



## "Goodness"

The fruit of the spirit

Courage Church, Detroit, MI

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I read an article recently that brought me great joy.

Well, great joy, followed by great disappointment, and then some laughter.

I saw someone post it on Facebook somewhere and it was about a bunch

of Fuddruckers restaurants that were going in throughout Detroit. I got stoked.

I opened the article, and realized it is a joke. It was one of those sites of a company that hires a bunch of people to tell fake stories on the internet just to get people excited only to shatter their dreams. So then I got sad.

Then I read it, laughed, and got a bit inspired.

Essentially, the "spoof" article was about how a young graffiti artist was buying old houses, and turning them into Fuddruckers restaurants all around Detroit's most blight filled neighborhoods.

I guess it's just good to see someone doing something! (Even if it is fake) but I really do love all of the creativity that is sparking as problem solving efforts just grow and grow around here, and I just see a future for this city that is just so good... Being built on the backs of thousands and thousands of people who each are helping out in their own unique way.

I am going to start today's message by reading you a scripture that blew my image of what God is like into a million pieces... I am still trying to pick them all back up as I learn to navigate this one.

Ezekiel 22:30 says: "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none"

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1) He brought order out of chaos. The bible says that darkness hovered over the face of the deep, and God said "Let there be light..." and there was light. (Genesis 1:3)

He brought newness out of nothing.

And he looked at the light, and he said "this is good." (Genesis 1:4)

A few verses later, the bible says that God created man... but he didn't just create man out of nothing or even just out of the dust, he created man in his image. (Genesis 1:27) - The bible says "lets make one of our own kind"

So he created man, and after doing so, he said, "it is good." In fact, he looked at everything that he had created, and in Genesis 1:31 said "its all good. Very good."

You are good. Thats you. God created you and said, "It is very good." This world God created... it too, is good.

Yet somehow, something that is good, managed to mess up something that is good.

Sin entered the world.

People started lying to each other.

People started hurting each other.

People started taking from each other.

People started wishing bad things upon each other.

and God had to look at this whole thing, and kind of ask himself, "how do we make this good again?"

So of course, he sent Jesus, to pay the price for our sins.

But then, he left these disciples with this commission to carry on the work. So now, we are created IN CHRIST for good works. For a story that tells that story. That's exactly what Paul says in Ephesians 2:10... we are his workmanship, created for a purpose... and we are supposed to walk in those things.

We were created to make a difference. We were created for a story... we are all one part of a much bigger and better story than any of us can ever create on our own. But I love the way that Paul says this... WE. WE. WE.

WE are his workmanship.

He doesn't say you... even though you are obviously His workmanship. Your story, my story... we are all working for the same story.

But for most of us, we take that story... the Jesus story, and we make it our story. We make it our own. As we should... as long as we never forget that where it is our story, it's not only *our* story. but it's a story that is meant to keep going. It's meant to keep growing. It is a story of redemption and the depths of its mercy are deeper than any of us could ever imagine.

Grace is the unmerited favor of a loving God who in the middle of all of your junk, he invited you to his story... because you are good. And he wants to make all of this good again.

But sometimes, we get lost in our story, and we forget about the bigger story. We engulf ourselves in our walled-in worlds forgetting to invite others in. Forgetting to join the fight alongside with them.

But goodness doesn't forget.

Goodness is the Greek word *Agathosune* and it means an uprightness of heart and life.

It's integrity, but it goes beyond integrity. It is to do the *right* thing when you are in public or in the privacy of your own home.

To do the *right* thing when it benefits you or when it hurts you.

## **Father Adam**

Have you ever wondered, Why is Abraham called the Father of all nations? Father Abraham? If you consider history, of course the first initial thought would be Adam right? "Father Adam"

But Adam was the "good" which managed to mess up something good when he and Eve partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. All of earths existence was in a state of shalom... in his state of total peace, and then suddenly the serpent came and he got Eve to question God. They basically convinced themselves that God was lying to them. That is really the first sin, Adam and Eve believed that God was a liar.

You see, Genesis 2:9 tells us that in the midst of the garden there were two specific trees. The tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

## **The Tree of the knowledge of good and evil**

So you have this tree. The tree of knowledge of good and evil... and you think, "Why would anybody eat of that?" God gave you everything else, and you had to go and touch the one thing that he said not to touch.

But if you look at what happened, with them partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you realize that it wasn't evil they were looking for by eating it. So by default you would think, "then they must have been drawn to the good..." right?

