

# The Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness

## Matthew 12:1-14

### Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. Sometimes I feel like a groundhog. Like a good little pastor, I spend all week in my little office cubby hole, and pop out occasionally to give people a word about whether or not they're good. I don't want to be like a groundhog. First, I want to write my sermons in community. That's why I have several people who give me feedback throughout the process. But I also want to submit myself to these words as well. It's not that I am the definition of goodness, and you all should measure yourselves by me. Today we come before the Lord together and seek his definition of goodness.

We're going to be considering goodness as it was reflected in Jesus in Matthew 12:1-14. Here's my main thought for this sermon: If we walk in God's Spirit-empowered life, we as a church will bear the fruit of goodness. I'll unpack that idea with two truths about Jesus, both of which have their own direct application to Christians: Jesus is good (therefore we are objects of his goodness) and Jesus does good (therefore we are channels of his goodness).

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Matthew 12:1-14. If you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs, you can find today's Scripture passage on page 816. Hear the word of the Lord:

*1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." 3 He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? 6 I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. 7 And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." 9 He went on from there and entered their synagogue. 10 And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, "Which one of you who*

*has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” 13 Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. Matthew 12:1-14*

May the Word preached here today echo among the nations. Amen. You may be seated.

## **Exposition**

Did you know that Kentucky has some of the most bizarre laws of any state in America? It's true. Apparently, we have had the need to keep the peace in some interesting ways. Here are a few examples:

- It is illegal to sell baby ducks that have been dyed blue--unless it is six or more.
- It is illegal to shower less than once per year.
- It is illegal to marry the same man more than three times.
- It is illegal to shoot game outside the window of a moving vehicle with the exception of a whale.
- It is illegal to carry an ice cream cone in your pocket.

What in the world kind of circumstances required legislators somewhere to take the time and effort to make these laws?! Hopefully they were well-intended and helpful at the time, but all this goes to show us one thing: we sure can come up with some strange rules and regulations.

And this is not just a Kentucky thing. Actually, it was happening even long before the days of Jesus. We enter the scene of today's story with some of the religious legislators of Jesus' day, the Pharisees, not just setting up strange laws, but enforcing them among the Jewish people. In this instance Jesus was messing with their laws related to one of God's Ten Commandments: keeping the Sabbath day holy.

In addition to God's simple commandment, the Pharisees had established dozens of extra laws to keep people from coming anywhere close to violating the Sabbath. These laws were so specific and detailed that it was nearly impossible to keep up with all of them. Let me read one for you:

“If a man took out [anything] in his right hand or in his left hand, in his bosom or on his shoulder, he is culpable, for this last was the manner of carrying...If on the back of his hand, or with his foot or with his mouth or with his elbow, or in his ear or in his hair or in his wallet carried mouth downwards, or between his wallet and his shirt, or in the hem of his shirt, or in his shoe or in his sandal, he is not culpable, since he has not taken it out after the fashion of them that take out a burden.”<sup>1</sup>

Uh...what? If it's not already obvious, this is obsession with rules, with getting things right. And it makes sense: for the Pharisees the three marks of true Jewish identity were circumcision, keeping the Old Testament food laws, and observing the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup> So sacred was the Sabbath to the Jews that just a few decades before Jesus, at a time often referred to as the Maccabees, they let themselves be slaughtered by their enemies rather than breaking the Sabbath to defend themselves.<sup>3</sup> Yo, that's some serious religion. But that's also some hard labor and a heavy yoke.

So imagine what it was like for the Pharisees when Jesus drew huge crowds and said things like this:

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30*

In some ways he kind of sounds like a peddler selling an easier religion, right? It's like when you've been starving yourself for six months to lose just a few pounds, and in walks your co-worker who has like two percent body fat and eats non stop everything you can't. Be honest, if he ever rubs it in, you might punch him in the throat (and take his food).

In a similar way, the Pharisees couldn't stand Jesus. But it wasn't that Jesus was toning down God's law, like he was just lowering the standard for people. Jesus was showing the Pharisees the true meaning of God's law.<sup>4</sup> That's why Matthew 12 is built on Jesus' statement that his yoke is easy and his burden is light: it shows us the contrast between who Jesus is and who we are. And not just in the way we go about making rules.

---

<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 299

<sup>2</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew*, 493

<sup>3</sup> Morris, 299

<sup>4</sup> Morris, 304-305

While we naturally work hard to be right and burden ourselves and others with whatever rules seem right to us, Jesus rests in rightness of God, and he relieves the burden of others. In other words--and this is our first key truth--Jesus is good.

## **I. Jesus is Good**

Now, you might be like, “Really, pastor, is that the best point you could come up with? Must’ve been a hard week.” But saying that Jesus is good has profound meaning. In fact, once when someone called Jesus good he immediately asked them,

*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. Mark 10:18*

Jesus wants us to think hard about calling him good. What does it mean? It would be really easy here to get all philosophical. That’s because the meaning of goodness has been something humanity has wrestled with for thousands of years. The term “good” is basically what we give to anything commendable, whatever is excellent, beautiful, valuable, useful, or enlightening. But it’s more than just how we use it.

