

You Are Here

“If you do good things, good things will happen to you.”

September 3, 2017

Grab a bible and go to Galatians 6. We’re in a series called You Are Here - looking at the big ideas that shape normal thought and life in our culture.

Accept/Affirm - there are some beliefs in our culture that we wholeheartedly agree with. Environmental responsibility, public education, human rights. Love it all.

Reject - There are other philosophies that are contrary to scripture and we outright reject them. White nationalism. No thank you.

Redeem - There are other ideologies that we want to redeem. Last week we looked at “just follow your heart.” Well... yes in some ways and no in others. Freedom is good but our culture’s approach is misguided and broken. Let’s redeem it.

It ends up meaning that all of these sermons require some nuance. We need more than simple, black and white, yes or no answers. We’ll find the same thing today as we turn our attention to: “If you do good things, good things will happen to you.”

- You find some really soothing quotes on the internet:
 - “Every time you put something positive into the universe, the world changes. Your kindness invites miracles to show up. Not just in your world but in the whole world.”
 - “The universe is not punishing you or blessing you. The universe is responding to the vibrational attitude that you are emitting.”
- Anyone remember the movie *Pay It Forward*? Do a good deed to three people and tell them to do the same, eventually it will come back.
- Or, if you’re familiar with pop-psychology/spirituality, Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret*. 20 million copies sold. Law of attraction - “positive people attract positive energy, people, circumstances.”
- If that doesn’t quite hit you, Justin Timberlake wrote a song about it, “What Goes Around Comes Back Around” Music video: Girl (Scarlet Johansson) is cheating on JT (what is wrong with her?!)... and she ends up getting in a car wreck and dying.

One big philosophical word that sums all up all of this is karma. Both in the positive and the negative. Do good things, good things will come back to you. Do bad things and karma will get you. A professor at the University of Tampa got fired for saying Hurricane Harvey was “instant karma” because Texas voted for Donald Trump.

And in all of it, most of what we’re talking about here is a motivation structure for why you should do good in your life. Do good and it will go well. It kinda has an encouragement aspect. “Hey if things aren’t going good for you right now, it’s ok. Just be patient and keep doing good and it will come back around to you.” And it’s got a warning aspect, “Karma will get you. Karma sees you.” Karma’s kinda like Santa Claus for grown up. So how does this hold up to scrutiny?

Well if all we’re talking about is cause and effect, practical consequences of our actions, then the Bible absolutely affirms that.

Galatians 6:7

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

If you want big biceps, do some curls. If you don't want big biceps, just keep doing what you've been doing. Cause and effect. "If you work hard at your job, of course you will increase your chances of getting a promotion." God's not fooled. Of course, there is a cause and effect pattern woven into creation. He put it there. We studied Proverbs this summer, where it describes all kinds of these general guidelines for how life works. But what we're really talking about is deeper than that. We're talking about some kind of magical cosmic repayment system.

This guy was making fun of me for being chubby - his kid turned out to be fatter than me. That's karma. Therefore you better be nice so bad things won't happen to you. It's the dangerous thinking that says, "If I'm nice to people, my grandma won't get cancer. If I let that person get the good parking spot at Target, I'll get a raise." So, the motivation is, I'm making good deeds deposits in the hopes that I'll get a payoff later. It's like playing a karma slots machine.

And like slots, it isn't the healthiest approach to life...As a motivational strategy, it's got some significant problems. Galatians actually mentions it. Keep reading in verse 8.

Galatians 6:8-9

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good.

There's the problem. We grow weary. See when he says, "let us not grow weary of doing good." ...I don't know if you know this, but when a pastor says, "Hey you guys, let's not do this...", it's because they're doing it. And it's not surprising for them. A lot of persecution and hardship is happening for these early churches. And they're getting worn out and frustrated. Starting to wonder is following Jesus worth it? I'm not getting a great return on my investment.

You ever see this sense of weariness creep into your life? I do. I see it in my own life. In my marriage, in my parenting, in my LifeGroup, in ministry in general. I'd be willing to bet you see it too, whether or not you'd use the word "weariness." You may call it disillusionment, or bitterness. You may call it disappointment with God. Or apathy. But regardless of the word we use, all of these things end with us throwing up our hands in defeat and saying, "What's the use?"

