

DAY EIGHTEEN

“RIGHTEOUS, ZEALOUS FAITH”

PSALM 119:137-144

Many times while meditating on the Scriptures, certain words initiate different images that are a reflection of innumerable thoughts from past readings of Holy Writ. Such is the case in the verses of Psalm 119 being considered today. Two major concepts—righteousness and zealotry—are liberally sprinkled throughout Genesis to Revelation. When contemplating these ideas, one sees that they can be linked together, and so I have been zealously considering them this morning. *Try plumbing the depths of His righteousness, and you probably know what I mean.* But, before commenting on our selection for today, please take the time to read and reflect on the following passages. **Perhaps your passion for more of Him will be ignited!**

PSALM 67:1-7

For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. God be gracious to us and bless us, *and* cause His face to shine upon us—Selah. That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.

PSALM 119:137-144

Tsadhe. Righteous are You, O LORD, and upright are Your judgments. You have commanded Your testimonies in righteousness and exceeding faithfulness. My zeal has consumed me, because my adversaries have forgotten Your words. Your word is very pure, therefore Your servant loves it. I am small and despised, yet I do not forget Your precepts. Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth. Trouble and anguish have come upon me, yet Your commandments are my delight. Your testimonies are righteous forever; give me understanding that I may live.

COUNTING THE OMER

A cursory reading of Psalm 119:137-144 will direct the reader to the concept of righteousness. Not only does this passage begin with a Hebrew derivative of this word,¹ but “righteousness” is mentioned several times (vs. 137, 138, 142). This selection of Psalm 119 is stanza *tzadi* (צ), and not surprisingly the significant Hebrew word for “righteousness,” *tzedaqah* (צדקה),² begins with this letter. When thinking of righteousness, I immediately think of a person entering the narrow gate via Spirit-led direction to complete salvation, rather than treading the broad way that leads to condemnation. I remember the Righteous One Himself, Yeshua, using this illustration to describe what is required to enter eternal life:

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Perhaps Yeshua was indicating that a person was achieving righteousness because He had just admonished His hearers to treat others as they would like to be treated. We commonly remember these words as the “Golden Rule”:

“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

In His Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua said that a proper treatment of one’s fellow human beings would come from knowing the Torah and the Prophets, and what has been expected of God’s people from the very beginning (Matthew 5:17ff). He knew that the testimony of the Tanakh pointed to belief in Him, His actions, and ultimately His atoning work (cf. Luke 24:44). Giving some final instructions at the Passover *seder* prior to His crucifixion, Yeshua declared that He is the Way:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).

This statement further expounds upon an earlier word He had given about being the Door or the Gate that leads to life:

“So Yeshua said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **I am the door of the sheep**. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:7-9).

All throughout the recorded testimonies of Yeshua’s ministry, we see the Lord constantly point people to the required imperative to acknowledge Him as **the only way** to reconciliation with the Father and final redemption. Yeshua the Messiah is the Righteous One to whom we must turn if we desire salvation:

“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Yeshua, *the one* whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. **But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One** and asked for a murderer to be granted to you” (Acts 3:13-14).

“Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of **the Righteous One**, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and *yet* did not keep it” (Acts 7:52-53).

¹ Heb. *tzadik* (צדק).

² The Greek equivalent of *tzedaqah*, frequently witnessed in the Septuagint and Apostolic Scriptures, is *dikaiosunē* (δικαιοσύνη).

Both the Apostle Peter and the martyr Stephen refer to Yeshua as “the Righteous One.” When you begin our selection for today (Psalm 119:136-144) and how it begins with “Righteous are You, O LORD...” (Psalm 119:137), you should see how the Apostles believed that the righteousness of the Father and Son were identical. How are we to emulate God’s righteousness today? Thankfully the Scriptures are full of examples for us to consider as we face various trials and obstacles to be overcome. These Biblical examples *all aid us* significantly as we seek to be effective in God’s service.

