

Series: Renewal; Cultivating Beauty from Brokenness

Goodness in a Culture of Brokenness

Psalm 34:8-10, Galatians 5:22-23

Sermon by Men's Minister Josh Brage

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, July 7, 2024

A reading from Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things, there is no law," and an additional reading from Psalm 34:8-10: "Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him. Fear the Lord, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing," the word of the Lord.

Paul: Well, this morning I am really excited to introduce you to my friend Josh Brage. Josh has been serving as part of our men's team for the last few years. He actually was a resident with us this past year as well, helping with our Wednesday night programming and some of our discipleship initiatives. Excuse me, you are really glad I am not preaching today, and so I would love to invite Josh up here. Would you please welcome him to the stage? So excited. He's got a great message for us on goodness, and here is what I want you to know about Josh before we kick off today. Josh loves this church so, so, so deeply. In fact, one of my first interactions with Josh was, well, actually, my first interaction with Josh was playing flag football with him at a tournament we used to do, and I did not like him then. We did not get along on the football field very well, but after that we got along pretty well. We actually met to talk about men's ministry on the morning when the world shut down for Covid. I asked Josh if he would be our men's ministry director, and then literally that afternoon, everything shut down, so I do not know if that bodes well for our interaction or not, but it was great. Over the next two years we figured out how to do men's ministry when we could not do church, but Josh loves this church so deeply. Waterstone means so much to him, and he has served in so many different capacities, whether it is helping with tech on Sunday mornings, helping kids ministry, or leading discipleship on Wednesday night, so I am so excited for the message that he has for you all today. So, would you guys welcome him? I am going to let him take it away.

Josh: Thank you, Paul. Yeah, I love shutting stuff down around here, men's ministry apparently included, so let's pray. That is enough about me. Let's turn our attention back towards the Lord. Lord, we come to you this morning. You are the center of everything. In you we live and move and have our being. We love your presence that we can already feel here this morning, and we lean in right now, Holy Spirit, to what you have for us. Speak to us, guide us, and move us closer to you today through this message and through our time together as a church, amen.

This sermon series, I am so excited that he assigned this word, "goodness," to me, because certainly I have received that from this church, but this series has been really cool. This series, "Renewal," that we have been in for the past few weeks, the thread that has been running through it is how the Holy Spirit, when He shows up, when He works in our community, what things He produces. When the Holy Spirit works in our lives and in our community, He produces good things. He produces joy and peace and kindness and faithfulness, loyalty, and self-control. He produces these things when the Holy Spirit shows up, and I am super excited to talk about how the Holy Spirit, when He moves in our midst, He produces goodness. Today's message is called, "Goodness in a Culture of Brokenness," and it starts in Psalm 34

with David in a cave. Really interesting, so this is one of the few Psalms that actually tells us where it was written, about this episode it was written for, but David finds himself in a cave. Who was David, and how did he get there?

David, you remember, at this time was the promised future king of Israel. We all remember this story, right? There are kids in the room. We all know David. He was a young shepherd boy that was kind and sensitive and a musician, and this old prophet shows up and anoints him as the next king of Israel. The only problem was there was a current king of Israel, and David spends years of his life serving the king, and eventually things go poorly, and King Saul turns violent, and David has to flee Jerusalem and spend months and then even years running from King Saul, who seeks to end his life and the threat to the throne. So, this Psalm in particular comes from this time in David's life, after an episode where David and maybe some of his men actually had gone to hide out. They had spent months hiding in various caves throughout the mountains, and they went to hide out in the Philistine city of Gath.

Now the Philistines were the enemy of Israel. These were the bad guys to the Israelites, and he hides out in the city of Gath, and somehow, they discover who he is. They discover that it is David. Maybe it is because he is the guy that killed their nine-foot-tall giant, Goliath, who was from Gath. Maybe they did not really think very highly of David, and so his life again is under threat, and it is this really crazy episode, where to escape with his life, David pretends to go crazy. He starts to thrash about, and he starts to claw and scratch at the doors of wherever they were holding him, and he begins to foam at the mouth, probably like some of you kids last night when it was time to take a bath to get ready for church. I can imagine that he was just crazy, and it worked. Somehow this episode of craziness allows David to escape, and he escapes to the cave of Adullam. Can you imagine what David was going through at this time of his life? In this cave, David is stuck between the promises that God has made to him, the promises of goodness, the promises of destiny, the promise of the throne, and his current reality, which is broken. Can you imagine him feeling a little stuck?