Goodness carries the sense of completeness, or perfection; and of being and light, or ultimate reality. Thus one of the early church fathers defined God generally as “a being than which nothing greater can be conceived” (in other words, there’s nothing *more good* than him).<sup>5</sup> God is the height of goodness, the brightest perfection, the ultimate reality from which everything good flows. And so it makes sense that we are told,

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. James 1:17*

When we say Jesus is good, we’re not just saying he’s a good dude or a nice guy. We’re saying he is *God*. We’re saying he is the height of goodness, the brightest perfection, the ultimate reality from which everything good flows--and yet paradoxically all bottled up in the form of a really average-looking middle-aged Jewish man. Let’s look at how Jesus’ goodness is put on display in today’s story, and how it stands in such contrast to the Pharisees. We read beginning in verse one,

*At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” Matthew 12:1-2*

---

<sup>5</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 402-404

So here's the situation: Jesus' disciples were hungry on a Sabbath day, so as they walked through a grainfield they pulled off heads of grain to satisfy their hunger. This was not stealing; the law actually allowed people to do this. What the Pharisees were calling unlawful was that in order to eat the kernels the disciples had to pull off the head of grain, rub it in their hands to remove the outer husk, and then blow the husk away. The Pharisees were basically saying that the disciples were doing farmwork on the Sabbath: reaping, threshing, and winnowing.<sup>6</sup>

It didn't matter to them that the disciples were hungry and needed food. It was a violation of their regulations and an opportunity to enforce them. To them, getting things right was more important than the good of others. Here's how Jesus responded:

*3 He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? Matthew 12:3-5*

Jesus responded with a style of argument referred to as "the light and the weighty"--in other words, if something is true for the less important, than it is certainly true for the more important.<sup>7</sup> He pointed to the time of a king named David, who was on the run from his enemies and needed food for himself and his soldiers. At that time David was given what was called "the bread of the presence," bread prepared as an offering in the tabernacle, which only priests were allowed to eat according to the law.<sup>8</sup> Jesus was like, "Didn't you read that? The good of God's king was more important than the technicality of that rule."

Then he gave another example from the Old Testament scriptures. "Ever thought about the fact that the law commands priests in the temple to work their tails off on the Sabbath?" Every time a serious Jew saw priests laboring on the Sabbath, it should've made them think about the purpose of the Sabbath. The "work" of the priests didn't violate the Sabbath because it was service to others.<sup>9</sup> The good of the priests' service to others was more important than the technicality of the Sabbath law.

---

<sup>6</sup> Morris, 300

<sup>7</sup> Morris, 301

<sup>8</sup> 1 Samuel 21:1-6

<sup>9</sup> Morris, 302

But this wasn't primarily what Jesus was getting at in using this less important-more important argument. He reveals that in verse 6:

*I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. 7 And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."* Matthew 12:6-8

What's the more important part of the argument here? It's Jesus! He's the true King David who needed bread for his men!<sup>10</sup> He's the Great High Priest who ministers on the Sabbath!<sup>11</sup> Something greater than the temple is here!<sup>12</sup> It's no longer the era of coming to a temple to find peace with God--Jesus is the true temple, he is the presence of God.<sup>13</sup> And if Old Testament priests could work to assist God on the Sabbath, then Jesus' disciples could certainly work to assist *him* on the Sabbath. If we capture the true intent of the Law, it always leads us to the love of God and the good of our neighbor.<sup>14</sup>

And there's the contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus wasn't setting the law aside, nor was he using it for his own advantage. He was getting at the very heart of the law: a genuine love for God and others.

Jesus. Is. Good. And for anyone who recognizes that, the light of Jesus' goodness is shining on you. And here's the exchange that happens:

*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."* John 3:19-21

You say, "How can I come to the light when I hate it? How can I do what is true when I prefer to exchange the truth for a lie?"<sup>15</sup> Are these verses telling us to start doing good so that we can then step proudly into the light? No way! It's saying to own what is true: that you are in darkness and you desperately need the light of Jesus. If you're owning that reality, then Jesus' light is already starting to shine on you.

---

<sup>10</sup> John 18:26-27

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 4:14-16

<sup>12</sup> John 2:18-21

<sup>13</sup> Morris, 303

<sup>14</sup> Doriani, 495

<sup>15</sup> Romans 1:24-25

## **IA. Jesus is Good (Therefore We Are Objects of His Goodness)**

And here is our application for this truth about Jesus. For those of us who hope in him, Jesus is good, therefore we are objects of his goodness. Yes, of course, everyone in the world benefits from Jesus' common grace goodness. But for the Christian, you get the fullest expression of it.

It's like when you're at a large sports event, and cheerleaders come out to get everyone hyped. Everyone benefits from what they're doing--but then all of sudden they start shooting free t-shirts into the crowd with one of those air-guns. Being a Christian is like Jesus' blasting his highest goodness--of all people--straight into your outstretched hands.

