Defense: I am a Good Person, That’s What Matters Memory Verse: John 10:14

July 6th, 2025 Scripture Reading: John 10:7-16

**[SLIDE 1]**

 Last week, in our deep dive into apologetics, we asked the question about miracles. People do not come back from the dead so how can you believe in the resurrection? So we laid out some reasons why the story of Jesus’ resurrection is the only story that actually makes sense of the historical facts. Simply put, we believe in the resurrection because the evidence shows that it happened! We are here today worshipping in a church because something happened 2,000 some years ago on a certain Sunday morning.

 Our question last week concerned historical data, but now we turn to a much more open-ended question, it’s one that we all struggle with even if we don’t ask it outrightly, and it revolves around the notion of goodness:If I am a good person…isn’t that all that matters? Isn’t that the goal of life?

 **[SLIDE 2]** We have a baby at home he’s a little over three months old and he is the darling of the home, the center of attention, the one everyone seems to be focused on. And that is okay. Essentially, that is the way it should be. Joel is the neediest, the most precarious, the most fragile human in the home. On a typical day in my living room you will see my wife holding Joel, maybe feeding him, maybe cooing at him while gazing into his perfectly beautiful blue eyes. If you slightly shift your focus you will also notice the giant head of a two year old honing in on the action. See, everyone in the house loves Joel, but some more than others. **[SLIDE 3]** Magdala is not quite so happy. Don’t get me wrong – she can’t help but love Joel, but she is torn. Her world is turned upside down. She has officially fallen from the coveted spot of “baby in the family”. So how is Maggie to respond to her new situation. With understanding? With grace and deferment? No…she steals the baby’s pacifier, she regresses in her own potty training, she sticks out her tongue to her parents and other adults, she melts down in tantrums that are unbelievably loud and violent. Maggie is jealous and having a hard time adjusting to the big changes happening in her life. This is completely normal for all kids her age who get a new sibling, or move to a new town or have some other major life change. Kids and adults all need time to adjust. Maggie is perfectly normal, but is she good?

 What does “good” **[SLIDE 4]** mean? A standard definition says that something is good if it is **[SLIDE 5]** desired or approved of. Good also includes the notion of being morally right. Maggie may be expressing normal behavior for a two-year-old, but, by this definition, she is not good. Her normal behavior is not desired or approved of, her normal behavior is not morally right. So, we can logically conclude that Magdala Judy Bonsell is not good; she is not even neutral….she is bad. But before you start wondering why I am picking on my daughter, let’s extend out the logic. We have already agreed that Maggie is completely normal in her behavior so that tells us that two-year-old humans are normally bad. As I love to point out, you never have to teach a child to shout, “Mine!” But you do have to teach them the concept of sharing. Kids are bad.

 Well, what about adults? **[SLIDE 6]** What happens as we grow up? We learn to control our impulses, we learn to consider others. We learn many tools that help us cope in a universe that does not hold us as the center. Certainly we know of many bad people who do not seem to possess these same tools, but we are also aware of plenty of good people who serve others and live a well-ordered life. But is reality so simple? Can we really divide people along the lines of **[SLIDE 7]** good and bad? Every “good person” is aware that they have issues in their own life. They know about their own imperfections. There is always room for improvement. And people we might consider bad certainly have some good qualities. In all honesty then, each human is a mix. We possess some good and some bad qualities.

 But we are talking about goodness here, not perfection. No one is claiming to be perfect. Really, what it comes down to is **[SLIDE 8]** percentages. If you are 51% good and 49% bad, then we should be able to deem you as a good person. If only we could know what that percentage actually was. If only we all walked around with a real time chart or indicator over our heads.

 But there is another problem with this assessment. Is good based on what we do or what we think about doing? **[SLIDE 9]** Is good a determination of what we do or of who we are? Is our thought life important? Do our motives play into this?

 If we were really honest with ourselves about our relationship with the word “good” we would have to conclude that we are not sure. When it comes to assessing the goodness or badness of people, even of ourselves, we cannot be certain where the percentages land. Not to mention that they would be ever-changing from one moment to the next. I cannot truly claim that I am a good person, the best I could do would be to say that I think I am a good person. As far as I can assess I am a good person…at least I am today…for the moment…but, in the next moment, that could all change.

 So while we are left guessing on our own, **[SLIDE 10]** the Bible has an answer. The Bible brings clarity to this question of goodness in a surprising way.

 In Mark chapter 10 Jesus is approached by a rich man who says to Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?” And Jesus goes on to answer the question by referring to the ten commandments. But before he gets to his answer, Jesus sneaks in this curious little question: **[SLIDE 11]** “Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God.” Let’s break this conversation down here for a moment. The rich man apparently has heard of Jesus and is familiar with his reputation. Jesus is widely regarded as a prophet of God who teaches with an authority that surpasses the other Jewish leaders at the time. People regard Jesus as wise and everyone is impressed by him. So naturally, as he approaches, the rich man needs to address Jesus in some way, he is coming wanting an answer to an important question, so he says, “Good teacher, I have a question.” But before he gets to the answer, Jesus basically corrects this man. “Why do you call me good?” Well, we just talked about all the reasons why Jesus would be considered a good teacher. Yet Jesus pivots this man’s focus. **[SLIDE 12]** “No one is good except God.” You want to talk about goodness, you must have God as part of the conversation. According to Jesus you cannot have a notion of goodness without God.

