

Jesus Christ the Righteous Psalm 17

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the principles of divine life through trust and righteousness as expressed in Psalms, emphasizing the believer's relationship with God and the assurance found in Christ's redemptive work.

Scripture: Psalm 17:1

Topics: "Trust in God", "Divine Righteousness"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the two foundational principles of divine life found in Psalms 16 and 17: trust in God and the consciousness of righteousness. He explains that while the Psalms express the struggles of believers, they do not fully reveal the foundation of God's righteousness as understood in the New Testament. Darby highlights that Christ exemplified perfect trust and integrity, and through Him, believers can find assurance of their standing in divine righteousness. He contrasts the Old Testament understanding of mercy and righteousness with the New Testament revelation of accomplished righteousness through Christ, which brings peace and hope to believers. Ultimately, he encourages Christians to embrace their identity as children of God, living in the certainty of their relationship with Him.

Transcript

This and Psalm 16 give us two great principles of divine life - trust and conscious righteousness. We find them running all through the Psalms, and any godly person's life as well as that of the Jew. But it is worthy of remark that it does not give the foundation fully on which we stand; according to the New Testament our position is different. You do not find in it the foundation of God's righteousness at this time. Souls in the condition of having divine life, but not knowing their standing in divine righteousness, find the suitability of the Psalms to their experience. Psalm 16 is the first that brings in Christ's own experience: for the first time here He takes His place in humiliation amongst them. Psalms 2 and 8 are prophetic of Him as King and as Son of man. In Psalm 16 He is taking His own place amongst these excellent of the earth. The first characteristic of the divine life is Christ putting His trust in Jehovah; as a man He does it. Hence in Luke, where we see Him more as a man, we see Him praying, the true expression of dependence. "Preserve me, O God," etc.; there is the principle of trust.

Then another principle of divine life is the consciousness of integrity. In Peter there was the same when he said, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee" There may be both these things - trust in God and consciousness of integrity - without peace with God. Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him"; and he pleaded his own righteousness against God - "Till I die, I will not remove mine integrity

from me." He had the consciousness of sin and the sense of righteousness, integrity in himself, at the same time. The soul cannot be at peace in this state. Job was entirely wrong in making a righteousness of his integrity; his friends thought him a hypocrite, but he had the distinct consciousness of not being one. The second principle you have in Psalm 17. God stays up the souls that are trusting in Him until they see Christ. Having got a promise they trust, but cannot say, I have the righteousness of God. Christ having taken up their condition and borne it, they have the consciousness of integrity through Him, and it is the stay of their souls, but not peace.

What a stay it is to find one's feelings expressed in Scripture! Should not I cry out of the depths? You say, I find it in Scripture, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee." The word of God gives expression to certain thoughts and feelings; they are in the word. A person taking up Psalm 88, expressing entire darkness under the curse of the law, may say, If one saint has been in that state, another may be, and so I may be a saint after all, and get comfort in that way by the sanction of the word. There is not peace in this, but it is a prop and stay to the soul.

29 This applies to the remnant surrounded by their enemies, as we see here; Psalm 17. We have spiritual enemies. Here is the reality of enemies pressing round Christ. Thousands of hearts will be found trusting in God, come what will, and have the consciousness of integrity, Christ having put Himself in the very place; and they will find every imperfectly formed feeling has been perfectly expressed by Him. In the perfect unconsciousness of sin (2 Cor. 5:21), He has come into all the trial and given expression to it. He has borne the sin too.

There is another thing in the Psalms - mercy always going before righteousness; and they never meet till Christ appears at the end to the remnant. I cannot say righteousness and peace have kissed each other until I know the perfectness of redemption. I may get hope, but I cannot have peace until I get righteousness. It may be said, "Righteousness and peace have kissed," etc., when Christ comes again (this for the Jew). A Jew under law would put righteousness before mercy; this is the law, and Israel never stood on that ground. They had made the golden calf before the law was given to them. Then God retires into His own sovereignty, and, to spare any, mercy comes in. It was the resource of God when wickedness came in. They were going about to establish their own righteousness and would not have Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness; but when they come back, it will be on the ground of mercy and hope. How many Christians are on this ground instead of in the certainty of possessing righteousness! It is mercy and hope, instead of righteousness the ground of hope. They think of the throne of mercy, and promises coming out to help them, not being founded on righteousness. Of course they could not be saved without it; but the state of their souls is that they have not got into it.

We are not like those who refuse to believe till they have seen Him; we have the end of our faith now, even the salvation of our souls. We know that righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Christ is gone into the holy place, and the Holy Ghost has come out, to us the proof of it, and we are certain of the reception of Christ within and of the accomplishment of divine righteousness. "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight," etc. (Rom. 3:20.) "But," it is said, "in Jehovah shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory." It is not 'shall' to us, but "being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." God had been forbearing in mercy with the Old Testament saints, because He knew what He was going to bring in. Now it is declared - it was not declared then. "Not to themselves, but to us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven" - "to declare at this time his righteousness" - "being fully persuaded that what he had spoken he was able to perform."

30 I do not simply believe that God is able, but that He has raised up His Son from the dead. One may trust He will help, but not be conscious of being helped yet; this was the patriarch's portion. But I do not expect Him to do it, but know that He has done it. It is "the ministration of righteousness." I am not merely hoping in His mercy to do something for me to stay me up; but, besides this trust and consciousness of integrity in the heart, there is the knowledge of accomplished righteousness: righteousness is declared. They could not judge sin in the same way when they had not righteousness as a settled question, which it now is for ever. The Spirit of God now demonstrates righteousness to the world by setting Christ at God's right hand. Christ said, "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do"; and God says to Him, "Sit thou on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool." And, as regards the believer, righteousness is on the right hand of God for him. The affections ought to be more lively, now there is the certainty of accomplished righteousness, than when there was only the hope. The Spirit of adoption is given us: we can cry "Abba, Father."