Well, it's a little more likely, but the truth is they already had "good" - they had oneness with God, they lived in this place that God himself deemed "good."

But in reality, it wasn't the good or the evil that enticed them to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was the knowledge.

After the serpent successfully convinces Eve that God is lying to her, he says this (Genesis 3:5): “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” And so, essentially, what Adam and Eve told God by taking part in the fruit was this:

“I got this.”

“We got this.”

We want to navigate good and evil on our own. We don't want you to do it for us anymore.

So what is the first thing that happened when they took the fruit?

They got the knowledge that they were looking for.

Their eyes were immediately opened up to the fact that they were naked, and suddenly they were bombarded with a whole new world of emotions. They felt shame. Their eyes were immediately opened to the fact that “we are NOT good.”

So they went from this relationship with God that was pure... that was perfect and innocent and lovely, where everything was provided for them and the earth took care of itself (Genesis 2:6) and they didn't need anything...

to suddenly having a whole lot that they had to figure out on their own.

In our generation, we love knowledge. We tend to hang on knowledge. Even in the christian world, so much is about knowledge. “How much am I learning?” “What is being revealed to me?” “What am I seeing that you don't see?”

Theology, theology. Good doctrine. Sound truth.

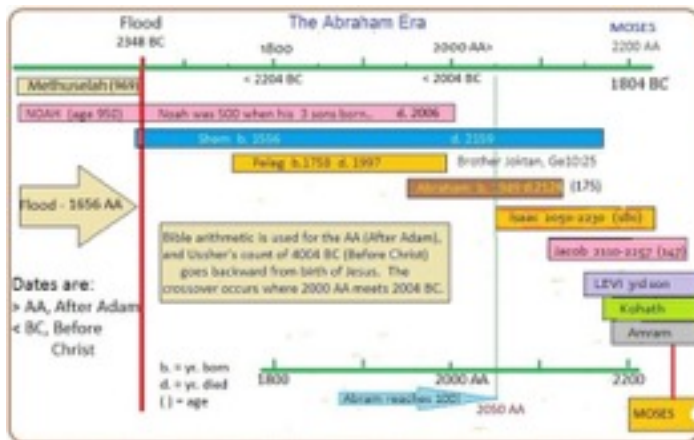
Well, “truth” is what God gave them in the garden. He opened them up to the big picture and that picture was unmanageable.

Adam went against God. His days were cut short.

## Father Noah

Then next would be Noah. Father Noah.

Because when you think about it, we are all descendants of Noah. After the flood, he was the one commanded to repopulate. We all come from him.



Let me show you this timeline. We know in the bible that Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth... and the bible says that from these three the whole earth populated. This is the timeline of Noah and his son Shem, who Abraham was a descendent of... so he in this timeline... We have Moses coming several generations

later... But there would have been similar timelines for the other two sons... Ham was the Father of Canaan, and so it goes. You can't actually trace all people back to Abraham, you can certainly trace all people back to Noah.

Why isn't it Father Noah?

I used to love the story of Noah. I loved the giant boat and two of every kind of animal. I loved the faith of Noah to build a boat in the face of ridicule and mockery. But as I studied a bit about Jewish culture something was brought to my attention that caused me to question my love for Noah a bit. I still love the story... I believe it happened just as it is written (I am one of those people who takes the bible literally) but in taking the stories literally you have to be able to acknowledge that where there was some good in all of the men that God was able to use, they are not all examples that we should put posters of on our walls and try to emulate their lives, or even worse, their hearts. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:6 says that many of the things that took place in the Old Testament took place as examples for us, that we might NOT desire evil as they did.

In Jewish culture, Noah is not really considered much of a hero.

And you bible scholars may say to me, yeah, but in Genesis 6:9 the bible says that Noah was a righteous man... But The bible doesn't say that Noah was a righteous man and then leave it at that. It says, Noah was a righteous man, (COMMA) blameless in HIS generation.

Compared to everyone else on the earth at that time, the time before the flood, God found Noah to be the most righteous. So even when the bible speaks of Noah's righteousness, it limits it to being compared to his generation. To his peers. He was better at being righteous than them. But as you can probably imagine, that is not saying much.

But Abraham, who was a descendent of Shem (who was Noah's son) - the bible says that he believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Then Paul in Romans 4:3 and again Galatians 3:6 quotes this scripture and re-iterates it. He believed God. Yes. Noah believed God to.

What is the difference?

Abraham believed God, and like Noah, he took God at his word... And he knew God would do exactly what he said he would do, *unless*...