And the problem is this weariness doesn't just come from nowhere. I actually believe our "do good things and good things will happen to you" ideology increases this weariness. Three ways belief in karma leads to weariness:

1. The random, chaotic nature of suffering.

A huge problem with accepting a wholesale karmic view of the universe is the way the universe actually works. Ecclesiastes is like the cynical older brother of Proverbs who listens to a lot of NPR. Proverbs says, "Because of God, here's how the world generally works." Ecclesiastes says, "Because of sin, here's how the world often works."

Ecclesiastes 8:14

There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

Do you hear what it's saying? "Man it'd be nice if the world worked like that. But I'm telling y'all there are righteous people who get what the wicked deserve. And there are wicked people who get what the best people ever deserve." And he says it's vanity! It's broken. It's meaningless. It's discouraging and it makes you grow weary.

Jesus actually presses his disciples on this in Luke 13. Two huge tragedies had happened and everyone's talking about them. Tragedy 1: A Roman official, Pilate, sends his henchmen to slaughter some of his political enemies while they're worshipping, offering sacrifices...so their blood mixes in with the blood of their sacrifices. Just a horrific scene. Big buzz. Tragedy 2: A tower falls and kills 18 people. Just a random, senseless tragedy. Like Hurricane Harvey crushing Houston. And here's what Jesus says about all this:

Luke 13:1-5

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Do you honestly believe this is how the world works? Do you really think the reason Pilate's enemies got murdered was 'cause they were worse than everybody else? Do you really think the tower picked 18 really bad people to fall on? Do you believe the hurricane in Houston killed 47 people because they had put some bad energy out into the universe?

Karma is a poor explanation for the reality that suffering in this world is often completely random, and ultimately it comes for us all.

Another way to think about it is that karma doesn't pass the Jesus test. Of all humans who have ever lived, Jesus did the most good out of anyone! And look what happened to Him. He got trampled on, rejected, betrayed, abandoned, and was crucified as a criminal. But despite this He endured; He pressed on. He never grew so weary that He quit trusting God even as doing good took; living the ultimate life of love took Him straight to the cross. Because He didn't put His trust in karma. He put His trust in God's faithfulness.

2. Believing things about God that He never said.

The first one is a more of a philosophical/existential weariness. Why does it work like this? This one is more personal. God, I thought you were going to make good things happen, but I'm experiencing bad.

A friend of mine from college, when he was a sophomore in high school, his grandfather, who was pretty much a father to him, died unexpectedly at 60. He went in for a routine surgery and never woke up. The following year, one his best friends got killed in a car accident. They'd grown up going on family vacations together and having sleepovers and now he found himself carrying the casket and putting him in the ground. And so, I'm talking to him and he said you know my faith wasn't ready to handle this at all at the time. Completely threw me for a loop. He said a big part of the problem was he grew up on a steady diet of what's known as the prosperity gospel. It's this idea that if you follow Jesus good enough, everything is going to go well for you. God will bless you and you will be favored and He will keep bad things from happening to you.

I want to read to you what he said about this moment in his life: "What I didn't realize at the time is that I was believing things about God that He never said about Himself. He never said he would make sure no one close to me dies. Never. But I responded as if He had. I felt like he was breaking his end of this cosmic bargain we'd made where I did good things and He made sure terrible things stayed far from me."

Some of you are weary because you believe God has let you down, but really karma has let you down. Karma doesn't keep its promises. God does.

I heard of a pastor who said, "There is great danger in believing things about God that He never said Himself." And it struck me immediately because I've seen it affect so many people. God never promises to keep everything bad from happening to His people. He promises to be with us in the midst of whatever we

go through and He promises to someday remake everything and restore it to sinless beauty. But actually God promises that following Jesus will at times make your life harder. In being a Christian, you're choosing to follow a guy who chose to get treated like a servant instead of a King.

