

Psalms 19-08-22b

And we're ready now to resume our study in Psalm 119, and we're looking at the section beginning in verse 137, the tzadeh section, the righteousness section, and righteousness creates conflict. I say again, righteousness creates conflict. Righteousness begins with God.

God is its definition. We find that out in the first verse of this section, verse 137, and God has communicated that righteousness and has demanded that we be righteous and faithful exceedingly. Exceedingly righteous and exceedingly faithful.

Not a little righteous and sort of faithful. So one of two things is going to happen. We're either going to be zealous or we're not.

We're either going to be motivated and make this a priority or we're not. So the question we can ask ourselves at this point is how high a priority in the day do I observe when it comes to ensuring that the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart are acceptable in God's sight as righteous and faithful. And it's a high standard.

Impossible for us to meet on our own terms, in our own strength, with our own resources. We have to be turning to what God has supplied in terms of the power in his word and the power in his spirit. And if we ignore or take for granted those provisions, we are going to fail and we're going to sin against God.

We're going to sin against each other. So once again when you come to the section that we are now investigating, you come to verse 140. Exceedingly pure of highest refinement is your word and your servant loves it.

It's not I agree with it. I'm cool with it. It's okay with me.

I recognize its quality and I love it. Ahav is the strong word for love in Hebrew. That brings us now to come back out the other side of the chiasm.

That's at the center. That's the most important thing. What are we telling God here? And is it true? I recognize the purity of your word, which is a reflection of your own purity and character and righteousness and my response is love.

What is the first and greatest commandment? Love the Lord your God. Why? Because if you don't you're in trouble because he's the vending machine and if you put in a little love you're going to get out a good life and happiness. Love is typically based when we express it toward one another.

We say the merit of love is in the subject not necessarily in the object. I love based on who and what I am, what God makes me, the character he gives me. It enables us to love the unlovely, to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us and pray for those who spitefully use us.

And you haven't lived until you've been despitely used and somebody is treating you as an enemy and has made themselves your enemy and God says have a policy of love. This is not emotional gushy love. This is a policy of I will not be unkind.

I'm not going to respond in kind. I'm not going to undermine. I'm not going to attack.

I'm not going to vilify. I'm not going to backbite. I'm not going to gossip.

I'm not going to try to inflict some sort of penalty on this person because they have been unjust, unkind, and unlovely to me. My policy is going to be to treat them fairly. I may have to put some distance.

I may have to treat them as a heathen and a tax collector. I don't run around, you know, shooting out the headlights of heathens and tax collectors. I don't chuck rocks through their windows.

I don't you know attack them and cause them mischief and harm. Jesus said if there is an issue and you've tried two or three times to approach and you've enlisted others to try to resolve this conflict and somebody will not be reconciled, treat them like a heathen and a tax collector. How were Israel to treat heathens and tax collectors? God never says go thou forth and massacre the heathen.

Go thou forth and, you know, beat to a pulp and stone with stones the tax collectors. What did you do? Tax collectors have an ugly job. If they're being unfair, if they're lining their own pockets and charging unjust amounts of tax and pocketing the the proceeds, I will just have nothing to do with them, but I'm not hostile.

I just avoid. I keep a distance. Well, I am small and despised.

This is verse 141 now. My enemies have forgotten your word and they're gonna have the same attitude toward us. The more we are identified with God and his word, the more similarly we are going to be treated.

You look at the absolute malice with which God is held in a lot of circles and in a lot of areas of our society today. It was just unthinkable a few decades back and now the cool thing is to be anti-God and anti-religion and anti-godly people and at best to look down on people and to be supercilious and belittle and minimize and sideline and feel sorry for all these poor benighted people who don't know what we know and they're unscientific. They're weak.

They need a crutch. They're afraid of death. They're pitiable and people pose as though they pity people who love God and people who honor God and try to live their lives to please God who believe the Bible and the truth of God's word.

Well, you're just treated with contempt and at best people just treat you as though you're defective in some way. Well, I am small and despised. Is he small and despised in God's eyes? Is

he small and despised in his own eyes? This state of being despicable is in the eyes of the enemies.

Look at the parallel verse on the other side of the center of the chiasm. Enemies who have forgotten God's words and this is a conscious pushing aside and forgetting. You consciously forget God's word and this is what is going to happen.

The verse actually begins if you look at the Hebrew word order here, it is little am I and despised. Little am I. I do not forget your precepts. Notice that yet is in italics there.

These two things are set in contrast. There is a penalty that I am paying. Small am I and I is kind of like we saw atah earlier on where you yourself are righteous.

Here small am I myself. Anokhi is the emphatic first person personal pronoun. So this is sa'ir, small.

