

Title: Righteousness

Description: In this Sunday evening message from Psalm 119:137-144, Pastor Anthony Kim of Calvary Road Baptist Church shows that God's Word mirrors God's character: because the Lord is righteous, His testimonies are righteous and very faithful. Working through the stanza built on the Hebrew letter Tzaddi, the sermon contrasts revelation with human speculation, traces the psalmist's burning zeal and love for a Word that is very pure and well tried, and calls believers facing trouble and anguish to keep meditating until they delight in God's commandments rather than read the Bible as a mere duty. It closes by pointing to Jesus Christ, the righteous Servant who suffered, the just for the unjust, so that God might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Transcript:

Go ahead and turn with me to Psalm chapter 119 and we'll be in verse 137 this evening. Psalm 119 beginning in verse 137 through 144. And if you have found your spot there, go ahead and stand with me and read silently as I read aloud from Psalm 119 verse beginning in 137.

Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful. My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words. Thy word is very pure. Therefore, thy servant loveth it. I am small and despised, yet do not I forget thy precepts. Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me, yet thy commandments are my delights. The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting. Give me understanding and I shall live. This is God's word. You may be seated.

We will examine God's word by seeing that in his word mirrors in fact God's character that God's word mirrors God's character and if you will look at verse 137 to verse 138, we read there, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful." This 18th stanza of Psalm 119 is built around the Hebrew letter Tzaddi. The root word comes from tsaddiq, which means righteous. It occurs five times including with the word righteousness in these eight verses and it forms the central pillar of this passage that you can trust the Bible because God is righteous which the word of God reflects his perfect holiness. So then grounded entirely based on this truth of who God is and

what his word is, his testimonies invites us to live in close alignment with his holy standards based upon his holy character.

Psalms 145:17 says this, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works." He is consistent with who he is and what he says.

Now I want us to understand then the difference between revelation versus speculation. Revelation versus speculation. Let's start with human speculation. Attempt of human speculation is to paint a picture of who God is based on personal desires or cultural trends. Basically, what does the world say and can I then say had the word of God match with the culture? And this term of speculation, there's a biblical name for it and it's called eisegesis. Eisegesis. It means to lead into or impose modern viewpoints, personal preferences or outside agendas onto the word of God, twisting the text of scripture to whatever the reader wants it to mean. So you see the danger in that. In contrast, the term exegesis is then meant to lead out of to lead out of in other words to extract the original author's intent historically, culturally and literally to allow the message, the passage to accurately be understood. That is why we need to be both preached the word and also taught the word of God. We don't want to insinuate in any way that the word of God is somehow the same thinking as our thoughts.

Let me point to you a passage that confirms this. Isaiah 55 verse 8 to 9 reminds us, verse 8, "For my thoughts," God's thoughts, "are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." See, we can only truly know God through his revealed word. If you care about what is right, then you will want to be taught by the Bible. And that's the idea of Isaiah 55:8-9.

And so a reflection then on holiness. Let's look at verse 137. Again, it says there declared by the psalmist, "Righteous art thou, O Lord." See, the Bible is not just a mere collection of human ideas about God. No, it is God breathed self-revelation of the Almighty. The text is 2 Timothy 3:16. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." You see, because God's intrinsic nature is holy and righteous, his rule, his judgment, his testimonies will then naturally mirror his character. And that's what the word testimonies. It's synonymous to scripture that the word of God is then God's testimony. And God has commanded or deployed his testimonies with authority into the world. And they carry two absolute characteristics. Let's point out or let's

look at one of them and that is righteousness. This is defined what we are to practice according to God's word to have proper relationship with God which is by the way received by grace which is gift through faith in Jesus Christ rather than are earned by human effort. And so Jesus then helps believers in him to practice that relationship with God.

And then the word very faithful. This is defined by what we are to believe. What we are to believe. So it's not just enough to know to have a right relationship with God, but there has to be a belief in that of God. And so God cannot lie or be unfaithful. And the text there is 2 Timothy 2:13. It says, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself." So if we are faithless, he remains faithful. His faithfulness is not based on our faithlessness. He cannot deny himself as the text reads. See his character and promises do not change. Even when we fail, even when we doubt, even when we stumble, he does not change. And again reminds us not of us that it is of Christ that abides in us that we can in any way be faithful. Jesus said in John 15:4, "Abide in me and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me." So then the fruit of abiding in Christ righteousness and faithfulness, God's will for you in Christ Jesus is that you to be faithful and to be righteous.

