

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
June 30 & July 1, 2012  
Lee Hanssen  
Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness  
Matthew 19:16-17**

Good morning, everybody. My name is Lee Hanssen, and I'm on staff here at CPC up in the student ministries office. One of my favorite invitations that Jesus gave to us is to come and be like children, and I love to watch this stage and these steps be so full of the life of these kids. Well, last night we weren't as fortunate to have as much life on these steps. There was one brave little girl in the back, just one. I could tell she was petrified to come up front, so I actually came up and sat with her and listened to the children's sermon from a different point of view. Sometimes it's good for me to have things spelled out because sometimes I take things that really are pretty simple, add to them and make them a lot more complicated. I hope you enjoyed this morning's children sermon as much as I did. In some ways, I feel like John and Caitlin stole all my thunder.

I don't know how familiar you are with our programs in student ministries. We don't get to talk about them a ton from the front, but let me tell you, up in student ministries we are firing on all cylinders this summer. We have seven different trips taking students away for a week at a time, whether it be on camps or missions trips down to the inner city in Minneapolis. In fact, Mandy [Mandy Jester, a student ministries leader] just boarded a plane on Friday with some of our missions staff and high school students on our second annual trip to Zambia to further our missions effort over there. In about a week or so some of our high school students will be leaving for Summit One when they head out to Colorado to learn about God, and I'll be taking next year's commitment class to the Boundary Waters to sail around on a boat for five days. I wonder sometimes how I can get paid to do the things that I get to do! I'm very excited about that trip. Let me tell you that in the midst of all these trips, God is doing amazing things in the lives of the students, and it is thrilling to watch and to be a part of it.

Just a week a week ago Mandy and I took a group of students, sixth and seventh graders, up to a camp called Shamineau. A lot of you are familiar with it. Lots of your stories started there. Some of my story started there also as I heard the Gospel there so clearly when I was 12 years old. Nineteen years later I was able to come full circle and bring my own group of students up there and tell them about this Jesus, whom I started to learn about at Shamineau. One of the things that became really clear to me up at Shamineau is that kids don't talk the way that I used to talk. Their language is changing. They use these words that don't at all mean what I used to know them to mean. For example, I was sitting with a group of guys, and they were telling me about how sick this guy was. "Oh, this guy is so sick!" And I'm thinking, "Well, I'll go get the nurse. What's wrong with this kid? We've brought all sorts of medicine. We'll fix him right up." Or another conversation, "I know this guy, and he is so bad. He is just bad." I'm thinking, "Do I need to talk to him? Is there a problem? Is it his behavior? Is he saying bad things? What seems to be the problem here?" They look at me like I'm a dork. "Lee, it means they are cool. I can't believe

you didn't know that." I'm thinking, "Well, ten years ago if you would have told me something was sick or bad, there was a problem."

We may not have used those words, but how many of us have had a conversation at a grocery store or a movie store or the coffee shop where you bump into someone you maybe went to high school with or an old coworker and you have a conversation that sounds like this? You run into him and you say, "Gosh, how are you? "It's good to see you. How are you doing?" And then you respond politely and say—what do you say? You say, "I'm good. Good. Yeah, thanks for asking." Then the conversation continues, and you say, "You know, we should really get together." "We should. That would be great. We should get together sometime." Then, of course, you respond with, "Yeah, sure. I'll call you." I've walked away from having so many of those conversations and stopped and thought and thought. "I didn't mean any of those things I just said. I didn't miss you. In fact, I don't know that I've thought about you since high school. I don't really want to get together with you, and in fact, I'm not good. I just told you that I am because I didn't want to list the 15 reasons why I'm not." We chuckle but I think as we think about the words that kids use in these casual conversations, so many words have either lost their true meaning or so often we say them without really having any meaning behind them.