3. A sense of entitlement. (I deserve better)

This is related to number 2, but a little different of an angle. Number 2 is getting upset when bad things happen to you. Number 3 is getting frustrated when the good things you expect don't happen to you. Entitlement is the mentality that I am owed certain results, either by God or the universe or whatever. I deserve to be treated in a certain way, and if you don't get the results you want, you question why you would even do good in the first place.

This shows up if you have ever done something you thought was good or helpful, and the gesture wasn't appreciated as much as you thought it should be. Hypothetically speaking, say if I were to clean our whole house while my wife was away from home; wash dishes and clothes, pick up toys, work in the yard, all the while also watching my five crazy kids. And then my wife comes home and doesn't immediately notice and appreciate all my hard work. All hypothetical of course. And then this thing rises up in you saying, "Forget that. Not worth it." That would be entitlement.

Maybe you've been busting your tail at your job, or at least you think you have been, and then that person with the obnoxious attitude gets the promotion instead of you. "Well if that's what I get for working so hard, I guess I'll be on Facebook a little more from now on..."

I hesitate to even apply this to parenting, because it's just too real. But parents in the room, if you've ever looked at one of your kids and thought, "I'm literally doing everything for you. You would be dead without me. I don't get to do anything I enjoy anymore. And this little poop attitude is what I get for all my hard work? You're just not cute today. I don't want to put any pictures of you on Facebook today." That's entitlement that'll leave you weary in doing good.

This gets even more complicated when the person not giving you the results you want is God. So, it's God not giving you the job you want, the spouse you want, the ease of life you want. "Well apparently God doesn't appreciate all the good I'm doing for Him."

If this is the framework through which you live your life, you're going to end up really bitter. I honestly believe this is why some people in their later years get so crotchety. Just fuming inside because life did not turn out the way he hoped it would.

If you're dealing with this kind of bitterness, it reveals you're doing good for the wrong reasons. You're not loving God. You're using Him.

So karma's got some problems. You're gonna end up worn out and weary. Disillusioned and frustrated. What does the gospel point us to as an alternative?

We do good because undeserved good has been done to us.

Turn to Ephesians 2:1-10.

Ephesians 2:1-3

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Ultimately, we are not good people when compared to God's design for humanity. We are dead people stuck in our sin; in our selfishness; in how we use people and use God instead of loving people and God. We were deserving not of good things, but of wrath.

Ephesians 2:4-9

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We were completely hopeless in our sin, "But God." Those two words are salvation for people who do bad things like us. God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love for you, caused the most incredible thing imaginable to happen to you. He saved you by His grace.

See if we were actually good people then maybe we would want karma to be true. It still wouldn't be. But maybe we would want it to be. Since the Bible is right and we are sinful by our very nature... You want something other than karma. You want grace. You want a God who will give you good despite your bad. You don't want God to repay you according to your sins.

And He hasn't. Jesus has absorbed all the pain, all the punishment, all the negative energy that karma or justice would say we deserve. So that we could get something better. Grace!

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

As an outworking of the unbelievable completely undeserved good done to you in Jesus, do good works. Do good because the most good thing that could ever happen to you has already happened. Look at how Paul ends this passage in Galatians:

Galatians 6:9

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

The undeserved good that's already been done to you is a down payment on the good that's going to come someday. Someday it'll all be worth it. Someday all weariness will be done forever. All suffering will cease. All tears and entitlement and sinfulness will be undone.

Galatians 6:10

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

"As we have opportunity" -- You are a limited, finite being. You can't do good in every area possible, and God has not even designed you to do good in every area. But He has created specific good for you to walk in, in advance.

So, I want to end with some reflection:

- What is the good God has designed just for you? What are your opportunities? What has God equipped and called you to?
- What's your motivation for doing good? Are you relishing in the unbelievable good that's already been done to you? Or are you doing good to get the good return? Hitting the karma slot machine?

- Where are you weary? Where are you bitter or disappointed with God right now?

Spend some time talking to God and asking for Him to reveal any unhealthy motivations for doing good, and to dig those up and give you gospel motivations for doing good that will last. Ask Him for courage and strength and sustaining grace to not grow weary.