I love what Matthew Henry wrote based on this text. He says, "That which we are commanded to practice is righteous. That which we are commanded to believe is faithful. It is necessary to our faith and obedience that we be convinced of this." So when doubts arise or hard questions emerge, notice, does your heart rush to question God's integrity? That's what sin does. Question God's integrity, knowing that because God is righteous, his word is right. Every single time.

So we will see in the next verses how the psalmist based on knowing God as righteous and very faithful. We then turn to how the psalmist responds to these truths by his personal testimony. So now he goes from God's testimony to now his personal testimony of trusting in the Bible in all types of situations.

So if you will look at verse 139 to 141, we're going to see how God's word proves to be a help in times of affliction. The psalmist writes, "My zeal hath consumed me because mine enemies have forgotten thy words. Thy word is very pure. Therefore thy servant loveth it. I am small and despised, yet do I not forget thy precepts." You see, a fiery zeal for the truth is a true marker of a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. And the psalmist experiences this passionate, burning zeal that moves one to action and not passivity. We see

that he has a connection with love and for truth. That love and truth are kindled together in the psalmist in his burning zeal and as well as with a burning zeal for hatred of error. And we see that in his remarks here.

And notice what kindled this flame. It wasn't a personal desire. It didn't come from a sinful heart because if it did, he would want to punish his enemies. But no, we see grief here. Grieved over the enemies that had forgotten or neglected or disregarded God's word altogether. See, it was based upon God's word. And so, true righteousness is offended by what offends God. True righteousness is offended by what offends God. You see, what a wonderful thing as a Christian that we don't take things personally. We don't take things personally. We don't allow the indifference towards God's word to affect us personally. But here is the nuance to this is that you find this fiery zeal against those who are haters of God's word that you take that personally that they are offending God and that inflames your heart. You see, isn't that what Jesus similarly did with the encounters with the Pharisees as we read from this morning? They grieved, he grieved rather over the hard-heartedness toward God's word and which is Jesus represented as the word in front of them.

So then we go on to verse 140. 140. I want you to particularly look at the word very pure. It carries the picture of precious metal refined in the hottest of furnaces. Scripture has survived after all the fiery hostility of critics for thousands of years, tyrants, skeptics throughout the ages. The word of God has stood the test of time because God's promises is thoroughly here. It is well tried. And that's why the Lord's servant, that's why as believers in Christ, we can then love God's word as a psalmist loves God's word.

And then in verse 141, the psalmist acknowledges his reality here on earth. He feels small. And that word small means he feels little in comparison to almighty God. That he feels young compared to the eternality of God. That he feels immature when it comes to reflecting on God's word. And then he goes on and says he feels despised, that he feels that he is being looked down upon with disrespect, not because of who he is, but of who he trusts in his words, namely God. And so the world's disapproval did not cause him to then abandon God's truth. Rather, it made him even anchor more deeply into God's word. And that's a reflection of every believer in Christ. When people are hating God's word, you don't go and align with them. You go even deeper and you anchor yourself even deeper into God's word. And that's one of the assurances that we can find here with the psalmist and with every believer in Christ.

During the 19th century, I want to share an anecdote by Dwight L. Moody. He shares that an elderly Christian lady used to write the letters TP in the margins of her Bible next to specific verses. It stood for tried and proven. Tried and proven. They didn't just highlight the text itself. Rather, they lived through a trial. This elderly lady went through a trial, tested the promise, and documented that God kept his word. Isn't that great? And I personally write Bible verses that I need to remind myself of where I'm being tried and where I can find that God's promises are sure and writing myself of me in my marriage. There's so many Bible verses on that my children and how to disciple them and being a pastor and so on and so on. And I can tell you again and again, tried and proven. Tried and proven because God is faithful to his word and to his children.