Have you ever found yourself caught between the great promises of God and maybe a current broken reality? I think we all have been. I think for some of us, maybe it is a career that started out super promising. We are the top of our class, the top of our field, and we make it to the career, and somehow that just turns into just another job. Or maybe you are single, and you do not want to be, or maybe you are married, and marriage always starts so well. You fall in love. You get all excited. You stand before God and family. I did that out in the hub in 2011, and you make promises, promises of goodness, expectations. Everything is up, and yet, somehow marriage sometimes ends up in a place that instead feels broken. Hannah and I have absolutely been there. For us, our cave has been down at Saint Joseph hospital, where multiple times now we have sat in a hospital room, stuck between what we know God has for our family and the cruel present reality of brokenness. Can we all imagine what this cave feels like?

Psalm 34 was written specifically, it is a theological reflection on this type of moment, the type of moment when we find ourselves stuck between goodness, promises of goodness, and brokenness. The Psalm is already preaching to us. Right in the middle of this Psalm, out of this time of David's life, is an extended reflection on the goodness of God. It almost seems like the promise of this Psalm is that we can experience God's goodness even in our brokenness. Let's take a look at this and see how it works. We are going to talk about how God is good, why we don't always experience that, why things are so broken, and we will look at how we can experience this better.

Let's look at verse eight here: "Taste and see that the Lord is good." The first place to start when we are talking about goodness is how to define goodness, and this word "goodness," is tricky. It is hard

to define. It is used over seven-hundred times describing God in the Bible, and it's really hard to pin down, because the Lord is good. The definition of goodness is God, and sometimes God is too expansive for us to really get our minds around, so what we learn here, right in the Psalm, right away, is that the Lord is good. The Lord is infinitely good. He is unchangeably good. He is constantly good. This is the story that we all believe. This is what we get all excited about. This is why we come together on a Sunday to declare and proclaim that the Lord is good. His attitude towards us is good. His actions towards us are good.

We see this from page one of the Bible, in the story in Genesis one, "In the beginning God created." We see this explosion of goodness. We see right from page one, a good God building a good world full of good things with good people to enjoy it. We see land and light. They are good. We see sea and sky. They are good. We see dolphins and whales and spiders and grass and trees. Good, good, good. We even see human beings. We see men, fine, women, good, and on the last day, in the last verse of Genesis one, God sits back, and He sees all that He has made, and what does He say? He says that it was very good, so from page one on we know up here that God is good. That is not quite what this Psalm is talking about, though. Let's look at it again. We all know God is good, but this Psalm is talking about tasting and seeing. This song makes the assumption that God is good, but it also invites us to experience his goodness. That is different.

Happy Fourth of July. Did everyone show up with all ten fingers here today? That is good. What was for dessert? Kids, what was for dessert? Cookies. Anybody else? What was it? Puppy chow, that is a good one. That is really good, rice crispy treats, okay. Was it good? Fruit pizza. Thank you, J.J. That's my boy, and I wanted to talk about fruit pizza, so he knows. He already knows. He got the preview, so what if my wife made fruit pizza for us, and I love fruit pizza. Now imagine with me that she does this. Imagine she goes to all the work making fruit pizza. She has it all lovely. It is beautiful. It is lovely. It is wrapped in plastic. It is in the refrigerator, ready to be eaten. Now imagine with me that at eight o'clock on the night of the Fourth of July, before the fireworks happen, it's now time for dessert, and she gathers everyone together. Imagine your mom did this, gathers everybody together and says, "All right, kids, it is time for dessert. I have made you a lovely fruit pizza," and imagine that she begins to describe it. She says, "Hey, it is lovely, sugar cookie, just perfectly baked, a little bit chewy, still a little bit soft, but it is going to hold up. The cream cheese frosting is a little extra, because apparently, we will need a little extra frosting. The fruit is perfectly ripe, the raspberries are tart, the strawberries are sweet, the blueberries are perfect," and imagine she gets done describing it, and she says, "Great, I hope you guys enjoyed the fruit pizza." I would be a little disappointed, wouldn't you? The whole point of the fruit pizza is not to be described. The whole point of the fruit pizza is that it can be seen and tasted.

