

GOOD IS ENOUGH

Hebrews 4:12-16

Intro

There are times in our lives when we look out at the proverbial landscape before us and all we are able to see are the obstacles. To a certain extent, seeing those obstacles is not a bad thing, because they give us the opportunity to prepare for the journey that is yet to come.

However, and this is something that all of us have done at one time or another, there are days when we look out at the obstacles and think, “it’s just not happening”.

Maybe the barriers appear to be insurmountable.

Maybe we think that we are simply too ill-equipped to take on what is about to take place.

In either case, forward progress grinds to a halt.

What I hear in this passage is a bold declaration that such a mentality no longer holds water because we have an advocate, an advocate who was born of flesh and yet was able to enter into the eternal realm without sin. We have an advocate who understands our brokenness and by God’s grace is able to fill us with everything we need to step out into the world filled with obstacles and live out God’s goodness. The scripture reads this way.

Hebrews 4:12-16

12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.¹³And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.¹⁶Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Amos 5:6-15

Intro

As Christians, we stand upon the foundation of having an advocate who is able to grant us the opportunity to be made anew. So as you hear these words from the Old Testament, listen to them not in a way that is a declaration of ‘just do it...or else’, but instead as a reaffirmation that we are to step out into the world and be those bearers of Christ’s light in a world that can be so broken.

We are not perfect...but in Christ we don’t need to be perfect to be good, to be of God. The scripture reads this way.

Amos 5:6-15

⁶ Seek the Lord and live, or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire, and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it. ⁷ Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground!

⁸ The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name, ⁹ who makes destruction flash out against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress.

¹⁰ They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth. ¹¹ Therefore, because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. ¹² For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins— you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate. ¹³ Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time.

¹⁴ Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. ¹⁵ Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

“Good (is) Enough”

I cannot remember the teacher’s name. But I do remember where I sat in the classroom. It was my 12th grade chemistry class and my teacher, who was rather diminutive (more on that in a second) was walking around returning the tests that we had taken two days prior. I was by no means a kid who did great in science classes but this was one of those tests that I felt I did really well on.

So, when I got the test back and there was red on it, I was really surprised. We then went over all of the questions as a class and when we got to the question that I got marked wrong I became completely dumbfounded because the answer that she gave was the answer that I had put on my paper. I vaguely remember stewing through the rest of class as I waited for an opportunity to speak with the teacher about the clear mistake that she had made.

The bell rang and I walked up to her desk as she stood behind it. I explained to her how I deserved some additional points. She looked at the paper and without looking at me she responded, ‘no, what you have here isn’t good enough’.

In a moment of shock I responded, ‘what are you talking about? I have the right answer!’

She then stepped up two steps on her stool so as to look me in the eye (no, seriously, she was that short) and proceeded to tell me that while my answer was correct the math that I used was not correct, that the formula that should have been used was not: that the question and the answer were like two houses next to one another on the block of a street and that the quickest way to get from the question house to the answer house was by walking right over to it via the formula.

I then distinctly remember saying, “but that doesn’t mean that you can’t go around the block and get to the same house: I got to the same house!”

She stood up on her toes and said again, 'Your answer may be right but it's not good enough!' Needless to say, I did not get any additional points on that test (but low and behold, all these years later, I've got a sermon illustration!).

We've all heard that statement in one way or another said by a variety of people. Some of those folks have been rather inconsequential: 12th grade chemistry teacher anyone?

But we have also heard that critique leveled by other people in our lives, people whom we have trusted, people whom we have looked up to, maybe even people whom we were trying to emulate and even impress.

Then that line of 'it's not good enough' or maybe even worse, 'well, I suppose that's good enough' shows up, and we are deflated if not defeated. In too many circles and for too many individuals this has been internalized as a mentality that if it isn't perfect (or really close!) then it's not good enough.

How many stories have we heard about, how many times have we witnessed, coaches and parents who's kids have won whatever game they've been playing, but you wouldn't know it because the coach, because the parent, is detailing everything that was missed, everything that didn't go exactly right, everything that wasn't perfect.

And they're the team who won!

And mind you, I'm not one of those 'everyone should get a trophy' guys: I'm not. But when something goes well, you recognize and celebrate that!

Think about it a different way: how often have you tried to complement someone only to have them respond with how they thought it could have been better.

So many of us carry that mentality in so many areas of our life, and that absolutely pertains to our life of faith as well: we look at the way that God has called us to live and what we see are the litany of ways that we fall short, or even that we are good but not good enough. Some of us have even been told all of the ways that we don't measure up.

