and your plans for giving with a trusted friend, believing Jesus when he says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).
4. Think of a "good" person you know who doesn't know the only One who is truly Good. If you had to talk to them about eternal life today, what would you say to convince them that they need Jesus?

Homework for Next Week

Read Acts 9:1-19.

Time of Grace Ministry
Churchy Words Explained (and Why You Should Care): Good
Romans 3:12; Acts 11:24; Mark 10:17-27
January 30, 2022

Pastor Mike Novotny

One of the most absolutely essential and one of the most notoriously difficult words to define is not the word atonement. It is not justification. It is not sanctification. It is not propitiation. It is not expiation. It is not penal substitutionary suffering of Jesus, have you heard of that one? It is the word good. Now, good might not seem like the kind of word you need to open up a dictionary for, but actually, if you slow down and think about it, most of us should, and we really need to here in church.

For example, quick show of hands, raise them up nice and high. How many of you who are here in church today, who are watching at home, think that I, Pastor Mike Novotny, am a good person. I was wondering how this was going to go, actually. My wife said, "Can I raise a half-a-hand?" Right, like, it is actually a really difficult question. I read my Bible every day. I take my wife, Kim, on a date every single Friday night. Our family strategically and intentionally gives to the poor in our community every month, which is pretty good, right? But also, I am frequently critical. Habitually boastful. And way too often, selfish. So, I am very serious about this question, am I a good person? A good husband, a good pastor, a good neighbor, a good son, a good person.

Right, it is a difficult question, like, wait. How good is good, and who exactly gets to vote? Because there are probably a whole bunch of people, like the people who write your obituary, who would point the good things you did here and that wonderful thing that you did then, and your closest friends and the family members who loved getting together with you would say, "Oh, my goodness, yes. She is such a good person. He is such a good guy. He has been such a good friend." But then there is a whole other group of people who would say, "But what I remember is..."

Good. Such a simple word. I had lunch with my youngest daughter today. I said, "Sweetie, what does the word good mean?" And she said, "Good." Yeah, what exactly is it? It is pretty tough when you slow down to put your finger on it, and if that was not confusing enough, do you know what happens when you ask God that question? What is good? Am I good? Are you good? I actually skimmed through the Bible and found out that there are 610 different places where the word good shows up in the Good Book, and do you know what those 610 examples say about you?

Get this, Romans 3 says, "There is no one who does good, not even one." Am I good, are you good? Apparently, no, no one is good. But flip back just a few pages in the Bible to the Book of

Acts. Acts 11 says this, "Barnabas," one of the early Christians, "was a good man." And we will say, well, wait, God. Wait, you cannot confuse us like that. Is no one good? Are some people good? Who is good? Am I good, are you good? Because at the end of the day, isn't that one of the most important questions that you want answered in your life? And so, today, we wrestle with a word that deserves wrestling with, what does it mean to be good? But thankfully, I think I found an answer.

As I was skimming through all those 610 uses of the word in the Bible, I found a story that showed up in the Gospel of Matthew and Mark and Luke, where Jesus clearly defines what it means to be good. It is a story, and I am not sure if you have heard it, about a fairly good guy who had good things to say about Jesus, and asked him a very good question about what good thing he needed to do to be good with God, and enjoy the good gift of eternal life. And today, as you and I seek and set our hearts on being good, the best people that we can, Jesus is going to clarify incredible things for us today.

So, let us open our Bibles to the Gospel of Mark, Mark 10. And let us read the story about the rich, young ruler who one day approached Jesus. In Mark 10:17, we find these words. "As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good Teacher,' he asked, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'" Where tons of people turn their backs on Jesus, or drag their feet in following Jesus, what did this guy do? He ran to Jesus. That is pretty good. And not only he ran to him, he fell on his knees, plural, before him. He did not stand up proudly and puff up his chest, he did not even take one knee in admiration. Two knees, on the ground, desperate, surrendered, humbled. That is good.

And the first question that comes off of his lips, what is it? Is it about being healthy? About being wealthy? About success, about romance? No. The first question off this guy's lips is about eternity. The thing that God cares about more than anything else. Which honestly is really, really good. But then, Jesus says this in Mark 10:18. "'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good -- except God alone.'" It is classic Jesus, right? A curious reply. Wait, sir, what? Stand up for a second, sir. What do you mean by the word good? Like, God is good. Capital G, he is the only one who is that good. Is that what you meant when you called me a good teacher, that you think I am like God? Or, by good, did you mean kind of, you know, good good.

And I imagine, as the guy's face kind of squishes up like this, and he thinks about Jesus' brand-new question. Jesus decides to answer his original question. Mark 10:19, Jesus continues: "'You know the commandments: You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "'Teacher,' he declared, 'all these I have kept since I was a boy.'" Now, if you are like me, you kind of want to roll your eyes at the guy at this point, right? Like, seriously. Should we text your mother and see if that is exactly true? You know, all of the commandments, I have always honored my -- you know, I do not quite believe it.