But, note, there is another sense connected with righteousness here - mercy going before righteousness, but righteousness appealed to on the ground of promises: the soul in the lowest depth of feeling; Psalm 42. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts"; "Out of the depths have I cried," etc.; "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps," is in quite a natural kind of experience. There is either the sense of hope in His mercy, or consciousness of sins: when thinking of the mercy, trusting in God; when under the sense of sin, down in the depths. This is not having the sense of everlasting righteousness brought in. All these exercises of soul being expressed give warrant, as it were, to these experiences of heart. It will give comfort, when down in the depths, to know that One has gone down into the depths for him; the soul will find Christ has traced all the way for him. The Spirit of God in Him, going through all these things for us, shews that not one place, from the dust of death to the highest place in glory, but He has been in for us, sins and all having been gone under. The feeblest Christian now knows more than the apostles could when Christ was on earth. Should we be surprised at His speaking of the cross and His rising again? The Holy Ghost has shewn it to us. We feed upon that which frightened them - "Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood," etc. What frightened them was a dead Christ; they fled from it when they saw it in the distance. When once founded on righteousness, it is different. How sad to see a saint crouching on the other side of divine righteousness, instead of having on the "helmet of salvation," having communion with Him in the efficacy of His death!

There is another thing to mark in these two Psalms: the character of hope flowing through them, now we tread in this path of life. What was the trust Christ had? He trusted in the goodness, in the infallible love of God. He delighted in communion with His Father; it was the spring of His joy. With us it is the same thing, though mixed up with all sorts of things. What did He delight in? In God Himself. Then as to righteousness, what was that? (See end of Psalm 17.) In Psalm 16, where we see Him trusting in God's love, what is the consequence? Reward in glory? Not a bit; but, "In thy presence is fulness of joy; and at thy right hand," etc. In Psalm 17, glory is looked for as the crown for a faithful walk. "I shall be satisfied when I awake up in thy likeness."

Christ looked to return to the glory He had left, from the path of humiliation down here: the reward for it would be glory as a crown. This applies to us: when we see Him, we shall be like Him. The highest and most blessed thing is to be with Him in the Father's house; this will be infinite, unspeakable joy; but there will also be the crowning with glory and honour. Paul speaks of this: "The crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me in that day, and not to me only, but also to all them that love his appearing." But his brightest hope was to win Christ. As the reward of walking with Him in communion,

there will be joy in His presence; as the reward for faithful walk, it will be the place in glory.

32 He will come to set everything to rights in power; "judgment will return to righteousness, and all the meek of the earth shall," etc. That has never been known yet. When Christ comes in power, judgment and righteousness will go together. Power will be given to the Judge, who will act in righteousness. Is that all I am looking for? No; I am going up to meet the Lord in the air; the hope is founded on righteousness of course, but I am not looking to be justified. What the church gets in the rapture is (as Christ was raised up by the "glory of the Father," and so taken up into His presence), we shall have the blessed joy of being with Him for ever; 1 Thess. 4. No getting righteousness is there; the best thing is looking out for Himself - to see Him as He is - to be ever with the Lord. When responsibility is spoken of, it is always connected with the appearing; there is the crown, the principle of integrity and faithfulness owned (Psalm 17), connected with the life down here. When speaking of going to be with Christ - the rapture, all go together to enjoy the grace and presence of Him who has done it all. It is very important to lay hold by faith of the truth of the rapture to Christ of the church of God.

Receiving crowns differing each from each is one thing; but all going together is another thing, all alike being associated in His own blessedness, as He said, "I go to prepare a place for you," etc.

The exercise of soul after divine righteousness is very different from these things before one stands in the divine righteousness. One who has this does not speak of crying out of the "depths." There is an immense change. We have the Spirit of adoption. If I am going through all the difficulties and trials of the world, it is as a child I am going through them. My feelings and affections flow from the certainty of relationship. "I have declared thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them." What was Christ's place on earth? Was He uncertain as to His Father's love? Never; but, on the cross, bearing our sin under the hiding of God's face. There was in Him perfect obedience, but as a Son. If we are led by the Spirit, we have liberty, "not bondage again to fear." Have you liberty? If I have the consciousness of Christ having been in the depths for me, I am out of them, and am no more to be in them; consequently I am sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. The cross behind me, having come by that to God, I look by the Holy Ghost at the cross and see my sins put away there.

33 Faith is my thinking God's thoughts instead of my own. God says, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more"; I think so too. God says, "children of God through faith in Christ Jesus"; I think so too. God says, we stand in favour; I think so too. I do not know how God could prove His favour more than by sending His Son. He says, an "heir of glory," "joint-heir with Christ." I have everything Christ has, as a child with my Father. Now comes conflict; but I have the experience of a free man with God. One dead, quickened, and raised up together with Christ is the experience of a Christian, into all which he enters by virtue of divine righteousness in Christ. In the "fulness of time" He came. They were servants before He came; but now we are sons, and the Spirit of God is in us the Spirit of adoption. This is my place. I do not always act rightly in it: the Holy Ghost reproves and humbles me; but that is my place.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-nelson-darby/jesus-christ-the-righteous-psalm-17/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net