We are in this series on the fruit of the Spirit, and the past couple of weeks we have heard from John [Pastor John Crosby] and Rich [Pastor Rich Phenow] and James [Pastor James Madsen] about love and joy and kindness. This morning I am going to talk about one of those words that I really do believe has lost much of its meaning. The word is *good*, or *goodness*, and we find it in the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5. Have you ever noticed how widely and even carelessly we sometimes make use of this word *good*? We call things good like Starbuck's and pizza or the movie we saw last night. Those are the things that we call good. In the bigger story, in the Scriptures, the first time we see this idea of something being good comes up right at the very beginning of Genesis, chapter 1. Lots of us know the creation story, and we know that God created the heavens and the earth and the water and the land and the birds and the animals and the plants and everything, and after God created us, man and woman, in His own image, He looked at everything He created, and He called it—what? He called it very good. But God wasn't talking about good in the way that we use it.

A couple times a year, a couple of other pastors in the area and I study with a rabbi. The rabbi's name is Allen, and he is well versed in the Hebrew Scriptures. He has talked about this word *tov* that God used when He called something good. The connotations of this word *tov* are that we would literally bear seeds of life. For example, an acorn could be good in the sense that its seed would fall to the ground and sprout and bring life, and an animal could lose its life in terms of someone else having life, but when God called us *tov*, when God called us good, He meant something completely different. *Tov* means that we would bear God's seeds of life that we might, in turn, bring life to something or someone else.

Last week I was sitting with Brad Jackson, one of the pastors here at CPC, and we were talking about how this is almost sort of an apologetics piece. We talked about how somehow, somewhere along the way, the church, your pastors, we, have talked to you, whether you are an elder, a deacon, a student, a grandparent, or a first-time attender, and it might not have been the way that we said it or what we said, it might have come in the way that we've acted or in the things that we've asked of you, but we have taught you that there is some kind of goodness checklist. We might have talked about goodness in a way that it seemed like there is a list we

have to check off, something that looks like this. Was I good today? Did I go to my small group? Did I have a quiet time or engage in a service project? Did I tithe? Did I pray? Was I nice?

Now here's the problem. These things aren't bad things, they are good things. The problem lies in that we do so many of these things without Christ, completely on our own in our own effort. I didn't become a Christian until I was 21. I really didn't understand what Jesus desired of my life until I was 21 years old. Until that point I tried to be good at everything I did. I wanted to be good at my role in my fraternity. I wanted to get good grades. I wanted to be in good standing with everybody, and the resounding thought as I became a believer that day in October, a decade ago, was, "God, I am so tired. I am so tired of trying so hard to be good." And I don't know when it happened along the journey of walking with Jesus for the last nine years, but a year ago I found myself in my counselor's office and saw that over the years, I had transposed the attitude that I wanted to be good at everything, into being a good Christian. I wanted to be good at reading my Bible. I wanted to be good at leading Bible studies. I wanted to be a good disciple. I will never forget looking at my Dad across the table, and the very same phrase was bubbling up inside of me. I said, "Dad, I am so tired."

There is a story in the Scriptures where we encounter a man who has similar sentiments. It is a neat unfolding as we watch Jesus respond to this man, whom we know as the rich young ruler. It is found in the Gospel of Matthew 19:16-21, and you can either follow along in your Bibles or with the words up on the screen. Jesus enters into a dialog with this man, and here is what He says.<sup>16</sup> Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

<sup>17</sup> So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

<sup>18</sup> He said to Him, "Which ones?"

Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' <sup>19</sup> 'Honor your father and *your* mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "

<sup>20</sup> The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

So many of us make this story simply about having lots and being rich and how it is hard to be rich and enter in the Kingdom of Heaven. And, yes, that is a piece of this story, but if that is where we leave this story, we miss so much of what God has to teach us. I think about this rich young ruler, and I think about myself. I think about us. We tend to invite people to dinner, to lunch, around our tables, to the cabin on the weekend, to have coffee with us, people who think and act a lot like we do, don't we? We like people who affirm our thoughts and the way that we live and the things that we do. It is important for us to understand the context of what is happening in the bigger picture and where this story falls in the Gospel of Matthew.

