

Series: All Things Rise	Reference: 2 Chronicles 6:41	Title: Free & Boundless	Date: 03.24.18
<p style="text-align: center;">Website Writeup:</p> <p><i>God is good, from beginning to end in the Scriptures. God's goodness is free & boundless, found everywhere, and cannot be separated from His Justice & Holiness. We can wake up to His Goodness, and begin to view life through a different narrative rather than the violence & vitriol we are consistently fed in this world!</i></p>			

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2 Chronicles 6:41 says... *“Now arise, Lord God, and come to your resting place, you & the ark of your might. May your priests, Lord God, be clothed with salvation, may your faithful people rejoice in your goodness.”*

The LORD is good. God's goodness is one of the principle revelations of the Old Testament Scriptures, found with Moses, in the Psalms & the Prophets (Exodus 33:18-34:8, Psalm 107:1, Hosea 3:5).

God's goodness is foundational to what it means to be the people of God. If God were *not* good in nature, we'd be a very different people, with a very different message, values & pursuits. Control, fear & coercion would be our tools of change which govern interactions. **Humankind still reflects some remnant of God's image within, although it is now broken & polluted with sin. Humankind cannot fully reflect God's goodness in its current state, we need outside intervention. Restoration. Cleansing.**

In the first few chapters of Genesis it describes how humankind was made in the image of God; our Creator. But we chose to sin in the Garden of Eden which shattered that image. So now, humankind is in need of repair, think of it as a broken mirror. We can still see remnants of God in our visage, but we need a new mirror which Christ gives us - that's why it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* In Christ our image is restored! Like a kitten seeing themselves as a Lion! Now, when God the Father looks upon you, he sees the perfect record of God the Son, Jesus, reflected in you. Our lives are lived now in the process of spiritual formation to address the residue of sin & its effects it had on us.

Therefore, filled with God's Spirit, and presented with His character, we seek to reflect His grace, mercy, servanthood & forgiveness with others - we seek to live out of what we truly are, children of God, *Image Bearers*. Without His Goodness within us & to emulate, we'd attack only behavior, living by a set of regimented rules. Instead the people of God address the heart, seeking true spiritual transformation of the soul into

Christlikeness, bringing about persons reflective of God's Goodness in how we treat each other - empowered to do so & learning along the way.

We've been speaking lately of pursuing God's Glory & God's purpose. Bringing others the glorious nature of God's Goodness, which makes our purpose a divine & welcomed task! We reflect the message of a loving & compassionate God. One who comes offering abundant life!

Two weeks ago we studied Jonah in sermon & community groups. Jonah was acting outside of God's Goodness. Up to a point he refused to represent God's true nature to the Assyrians, due to Jonah's hatred for the Assyrians. And even when he finally succumbed to his calling, he did so reluctantly. Jonah was aware that if they knew of God's Goodness, they'd probably embrace Him.

To Jonah's chagrin, they did. The Assyrians repented in light of God's goodness & he was mad at God for having compassion on them. *He said, I knew that you are a gracious & compassionate God, slow to anger & abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity (Jonah 4:2).*

Many do not share Jonah's view of the Old Testament God. Ours is one of a God who punishes - who relishes bringing calamity on people in the Old Testament. Not Jonah... who, if you recall, didn't have the New Testament Scriptures, nor much of the Old to go on either. But his view was one of goodness, grace, compassion - a God slow to anger & abounding in love! So....from where did Jonah get that image?

He got it through what he had of Old Testament Scripture, either in writing or oral tradition, which communicated God as opposite of what we hear him to be in our culture today.

Where'd we get our angry view of God in the Old Testament? It's from culture, not the Scriptures. It's from those who've either read very little, or not at all. Those who've not taken care to immerse themselves in His story with a trusting open heart. Or, who've come with preconceived notions, seeking only to find evidence to back up wrong attitudes. Operating on assumption. Drawing wrong conclusions. It comes from that reluctant part of us which has not yet fully submitted to His goodness. We don't begin with the view that He is good which would make sense of the hard things. We don't fully understand that living by His holiness is what's best for all humankind. Holiness which sometimes must come into conflict with evil perpetuated by people in the world.

There is an old joke which says, *in the beginning God made man in His own image & since the fall, man's been trying to return the compliment.* That wrong angry view of God is humankind's attempt at creating God in our image, not reflective of His. God's goodness expressed through Israel was surrounded by an environment of very different views of God.