But actually, if you think about how we use the word good, what makes someone a good person, that might be a very good answer. And maybe his older brother was really rebellious. You know, dad would say A, and the kid would fight back, you know, everything was a battle. But this guy,

instead, would try to obey his father with a good attitude. And if you are a parent, you have had one rebellious kid and one obedient kid, you know that one is good, and the other is not. And maybe this young man, he was a rich, young ruler according to the Gospels, maybe he had opportunities where married women were lonely and looking. And he looked away. And he never took the bait. And if you are in a relationship, you would say that faithfulness and fidelity is good. This guy cared about the commandments of God, he tried to keep them as best he could, which I think we would all agree is pretty good.

But what happens next is maybe the most important part of the story. Mark 10:21. "Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' Jesus said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'" If you had to choose, sir, between all of your money and all of your wealth, and being with God, what would you choose? Just a minute ago, you said I was a good teacher, what did you mean by that? If I would invite you to follow me, but you had to leave all of that behind, how would you feel? Excited that you get to be with me? Following in my footsteps as the good teacher? Or depressed for what you have lost and what you had to leave behind? It is like Jesus is putting his finger right on this man's soul and he is pushing as hard as he can, do you believe that God is that good? And the young man tragically answers Jesus' question without a single word. Mark 10:22. "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth."

Once upon a time, Jesus pulled his 15-passenger van into the driveway of a suburban home. And he honked the horn and he rolled down the window, and a middle-aged man opened the door and stepped out onto the porch. Jesus said, "Hey. It is me. Jesus. You want a ride?" The middle-aged man said, "Me? Jesus, seriously? Yeah, yeah, yeah. One second. Let me get my stuff." "Wait," Jesus said, "I don't have room for your stuff. I got, like, 12 guys sitting in the back there, so you all cannot bring a bag, but listen, Peter says he will jump in the back, and you can sit up front with me." And the man looked at Jesus, and he looked over his shoulder, and he saw the leather recliner. And he saw the 65" TV he had just gotten from Best Buy. And he thought about his comfortable home, he thought about the backyard that he loved, he thought about the truck in the garage, and the boat that he was just about to pull the trigger on and buy. And he looked back at Jesus, and he did not say a word. He just quietly closed the door.

In the silence of that moment, as the rich, young man walked away from the disciples, Jesus was the first to speak. "Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!' The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God.'" The gates going into the Kingdom of God are so narrow that few will make it through. Squeezing a camel through the eye of a needle, a camel, by the way, is about the size of four NFL offensive linemen. Squeezing four of those beefy guys through the eye of a needle, that would actually be easier than getting a rich person into the Kingdom of God. Mark 10:26. "The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, 'Who then can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.'"

So. Any questions? This story is a shocking story. It is an exciting story, and then a sad story, and then a confusing story, and then a humbling story, and then an amazing story, so if you have questions about this story, take a number, and I will try to answer them. In this story, we find out everything we need to know about God and about us, and about the word good.

If you are taking notes, I would love to just share three application points from this story. Here is the first one. From Mark 10, I think we learn that there is a difference in Jesus' eyes between good and good. You know, good with a lowercase g, like I am a pretty good person, or some of you are really good neighbors, or you are a good worker, a good mom, a good brother, a good boyfriend. Just like this young man who ran to Jesus, fell on his knees, called him good, and cared about really good things, there is a human definition of the word good. Acts 11 said Barnabas was a good man, just like many of us are good people. But did you notice what Jesus said to this relatively good guy? He did not say, "You are good." He said, "You still lack." We lay in our beds at night and we pull out of our consciences the good things we tried to do, the bad things we resisted, the money we gave to charity, the times we helped people, the things we could have done, but in the name of God, we did not, and God looks at that, and he loves us. And he says, "Not yet." All the goodness of the best human is about 1% of the rent of a one-bedroom in the Kingdom of God. There is a difference between human good and divine good. And no one, the Bible says, can claim to be good enough for God.

Point number two explains why. Write this down, no one is capital-G good, because of their gods. This young man's problem was not murder or adultery, it was idolatry. He did a lot of things right, but the biggest thing he did wrong was loving something more than God. Did you notice that in this story? When Jesus said, "Hey, sell everything you have and follow me," he could have said, "Oh, Jesus, help." He could have said, "Well, Jesus, I do not know if I can, I am going to need you." He did not say, "Jesus, I want to, but I cannot promise I am going to do this perfectly." He could have said any of those things and followed Jesus, but do you remember his reaction? He just went away. When Jesus pushed the button and asked him, what is the biggest, best, goodest, most-worthy thing in the world? It was not Jesus.