And that is where we get to the crossroad. Because Noah only saw what *is*, but Abraham saw the *unless*.



Right by Zach's house in Woodbridge is "The Lorax house" - I love this house, many of you have probably seen this before, and hopefully you look at it with as much excitement as I do. Someone bought this house, I believe in the auction, and themed it after the Lorax. He did another house themed after the movie "UP." Our family was riding our bikes that way on Thursday and we pointed the Lorax house out to the kids and they all loved it. They got excited as if they

had never seen it before, though we have been by it many times and talked about it many times... And that's kind of the big concept with "The Lorax" - **Unless**. and this house is just so inspiring.

Painted out from under the statue of the Lorax (standing on a stump, because the whole book/movie is about a guy who cuts down all the trees) is the word "unless" and then on the wall at the sidewalk is this quote from the movie - well, I say movie because I like the movie, but it's from the Dr. Seuss book: "Unless someone like you cares a whole lot... Nothing is going to get better. It's not."

One explanation that the Rabbis give us as to why it's "Father Abraham" instead of "Father Noah", I will explain in a few moments, but in my own words would be this: Because Noah didn't act like the father of a nation. He didn't act like the Father of a people. In fact, one may say he didn't demonstrate that he "cared a whole lot," or even a little for the people he was in community with. He was not a hero that redeemed his people, and if you read his story carefully you will see that. He found out that a storm was coming. He built a boat, and he saved his own family and he repopulates the whole world from his family who was spared because they were on his boat. The rest of the world drowned.

There is a lot to this, and it will take a little while to explain.

Abraham, who we will talk about in a few minutes, is considered a hero. and Moses, who we are going to talk about right now, is also considered a hero.

When the Israelites sinned, Moses pleaded for them.

In (Exodus 32), Moses is up on the mountain and the people notice that he is taking a longer than ordinary amount of time up there... They start to wonder, "where is this guy?" - what has become of this Moses character? They didn't know if he was ever going to come back down again.

So Aaron tells the people to take all of the gold earrings out of their ears, and he fashioned all of the gold from all of their jewelry and built a golden calf out of it, and they started saying these really weird things to the calf like



"these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:4)

Are you out of your mind? This golden calf that you literally just crafted out of your earring, is "the gods that brought you out of the land of Egypt?"

They are the gods who caused the plagues?

Who caused the Red Sea to part? So you could cross and who had it pour back over the Egyptian army when they tried to cross?

They are the gods that spared your first born sons when you put the blood of the lamb on your doors, while all of the Egyptian first borns were killed?

really?

And then they decided to have a party for this new found god who they just created out of their earrings. And so God tells Moses, "you need to get down there... Israel has corrupted itself without you. The whole thing is a mess!

Then, God told Moses in this moment, essentially says, on second thought, you know what... "these are a stiff necked people (Exodus 32:9-10) - let me alone, that my wrath may burn against them, and will consume them." But then God says this to Moses.. "That I may make a great nation of YOU!" (Exodus 32:10)

God tells Moses, I am going to destroy them, so I can lift you up and build a great nation, because you are not like them.

Don't worry Moses, you are still going to live. You are still going to lead a revolution. Just not with those people. We will move this thing forward, without them.

It's just like what he told Noah. "I am going to destroy everyone, and you and your family will carry on and rebuild and create a new nation..."

Compare that to Noah: (Genesis 6)

Genesis 6:13-14 "God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will

destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch... basically, build a boat.

Genesis 6:17-18 “For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you”

Just like with Moses, God tells Noah, I will establish you, but not them. Then look at Noah’s response, in Genesis 6:22:

“Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

Now, compare that to how Moses responds, and then how God responds to Moses. (Exodus 32:11-14):

But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’ ” And **the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.**

Moses petitioned to God on their behalf. He was diligent. He stood in the gap between the people and God, and he built up a wall so that God would not have to destroy them.

Father Abraham was the first to approach God with this type of boldness.

When God wanted to destroy Sodom, Abraham begged him not to do it. He was persistent with the Lord. In fact they went back and forth multiple times

on behalf of this sinful city. He asks God (Gen 18:22-33) “will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are 50 righteous within the city... Will you not at least spare the 50? He gets even more bold, he says to God “Far be it from you to do such a thing.”

And God responds and this is amazing. Abraham asks that at least the righteous be spared, and look how God responds...He says I’ll see your 50, and I’ll raise you a thousand. He says “if I find 50 righteous, I will spare the WHOLE PLACE for their sake.” (Gen. 18:26)

And Abraham keeps going back and forth with God...