God's made in our own image like the Canaanite God, Baal, the supreme deity of many gods, who was the male deity of land & fertility; his title meant landowner. Or, Ashtoreth, also known as Venus in Rome, Aphrodite in Greece (Greek Olympics), or Ishtar in Babylonia. The Goddess of fertility & war, imaged by Asherah poles - phallic symbols which decorated high places.

What the Canaanites believed was if these deities would see them in lascivious acts including orgies, incest, adultery & homosexuality, they'd be aroused & bring forth rain, making the land fruitful. Within this religious structure there was a temple priesthood, good looking young folks forced into sexual servitude. As your act of worship, you'd go to the temple to perform sexual acts like, orgies, incest, homosexual acts & adultery, as worship.

As a result, they had a problem with paternity & unwanted pregnancies. Babies without fathers & mothers who couldn't afford them. So, there was a third god, Molech, the god of fire, who demanded child sacrifice...the obvious solution to the unwanted byproduct of the worship of the other two deities; the ancient equivalent of abortion.

If God had anything hard to say, or do, in the Old Testament, it was in answer to such evil practices. Which is very much loving & compassionate to come to the aide of people living under such bondage even if they were the ones perpetuating it. One of the quotes TJ, our speaker, used on our men's retreat was from *Alistair Begg*, which said, *"God requiring our obedience is in itself an act of grace. Because He knows that the path he puts before us will result in the best for our lives."* God's path was in stark contrast to the path of all other gods worshipped, then & now.

Jonah could've been quoting various passages of the Old Testament, such as Exodus 34:6-7, where in an encounter with Moses, God passes in front of him... 'proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate & gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love & faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion & sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children & their children for the sin of the parents to the third & fourth generation."

This concept comes up all over Scripture: Psalm 86:15, Numbers 14:18 & 20, Exodus 22:27, Psalm 78:38, etc... That's the God I *want* to worship, compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love & faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion & sin. A God who doesn't let evil go unpunished, whose Holy standards He upholds for the good of all people. *"God requiring our obedience is an act of grace, knowing the path he puts before us will result in the best for all."*

A God of Justice, Holiness & Love - that's a God to worship, as Moses did in v8, when he heard those words of truth proclaimed over him...⁸ *Moses bowed to the ground at once & worshiped.* The same God David worshipped as seen in Psalm 107:1, *Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.*

Old Testament people, seeing God in a very different light than what is touted so confidently by the spiritually illiterate & inexperienced masses who surround us today. God is good. Slow to anger, patient, wanting people to repent. But who will arrest & deal with evil as needed, due to the fact that it's destructive to His creative order & all He loves so dearly. His Justness & Holiness are part of His Goodness.

He's not capricious, nor a vindictive curmudgeon. He's thoroughly good & has broadcast his goodness across the universe. A stark contrast to the petulant angry controlling gods to be feared in the surrounding cultures of Israel & ourselves. He speaks into being, Creation. Fills it with beauty, drawing order out of chaos & pursues people in an effort to reconcile them with Himself.

The lesson...don't believe the culture hype - get into the revealed Word of God beginning with the conviction of his Goodness. Explore the nature of God from the Source. Align yourself with the true image of God. And what you'll find is, God isn't only good, but is **Free & Boundless**, with no master, challenger, or equal. God's goodness is not only free, but He is freedom.

It's popular today to say you can't criticize another's behavior, or decisions. "Don't judge me!" The millennial rallying cry - but anyone with a grasp of reality knows that's not true, nor sustainable. Parents, with any experience, scoff at such declarations, because we know some choices & behaviors are destructive & hurtful to children. Anarchy isn't freedom, it's slavery. Freedom comes in submission to that which is Good, God himself - Freedom personified. *"God requiring our obedience is an act of grace, knowing the path he puts before us will result in the best for all."* Aligning with His true Image.

God's free & boundless **goodness is everywhere!** All over the world the goodness of God is on display. Just look at some of these images from our trip on the John Muir

Trail! Kim & I are going to hike in Glacier National Park this summer. I looked up a video of someone hiking there. The young woman was hiking around a corner & when she came upon a majestic view, she burst into tears! How can you not! Ivory Bishop, born & raised in NYC, said that when he first went into the wilderness, "It just looked fake, it was too beautiful!" The big city boy felt small.