With this in mind, Tom Wright in his commentary on Mark notes that if you had asked any Pharisee or any member of another sect of the time, “What should you do to inherit the age to come?” they would almost certainly have given you two replies. First, they would have given you their own detailed interpretation of the Jewish law, that the law itself defined Israel as God’s people but, granted that Israel as a whole was full of sinners, it was necessary to follow a more precise understanding of the commandments. Rabbinic law and the Dead Sea Scrolls have plenty of material like that. Second, as if it weren’t enough to follow the commandments and then a more strict set of the commandments, they would have said that you probably needed to join their group, to become a Pharisee. Then you would be able to enjoy in the present age the security of knowing that you would inherit the age to come or the Kingdom of God as we talk about it today.

We might hear Tom’s words about how people thought, and you might think that that sounds crazy. Of course, we don’t have to just follow the Ten Commandments and then a bigger set of those commandments and be in a certain club. But as I thought about the way that I’m prone to act sometimes and the way that I’ve seen some of us act sometimes, we may not talk about it, but we’ve certainly added on to the list of rules that it takes to be a true Christian, haven’t we? We’ve got it figured out; they don’t. We do this, but they don’t understand that. And as I interacted with this text, I don’t know how different I am in my mentality than these first century Jews I read about. It is interesting to me too, keeping in mind what we have just learned about the people around this table, this guy was a rich young ruler so he was prestigious, and prestigious people were religious people. And while we don’t know whether he was a Pharisee or what sect he was a part of, we know that he tells Jesus that he knows the commandments and that he’s kept them ever since he was a youth, a kid.

Knowing that and knowing that these people would have told you what you needed to do, I bet from the outside, this guy would have boldly told you what he needed to do and also what you needed to do to inherit the Kingdom of God. It is interesting to me that as he encounters Jesus—he could have asked Jesus anything he wanted to—his question is, “What good thing must I do?” It is interesting that on the surface, he probably would have told you what he needed to do, but there was obviously something inside of him, something happening in the deeper places of his heart than on its surface that led him to know that following the rules and being good wasn’t quite working. This resonates with me because the question I ask myself all the time (and maybe you’ve asked yourself this same question) is do I have what it takes? God, am I good enough? It is a hard pill for a 29-year-old male to swallow, but Jesus’ answer with clarity and certainty was, “No, Lee, apart from Me, you don’t have what it takes, and you are not ever going to be good enough.” The Scriptures teach us in Romans 3:12,

<sup>12</sup> ...no one does good, not even one.”

The reality is that in all of us, our own brokenness wins every single time—Jesus’ response to the rich young ruler’s question, “What good thing shall I do?” and his calling him “Good Teacher.” Jesus said, “Why do you call Me good? There is only one who is good and that is God.” “No, not one is good, not one.” We are going to come back to Jesus’ answer in a bit, but in answering this guy’s question of what good thing he must do, Jesus completely turns it upside down, completely redefines what this guy thinks it means to be good. Jesus lists six of the commandments that are all about *doing*. Listen to them. He says, “You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your

father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.” All those things are measurable. We can count them. We can look at people and see from the outside if they are doing them.

Now notice some of the commandments that Jesus leaves out. “You shall have no other God, no idols, nothing should take resonance in your heart the way that I should. Keep My Name separate from all the other language you use. Revere Me.” The commandments that Jesus leaves out have a different place in our lives, and they hold a different place in our hearts. I hear Jesus so clearly saying that He doesn’t want to modify our behavior. He wants to change our lives. He wants to transform our hearts, as He wanted to transform the rich young ruler’s heart. The ruler responds and says, “Yes, Jesus, I’ve done all these things since my youth. You don’t get it, Jesus. I’ve been good. I’ve been really, really good ever since I was a little boy.” You know what my parents told me when I was a little boy when they dropped me off? When you dropped your kids off, your grandkids off, whether at church or for a sleepover or for camping, what did you tell them? “Be good.” “Be a good boy.” “Be a good girl.” It is so deeply ingrained in us, this idea of being good without having any sort of context about what it really means to be good.