What if there are 45?  
What if there are 40?  
What if there are 30?  
What if there are 20?

And eventually Abraham struck up a deal with God that if there are even 10 righteous in that place, that God would spare it.

Abraham sought the welfare of the city and its citizens. He saw the *unless*. And Isaiah 51:2 says “look to your Father, Abraham... When I called him, he was only one man, then I blessed him and made him many!”

But when God told Noah, “I am going to destroy the whole earth, build a boat so you and your family can survive the flood and repopulate everything...”

Crickets.

No petition.

No going before God on behalf of the people that are going to be destroyed if he goes through with this. He merely saved his family and he let the world pass away.

and the argument of course is, “yeah, but God spared him for a reason. Why would you question God? If God says he is going to destroy

something, its as good as gone.” But only a brief examination of the scriptures would reveal that that is not true.

There are numerous accounts in the Old Testament where it says “God changed his mind about this.”

God earnestly desires the diligent prayers of his people on behalf of their sinful neighbors. That is what changes his mind. That is what "good" Christians do.

They care about what happens to others!

What made Noah righteous, more righteous than those in his generation, was he obeyed. Others ridiculed. Others mocked, but he did exactly what the Lord asked him to do. And obedience is a good thing. But he failed to speak up for the broken generation that needed a savior. He failed to value life beyond his own family.

And as important as obedience is to God, it is in and of itself, not enough.

Noah obeyed. He did exactly what God said, but the whole plan involved him saving his own neck. His own kids. His own legacy.

But I think that God is looking for more than just obedience... He is looking for people who will stand in the gap.

Who will look at the mess that our society has found itself in and, to be frank, not accept it.

We know according to the bible that things are going to go the way they are. We know we as a church will be persecuted. We know we will be flogged in the synagogues... We know persecution will come for those who believe, and working our whole lives to avoid those things is a pointless waste of effort and life.

What Christians need to get better at is the part about standing in the gap.

About being good no matter what it cost them. Defending others no matter what it costs them. Standing in the gap for people no matter what it will cost them AND no matter how much that person does or doesn't deserve it.

1 Peter 2:20-21 says "if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."

We have to approach our Christian walk knowing that there will be a price for goodness.

We need to do good no matter what the cost. We need to stand in the gap for the people who are falling even if it puts us in harms way ourselves. We know harder times than these will come.

But we also know that Detroit's story is not written yet. Your neighbor, their story is not written yet. Maybe a few chapters, but not the conclusion. Not the end. Not the entirety. Maybe there are a few chapters, and they are no good, and that person wishes they could just rip those pages right out of the book, or burn it entirely...

But its not over.

And some of the best stories are the ones that have surprise ending.

And I believe in these days Jesus is looking for some good people who will look at a broken story and insert themselves right into the middle of it for the sake of reconciliation.

People who will break for that broken story. Who will fall to their knees before God as their hearts earnestly break for the deceit that has crept into our society... For the corruption that has surfaced... For the injustice that reigns supreme...

Who will be devastated to think of what the results of those things will be in those peoples lives if someone doesn't stand in the gap for them and a breakthrough does not come.

1 Peter 1:22 says “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart”

and this is important. We don't obey just to obey. We are not robots or machines who can be turned on and off, we have to choose to obey but our obedience needs to be to the truth, for a sincere brotherly love. Any sort of “Obedience” that does not represent both truth as well as loving our neighbor is obedience rooted in indifference. Noah was indifferent about an entire society's future, but he accepted the call because it preserved his.

It is easy to obey when you know you will win. When everything you are being asked to do is in your best interest.

But Abraham obeyed even when it meant laying his son on an altar, and he petitioned when it meant the lives and souls of a lost generation.

God says in Ezekiel, and we read this at the very beginning, that, “I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none” (Ezekiel 22:30).

A gap is a place of weakness. A space between two things.

Pastor Choco at district council talked about standing in the gap, and he said “The church is the only institution that can stand in the gap. For the least of these, for the voiceless... Become a voice in the wilderness.”

God wants his people to be building walls around our cities... standing for them, and defending them. Working for the betterment of the people who are perishing, so that they can see something good.

Something that will change them.

Something that will open their eyes to the beauty of a Kingdom that is not perishing in the midst of one that is.