Listen, listen, listen, the goodness of God is like this fruit pizza. It is not meant to be left in the refrigerator. It is meant to be tasted and seen. The goodness of God is meant to actually be experienced in our lives. That is one of the things that makes church so cool. Right now, this room is full of people from all kinds of different backgrounds, all kinds of different stories, all kinds of different places, all kinds of different theological backgrounds. You have a Cornhusker preaching to you right now, but what makes us special is that this diverse group of people comes together on a Saturday and a Sunday, and we are united by a shared experience. This room is full of people who have experienced the goodness of God in their lives, amen.

So where have you experienced that? Maybe it was when you were a teenager, and you first found Jesus. Maybe it was somewhere in your life when He carried you through a difficult time. Maybe it is a place where you didn't have the money or didn't have the job or didn't know how you were going to move

across the country, and God showed up and delivered you. What makes the church special is we are people who have experienced the goodness of God.

So, God is good. We experience his goodness. The Psalm invites us to experience it. Then why is there so much brokenness in the world? The Psalm has an answer for it, verses 9 and 10. Let's read this together, "Fear the Lord, you, his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing." This Psalm paints us this picture and introduces us to this interesting word here, "lack." This Psalm paints a picture of when everyone is seeking the Lord, when everyone is fearing the Lord, when everyone is going that way, good things happen. When everyone is seeking the Lord, when everyone is fearing the Lord, they will lack no good thing. I would like to say that the reason we have so much brokenness in this world, brokenness is caused by looking elsewhere for goodness.

To illustrate this, I want to share a story from Jesus' life. This is a really fun story. It is found in the gospel of Mark and again in Luke. It is the story of the rich young ruler. It is in the middle of Jesus' ministry. He is running around preaching, healing, delivering, spreading goodness as He does, and this man comes to Him. We do not know much about his backstory. He was rich, he was young, and he was influential. That is what we know. He kneels before Jesus, and it seems like maybe he dramatically lifts his hands. We do not quite know, but he says, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus gives them a really interesting response. By the way, Jesus is always giving people really interesting responses. He says, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God," and Jesus presses him. He says, "You know all the commandments, rich young ruler. You know do not murder, do not steal, do not cheat on your wife." The guy gets excited, "Done. I have never done any of those things since the day I was born." Scripture says that Jesus lovingly looks at him, and He says this. He says, "One thing you lack. Sell all you have, and give to the poor." This man stands up. Scripture says that he walks away sad. This man walks away miserable after encountering Jesus. Why? I think it is because he was looking for goodness in the wrong place. I think he was looking for goodness in two places. I see this in his life, and I see this in our culture. I think he was looking for goodness by being a good person and by building a good life. I think these are two ways he and we look for goodness apart from God.

Have you guys seen these shirts in town? There is a popular Denver brand called, "Be a good person." Have you guys seen those black shirts, white words? Very simple. The world seems to have this perspective that the answer is just go be a good person. If we want to experience goodness, just go do it. This guy was looking for goodness that way. He was looking for goodness in his own moral perfection. I call this checklist morality.

What is checklist morality? We all know this, right? We think somewhere, some people think that somewhere up there, there is a giant accounting firm, and they are watching us on the video screens like Santa Claus and one of those big crazy North Pole TV screens, and we think there are a whole bunch of elves or something running around judging everything we do, every action we take, every thought we make, every move we make, like the Police song, apparently. We think that someone is out there just watching us and assigning point values to everything we do. Stay faithfully married to your spouse for your whole life with the church group, plus 50,000 points. Book a destination wedding, invite all of your friends, minus 5000 points. Take the kids camping, plus 1000 points. Root for the Chiefs, minus 5000 points, right? Think Taylor Swift is good for football, minus 250,000 points. You are out. You can't play. You do not have any good points. What is the problem with checklist morality? What is the problem with scoreboard behavior modification?

The problem is, I have three problems. Thanks for asking. I have three problems with it. The first problem with being a good person is we do not know the score. We do not know. It is this invisible score. We cannot possibly know if we are winning or not. Paul Joslin referred to me really enjoying the winning part of things. I am defending my title as a softball champion. The problem with scoreboard morality is we cannot possibly ever be good enough. We do not know the score. We have no idea what is actually going on. The best we can do is to just limit the bad stuff, try to promote good stuff, and just hope that things work out, but we do not really know. Look at this guy, the rich young ruler. This guy had spent his life doing the right things. Jesus said, “Do this. Do not do that.” He said, “Great, check, check, check,” but he was still fundamentally insecure about his future. He did not know where he was going. He said, “What else do I need to do?” He was fundamentally stuck. The second place just does not work.