In Galatians chapter 5, we see a new word come up. In this list of the fruit of the Spirit, as Paul is describing what God desires to freely give to us as the Spirit dwells inside of us, we see this new word. It is goodness, *agathosune*. That is the original word. It is such an interesting word. It actually only appears four times in all of the Scriptures. Only four times. It is even more interesting to me that this word didn’t even exist in the secular Greek. It only has the connotation of being linked to God’s goodness. Interesting and so different from the way we think about good and goodness, isn’t it? The actual definition of this word *agathosune* is intrinsic goodness as relating to believers. The goodness that comes from God is showing itself in spiritual virtue. Notice very carefully that *agathosune*, that very first word that Paul uses to describe goodness in the fruit of the Spirit, the very first word is intrinsic. It is something that happens inside of you—deep inside.

As I mentioned, I’m on staff in student ministries, and one of the things we are really excited about is our new student leadership program. It is called Impact. We have worked really hard to come up with all sorts of different areas for our students to serve and to grow and to recognize their giftedness. We have students serving on tech teams. We have students serving in our office, helping out with administration. I praise God for kids like that. We have students leading Bible studies. We have students doing all sorts of different things that hopefully will fall under their giftedness. They fill out applications and they have references, and there is a three-part interview process.

In the first room in the interview, we talk about their giftedness. You know, where they see their natural giftings, where they get excited, what comes naturally to them, to help them try to figure out where they belong in this area of leadership. In another room we talk about character and what God requires of people who are stepping into an area of spiritual authority and leadership over other students. And then the last room, my favorite room in that I got to sit there for most of these interviews, was a room where we talked with students about their faith. I got to sit across the table from them for hours and hours. Who would have thought that after hours of interviews, I would be so excited every single time as I would hear these young kids, these young students, tell me about what they are grasping onto about the God that we serve together.

I will carry this story with me until the day that God calls me home. I sat across the table from a girl named Melanie Dahlstrom. Melanie was in my commitment class last year. She is 12 or 13 years old, and I asked her, “Melanie, if you got to spend a year leading a small group of girls, spending a year with them, at the end of that year what one or two things would you hope they would know about God?” Melanie looked at me. It took her a minute, and then her eyes started to well up with tears. She looked me right in the face and she said, “Lee, I would want them to know that God is so good. He is so good!” It sends chills down my spine as I even share this story with you because Melanie wasn’t talking about God is good like Starbuck’s is good or like pizza is good or like the movie was good. Melanie was talking about *agathosune*. Melanie was explaining something intrinsically inside of her that experienced goodness that she couldn’t help but reflect to the world. She understands something about God that I so desperately want to understand. In Melanie’s answer, I heard her echo Jesus’ answer to the rich young ruler some 2,000 years ago. She communicated that day that only God is good. Only God is good. It is not just something that He does. It is not a list of dos and don’ts for Him. It is literally who He is. John Ritenbaugh says this. He says, “God doesn’t just have it or do it. He abounds in it, and He greatly desires to give it to men.” He desires to give it to men. That’s us.

*Agathosune* is more than being gentle and kind. It is our character being energized. I catch that character comes first, and character isn’t something that we can create. Character is something that happens inside of us that forms who we are, and so *agathosune*. If we are to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, then we must have this goodness as a part of who we are. I tend to remember cheesy taglines, so here is one for you. If you take God out of good, you are left with a big, fat zero. Isn’t that so true? If we take the God out of good, we are, in fact, left with a big, fat zero, so take that away with you today. Goodness is our character, who we are. Out of something that God has done in us, we are energized to do good works which God has prepared beforehand. We should or might or could walk in goodness, and it always flows from the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. It is our experience of, not our conjuring up of. It is an outward expression of an inward reality. The fruit of the Spirit that we see in Galatians in so many ways is a regaining of Genesis, chapter 1. It is a return to Eden, and God is giving us goodness again through His Holy Spirit.