And friends, that is the same problem that every human has. It is the problem that I have as the pastor, it is the problem that you have if you are a Christian. It is the problem that you have if you are just watching this for the first time, and you have no clue. The problem we have with God, the problem humans have with getting into the Kingdom of Heaven, is that we often love something more than we love God himself. And so, no, maybe you have never been to prison. No, maybe you have never murdered or committed adultery, but that is not the big issue. The big issue is do you worship other gods? So, as long as it is super serious here today, let me ask, do you know what your go-to god is? Do you know what that thing is that you are just so, you love it, just a bit too much? And when God says, leave it, stop it, sell it, confess it, change it, repent it. Instead of saying, I want to, God. No. Do you ever have the reaction where you just turn around and walk?

I know this is a controversial and treacherous place to go, but Jesus went there again and again, so let me go there. Is your go-to god money? The Bible is so clear that God wants everyone who follows Jesus to give a generous, joyful percentage before anything else to the church and to the

poor. So, do you? If I could see your budget, your spending, the banking app on your phone, what would I find? Is giving to other people the kind of nice thing that you will eventually do, once the retirement is funded and you have paid for the motorcycle, and you have got the Netflix and the smart phone and the new Xbox? Is giving the first thing you need to do because Jesus said, or a thing you would like to do?

You know, for some of you, money is not the problem. For some of you, it is work. Work is a good thing but it is not good if it is a God thing. And some of you want the respect and the career so much that you would break a vow and leave someone lonely at home. And that is not good. Some of you love human praise so much that you post things on Instagram and you know why? You want the compliments to come, you fish for them.

But some of you love acceptance so much, even though you are just in high school, you drink. Black-and-white wrong, sinful in ten different ways. You hide it, you plan it, you sneak around, you lie about it. And some of you love being loved so much, that even if you have to cross that line and have sex with a guy who has not committed in marriage, you will.

And so, for all of us, you know, you good? Am I good? Who, then, can be saved? Now you know why Peter and John asked the question of Jesus. They said, if that is what it takes to get into the Kingdom, to be a good person, who is going to make it? If this guy running to you, falling on his knees before you, keeping the commandments for you, if he is not good enough, who is good enough? And you remember Jesus' answer? Nobody. Impossible.

But all things are possible with God. There is a little glimmer of hope at the end of this story. And there is not much of it. But it is there. So please write this down. The final point I want to share with you is that only God can make you good. Nothing is impossible with God. Only God himself can make you good enough for God himself. Good enough to get into the Kingdom. Good enough to have treasure in heaven. Good enough to live and to die with confidence and hope, because Jesus, listen to me, Jesus is not -- he is not just a good teacher. He is Good. Capital-G, absolutely Good, he is God, and he is a great Savior. And today, if he was standing here in front of me, here is what he would do. He would look at all of you and he would love you. So that whether you are good or bad, wherever you fall on this human spectrum, you and I could be absolutely good with God. So we could stand before the Cross of Jesus and now it is our turn to look at him and love him. So that me, you, all of us who have trust in Jesus, can say, I am good. Not regular good, I am Good, capital-G good. I am holy in his sight, I am without blemish, and free from accusation. I am Good. Because Jesus is Good. He is a good God and he is a great, great Savior.

So, put this story all together, and what do you get? Am I a good person? I do not know. Trying. Am I a good person? Without a doubt. Are you a good neighbor, a good person, a good wife, a good son, a good employee? I hope so. I hope you try harder than ever. Are you good enough to see the face of God? Impossible. Unless you have Jesus. If you have Jesus, friends, it is not just possible, it is guaranteed. By the blood of Jesus Christ, we stand before God, and we are better than good. We are perfect in his sight.

So today, run to Jesus. Fall on your knees, but do not ask him the wrong question. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Instead, say to him, "Jesus, thank you for what you did, so I could inherit eternal life." This is the Christian faith. We confess our lack of goodness, and we cling to Jesus for his. And we believe that it is enough.

Let us pray.

Jesus, thank you for your unrelenting standard of goodness. It would probably have been a lot more comfortable today if you had just said to that young man, "Try your hardest and be your best," but the truth is, we could never know. We could spend 80 years of our life trying to be good people, and when cancer came, we would still have to ask ourselves, was it enough?

So thank you, Jesus. Thank you, that you pulled a rug out from any concept of karma. Thank you, Jesus, that you take the scales of goodness and you smash them, so none of us has a chance. Thank you, Jesus, that you demand perfection and holiness, so not a single person here today wastes their life trying to impress God, and ends up falling short. Thank you, that you leave us with no other option but to say, who can be saved? And to listen to your one-and-only answer, that through the Cross, anyone can be saved.

God, may this teaching today keep us humble. May we never look at anyone in our community, our family, never see a single news story on Facebook, and think we are better people than other people. Heavenly Father, instead, help us to be humbled, amazed, and so impressed at what Jesus did. That he gave up all the relative goodness of heaven, so that we could have absolute goodness in your presence. We love you, God. Because you loved us first, and we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.