**The woman caught in Adultery**

There is a story in John 8 that really brings to light the heart of God in this area. Because the first argument in your mind as you hear this message, if you are to be honest, would likely be “who are you to question God?” Who am I? Honestly. And even as I show you scriptures, its hard to wrap your mind around the idea that God wants us to question him. Like i told you at the beginning, this verse has shattered what i thought I knew about God into a million pieces. This verse in Ezekiel, honestly, its hard to wrap your mind around what God is saying there.

Well, the reality is that God gave Moses the law... the law that is in question in the passage that I am about to read to you. And Jesus himself just totally rains on the whole parade of these religious folks who operate off of and make decisions based merely on the knowledge that they have uncovered. The knowledge that Adam and Eve in the garden decided, “we want to navigate this, on our own.” But Jesus comes in and does what he does best... He basically says “Oh Pharisees. You can’t possibly navigate this one. You have no idea how to navigate this.”

John 8:3-11:

“The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

I started thinking about what Jesus wrote on the ground, and I really think the Holy Spirit very gently spoke something to me about this passage.

Because there is all sorts of weird speculation as to what it was he was writing, everybody has some input as to what they think it was, and why... but I realized on Friday, "if Jesus wanted us, 2000 years later, to know what he was writing in the sand, John would have written it when he wrote this account.

But what if the whole point of leaving this open was for you to be able to read it, and apply it to your own life.

What is it for you?

What would you have needed to see Jesus write in the sand, to make you lay down your stones? To make you walk away?

What would He have needed to write in the sand, to make you realize, "I am just as guilty."

What do you need to see written in the sand in this moment in your life, that would cause you to lay down the stones, and instead offer a petition to the Lord on behalf of someone you were previously ready go accuse?

What was Jesus doing here?

He was petitioning on behalf of someone who is guilty.

He was standing in the gap for the woman caught in adultery.

He was building a wall between what should be done... what the law says to do, and the way of life.

## **The Tree of Life**

You see, there was another tree in the garden. Adam and Eve partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and it opened their eyes and suddenly left them with the weight of having to navigate what was good and what was evil when before that God handled the heavy lifting for them. But the other tree mentioned (Gen 2:9) is the tree of life.

And that is the tree that they should have been eating from.



And that is the tree that we should be eating from every single day.

Because there is a big difference between knowledge, and life.

Knowledge will open you up to how broken you are. How broken your neighbor is. How deserving we all are of God's judgment and his wrath because we have wronged him in so many ways.

And if you chose to eat from that tree, you will live your whole life wondering... am I ok?

Not only that, but you will live your whole life thinking that everyone else is not okay. They're not okay! They're not okay! You will live your whole life judging... You will be like Jonah. Jonah got mad that God wanted to spare Nineveh. In fact, you can almost see this progression over time of the way people both respond to God and how God reacts.

With Noah, God saw the evil and wanted to destroy it, Noah said nothing, and it was destroyed. With Abraham, God agreed that he wouldn't destroy it if he can find even ten good... which he could not. With Moses, God saw the evil, wanted to destroy it, but Moses petitioned, and God changed his mind... but by the time we get to Jonah and Nineveh, God is all about mercy when Jonah thinks God should destroy it. God actually says to Jonah, "Why should I not have pity on Nineveh? That great city! Where there are over 120,000 people who don't know their right hand from their left, and much livestock."

God said, "these people don't even know what they are doing, lets have mercy!" But Jonah begged for judgment.

Who wants to live like that? But it happens to people who live off of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... You will get mad at God when he shows mercy to people because you have this clear and vivid picture in your mind of "their sin." And you will find yourself deep in your heart wanting to see destruction rather than restoration. Its human nature... its what knowledge did to us at the fall of man.

But if you eat of the tree of life... if you make that decision that you will follow Jesus, and take Jesus at his word.... That you will eat from his tree... Then you will start seeing people how He sees them. You will start finding yourself defending people who you never in a million years would have thought even deserved to be defended when you were living your life off of knowledge.

Knowledge will only illuminate the problem.  
But Jesus will cleanse you of it.

Noah built a boat, so we call him a hero. But really he saved himself and his family, and with the knowledge of the sinful nature of his neighbor he let them perish. But Abraham ate from a different tree... and it caused him to petition on behalf of the people. Moses ate from a different tree, and it caused him to petition on behalf of the people.

Jesus came bearing the fruit of a different tree. Jesus petitioned on behalf of the people... that they may have LIFE. He petitioned on behalf of the woman caught in adultery, a woman deserving of death yet all that was in his mind was life. It was the future. It was "go and sin no more."