It's an adjective that means insignificant, little It was applied to the youngest, the least. So least, insignificant, little am I myself and despised. And this means to be disdained, to be held in contempt, to be considered vile and worthless.

People just sneer and have nothing good to say. And then with no conjunction at all, he continues and says your precepts, piqued. Remember when we were enumerating the different facets of God's word reflected in Psalm 119 and indeed in the Old Testament in general, piqued these statutes and precepts this is the warp and the woof.

This is the vertical and the horizontal reference for what is straight, what is upright and what is not. Is it crooked or is it straight? Is it upright or is it leaning and falling over? Your precepts, your standards, your statutes. I do not forget and this is Shakak.

We saw this in verse 139. My enemies have forgotten. Enemies have forgotten.

I do not forget. You see the forget in these in the C and the C prime areas of the of the chiasm here. Enemies have forgotten.

I do not forget. That brings us to verse 142. Your righteousness is right forever.

It seems almost like a tautology. Your righteousness is righteous. Your goodness is good.

Your rightness is right. So this is uh Tzedakah Tzedakah which is your tzedakah, your righteousness, is righteous, is tzedek. La'olam.

So it's not the tautology to say well your righteousness is really right. Your rightness is right. He says your righteousness continues to be righteous forever.

La'olam. Unto the ages. It's everlasting.

Your righteousness continues to be righteous everlasting. Once again five words in this verse.

So you have tzedkatkah, your righteousness, tzedek.

Is right. La'olam. That's your first three words.

Then you've got two more. And your law, your Torah Torah Emet. Your law is truth.

Your righteousness, that's God's personal righteousness. And his law is truth. What does this correspond to in your chiasm? Your testimonies.

You have commanded your testimonies. Righteousness, exceeding, and faithfulness. Right? Exceeding righteousness and faithfulness.

Here you've got righteousness and truth expressed in the law. Testimonies reflect God's character, God's communication. We're back to that interface between God and man.

Now in verse 140, and by the way, keep your finger here and turn back to Psalm 103, verse 17. We've got the same idea. Psalm 103, verse 17.

We can begin in verse 15. As for man, his days are like grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him and his righteousness to children's children, to such as keep his covenant, and to those who remember his commandments to do them. Do you worry about the temporary disapprobation and the despising and the ridicule of people who are here today and gone tomorrow? Or are you consumed with zeal for God and his righteousness, the standards that are reflected in his character and his judgments? Same idea here. Your righteousness is an everlasting, is everlastingly righteous.

The mercy and righteousness of God is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him. And you flip over a few pages from Psalm 103 to Psalm 111 and look at verse 3. Psalm 111. The hand is not helping me flip pages here.

The works of the Lord are great, verse 2 of Psalm 111. The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and his righteousness endures forever.

You may remember 111 was another one of our acrostic Psalms that we looked at in some detail. But you look at the work of the Lord and his righteousness, which endures forever. And you think, isn't that sort of a given? But if you stop and think about it, God's justice isn't changeable.

What's right in God's eyes yesterday is still right in God's eyes today and is going to be right in God's eyes forever. Look at the changing standard of righteousness in the world. Things that used to be acceptable aren't.

Things that were never acceptable now are. People call good evil, an evil good. And what used to be approved and considered proper is now passé and is despised and ridiculed.

The standards of the world, if you gain approval, you can't count on it to last. What people think is great today, they're going to hate tomorrow. God's righteousness never changes when we latch onto it, when we live in its light, when we appreciate it and become imbued with it in our heart.

We have a righteousness intrinsic that stays with us and guarantees our compatibility and our acceptability with God now and forever. It's a wonderful thing to know that God doesn't change. And if he's saving us now, and if he's declaring us righteous now, he's not going to change his mind a couple of thousand years into the eternal future and say, well, I know I told you you were saved forever, but I'm really kind of sick of looking at you.

I'm God. What are you going to do? He thinks a thought, says a word, and we're vaporized. God does not change.

With him is no shadow of turning. And it's a great comfort to live your life to please an unchanging God whose standards and whose righteousness is unvarying instead of trying to keep up with trends. So your righteousness is righteousness forever.

That's really how the Hebrew reads. Your righteousness is righteous forever. And your law, truth.

The implication being it is also eternal truth. It does not change. Now verse 143.

Trouble and anguish have overtaken me yet your commandments are my delights. So now we're contrasting what is in heaven and what is on earth. We're back to A and A prime here, right? In the chiasm.

So the psalm began, Righteous are you, O Lord, and upright in your judgments. You are righteous and upright. That's you in heaven.

Unchanging, perfect. Me down here, I am awash in trouble and anguish. God is imbued with and exudes and communicates this wonderful righteousness and uprightness.