 And logically, this must be the case. If you and I go into a **[SLIDE 13]** pizza place together and I order my favorite: Pepperoni, with green pepper and onion cooked extra dark, you might very well say, but I hate onions or I don’t like crispy crust with burnt cheese, that’s not good. And I would say you are wrong. That is simply the best type of pizza, it is very good!

 So, you can see the problem. Each of us has a different opinion on what makes for a **[SLIDE 14]** good pizza. But the same is true when it comes to motives, or policies or behaviors or morality in general. The term “good” can actually become pretty vague very quickly. But Jesus brings clarity front and center. Jesus is saying, “Let’s not be confused about what is good and what is not. Let’s not get caught up in differences of opinion. Let’s look to God. God is good. Not only does God define goodness, but he exclusively defines goodness. Jesus says, “No one is good except the one God.”

 God is good **[SLIDE 15]** …I am not. I might think that I am good or at least 51% good, but, according to Jesus, I don’t actually get to determine my goodness. My opinion on the matter doesn’t actually count. God will decide because God, and God alone, is good. And this part of why Christianity is the best worldview. Because who else would you rather have defining what is good? Should it be the government? Should it be the strongest person in the room? Should it be doctors and lawyers and judges? Well, surely all of these individuals have their own opinions on what is good. Should it be a spiritual leader like Mohmmad? Or maybe Jospeh Smith? But even Jesus Christ himself points beyond himself to God himself. Jesus’ answer should be our answer as well. Don’t look to me for goodness, look where I am looking; to God himself.

 So the question we started with was, **[SLIDE 16]** If I am a good person, isn’t that all that matters? And Jesus informs us that no one is good. So this changes the question. Instead, we should ask, **[SLIDE 17]** since I am not a good person, what matters?

 I think Jesus explains this question as well. Let’s look at Matthew 7:21 **[SLIDE 18]**. In this section Jesus is getting ready to wrap up his sermon on the mount. And he pulls no punches as he talks about what it takes to get into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus lets us know what really matters.

 READ Matt. 7:21-23

There are two things going on here but really they are one thing presented in two ways. On one hand Jesus says what matters is that we do the will of his Father who is in heaven. God, who alone is good, has a will, a desire that we are to carry out. That’s not so easy right? Because we have our own will and our own opinions on how the pizza should be made. But what matters is that we enact God’s will in our lives and in this world. But that’s only part of what matters. Jesus goes on. It’s actually not enough to do good stuff. It is not enough to do God’s will. Verse 23 says “Then I’ll tell them, ‘I’ve never known you. Get away from me, you people who do wrong.” This then is what really matters: knowing Jesus. Not knowing about him, not living out his teachings, not memorizing what he said…do you know Jesus?

 Knowing another person is hard enough as it is…but what about when you can’t hear or see or touch the other person? **[SLIDE 19]** Jesus is no longer here, how can I know him? The answer to that goes back to what we talked about last week: the resurrection. Jesus may not be walking and talking among us, but he is alive. He has risen. I cannot know Abraham Lincoln, or Elvis Presly. They are no longer with us. But in all reality I cannot know Tom Cruise or even the new Pope. They are alive and they may know thousands of people, maybe even by name, but they don’t know me. Jesus is alive and since he is God, since he came to save us he can know us all, personally and fully. Jesus says that even the hairs on your head are all counted. And beyond our physical aspects, Luke 16:15 says that God knows our hearts; the innerworkings of who we are. Jesus has been raised and has been seated at the right-hand of God. He is available to us all right here and right now. He is not a dead historical figure. He is not a modern celebrity. He is our Savior who has become one of us so that he could relate to us, so that we could know him.

 Knowing Jesus is what matters. And getting to know Jesus seems like a mysterious, almost magical thing. But it begins like any other relationship: with a conversation. You talk to Jesus to get to know him. We call that prayer. And when you talk to Jesus, you also ought to be ready to listen. And Jesus has spoken. So we read what he says. We call that Bible study. And if we are praying and reading his word, we will find that, more and more, we are doing his will. All of these aspects culminate into a real and effective relationship with Jesus. We don’t just live to do good deeds, but we live knowing Jesus and he knowing us.

 So I may not be a good person; my daughter Magdala may not be a good person. Both of us handle life change in a pretty normal way…not good, but normal. Even Joel, at a few months old, he’s not a good person either. He needs Jesus just like the rest of us. So, let’s not fool ourselves. Let’s take Jesus at his word: **[SLIDE 20]** “No one is good except God himself.” So, if that’s the case, what matters now is my relationship with Jesus. I know him and he knows me. As our memory verse declares, in Jesus’ own words, “I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and they know me.” Amen.