Even in his dying words on the cross, Jesus makes one last petition to his Father on behalf of the people who were doing something very bad to him.

He said, "Father, Forgive them."

Jesus knew that in the midst of all of this bad, were people that were capable of doing good. Of being good. Capable of realizing what they had done and who they had done it to. People capable of picking each other up and bearing one another's burdens. People capable of having their entire lives turned up-side-down by the very gospel Jesus was living out in that moment. People capable of eating from the tree of life.

In the midst of all this bad, were people who were worth saving. Because no amount of knowledge could possibly be stronger than love.

**Walk in Light (Light is found in all that is good)**

Ephesians 5:8-10 says "Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord."

All we can do is try. We can try and discern what is pleasing. We can read, we can study, we can take in as much knowledge as we can about God and his character and his ways but at the end of the day we just have to do our best to discern, "God, what is right? God, what do we do? God, I need you to help me navigate this so that I can be a light."

What is light?

It is what makes things visible. When God created light he created newness out of nothing, and the light revealed that creation.

Light is the way we show Jesus to the world, and the fruit of light is found in all that is good.

I think about Detroit. I think back about all the horrible things that I have heard about it and read about it. I remember one day a couple years ago riding the train home from work and I was reading an article about Detroit, how they were giving away houses to writers who would come here and base... they were giving away houses to get people here. And even now, we live here and we ride our bikes around and get excited about how much things have changed already... We ride by the Lorax house and we see a community that is shining just so bright... but you don't have to venture very far and you will see houses that you can't even imagine ever shining like that again.

So I just wanted to show you this one last picture of the Lorax house. This is what it looked like when the owner bought it. It doesn't look much different than a lot of them look now. Zach was telling me that this is right around the corner from his house, and he said that the house was literally sinking in when the guy bought this. It was a total mess.

But a few people saw a neighborhood, a neighborhood that years ago thrived... that years ago had an economy and industry and families and life... a neighborhood that years ago, was good... These people looked at

these blocks, and they asked the question, “How do we make this good again?”

Its not by casting stones at the ones who you hold responsible for the blight. Its not by calling “God’s judgment” upon a place that many good people never wanted to see fall apart in the first place.

Its by helping people rebuild it. Not forcing them out of it. Dawn and I were talking to Kyle and Rebecca a couple months ago and we were talking about the progress in Detroit, and Kyle said something to me that I’ll never forget, he said “It’s hard to say its better if it’s completely different people.”

The church needs to be much more about reconciliation than we are about gentrification. Gentrification typically happens by new people moving in and with an interest of renewal, and we do need that... we need people to buy those houses and make those neighborhoods good again, but not at the expense of the people who are already there. Not by forcing them out. We need to move into the gaps. The openings that are being ignored. I looked at one house in this neighborhood last week, its about the only house for sale around here and it was tenant occupied and they were so kind to me as I looked at it but they said, “if you buy it, please don’t make me leave my home... this has been my home for seven years.”

Thats not a gap.

We need to come alongside our neighbors and meet them where *they* are. Move into the gaps but not at the expense of the faithful.

That's how we make this good again.  
Its by owning it.

For some of you Its by moving in. By investing yourself. Investing your money. For SOME Its by buying some of these old houses and turning them into Dr. Seuss themes. Its putting in a Fuddrucker's or two, and knocking on your neighbors door and seeing what they need.

I almost impulsively bought one yesterday. There was a house a few blocks from here, so charming, so much potential, and it was on the auction and it

wasn't really getting anybody bidding on it, and I could have gotten it for probably 1200 dollars and we really need a house... I had Zach drive me by and then I went back later, and I just stared at it and I thought about it, and I got so overwhelmed by what it may actually take to do the project so I didn't do it. But man, did I want to.

For some it may mean buying some of those. I am still trying to figure out exactly what it means for my family and I... for our church... but I sure hope that our church has the opportunity to do something like that in the future.

It may inviting someone to church or even better, into a relationship with Jesus.

Its By petitioning to God, have mercy on this place.

By petitioning to God, "God be a part of the renewal!"

and its by being his hands and his feet through the process.

There is a highly tangible, highly practical side to goodness... but goodness as a bottom line is a consistency from your heart to your life.

Its knowing in your heart what is good, what is noble, what is pure, what is right.

and its doing those things.

I am going to end todays message with a quote I have already given you today, one you have likely heard and seen many times in your life... and its the words of the great Doctor Seuss. Because he is such a great Doctor.

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,  
Nothing is going to get better, its not."