He lived for you. He kept the law perfectly for you. He died for you. He rose again for you. He ascended to heaven for you. He sent his Spirit for you. And all of his cred with God the Father, he gives to you. You are now an object of his goodness. That means:

- Your quiet time is less about getting it right and more about being melted down by his goodness.
- Your obedience is less about figuring out all the specifics and more about loving God and seeking the good of others.
- And because Jesus' goodness is always the same toward you, it means your life is less about projecting a certain persona of having it all together and more about being a consistent, transparent person. That leads us this definition of goodness:

Consistent sincerity that blesses others

Pastor Tim Keller says that a person who bears the fruit of goodness is a sincere person, a person whose heart is like a clear lake that you can see all the way to the bottom. What you see is what you get.<sup>16</sup> As I have reflected on this characteristic of Christ this week, the same person has come to mind over and over: Doug Groce. No matter what situation he's in, he's going to give you a hug and pull your leg. In all seriousness, there is a consistent, sincere warmth in Doug that's expressed toward others. Doug, I thank God for how we experience Jesus' goodness in you.

---

<sup>16</sup> Tim Keller, "Goodness, Faithfulness, 1 John 1:5-2:8," 3

## II. Jesus Does Good

And here's the thing, if what's on the inside is good--has become the object, the receptacle of God's goodness--then that goodness cannot help but overflow out. And so this brings us to our second key truth: it's not just that Jesus *is* good, Jesus *does* good. He proves it to us in the passage as

*He went on from there and entered their synagogue. 10 And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him. Matthew 12:9-10*

If it wasn't obsessive enough that the Pharisees condemned Jesus and his disciples for satisfying their hunger on the Sabbath, now they want a chance to condemn him for *healing* someone on the Sabbath! This is the depth to which, apart from Christ, we oppose the goodness of God. We get obsessed with the particulars--who's getting things wrong so that we can use them to prove ourselves right. But Jesus, in the light of his goodness, reveals the darkness of their hearts:

*11 He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Matthew 12:11-12*

"You're telling me that if one of your farm animals is hurt or in danger, you won't help it? Of course you would!" Jesus says. "But you won't help a person who is hurt or in danger?" Basically what the Pharisees are doing is giving greater value to an animal than a person. And this is what sin does, it distorts our understanding of what's good. It keeps us from doing good from a pure, sincere motive. We volunteer to serve, but in part because how it will benefit us. This is what Jesus is talking about later when he says,

*The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45*

But better than just saying it, Jesus shows us what it looks like. He shows us what his heart looks like:

*13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. Matthew 12:13*

Out of the good treasure of Jesus' heart, he does good. He volunteers to serve this man, but only for how it will benefit the man and point us to God. So what do you think Jesus does when his Spirit comes to live in you? He does good. Therefore we become channels of his goodness.

## **IIA. Jesus Does Good (Therefore We Are Channels of His Goodness)**

Because Jesus died and rose again to implant his goodness in those who believe, we can find ourselves supernaturally beginning to have sincere motives in serving others. And when he makes us aware of insincere motives, we can repent and be restored! And when we are crippled in fear of possibly having insincere motives, we can still serve with the confidence that we offer and Christ perfects! We can let our light so shine before others that they may see our good deeds and give glory to our Father in heaven!<sup>17</sup>

This is why Paul concluded his list of the fruit of the Spirit with

*against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:23*

It's like, "Go crazy doing good!" And it's why Paul continued,

*And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:9-10*

## **Conclusion**

If we walk in God's Spirit-empowered life, we as a church will bear the fruit of goodness: bringing meals to one another, opening our households to one another, being real with one another, grieving with one another, rejoicing with one another, serving one another without seeking recognition, and letting this spill over among our neighbors and co-workers.

The broken body of our Lord Jesus isn't just the proof of God's goodness, it's the source and pattern of any and all goodness we can do as Christians.<sup>18</sup> On the night he was betrayed, when he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to his disciples and said to them, "This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in

---

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 5:16

<sup>18</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness*, 1467

remembrance of me.” He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, “This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord’s death until he returns.” **We are announcing that Jesus Christ showed us the goodness of God when he laid down his life for us.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to my left, your right. If you’re a baptized believer, come and remember what Jesus has done for you. If you’re a believer but not yet baptized, let us know so we can help prepare you for baptism and communion. If you’re not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back and people to pray with you on the sides. Let’s pray.

## **Bibliography**

Christopher J.H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness*

Jerry Bridges, *The Fruitful Life: The Overflow of God's Love Through You*

Trey Moss, "Life in the Spirit, Galatians 5:16-26"

John Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*

Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew*

Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*

Ligon Duncan, "Condemnation of the Enemies of the Kingdom, Part 1: The Lord of the Sabbath, Matthew 12:1-14"

Tim Keller, "Goodness, Faithfulness, 1 John 1:5-2:8"

John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*

Gospel Transformation Bible