So reminder, never compromise God's word to win man's approval or to escape man's disapproval. When you feel small and despised, trust in the reliability of the one who holds you with the promises and precepts of God. He's holding on to you. And that's the only reason why you're being held by God's word. Now, let's look at verse 142 to verse 144.

It reads, "Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me, yet thy commandments are my delights. The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting. Give me understanding and I shall live." Here we see the everlasting truth of God's word, living in this temporal world. You see, human philosophies and all sorts of cultural opinions have an expiration date, but rather to what God's righteousness and his word is an everlasting righteousness. There is no expiration date with God's word. His law is absolute truth. And here the psalmist again affirms the righteousness of God mentioned back in verse 137. But here he speaks of the length of his righteousness in eternity and eternity. And so it's so unlike the shifting of human laws of each passing generation seems it's getting worse and worse. New laws coming into place that contradict God's word. But scripture is built out of the same enduring material as eternity itself. It will go on and live on and will never change forever and ever. What a great reminder for ourselves in this temporal world that constantly is changing around us that the word of God is eternal and everlasting and we can build our lives on him.

So if you are truthful to yourself, you struggle as all sinful people do to attain righteous conduct and maintain it. Right? So first receiving the righteousness of Christ and continuing to maintain righteousness of Christ. We see in Romans 1:16 and 17, says this, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,

for it is the power of God unto salvation." That's the initial attainment of receiving righteousness. And then "to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." And then verse 17 says, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." That's the righteousness being sustained in a believer's life. And it says, "As it is written, The just shall live by faith." Faith to faith. It's only because of what Christ is doing in our lives that we can live righteously.

I want us to look at verse 143 at this time. How important delighting in God is to overcoming all sorts of distress. The psalmist uses two vivid words. He uses first the word trouble. Now trouble is the idea of hardship surrounding him from the outside. And then anguish is distress pressing on him from the inside. This is everyone goes through these two battles as it were, trouble and anguish and they act like military pursuers who track down you and overtake every hidden place. You try to hide here, the trouble comes. You try to here and the trouble finds you. You go over here and the anguish finds you. So he uses this military term that we're always going to be tracked down with these two areas of trouble and anguish. Yet in the midst of this internal and external distress, he says, "Thy commandments are my delights." I love that God's word provides spiritual delights. Notice the plural there as he's having not just one trouble or one episode of being in anguish. It is many troubles, many anguish and as a result the answer is delighting delights in God's word.

So I want to spend time here because this is most important again as we live in this temporal world filled with all sorts of trouble and anguish both from external and internal. You see God's word provides spiritual delights that outshine present suffering. That's what we see. The delights are always above our sufferings, our troubles and our anguish. You must see it that way. It's never underneath the suffering. It is always above our sufferings.

So the question is how long should you spend in your daily devotions? So I never tell you how much time I spend in my devotion or what someone else's spend in their personal devotion time. This is the point though. Take as long as it takes to delight in God's word. Take as long as it needs to be to get to the goal of delighting in God's word. That might be different for every single person in this room and how you deal with troubles and anguish. But know this, all of us must arrive at delighting in God's word. Make that a desire psalmist desire in you reflected in your time of devotion to God. Because you see this is utmost important because in order to overcome troubles and anguish is delighting in God's word as experienced the psalmist and all healthy believers in Christ.

Here's the thing: that word delight it means to find great pleasure and great joy in God. In God. Now where does Satan attack us? In the pleasures and the enjoyments, in the pleasures of entertainment, in the pleasures of fulfilling our personal desires in our times of finding enjoyment of escape, these are the areas that Satan has won over. And you'll notice that the third soil of the parable of the sower is what? The cares and the riches of this world, right before bearing much fruit, 30, 60, and 100-fold. So then if that's the trend right before you can actually bear fruit do you not think Satan and your flesh so internally and externally the trouble and the anguish will be on that front so that you will be spiritually fruitless so that you will then give in to your desires of your flesh and then ending up with just nothing but bitterness and sadness. Filled with constant troubles and anguish that doesn't seem to go away. All because one did not arrive in delighting in God's word, finding all of his greatest pleasures and all of his joy in God.

