

Always Right

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Psalm 119, verses 137-144 Righteous are you, O Lord, and right are your rules.

You have appointed your testimonies in righteousness and in all faithfulness. My zeal consumes me because my foes forget your words. Your promise is well tried and your servant loves it. I am small and despised, yet I do not forget your precepts. Your righteousness is righteous forever and your law is true.

Trouble and anguish have found me out, but your commandments are my delight. Your testimonies are righteous forever. Give me understanding that I may live.

Most of you actually have probably heard me tell this favorite story about Abraham Lincoln and these once or twice.

[1 : 02] You guys know which one I'm talking about? It's during the Civil War when someone asked Abraham Lincoln, So, do you think that God is on the side of the union?

And Abraham replied, Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side. My greatest concern is to be on God's side. For God is always right.

And so, this is my favorite story about Abraham Lincoln. God is not someone we can co-opt for our own agendas. He is always right.

And so, instead of seeking God to bless our purposes and priorities, we should be always aligning ourselves with God's purposes and priorities. Because God is always right. And that's what this stanza is really about.

Five times he uses the words righteous or righteousness. God is always correct. He is supremely in the right. His cause is ever righteous.

[2 : 02] And so, the main point of this stanza really is we should delight in and declare the word of God. Because God is righteous and his rules are right.

And verse 137 starts like this. Righteous are you, O Lord, and right are your rules. And so, the second word, right there, is a little bit different from the word righteous.

It actually means straight. Right. And so, it has a range of meaning in Hebrew as it does in the English. Right. I mean, I think there are English slangs that are similar to the way this is being used here.

Right. It's like when someone says, like, that's straight. You guys heard that? Maybe that's a little old. Yeah. That's straight. Or right on. Right. Like, right.

Like, that's straight. Like, it's like a, it's affirming and expressing approval. Right. Right. Of something. So, when it says, straight are your rules, he's talking about the same thing. The psalmist is testifying to the righteousness, the rightness of God's rules.

[2 : 58] It's straight. So, God's rules do not stray or err or meander or deviate. They're always straight. Always correct. Right. And that's because God himself is righteous.

His rules are right and he is righteous. Righteous are you, O Lord. And so, righteousness is one of the attributes of God and it encompasses his justice. It's often actually translated as justice, the same word.

And it means he's always morally right. He's always correct in his judgment. And since God is righteous, his rules are also right. Verse 138 continues the theme.

You have appointed your testimonies in righteousness and in all faithfulness. The word faithfulness is also a related concept. Except it's a noun form of the adjective in verse 142 that's translated as true.

So, in some ways, it's truthfulness or trueness. Right. So, it's the idea that God is always true to his character. He never deviates from his character.

[4 : 03] He never fails in his promises. His words are always reliable. So, that makes him faithful or trustworthy. And so, he says, you have appointed your testimonies in righteousness and in all faithfulness.

And I was really marveling at this truth as I was preparing this. I think it was yesterday. Because I read the news nowadays.

And it's like, I don't know if you guys are following any of the impeachment stuff. You could get like a, you could read all the Democrats saying what they think.

And then you read all the Republicans saying what they think. And they could not be more different. It's almost like nobody's interested in truth. It's like they're all just like saying whatever their party line is. And it's just like a, it's so biased, so partisan.

Like, and that's how I feel about news in general. Like, it's like, I feel like I can't read anything and take it straight. I have to check it. I have to, when I read a research, I have to check the sources.

[5 : 05] And I have to check the methodologies to make sure they did it right, you know, right. Or I have to, if I read the New York Times, I always have to feel like, I feel like I have to read the Wall Street Journal to go with it. Or if I read the Atlantic, I feel like I have to, you know, read the American Conservative or the National Review.

Or it's just kind of, things are always, there's always a slant. It's never straight, right? It's kind of like God's Word is. But then when it comes to God's Word, that's the amazing thing about it is it's, his testimonies, he appointed it in righteousness and in all faithfulness.

So then it's always true. It's always straight. You could just take it straight as it comes. And that's such a liberating reality, if you think about it. It simplifies our lives so much.

Because then, you know, when you go to a doctor, sometimes you have to get a second opinion, right. When you hear something from a teacher, you might have to second guess it. But you, or a teacher obviously doesn't want that.

You know, but for us, when it comes to God's Word, we never have to question it. We never have to doubt His promises. We never have to, you know, worry about whether there's a slant or not.

[6 : 13] And that's why a Christian who really has faith in the authority of God's Word can stand firm and never waver. Never waver because it's a firm and unshakable foundation. And, of course, the Bible doesn't speak exhaustively about everything, in detail about everything, every particular situation.

So it doesn't grant absolute certainty about everything. But it does leave room for the exercise of God-given wisdom and discernment. But the fact that God's Word is right and true in everything it teaches, it provides great assurance for the Christian if we believe it.

And precisely because God is righteous and His rules are right, the psalmist says in verse 139, My zeal consumes me because my foes forget your words. So the foes forgetting God's Word is contrasted with verse 141.

It says, I am small and despised, yet I do not forget your precepts. So the psalmist, even when he feels small and despised, doesn't forget it, even though his foes forget it. So he remembers God's Word.