This also does not work because what happens when our lists are different? What happens when my list says that it is bad to root for the Chiefs, and your list says it is good to root for the Chiefs? What happens? We know what happens, all kinds of things. It is a lot like the list that the apostle Paul gives us in Galatians 5, division, strife, anger, hatred, and fear. This idea does not produce goodness. List-keeping does not produce goodness.

The last reason that do’s and don’ts do not work, and this is the important one, this is the heart of our sermon series. External behavior modification does not produce internal transformation. This is the whole message of Galatians 5. The whole message is that doing all of these right things and avoiding all of these wrong things does not actually change our hearts. God is interested in so much more than our following all the rules. He wants to transform us from people who need a list of all of the rules into people who look and think and act like Jesus. That is one of the mottos of this church. We want to be like Jesus. We need something else. We need something else other than the checklist to find goodness, so this guy leaves disappointed, apparently because he was looking for goodness from his own list-keeping.

He was also looking for goodness through building a good life. I think that we think this way too. This man was rich, he was young, and he was powerful. Is not that what our culture tells us, that the way to experience goodness is to run out and spend all of your life, all of your energy, and build a good life? Now we know this guy, right? We know this guy. He went to a good school. He played good lacrosse. He got into a good college. He got a good scholarship. He found a good wife. He got a good entry level job, and now he is building a good retirement. He owns his second good house. Well, now we know this guy, but look at this guy. He is miserable.

What is the problem with building a good life? What is the problem with pursuing happiness? The problem is this, when we pursue happiness for ourselves over pursuing the kingdom of God for others, the law of diminishing returns kicks in, and we end up deeply unsatisfied. Society is starting to catch up to this idea. The National Library of Medicine just posted a series of studies, and they studied happiness and what works for people and what does not, and what they found was absolutely fascinating. They found that the higher people value happiness, the less happy they become. Look at this quote from the study, “Valuing happiness could be self-defeating, because the more people value happiness, the more likely they will feel disappointed.” Look at this rich young ruler. He is rich. He is young. He has followed all the rules, and he is sitting at the feet of Jesus, miserable.

I have been serving as the men’s ministry guide for a while, and I have had a lot of very similar conversations. Maybe the word “miserable” doesn’t come up, but you ask them, “How are things going? How is your job? How is your life? How is your wife? How are your kids?” and you get the same answer. “Good, good, good, good,” right, and they don’t quite always say it this way. They only say “disappointed”

or “bombed.” They do not quite say that, but they do use this word a lot, “unfulfilled.” Somehow, the good life that we all work so hard to pursue leaves us feeling a little unfulfilled. Maybe we are looking for goodness in the wrong place. It seems like the moral of this story is that the more we seek goodness by building ourselves up as good people with good lives, the less likely it is that we will experience his goodness.

Let’s go back to the Psalm, and let’s figure out now where we can experience his goodness. Let’s go back to our story. Imagine being David. I gave the whole story of David up to this point. Do you know his relationship with Saul before this? It was really a plus one. He had been anointed king. David went and saved Israel from the big giant, and he got elevated to a very high position. David served in the palace for many years. He fought battles for Saul. David married Saul’s daughter. He was in the palace. There are even these interesting episodes, when as Saul began to age and get a little bit kooky and go through hard times, David would come and play soothing music. David had a position with Saul of intimacy and of power, but the Saul that David once knew was gone and had been replaced instead by this vile, evil, violent, crazy person, and David is sitting in this cave, not just stuck between what he wants for his life. David wants to be king, he is stuck in a place where he is hurt, where a man he once trusted, the highest, most powerful man, is chasing him, trying to kill him. I imagine David felt betrayed and hurt and even frustrated. He may have even felt like his heart was broken, and here is what we find in Psalm 34. We find in verse 18 that the Lord is close to the broken-hearted, and He saves those crushed in spirit. In the middle of the place where we are stuck between expected and promised goodness and betrayal and disappointment and disillusionment, somehow, right there, goodness can be experienced. This is what makes the cave so unique. The cave is the place of our grief and the place where we can experience the goodness of God.