But how do you do that? You have to meditate on God's word. And you got to keep finding those delights in God's word. Make it a time. Whatever it takes to get there. I don't know where everyone is at in their devotionals, but I can tell you this. In conclusion, if you have so much troubles going on, so much anguish going on, I can tell you you're not properly spending your time and devotion to the Lord. And I must spend much time here because this is where many people struggle in and the answer is so straightforward and yet many people miss this part. The worst thing to see a Christian is despondent because it's a reflection then of the Father's lack of care which is not true. But you see, you're always reflecting God's character, aren't you? We're always reflecting of who our God is. And he wants us to reflect delighting in him.

And this age that we live in, this digital age we live in, it's just an amplifier of good, but it's an amplifier of evil as well, isn't it? It can go both ways. And so, we got to be very discerning in the good and evil of the age that we live in and the increasing temptations that we're all confronted with on a day-to-day basis. But let not that be an excuse. Just because you're in front of a screen doesn't mean you have to give in. You don't have to give in. And so, in a way, you have to plan ahead. That when I open up this word, my goal is to delight in God's word at the end. If that means you got to wake up a little bit earlier so that you have time to meditate on God's word instead of just scanning God's word, then do so. If that means that you have to stay up a little bit later, then do so. Just consider these things because it's utmost important and I want as a pastor to see much fruit bear upon your life. That is what I desire

for you as well as I desire for myself.

So let's go on in verse 144. The stanza concludes with the psalmist here and it's his only time in the whole stanza where he actually prays. He prays here. The psalmist repeatedly asks God to give him understanding and to give him life. Notice the words there. This is his prayer. Give me understanding. Give me understanding of what it means to delight in your word. Give me understanding of how to avoid troubles and anguish being setting in my heart and allowing delight to be over the sufferings. And he goes on, he says that the end goal is that I may live that I shall live. That I shall live. He does not merely ask for more information, more reading, more reading. No, he wants spiritual illumination. God's word is a light to our darkened heart and we need to constantly be opened with God's word so that we can see clearly. I mentioned in another sermon about light it reveals the even dust in the air. You can't do that with darkness. But the light shows us, oh this is what's going on in my interior life. Oh, this is what's keeping me from delighting in God's because I'm focusing on these external troubles. And we set ourselves up, don't we, for that. But we can also set ourselves up for spending quality time in God's word. And so the divine clarity to comprehend apply truth is so that he may truly live. That's another way of saying it. That he may truly live. You can live, but are you truly living? Are you truly living with God's delight upon your heart? That's so important.

A lot of times people think God is this God that's angry. Yes, he is angry with sin, but he's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come unto repentance. First and foremost, the first turning is turning to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation of our sins. Absorbing the wrath of God that we rightly deserve and then continuing on in aligning ourselves to his word. And that's the idea that we are to live here as Christians. That true living is a flourishing life, not a life of stagnant and despondency. For the most part is flourishing in God's delight and delight and being directly content connected to knowing and walking in God's righteousness. Look at what Jesus says in John 17:3. He says, "And this is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Notice that this is life eternal. Meaning you can have this life eternal now upon when you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior and lord. Not when you go into heaven. No, eternal life now. What a wonderful truth that Jesus gives to us.

And so when troubles surround you and anguish threatens to swallow the inner peace of your soul, your flesh may desire to then stop opening up your Bible. And if you have passed this first test of not going after your flesh and

not opening up your Bible, the first test, now when you do open up your Bible, you're going to be tempted to read your Bible as a duty, as a duty and not as a delight. So that's your second test of reading your word, rather reading God's word. But then when you pass this test, you then find genuine spiritual delight in God's truth. That's where you want to go. But there's these tests that come before then. In many ways, that's the pattern of the sower and the seed. Sower.

So then we cannot read Psalm 119 verse 137 to 144 without then seeing the Lord Jesus Christ in all of this. Let me just share with you that Tzaddi, the stanza that we're reading from, actually points us to the Messiah. And I want you to see this as a reality. You see this word Tzaddi has the original context of one of a suffering servant but also together with the glorified servant. And I want you to see this in scripture that points directly to the Lord Jesus Christ here in this stanza.