I mean seriously, how many people have a negative view of church, the Bible, and even God because they were told time after time that they were not good enough? I hear it a lot and if I hear it a lot, I can only imagine how often that thought permeates the synapses of not just the people who do cross the threshold of a church but of all those folks who don't feel like that can or they should.

I am sure that there are at least a few of here today who heard that opening line of the second passage ('seek the Lord and live'), and were immediately able to flip it: so if I don't seek the Lord, if I sin, I'm not good enough, and I will die.

It's real easy to get there. It's really easy to get stuck there.

However, when we meander into that mentality, let alone get stuck in that place, we are forgetting a ridiculously important variable: we are forgetting Jesus or, at the very least, limiting the affect that he is able to have in our lives.

That's why I read the scripture lessons in the order that I did because hearing that message of 'be good and live' leaves so many of us feeling like we will never be able to measure up.

Well, the reality is that none of us would be able to measure up on our own,...and we aren't on our own. We have a savior who has gone on before us to be our advocate.

Yes, we are a church that professes that we are a fallen and broken people but so much more powerful than that is the fact that we have the Son of God who gave his life and was raised from the dead so that in spite of all of that brokenness, we are able to be good. And in and through that goodness, God's light is able to shine.

This past Tuesday night I attended the regular denominational meeting and one of the things that I was able to hear from the minister who was preaching stood out to me in a way that just caused me to stop. What I heard him say was, "you don't have to be perfect to be good."

He was absolutely right.

Too many of us have bought into the mentality, have listened to the critiques, where all we see are our faults.

But what does God see? God looks at us through the sacrifice of His son and sees sons and daughters who have been blessed by Him in a multitude of ways, who are able to share His light with the world, keep His eternal fire going, who are good.

We are not perfect but in God we are good! And you know what? With God in the equation, good is enough!

A couple of weeks ago, Linda Santa-Lucia and I attended a 'Conversation' that was attended by seven or eight congregations that were our size and smaller. As we talked, as we shared, a sentiment began to arise. As articulated by one of the pastors, it sounded like this: 'I am failing as a pastor because my church is not as big as the church down the street and doesn't have as many programs as the community around the corner.' Because we were smaller, we viewed ourselves as not good enough.

But as we talked, another reality emerged and it was this: that each of our congregations had been blessed with certain gifts. Not every gift, but certain ones and it is our responsibility to lean into those gifts so that God's light might be able to shine. We can't be all things to all people.

But the reality is that we shouldn't be! Instead, we should use the gifts that we do have so that others might be empowered and for those areas where we are in need, we should seek our partnerships to supplement the area that we aren't necessarily gifted. Just because you are not someone else does not mean that you are a failure! God has blessed you, blessed us, God has made you to use certain gifts and using those gifts is good. By using those gifts we are led to the next arena of service and then the one beyond that, and then the one beyond that.

You don't have to be perfect to be good. You don't have to be perfect to be of God. Good is enough. Good is enough, because Jesus is there with us and for us.

Don't strive to be perfect. Strive to be good for in that goodness, however it manifests itself, God will be there; God will shine. Never forget, always remember, that with God in the equation of your life, good is enough!

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, so many of us have gotten hung up on the belief that we are not good enough. Some have been told that outright. Some have just heard that sentiment through the critiques which can be so readily apparent. God, remind us, remind us in such a way that we will never forget that in Your son, not only are we good enough, but we are able to be good. God, let us believe that truth so that we might be able to go from this place and allow Your presence, Your goodness to be experienced in the world. God, You don't need for us to be perfect; You just need us to trust in Your son for when that happens then Your goodness reigns. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Congregational Prayer

O God, whether we are in a time of crisis or of relative normalcy, help us to see all the good things we have received from You. Let us draw our loved ones close and breathe a prayer of thanks for their safety. Let us look around our homes and wonder at all of the blessings contained therein. Let us put on our clothing and eat our meals and sleep in our beds, and realize how often we take those simple things for granted. We thank You for giving us hearts that are pulled by the needs of others. We pray for those today who are grieving loss, for the elderly and weak, for the sick and depressed, and for those who have lost all hope. Show us how we may share the love of Christ in whatever way we can. God, lead us to be good!

Lord, we lift to You now the prayers of this congregation as they have been collected in our weekly prayer list. We pray for **(Give List)** We pause now to lift to You all of the prayers that we have been carrying with us these past few days. Lord, hear our prayers in the silence of this place. **(Long Pause)**

O God, You know how much we long for control, especially in those moments when stability seems so far away. We pray that we might be able to understand that the results that we feel will be found in obtaining control are, in reality, only found in You. Lord, help us to place all that we are into Your hands, knowing that as we do, not only will we be cared for, but that we will be blessed in ways we will never forget. We pray all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.