

A Hero Will Rise

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 10:1-18

Topic

God's pursuit of His backslidden people
illustrates for us that He is good

Title

"Scripture Tells Me I'm Into Someone Good"

Introduction

It's one of the great advertising slogans of all time. I know you can finish it: "You're in good hands [with Allstate]."

How about this one: "Good to the last [drop]." Whose slogan is that? That's right; Maxwell House Coffee.

One more: "M'm! M'm! Good... M'm! M'm! Good... [That's what Campbell Soups are - M'm! M'm! Good]."

Because you're sharp, you noticed that the key word in each of those slogans is "good." It's a robust, comforting word that instills confidence.

Christians use, as a slogan, the phrase, "God is good." I don't think a day goes by I don't hear it said, or read it on social media.

It figures prominently in the recent popular Christian film, *God's Not Dead*. Two of the main characters say, "God is good... All the time"; and "All the time... God is good."

We get it from verses like the following:

Psa 31:19 Oh, how great *is* Your goodness, Which You have laid up for those who fear You, *Which* You have prepared for those who trust in You In the presence of the sons of men!

Psa 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD *is* good; Blessed *is* the man *who* trusts in Him!

Psa 107:1 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good! For His mercy *endures* forever.

Something I didn't know. According to A.W. Pink, "The original Saxon meaning of our English word *God* is "The Good."

I got to thinking about "good," and God's goodness, because it is one of the things we can see illustrated for us here in chapter ten of the Book of Judges.

The chapter opens with a quick summary account of two of Israel's lesser-known Judges, Tola and Jair. God, in His goodness, gave these two men to Israel to provide them a measure of peace for quite some time.

Then the bulk of the chapter describes Israel being overwhelmed by several of her enemies. God explained to them that their subjection to their enemies was His doing on account of their sin.

When Israel cried out to God, He answered them, saying, “I will deliver you no more” (v13).

On the surface, God’s response does not seem consistent with His goodness. It seems the direct opposite of goodness. Wait for it; we will see that it illustrates His goodness leading them to repentance, after which God does deliver them.

I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Is Good & He Shows It By Looking Out For You, and #2 God Is Good & He Shows It By Coming After You.

#1 God Is Good & He Shows It By Looking Out For You

(v1-5)

When Frodo first encountered him at the *Prancing Pony*, Aragorn had spent most of his adult life as an unheralded Ranger protecting the borders of the Shire from the Enemy.

Aragorn says of his task, “Travelers scowl at us, and countrymen give us scornful names. “Strider” I am to one fat man who lives within a day’s march of foes that would freeze his heart or lay his little town in ruin, if he were not guarded ceaselessly.”

As far as our world is concerned, it is because God is good that life can proceed on the earth day-after-day. God is on guard. His goodness looks out for His creation. If it weren’t for His goodness, our enemies would do far worse than freeze our hearts and lay our world in ruin.

One book on systematic theology asks the following questions:

How can we explain the comparatively orderly life in the world, seeing that the whole world lies under the curse of sin? How is it that the earth yields precious fruit in rich abundance and does not simply bring forth thorns and thistles? How can we account for it that sinful man still “retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior”? How can the unregenerate still speak truth, do good to others, and lead outwardly virtuous lives?

The answer is that God is good, and in His goodness He preserves life in order to give men the opportunity to be saved.

Keep that very basic thought in mind as we work through verses one through five and see God’s goodness preserving and protecting Israel.

Jdg 10:1 After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in the mountains of Ephraim.

Jdg 10:2 He judged Israel twenty-three years; and he died and was buried in Shamir.

Abimelech is named just ahead of Tola. Abimelech's story takes-up a verse in chapter eight, then fifty-seven verses in chapter nine. He was not a Judge. He was the least son of Gideon who promoted himself to be a king by murdering his 69 brothers.

Murder and destruction stain his career.

The entire twenty-three year hero-ship of Tola is summarized in two verses.

It doesn't seem right, or fair. Tell me more about Tola - a real hero, raised-up by God, with a more than two-decade spotless record.

You and I are probably destined to be Tola's. I mean, my opportunities to be famous, as a Christian, are pretty much over.

That's OK. I'd rather have a short epitaph as a faithful servant than a long explanation of my failure. Be content as a servant of God.

Jdg 10:3 After him arose Jair, a Gileadite; and he judged Israel twenty-two years.

Jdg 10:4 Now he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; they also had thirty towns, which are called "Havoth Jair" to this day, which *are* in the land of Gilead.

Jdg 10:5 And Jair died and was buried in Camon.

We talk about "the American dream." These verses describe something like that in Israel. There was a donkey in every garage, and everyone could have their own city if they wanted to.

That's an exaggeration, but you get the idea. God's work through Jair preserved a twenty-two year peace. In that peace, they prospered. God was good - obviously good - to His people.

When we declare that God is good, we are not ignoring sin and suffering on the earth. In a way, sin and suffering highlight His goodness. God could end all suffering; He will end it, at about Revelation twenty-one. But when He does, His longsuffering with men, to see them saved, also ends. The fact that suffering continues means there is still time for God's goodness to reach lost souls and save them.