1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also has suffered for our sins, the just," which means the righteous, for the unjust, the unrighteous, us, that he might bring us to God. And that's the suffering servant, the Lord Jesus Christ in that way. And then we see him pictured as a glorified servant in Isaiah 49:3. And he says, rather Isaiah says this, "And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." The ultimate goal of the glorified servant namely the Lord Jesus Christ was that his life was to be a life of suffering here on earth which was unjust rather just suffering and then his resurrection and it was showcasing his perfection his power his redemptive love of God to the entire world namely us as those who are unjust, unrighteous towards God. And so he fulfills these two attributes, one of suffering and one of a glorified servant pictured in 1 Peter 3:18 and Isaiah 49:3.

And then he also fulfills the zeal that we see in the text. And it points us to John 2:17 which says, "When Jesus cleansed the temple, the disciples remembered the scriptures, the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." Quoting from Psalm 69:9. See, Jesus embodied the perfect holy zeal for God's word that we failed to maintain.

And then we also see that Jesus was literally treated as small and despised. He was despised and rejected of men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Isaiah 53:3. Trouble and anguish overtook him in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross. But he did not give up as he said there in the garden of Gethsemane. Not my will but thy will be done. He did what God asked him to do perfect in obedience. Again, we could not maintain. Yet, he

never turned away from the Father's word. He never turned away from the Father's word.

And then we go on seeing how he is the perfect righteous one and his life. We cannot perfectly keep God's righteous standard or produce our own righteousness. Just listen to Romans 3:26, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." This text explains to us that God can forgive sinners while remaining completely holy and just and fair by punishing sin through Jesus Christ. What we deserved, the punishment was received by Jesus Christ in perfect obedience.

I want us to think at this time as I come to in conclusion what we found here in this stanza beautifully laid out is because God's word is perfectly righteous and eternally true. You can then anchor your soul in scripture no matter how small you may feel or how fierce the storm becomes both internally and externally. Our God gives us perfect peace in Christ Jesus. A life lived not at the mercy. This is what I want you to think about that you would not live a life at the mercy of breaking news headlines. Not to be fluctuated by your soul, by any however drastic the headlines may look like tomorrow or next week or next month or next year. Not to be shifting your life based on the moral trends of this world which are mix of immorality or being on an emotional roller coaster ride of this world because as believers in Christ we are not to live according to the people of this world and all of its false understanding of what life really means.

And so, picture stepping into every storm then with an unshakable calmness provided by God's word, provided by his peace offered to every believer in Christ, knowing that while heaven and earth may pass away, the word of God will never pass away. That's Matthew 24:35. When you stand firmly on God's testimonies, you are no longer a victim of circumstances. You are anchored to the eternal King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And you can live a flourishing, enduring life, full of joy in the Lord, full delight in him, that no trouble or anguish can ever take you away. This is a promise to every believer in Christ.

But I speak to you that are not believers here, that don't understand ever experiencing delight in God's word, know this that God is giving you the opportunity. The word says today is a day of salvation. As long as is today, as long as Jesus not come back in his second coming, you have an opportunity for salvation. And so I pray that you will come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and you will truly find rest for your soul. Let us pray.

Father, thank you for this time together that we looked at your glorious word. So pure and perfect, so holy, and so much to delight in. Because, Father, you out of your amazing plan that you want us to have the same heart as you do, that you want us to be at perfect relationship with you through thy son Jesus Christ, Father. But thank you that we don't have to trust on our faithlessness or even our doubts or maybe we stumble here and there, but that we trust in the matchless name of the Lord Jesus Christ who is continually faithful in giving us strength to overcome our troubles and our anguishes and gives us then the delights of your word because we have his righteousness upon us that we can live rightly before you and as well as living rightly before men. And so, Father, I pray that you would bless this message to our hearts. Give us more delights in our devotion time. However long it takes for my brothers and sisters in Christ to arrive there, I pray that they would find more delights in what you have for them in your word. And I pray that you would please bring people to salvation that are lost here in this room to again saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and that they will be for the first time good news of what Jesus Christ has done for them on the cross. Please, Father, bless this and we'll thank you in Jesus' precious name. Amen.