Me down here, I am trying to take up arms against a sea of troubles, slings and arrows of outrageous fortune as Shakespeare said. So trouble and anguish have overtaken me and this is the idea. If you want to flip a few pages back to psalm 116 verse 3, this very same verse, this very same verb rather is used in this verse.

I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplications because he has inclined his ear to me. Therefore I will call upon him as long as I live. God is in heaven.

I am on earth. The pains of death, verse 3, surrounded me and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me. I found trouble and sorrow.

The pains of death and the pangs of Sheol have laid hold. That's what he's saying. They have overtaken.

They have seized me. They've got me in their grip. And it looks like dire straits.

A seemingly hopeless situation. Yet your commandments are my delights. Why is it delights in the plural? Your commandments are my delight.

Why wouldn't it be the whole package as a delight singular? Well, you can look back. This same idea was expressed in this very same psalm back in verse 24. Princes in verse 23 sit and speak against me, but your servant meditates on your statutes.

Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors. They are my delights. And the plural here is a plural of fullness.

It's like so many of the plurals in Hebrew. God himself is his name. Elohim is a dual or a plural.

Mayim, the waters, is a plural in the sense of bigness, largeness. Hashemayim, the heavens, is given in the plural because of its of its magnitude. And so although trouble and anguish have overtaken me, your commandments are my delights in the sense of that's where I take my refreshment.

That's where I get my pleasure and my comfort. So trouble and anguish, the word trouble here is the word tsar, t-s-a-r, begins the verse, and it literally means a tight spot. If you ever had something that was too tight, you get an injury and they wrap you in an ace bandage or they put you in a splint or they put you in a cast.

But after time, or you've got shoes and you thought they fit fine in the store, but you start wearing them and after a while there's just a greater and greater sense of discomfort. If you've ever been in an airline seat and you're you're too constrained, there's no room to stretch out your legs. If you're tall, it's worse.

If you had to put your luggage under the front of the seat in front of you, and so there's no place to put your feet, you can't stretch to the left. The wall of the plane and the window is to your left and somebody is to your right. You can't lean back.

Somebody's back there. You're just constrained. That's tsar.

This trouble is in the sense of I don't have any options here. I'm uncomfortable and I've got no room to move. I've got no room to maneuver.

It's too tight. It's uncomfortable and I can't escape it. The second word here, anguish, also is a tsade word, but it's matsok.

Tsade is right in the middle of it. Matsok, M-A-T-S-O-Q. And this also means to be in a narrow spot, to be between a rock and a hard place.

I'm channeled in one direction and I can't turn to the left or to the right. And so this puts me in distress and anguish, but the the root idea is I'm hemmed in. I'm constrained and hemmed in.

I just feel like I'm out of options. This is a specific kind of trouble and a specific kind of anguish. I feel that there is no option and no escape.

And it has overtaken me. And this means it has found me and taken me prisoner. It means to find something and to grab a hold of it.

I have been found. I have been taken. So this constraint has, this constraint and this lack of options has taken me prisoner.

It hunted me down and captured me. It's a very vivid picture in Hebrew. But he says your commandments, your mitzvot are my delights, my enjoyment.

This, I'm constrained by circumstances. I'm hemmed in by people. It's sought me out and taken me prisoner, but I am free when I dwell on your commandments, on the revelation of your word, your righteousness, what you have said.

And it's more than one commandment. It's it's the body of it. It's the collection of it.

These are my delights. So what happens? Physical circumstance, earthly constraint is transcended because our heart is in God's word. Our thoughts are in God's precepts and his statutes and his commandments.

And suddenly the earthly constriction loses its power. You think of Paul and Silas in prison. You think of the beatings and the chains and the darkness and the discomfort of it and they're singing hymns.

How is that possible? They're not really there. The reality of God and his word and the wonderful truths expressed in the lyrics of those hymns transcends the moment. It sounds great.

The question is can we actually exploit this? So then we come to the coda which usually re-expresses the theme of the chiasmic structure of the first seven verses. The center of it is pure, super refined, 24 carat is your word. Therefore your servant loves it.

So the coda in verse 144, the righteousness of your testimonies is everlasting. Give me understanding and I shall live. The righteousness of your testimonies.

We began in verse 138 talking about the righteousness and faithfulness, the exceedingness of those that God has commanded. You have commanded these things. Well, it is everlasting.

And once again, we have a five-word stanza here. Tzedek are your testimonies. Righteous are your testimonies and everlasting.

That's how I would translate this. Your testimonies are righteous and they are everlasting. Then the last two words say cause me, hyphial is the causative stem in Hebrew.

This is a hyphial imperative. Cause me to discern, cause me to understand, cause me to know, give me discernment is the prayer here. Cause me to know and understand and I will live.