Right now, the goodness of God's at work. His goodness is giving & sustaining life all around us. It's the goodness of God which presents itself to us as everything beautiful. Get away from your screens, turn off the news, go bird watching, focus on a squirrel in the backyard, take a hike, or notice an act of loving kindness in the world.

TJ, also quoted Elizabeth Barrett Browning - *"Earth's crammed with Heaven, and every common bush afire with God. But only those who see take off their shoes. The rest just sit around & pluck blackberries."*

TJ, heard the voice of God audibly say to him the word WATER as he was searching of what to do with his life. He then was flooded with an idea to start a beverage company which provided clean drinking water throughout the world; HumanKind, which we serve in the back of the room. God's goodness in action, from listening to the Holy Spirit & being obedient to it. Vinny, walking through the Stations of the Cross on the Men's Retreat, writing songs about each station of Jesus' suffering. Residual representations of the goodness of God!

What's God saying to you? How's he been speaking to you? What's He calling you to do? Is He calling you to honor him in obedience in some area which is good for you & others around you? Have you used our postcards to invite anyone to our Easter Celebration? Have you expressed God's goodness to someone else lately? Have you told them of how Jesus has made life better & made you better for life? Wouldn't it be nice to share Jesus' abundant life with others? Don't people need to hear that right now? Or, are you Jonah..."Well they're Republicans," or, "They're a Democrat, they don't deserve it!"

Choose to **wake up to the Goodness of God!** If we can wake up to the large & small tokens of God's goodness, we'll notice where He is, what He's up to & engage in it. Instead of focusing on the false narrative of an ancient angry curmudgeon, or the modern narrative of vitriol & violence, we begin to see God as saving, restoring & protecting people - sometimes even from themselves. God's scattering goodness like breadcrumbs throughout the world - we can follow all of them back to Him.

In doing so, we begin to see the reasons behind Matthew 28:18-20 & making disciples of all peoples, calling them to the obedience of faith...because...*God requiring our*

obedience is an act of grace, knowing the path he puts before us will result in the best for everyone. We did a sponge activity on the mens retreat. Everyone got a really dry sponge, then soaked it in water, then wrung it out & soaked it again. Christians soak up God's goodness & God wrings it out of us into the lives of others & that wonderful process repeats itself throughout life!

You've seen the bumper stickers which say, RESIST (they're out there for groups conservative & progressive). A call to defiance. But what it communicates is anger. Be mad. Resist. Get angry. Fight. Conquer. And what we won't admit is, that when we resist someone else, we must exert control over them by using some form of coercion, fear & dominance - which isn't reflective of the image of God. *God's goodness is an invitation to wake up, to surrender ourselves to that which is in nature truly good. His goodness is permission to live from a different narrative. To love your enemy. To call people back to that which requires our obedience to true Goodness - to God-ness. That obedience which is truly an act of grace, to salvation & a standard of life which honors God & brings real freedom in all we do.*

So, to apply this... change how you view life. Avoid the temptation to live from a false narrative. The loud cacophonous narrative which surrounds us all. Believe God is Good.

TJ led us through an activity where he blindfolded Mike Thomas. Mike had to listen to TJ's quiet voice leading him through a labyrinth of desks. But all the while we got to yell at Mike in order to distract him (the best part of the activity). Mike had to train his ear to listen to TJ's quiet voice, representative of God's through the labyrinth. Learn that. Listen to God via His Word, His Spirit & His Church.

Look for Gods Goodness. Immerse yourself in His Story. Ask the Holy Spirit to make sense of the life around you - ask Him what's your role, right where you are, to bring about His Goodness & Freedom in others - to seek first His Glory as we live out his purpose for our lives.

Let me end by praying the lyrics of our signature song for this series, ALL THINGS RISE...

God, how beautiful is Your Holy Word, which formed the worlds in such goodness. The shame that we would spurn it all, to turn & fall into darkness. We'll sing how through Your Son, You turned this loss & hurt into glory. How when, scorned in death, You raised Him up. His gain's become the whole world's story. Let all things rise & bless Your name - all things made right & new again. Lord, Your goodness, is free & boundless & reaching endless through it all....AMEN!