Perhaps the most significant example of righteousness I can consider is Abraham. It was because of Abraham’s steadfast trust in God that he was considered righteous:

“And Abram said, ‘Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.’ Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.’ And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ **Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.** And He said to him, ‘I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it’” (Genesis 15:3-7).

If you will remember, Abram (later renamed Abraham) had some questions of the Creator God. As he sought answers, the fact that *he believed* in Him was sufficient for him to be considered righteous. The Apostle Paul considers Abraham’s example to be so significant, that because of his belief in God’s promises, Abraham actually had the essential “gospel” proclaimed to him long before the arrival of the Messiah:

“Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS [Genesis 15:6]. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. **The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU** [Genesis 12:3].’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer” (Galatians 3:6-9).

Another interesting thought caught my attention from the author of Hebrews:

“BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH; AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM [Habakkuk 2:3-4, LXX]. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul” (Hebrews 10:38-39).

The author of Hebrews restates Habakkuk 2:4:

“Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith” (cf. Galatians 3:11).

As I reflected on this statement, the idea of “shrinking back”⁴ caught my attention, as did the thought of Yeshua’s zealotness. The Messiah did not at all back away or cower from His detractors when it was appropriate. All we need to consider is the testimony of Yeshua overturning the moneychangers in the Temple, who were responsible for swindling many of the people:

“And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their

³ Heb. *tzadiq atah ADONAI* (צַדִּיק אַתָּה יְהוָה).

⁴ Editor’s note: The Septuagint renders Habakkuk 2:4 with “If he should draw back...” (LXE), which is obviously a theological value judgment for what “Behold, his soul is defiant...” (ATS) or “the proud one” (NASU) means.

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tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, ‘Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business.’ His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME’ [Psalm 69:9]” (John 2:15-17).

Here, the Fourth Gospel quotes from Psalm 69—applying a text to Yeshua—where the zealous King David originally described his challenges with the unrighteous of his day. The reproaches against him were so intense, that in this Psalm he poured out his heart by appealing that God would prevail over those who seek him harm:

“I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched; my eyes fail while I wait for my God. Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies; what I did not steal, I then have to restore. O God, it is You who knows my folly, and my wrongs are not hidden from You. May those who wait for You not be ashamed through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; may those who seek You not be dishonored through me, O God of Israel, because for Your sake I have borne reproach; dishonor has covered my face. I have become estranged from my brothers and an alien to my mother’s sons. **For zeal for Your house has consumed me**, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. When I wept in my soul with fasting, it became my reproach” (Psalm 69:3-10).

Neither Yeshua nor David shrunk back from executing righteous judgment, or from crying out for the Father’s judgment to come against their opponents.

Here, we see an important link between righteousness and zealousness that is very uplifting. And when the time is allowed to consider some of my favorite Biblical zealots like Phinehas (Numbers 25), Elijah (1 Kings 19), Jehu (2 Kings 10), and John the Immerser⁵—individuals who are all described as having great zeal for the things of the Lord—I can contemplate the results of their faith-filled zeal and how He used them in their respective roles. Even if we are not called to fight the same kind of fights that they did, **we are to still be able to face adversity head on when we encounter it**. For most of us today, this simply means being able to resist the temptations of sin, and properly stand firm for our faith (or even *the* faith) when it is challenged. The Apostle Peter exhorts us:

“But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED [cf. Isaiah 8:12-13],⁶ but sanctify Messiah as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Messiah will be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:14-16).

It is amazing how simply Counting the Omer can take one on a significant journey into the important themes of the Scriptures! How much will the Lord be pleased as we continue forward in anticipation of the Feast of Weeks? Will our zeal for Him and His righteousness result in an outpouring of His blessings? I certainly hope that I will have the faith to see this happen! *Thirty-two more days to go...*

⁵ Matthew 3:3; 11:10; Mark 1:2ff; Luke 3:4; 7:27.

⁶ “You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, and you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread” (Isaiah 8:12-13).