To quote from A.W. Pink again:

If man sins against the goodness of God, if he despises "the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering," and after the hardness and impenitency of his heart treasureth up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath (Romans 2:5-6), who is to blame but himself? Would God be "good" if He did not punish those who ill-use His blessings, abuse His benevolence, and trample His mercies beneath their feet? It will be no reflection upon God's goodness, but rather the brightest exemplification of it, when He will rid the earth of those who have broken His laws, defied His authority, mocked His messengers, scorned His Son, and persecuted those for whom He died.

The ultimate goodness of God, of course, is salvation through Jesus Christ. At the birth of Jesus, the angels announced God's "good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). Here was the One Who was born to die for your sins, and for my sins. It is good that when we were yet sinners, and the enemies of God, He sent His Son to take our place in death, that we might live forever.

Titus 2:11 proclaims, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men..." "Grace" is the goodness of God in action. It doesn't just preserve the universe, as a theater within which the drama of redeeming a lost race plays out.

No, grace is active, working on the hearts of all men everywhere, freeing their will in order that they might make a decision to surrender to Jesus and be saved.

"God is good... All the time."

#2 God Is Good & He Shows It By Coming After You

(v6-18)

If I use the phrase, “relentless pursuit,” probably only negative images come to mind. I can’t help but think about the Terminator, or after him, the T1000 liquid metal man. They just kept coming.

We need to suspend any negative connotations about relentless pursuit, because God’s goodness is presented as relentlessly pursuing mankind:

1. First, as we’ve said, He pursues us through grace, with the Gospel, to bring us salvation.
2. Second, after we are saved, when we sin, His goodness pursues us to bring us to repentance.

In the Book of Romans, where we are told, “the goodness of God leads to repentance” (2:4). The statement is made in the context of God withholding the judgment the human race deserves in order that we might repent, and either receive Him or return to Him.

One pastor put it this way: “God’s goodness is the reality that we have not yet experienced His judgment. That is what leads us to repentance.”

In Second Corinthians 7:9-10 we read,

2Co 7:9 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.

2Co 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

In the remaining verses of chapter ten, we see the goodness of God leading Israel to repentance.

Jdg 10:6 Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.

I'm not sure if the years Tola and Jair judged Israel were concurrent or consecutive; localized or national. But the author of Judges, the prophet Samuel, wants to emphasize that the Israelites sinned grossly at the first chance they got.

If there was a god to be found among the Canaanites, find him or her they did, and serve them.

Jdg 10:7 So the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon.

Do you think of God as having emotions? Theologians debate what they call "the impassibility of God." While some of them would argue for the position that God does not possess any feelings or passions, the real question is whether or not God's passions are voluntary or involuntary. Does God actually *react* to his creation in an emotional way? Can humanity hurt God?

We won't solve the great impassibility debate. We **can** confidently state that God has emotions; we're told that over-and-over in the Bible. He loves; He hates; He has compassion; He grieves; He rejoices.

In Judges, He is hot with anger. Don't think of God as losing His cool, or in any way over-reacting. His emotions are not like ours.

Don't think of God as having mood swings; or of being depressed; or manic.

But since He is holy and good, His emotions must be so much stronger than ours, in their perfection. I'm not sure what it means to say this, but, in this case, God has a perfect hot anger against Israel. It motivates Him to act - on their behalf, for their good.

Does your hot anger motivate you to do good? Most likely, not.

The good God did was that He "sold them" into the hands of their enemies.

One way of understanding this is to say that God simply gave them what they wanted. They chose to "serve" foreign gods, so Jehovah "sold them" to those gods by allowing their enemies to dominate them.

God accelerated what would have happened anyway.

At first, we don't see how this was good. It was - infinitely so.

Jdg 10:8 From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years - all the children of Israel who *were* on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead.

That's a long time. But it doesn't reflect so much on God as it does the Israelites. It took eighteen years for them to cry out to God for help.

Are you praying for someone who has walked away from the Lord? Have you grown discouraged because that person seems no closer to returning to the Lord; maybe they are even further away?

Be confident in this: God is at work - even though you cannot see it, and even though there seem to be no results. People are stubborn sinners. God will strive with them, but He cannot overrule their free will. Keep praying for them.

Jdg 10:9 Moreover the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan to fight against Judah also, against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.

This marks an acceleration of oppression. God allowed their enemies to subject them for eighteen years. They continued in their rebellion against God. So God turned up the heat, and brought an army against them - an imminent threat.

It worked:

Jdg 10:10 And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!"

They made a strong confession. They used the “S” word - sin. They fessed-up to turning from God to idols.

Jdg 10:11 So the LORD said to the children of Israel, "*Did I not deliver you* from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines?

Jdg 10:12 Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand.

The Mailman. Not the one who comes to your house; the one who played for the Utah Jazz. Karl Malone was called “The Mailman,” because he delivered.