And, in fact, his zeal is, he says, to see God's Word heeded by others and himself in his life, it consumes him. He's zealous for it. And this reminds me of Revelation 3.16, where God admonishes the church in Laodicea, saying, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

[7 : 40] It's the idea that cold water is at least good to drink, or hot water is good to wash in, but a lukewarm water is good for nothing. And he's saying, the church in Laodicea was like lukewarm water, I don't want to spit you out.

And so when we serve a God who is righteous and obey his rules which are right, there's really no room for ambivalence, right, for mediocrity or just kind of vacillating one way or another.

There's no room for lukewarmness because it's always right. God's rules are always good, right?

And so we should be zealous to see it remembered and obeyed in every sphere of life.

And if there were uncertainty about the veracity of God's word, then sure, we'd have good excuse to vacillate or waver or be lukewarm or ambivalent about applying it.

But because God's righteous and his rules are right, we should never be hesitant to proclaim it, to declare it, to delight in it.

[8 : 51] And the psalmist says, even when he feels small and despised, he does not forget his precepts. And that's challenging because when we feel small and despised, when we feel intimidated and pressured, when we feel small or weak, that's exactly when it's hard to stand on God's word.

But the psalmist says he still does not forget his precepts. And it's because he who agrees with God is right, even when the whole world disagrees with him.

And so our attitude should echo Paul in Romans 3, 4. Let God be true, though everyone were a liar. And even when we feel intimidated by those around us, when we feel small and despised, we should remember God's word.

And psalmist is able to do this because he says in verse 140, your promise is well tried and your servant loves it. Well tried. I love that phrase.

It's not something God's promises and God's word is not something that he has left untouched or unopened or unused. It's well tried. He's used it.

[9 : 57] He loves it. It's something that it's like his go-to. It's what is tried and true for him. I mean, we always have, we all have things like this. People have their, you know, go-to recipes, right, for foods that always turn out good, right?

Like Zach has his, like, what is it, maple, that maple syrup chicken thing. It's like his go-to dish sometimes. When he doesn't have that much time, you know that one's going to turn out good, right?

It's like a, and so like some other people have a go-to music, maybe they listen to it for comfort, right? Or go-to people, right?

People who are tried and true that you go to for comfort or you take it for counsel. And it's, there are things that are tried and true that we know are not going to disappoint. For the psalmist, that was God's word.

It was well tried. At the risk of being crude, this analogy came to mind. I've heard Mike Tyson say this one time.

[10 : 56] You guys know who Mike Tyson is? Yeah. Okay. You don't know? Yeah. Okay. He was, he was, he was formerly the heavyweight champion of the world in boxing. He's, he was known for his, I guess, really powerful punch or whatever.

Yeah. And, and he said, he has a famous saying that he says a lot. And he says this, quote, everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth. And so what he means is, what he means is this.

Like, it's like, so he's saying all the boxers, when they're preparing for, for a fight, they watch footages of their opponents and study their habits and tendencies and in order to get an advantage. Right. So they had, and they come with a, with a plan, with a strategy on how to defeat their opponent. And, and, and he says that those things are all true, but then all the plans go out the window as soon as you get punched in the mouth, basically, as soon as you get hit in the head. Because then, then fear and panic kicks in. And then all those plans are just nowhere to be remembered. Now, if their instincts come in, what they do when they feel threatened, right?

[12 : 01] Their, their muscle memory kicks in. The things that they've been doing over, over year after year after year. That's how they respond to the things that come. And so, so it's, it becomes instinctual, no longer a strategic, right?

In that sense. And it's like that in life too, right? We, we, people say that they believe all kinds of things, but it's when adversity hits, right? It's when true, that's when our true fundamental beliefs are exposed.

That's when our instincts, things that we really believe in, surface. That's how we respond to the things that come. And for this psalmist, his dependence on God's word is, was that.

It was that instinctual thing. He was well tried. That's what he went to. That when, in, when he says in verse 143, trouble and anguish have found me out, but your commandments are my delight. When he is overcome and overwhelmed by trouble and anguish, what came out of him was trusting God's word, because that's what he went to time and time again and developed his, his spiritual muscle memory.

[13 : 03] And that's what, that's the instinct that came out. And so that makes me want to ask us, like, are we as well acquainted with God's word? Is God's word our go-to in times of trouble and anguish?

Or is there something else? Or someone else? Because we should delight in and declare God's word, for God is righteous and his rules are right. And, and since God is righteous and his word is right, Jesus, who fulfills all of the scriptures, who is the incarnate word of God, the word of God made flesh, is also true and right.

And we see that all throughout the gospel of John. Jesus repeatedly describes himself as true. He says that he's a true light, John 1, 9. He says he's a true bread from heaven, John 6, 32.

True vine, John 15, 1. And he says, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me in John 14, 6. So much like what the psalmist is saying about the word of God here in this stanza, there is no good life apart from Jesus.

There is no right way to God apart from Jesus. And there's no saving truth apart from Jesus because he is the word of God in human flesh who came to show us the way, the truth, and the life.

[14:16] And he died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead for our justification.

And so we should then, as people who are living in the fulfillment era, delight in Christ and declare his gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, because he is righteous and his rules are right.

And so we should be zealous for that, to see the word of Christ spread and believed. And we should remember it even in the midst of trouble and anguish. And we should stand upon the gospel even when we feel small and despised like the psalmist is saying.

And that's my exhortation to you as we close, that we should make it our lifelong pursuit to delight in and declare the gospel until our dying breath.