And this is from Chay, C-H-A-Y. Every time we come across this verb, I remind you of the toast in Hebrew, l'chayim, l' meaning to and chayim is life, but it's im because like that plural we saw earlier, it's life in its fullness. So it literally says two lives, but it means two full and abundant life and it's chayim, l'chayim.

It's a toast. Well here, this is cause me to know and understand, give me wisdom. Remember James says if any of you likes wisdom, let him ask.

This is the psalmist asking, give me understanding so that I will live and live indeed. Give me understanding and I will live. Well, it's all about God's righteousness lifting us up and out of a heartless, cruel, vindictive and hostile world.

The closer you identify with God and his righteousness, the more hostile the world is going to be to us and to everything we believe in and stand for and that which we love, which is God and his word. And Jesus said if they've hated me, they're going to hate you. So do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that you face, Paul says.

Don't be surprised. It's a fiery ordeal. But if you are living as you should and if you are loving who you should, God and his word, then this hostility is natural and we turn back to the source to be delivered from it.

Well, this brings us to the Kof stanza. We just have four letters left, which is Kof and Resh and Shin and Tav which reminds you of Tov. But the theme for tonight is where do we stand with regard to God's righteousness? People who do not embrace it are its enemies.

You either love it and embrace it and live for it, derive comfort from it and ask God for understanding to pursue it and to live it out or you are its enemy. There is no middle ground presented here. The psalmist doesn't talk about the apathetic or the indifferent or the distracted.

You know who the apathetic and the indifferent and the distracted and the lukewarm are? Enemies. If it's not love and dedication, it's enemyship. And Paul talks about that in the New Testament.

I tell you even weeping, they are enemies of the cross, fallen from grace. Cut off from Christ. God's not kidding.

The judgment is coming. Where do we stand? What have we chosen to be? What have we chosen to do? What is the basis that we use to interact with each other and with the world

around us? Are we dedicated to God and his righteousness or have we found some false standard? And we're going to apply that and adhere to that because we have a much easier time meeting it. It is a sober call to righteousness here in the tsadeh section and worth reflecting on.

Let me give you one last quick final thought. Pure is your word, therefore your servant loves it. It's at the heart of the psalm.

It's at the center of the chiasm. If you turn back to psalm 18 verse 31, I want to end on a hopeful note here. Psalm 18, it's a wonderful psalm.

I'm just going to read beginning at verse 20 because we've covered this psalm several months back. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness. You really need to read this whole psalm.

I just don't have time. We'll start at verse 20. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness according to the cleanness of my hands.

He has recompensed me. I have kept the ways of the Lord and have not wickedly departed from my God for all his judgments were before me and I did not put away his statutes from me. See the similarity of theme.

I was blameless before him and kept myself from my iniquity. Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my tzedek, according to my righteousness according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. With the merciful you will show yourself merciful.

With a blameless man you will show yourself blameless. With the pure you will show yourself pure and with the devious you will show yourself shrewd for you will save the humble people but will bring down haughty looks. For you will light my lamp.

The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness. For by you I can run against a troop. By my God I can leap over a wall.

As for God his way is perfect. The word of the Lord is proven. He is a shield to all who trust in him.

For who is God except the Lord and who is a rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer and sets me on my high places. He teaches my hands to make war so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

And remember we went through this whole section in great detail and just remember the benefits and the eternal longevity of God's grace toward those who are willing to be sustained by him. And as a final thought turn back a few more pages to Psalm 12. And we're going to look at verse 6. Psalm 12 verse 6. Begin at verse 3. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaks proud things who have said with our tongue we will prevail.

Our lips are our own. Who is Lord over us? For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy. Now I will arise says the Lord.

I will set him in the safety for which he yearns. The words of the Lord are pure words like silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times. You shall keep them O Lord.

You shall preserve them from this generation forever. The wicked prowls on every side when villainy is exalted among the sons of men. The purity of God's word that's at the heart of our section on tzaddik.

But you go back and review Psalm 18. Review Psalm 12. This is the heritage for us when we respond in obedience and faithfulness and in love for God and for his righteousness.

There are abundant promises, but they always have that condition. That's us. Let's close here our word of prayer.

We'll pick up at verse 145 next time. Father thank you so much for the wonderful promises that are ours to claim when we respond to your grace, to your righteousness, to your justice. When we value the truth of your word and store it away in our hearts.

Recognize its purity, its eternity and its contrast with the temporal, ephemeral, changing and corrupt truths and values that characterize this world. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will help us to see clearly that contrast, to see where the truth is in our lives and in our world. We pray with the psalmist that you will give us understanding, give us comprehension, give us discernment so that we can live.

Live in a way that pleases you and glorifies the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in his name. Amen.