[His lack of success in the playoffs led many to joke that The Mailman didn’t deliver on the weekends].

God delivered every time. Enemy after enemy was overcome. But after each victory, His people returned to their sin.

Your flesh is powerful. By “flesh” we mean the unredeemed humanity that has a propensity to satisfy its lusts in sinful ways.

I used to think that the longer I walked with the Lord, the weaker my flesh would get.

It never weakens, and the case can be made that it gets stronger, in the sense that I get more-and-more sensitive to sin. Things I never considered sinful - like attitudes - are shown to me to be ungodly.

God has delivered me from sin; but if I don't constantly crucify my sin, and die to self, I can still serve the various Baal's of our culture.

Jdg 10:13 Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more.

Uh-oh. Seriously? Did God just say that?

Jdg 10:14 Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress."

This at once seems so unlike God, and so much like Him.

It seems unlike God in that we always think of Him as the father of the prodigal son - waiting to run out and embrace his wayward child upon his return.

But it seems like God in that He alone can divide between our soul and our spirit, to know if our sorrow is mere regret, or genuine repentance.

Israel regretted their situation, but their confession was not accompanied by the attitude, or the actions, of true repentance.

Jdg 10:15 And the children of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray."

Jdg 10:16 So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.

They repeated their confession. But this time they had a change of attitude, surrendering by saying, “Do to us whatever seems best to you.”

And they had a change of action. This time they abandoned the foreign gods and served the Lord.

Repentance means a change of mind about sin, leading to a change of behavior. It can be hard to recognize true repentance.

Sometimes it’s hard to recognize because we simply do not believe the repentant sinner. Especially if he or she has sinned against us, we can be reluctant to forgive them. We think they are just saying the words with no change of heart. We want them to jump through all kind of hoops. We want them to suffer a little.

As wrong as that may be, a person who has genuinely repented will remain humble, and be willing to jump through those hoops. They will recognize the ruin they have caused, and not demand their rights when they have so wronged others.

They will rejoice they are forgiven by God, then seek forgiveness from others - but with grace.

The prodigal son is a good example. Upon his return to his father’s house, he was willing to be a mere servant. He didn’t demand to be treated as a son. He didn’t demand a celebration during which they killed and consumed the fatted calf.

“And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.” More strong emotion from God. He had compassion on His repentant people.

That person, or those people, who are backslidden and you are praying for. Your soul can barely endure the misery their sin is causing. It stresses you that God is doing very little - as if He does not see, or care.

He sees; He cares. But their heart is not repentant. God's soul is not in misery yet because they are not yet repentant.

He remains faithful, in His goodness, to lead them to repentance.

We need to think of the Lord as both the patient father of the prodigal, **and** as the One Who goes after His wayward children:

- On the one hand, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, He must wait for their heart to change. He must wait for them to become aware of the pigpen they have sold themselves into.
- On the other hand, we must believe His goodness is actively working to bring them to repentance. We may not see it, but we can believe it. He is bringing armies to encamped against them - imminent threats that are designed to point sinners to Him for deliverance.

Jdg 10:17 Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah.

Jdg 10:18 And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, "Who *is* the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

These verses set-up the next chapter. The "man" who answers God's call is Jephthah the Gileadite.

For now, we simply note that the Israelites had returned to a place of faith. They weren't wondering *if* God would raise-up a hero, but who that hero would be.

They knew they would be delivered - just not by who.

And they were willing to fight. They said, "who will begin the fight," indicating they would follow the Lord's man into battle - against any and all odds.

These people who had been sinning grossly for the past eighteen years were transformed into a people of faith, ready to act.

God had shown them the depth of their sin. In His initial refusal to deliver them, He had shown them that they deserved only judgment.

His goodness led them to a genuine repentance, and a return to serving Him with their hearts, their minds, their souls, and their strength.

Kurt Russell portrays Wyatt Earp in the film, *Tombstone*. He utters a classic line towards the end that I'm going to change a little.

In this text, we can hear God proclaiming to backsliders, "You tell them I'm comin', and Heaven's comin' with Me. You hear? Heaven's comin' with Me!"

Have you ever heard the phrase, "The Hound of Heaven?" It's the title of a poem written by English poet Francis Thompson (1859–1907).

One commentator said this about the poem:

The name is strange. It startles one at first. It is so bold, so new, so fearless. It does not attract, rather the reverse. But when one reads the poem this strangeness disappears. The meaning is understood. As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing nearer in the chase, with unhurrying and imperturbed pace, so does God follow the fleeing soul by His Divine grace. And though in sin or in human love, away from God it seeks to hide itself, Divine grace follows after, unwearingly follows ever after, till the soul feels its pressure forcing it to turn to Him alone in that never ending pursuit.

Concerning the backslider, the poem says,

*I fled Him down the nights and down the days
I fled Him down the arches of the years
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind, and in the midst of tears
I hid from him, and under running laughter.*

Concerning God, it answers,

*Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,
Save Me, save only Me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!*