The other day, I was out to breakfast with a group of boys who are going to be seniors, and I was talking about this idea. In the midst of that, it became clear to me that I needed to make something else clear. Here is what I am *not* saying. I am *not* saying that it is a bad thing to be good. I am *not* saying it is a bad thing to do nice things or to do any of those things that we had on the checklist earlier. Those are good things. But I *am* saying that we in our flesh and in our brokenness are prone to replace doing and being good with knowing the goodness that comes through the Holy Spirit. My hope for us is that we would not throw away that old goodness but that we would redefine it and tweak it a little bit. And as we lie down to present our resumé to God and to check in with Him at the end of the day, that our resumé would look a little more like this—that today I allowed God’s goodness to be reflected in my thoughts, my words, and my choices.

I’ll leave you with this from the Gospel of John, chapter 7. We find Jesus in the midst of a huge, religious ceremony. The rich young ruler was for sure there and all the Pharisees were there, too. It is a long festival, one of the biggest ones of the year, and Scriptures say that at the height of the festival, at the peak, at the grand finale, Jesus stood up in the midst of all these people (who would have told you so many things that you needed to do to inherit the Kingdom of God), and He says,

<sup>37</sup> ... “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup>Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”

Now I don't think that Jesus was asking a question, I think that Jesus was making a pretty bold statement. That these good people who had all the good rules and good things they thought they must do, Jesus was asking them how it was working for them. He was asking them if anyone was thirsty. Does anyone sense yet, does anybody get yet that this is not what the Scriptures teach? In the very same phrase, Jesus doesn't get angry, He doesn't scream, doesn't yell, doesn't point His finger, but extends an invitation. He says, “If you find yourself in this place, come and believe in Me and believe what I say about the fruit of the Spirit, believe in *agathosune*, that you can experience My goodness and, indeed, that goodness will flow from within you if you do.”

It sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But I'm not always so sure as to how I am to make that happen. It seems so contradictory, even after the sermon I just gave to ask, “How can I make that happen?” While I don't know how we can completely transform our lives, I want to give us a place to start. I want us to take a first step toward allowing Jesus to be at the center of our lives.

We've ordered 2,000 of these booklets for you. This is an incredible resource. I call it an adventure. I can think of no better word because it is an adventure to learn how to walk in the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. John is going to wrap up our series in a couple of weeks and walk you through most of this booklet, but I want to leave you with one exercise. It is called spiritual breathing. It is a step one for us, a place to start. It goes like this. As we recognize our sinfulness, as we catch ourselves grasping onto doing and being good apart from Christ, we would stop and, in that moment, we would recognize it. We would stop and breathe and exhale, and in our exhaling, we would confess. We would invite God into that space and talk with Him about why and how and where we are starting to grasp. We would confess that we have made this more about us than experiencing Him, and we would confess those things as we exhale. And in the next part of breathing, we would inhale and believe in the Scriptures and claim God's promise that He abounds in goodness, that it is His good pleasure to give it to us, and that it is His main desire to dwell in us, and we would listen. As we do that, as we inhale the promises of Scriptures, we would experience God's goodness and we would watch it flow from the deepest places within our hearts.

God, I am so grateful that You really are good and not just that You are good, You don't keep it to Yourself and You don't hoard it, but You desire to lavish it. All You have is ours, God. You have given it to us. We are sealed with Your Spirit. It is finished. We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. Together, Jesus, we would loosen our grip on our lives, loosen our grip on things that we think we need to do, stop adding to the pile, and allow Your goodness to flow from within us. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*