This verse is incredibly special to me. In my Bible, there are three dates scrawled in the margin next to it, three times now that my wife and I have lost babies. Once, in 2016, the day after Thanksgiving, and again twice in 2021, we lost the baby at twenty weeks, and then at fifteen weeks. Miscarriage, if you do not know, I did not really know, but occurs between one-in-ten and one-in-five pregnancies. For us, it is three in five, and it is very difficult. In one episode, everything was totally fine on a Wednesday, and by Friday, things were not, and we have sat in this cave, completely broken-hearted, completely crushed in spirit, and what we found each time was this radical, unmistakable, palpable nearness of God. I do not understand it. All I can do is receive it. In the hardest points of our life, in the most broken spots in my life, God was closest to me, and not only that, but also, here is the power of the cave. Not only that, but also, He does not leave us broken. Somehow, in some way, God comes into these moments, and He starts to put things back together. I do not understand it. I do not get it, but it somehow it works.

This is a really hard thing to express, so it’s best to express it through art. Back in 2019, I was here, and I had been brought in to help run some tech for the memorial service of the twentieth anniversary of Columbine. It was a beautiful service, but the most striking moment of that night to me was when a Japanese artist, he is from New York, Makoto Fujimura, gifted the high school with a bull, a piece of kintsugi. We will put that up here in a second. Here is a description of Kintsugi. This is from his website. “Kintsugi is the Japanese art of putting broken pottery pieces back together with glue. Rather than trying to hide the damage, kintsugi highlights the repair. The imperfections are what make it beautiful and valuable. A broken piece that is put back together has more of a story. It is stronger and more resilient than something that has stayed perfect.” We experience the goodness of God, not in our perfection, but actually, in our brokenness. This is the grace of God that works in our lives.

We experience the goodness of God, not because everything goes fine all the time, not because everything is perfect all the time. No, no, no, no. I stand here today to tell you things don't always go well. We stand here today as a group experiencing the goodness of God, because when things fall apart, when things break, they break for all kinds of reasons. They break for trauma. They break because of accidents. They break because of sickness. They break because of other people's decisions. Broken people break people all the time. Sometimes our lives are broken because we broke it. Some of us, it seems like, are good at breaking our lives and the lives of people around us, but here is the gospel. The gospel is that when things are broken, God does not stay away. He actually moves towards us, and because of his grace and because of his goodness, He sweeps the pieces back together like a Japanese kintsugi artist, and he starts to glue our lives back together by his grace. This art takes forever, layer after layer of healing. Layer after layer of gold is painted over the broken pieces of this pottery and over the broken pieces of our lives, and layer over layer, the Lord puts us back together.

This is what makes church special. Stay with me. The church is specially positioned to spread the goodness of God, because God uses us to put other people back together. We are a special community, not because we are perfect, not because we impress each other, not because we have it all together. No, no, no, no, no. We are a special community because we spread the goodness and grace of God. This is what Hannah and I have experienced from this church. We have experienced the goodness of God through friendly text messages, through actual relationship and friendship, through people who know how to show up and shut up. We have experienced the goodness of God through shepherd's pies being delivered to our house in the worst moments of our lives. That is where the goodness of God has shown up in our lives, through our actions and behaviors, through our personhood, and through our embodiment. This is where we experience the goodness of God, in our brokenness.

As we head now towards communion, I want to share one more thought. This is a quote from this artist. We know this is all true, because we most clearly see the goodness of God in the brokenness of God. Look at this quote, "He," Jesus, "is the only savior with glorified wounds, and through them, the light of new creation shines into our broken world." On the cross, we see a perfect God, who does not shy away from our brokenness, does not stay away from our sin and our corruption and our rebellion. No, no, no. On the cross, we see a perfect God, whose hands and feet get nailed to the cross. A crown of brutally sharp, violent thorns gets shoved into his head. A sword from a soldier pierces his side. Our perfect God becomes broken for us. This is where we see the goodness of God, as in the brokenness of Jesus Christ on the cross, and we know this is true, because even following Jesus' resurrection, this is fascinating. Jesus could come back as whatever, and you remember Thomas with Jesus. He says, "Jesus, let me see the scars." Even the post-resurrection glorified body of Jesus still carries the scars. The goodness of God is seen in the brokenness of God. He was wounded for our transgressions, and He was bruised for our iniquities, and it is by his wounds we are healed. This is the message of communion. This is the thing that unites us, the thing that we celebrate.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, He took the bread and broke it, saying, "This is my body broken for you." He took the cup, and He shared it, saying, "This is my blood, shed for you," and every time we drink this wine and eat this bread, we remember the goodness of God. I'm going to invite us now. We will take a second if you want to, but I want to invite us now to come to the communion tables. Gluten-free is in the middle as usual, but come and taste and see the goodness of God, amen.

34:49 minutes