

Kindness and goodness (Is 54:4-10, Luke 18:18-30)

Next in series on fruit of Spirit – only one putting 2 together (so could fit into 8 weeks, and look at God's faithfulness for harvest last week!).

Key point as Melvyn said last week: fruit of Spirit = be like Jesus. Jesus calls us to follow him, and gives us his spirit to change us from inside out. Jesus was good and Jesus was kind – so his Spirit will (super)naturally lead us towards being more good and more kind.

What do words mean?

Word kindness only used once in NT here. Can also mean 'good' or 'gentle', but most intriguing, word used as root of most common slave-name. Suggests that it is the ideal quality of a servant – a instinctive kind-heartedness, or willingness to give to others.

Goodness is much more common – word used 100+ times in NT. Can also mean generous, but most important reference is here in this passage (repeated in other versions): goodness is fundamentally something which describes God: READ v18-19. Jesus having a joke with the man, but also making a serious point. We often work with relative definitions of good: 'I'm a good person, I've never killed anyone'. But real goodness has this quality of purity, perhaps slightly of awe. Someone who radiates goodness changes the room when they enter it. As Jesus points out, a good person doesn't just give a small token to charity, they sell off their spare stuff (note: possessions here refers to everything beyond the basic necessities). Goodness attracts and maybe repels at the same time.

A good person doesn't just agree to dine with the respectable religious leaders but breaks his meal to offer comfort to a prostitute whose presence scandalises the other guests. Indeed, his goodness 'infects' the prostitute, not the other way round. Real goodness is infectious.

A good person sees his religion corrupted by the chance to make money, and decides to clear them out. Not so he can feel good about himself but so that foreigners have somewhere to pray alongside his own people. Real goodness isn't always popular, and often controversial.

A good person looks his enemy in the eye and says 'father forgive them, they know not what they do.' Goodness chooses to think the best of someone, even when they display the worst.

A kind person sees a huge crowd of hungry people and decides to do something about it, rather than leave them stranded.

A kind person is unexpectedly grabbed by a social outcast and stops to bless her first and restore her to the community, even with other urgent calls on his time.

A kind person is asked for an outrageous favour by his friends and takes time to discuss it with them and show them a better way.

A kind person accepts hospitality from a traitor and watches his life transformed in an afternoon.

Ultimately, we can try to define words like kindness and goodness, but in the end we understand them by watching them in action. Jesus was good and Jesus was kind – and this is what *that* looks like.

Most teachers will tell you that ultimately what we learn is more caught than taught. One of the difficult things that every preacher has to admit is that for all our fine words on Sunday – and we hope some of them are remembered – we learn a lot of the really valuable stuff by watching and doing. Two simple observations for you today:

(1) We copy the people we admire. We all do it. Someone gets a new thing and sings its praises – and we think yeah, I'd like one of those too. Turn on the telly in the morning and even the some of the main channels will have teleshopping. (Recommend a look!) Approach is always the same. 'I bought this cloth/wrinkle cream/vacuum cleaner/vitamin supplement and it changed my life.'

Same with faith. We copy what we admire. Jesus is pretty clear on this – doesn't just say 'believe me,' he says 'follow me.' If you really admire me, then do what I say, in fact do what I do. If we claim to follow Jesus but don't try and live like he lived, then you could argue that we don't think much of him at all, because we humans copy what we admire.

That's what happened back in Jesus' day. Only 2 individuals (apart from Jesus) called 'good' in NT:

- Joseph of Arimathea – gave up his tomb for Jesus (temporary let)
- Barnabas (good man, full of Holy Spirit – of course) – gave away a field to provide for needy, nurtured a young Paul to bless church in Antioch, generous-spirited with Mark when Paul wanted to fire him.

We copy what we admire. Barnabas was filled with Jesus' goodness by his Spirit, so showed the same sort of generosity as Jesus showed.

I've seen it too myself among Jesus modern-day followers:

- Friend Dave at station KINDNESS
- Blessing of families with newborn babies at our church (meals every day) KINDNESS
- John Kirkby set free from debt and decided that he could pass that on to others – founded small charity called Christians Against Poverty. 20 years anniversary this month – helped 70,000 people last year with free debt advice and help, and 1,000 gave their lives to Jesus as part of the blessing they'd received
- Mark Greene campaigning phone booth ads (true goodness not holier than thou but making our society better) GOODNESS
- My friend James decided that it wasn't right that none of the major chocolate companies in this country offered Fair Trade chocolate and decided to do something about that. He wrote to Cadbury's and inspired by his example, I did too. We both met one of their senior managers and James kept up the lobbying in the background. A year later, Cadbury's Dairy Milk bars went Fair Trade (NB take no credit for that, small part of big thing God did)

(2) Brings us to second underlying principle: **We become more like the people we spend time with.** If want to be more like Jesus, we need to spend as much time as possible with him. More we learn, more his love impacts our lives, the more we'll pass it on to others. Jesus rubs off on us.

We also need to be around other good and kind people who in turn inspire us to good and kind things. Why church is not just a Sunday activity but a community. Time we spend is not just a practical arrangement required for us all to be at worship at same time. We rub off on each other.

Those CAP clients gave their lives to Jesus not primarily because someone taught them, but the love of Jesus, but because someone showed them the love of Jesus. Jesus rubbed off on them.

I got involved in campaigning for Fair Trade because James inspired me. Jesus rubbed off on James. James rubbed off on me. That's how it works.

You want to be more like Jesus? More good, more kind? Let Jesus rub off on you. And we'll rub off on each other. And God's Spirit will develop that fruit in us. We copy the people we admire. We become more like the people we spend time with.

Who rubs off on you?