

The Righteous holds to his way

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back to the book of Job for a little, and chapter 17, chapter that we read. Reading at verse 9, Job chapter 17, verse 9, particularly the first part of that verse, the whole verse, but yet the righteous holds to his way, and he who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger. The book of Job is a book that often perplexes many people, in fact probably perplexes everybody, because it deals with the age-old problem of suffering, and particularly the suffering of the righteous, particularly the suffering of the Christian, of the believer. And it's something that often baffles us and perplexes us. I'm sure we've often come to points and places, and we're left bewildered by the mystery of God's providence, because things just don't seem to make sense, things just don't seem to add up. And often the Christian is left really bewildered, particularly when difficult things and bad things and sore things come into the life of the believer. We're liable to question all sorts of things. And that's one of the things that the book of Job brings out very forcefully and very powerfully, because Job was an exceptional believer. He was noted in his day as being a man of great integrity.

And yet Job suffered one calamity after another, a man who had everything. He lost everything he had. He lost his family. He lost his health. He lost his wealth. His wife, who he still had, turned against him. The friends that he had all turned against him. In fact, he became a byword in the community for all that was wrong. And people came to the firm conclusion that Job actually had been living a lie, that he was a hypocrite, that all his goodness that appeared was only surface deep.

And that they were absolutely persuaded that these things could not have possibly happened to him, unless it was the fact that deep down he was actually a bad man. Job had three friends who came, and they were termed Job's comforters, but they weren't much comfort, because they kept accusing Job of this hypocrisy, this hidden hypocrisy, and telling him that it was because of this that he had been dealt with so harshly. But when you read through the book of Job, and part of what we're reading here, we find that Job, it's actually a very heavy book at times, because we find that Job is just pouring out his heart, and it's full of complaint, and full of absolute sadness, and bitterness, and every kind of distress. If you've ever gone through distress, you can go to the book of Job, and you'll find you can identify with some of the things that he's saying. For instance, towards the end of the chapter there, he says, if I hope for Shoal, if I make my bed in darkness, if I say to the pit, you are my father, and to the worm, my mother or my sister, where that, you know, it's just, it's very bleak.

But when you read through the book of Job, and when you get to the end of the book of Job, it all changes. Because God is dealing with Job. And after Job, as it were, almost exhausted himself, and poured out all his complaint and all his sorrow, it's as if he has got nothing else left. And it's then that God comes back to Job.

And God begins to reveal himself to Job. And the change, and if you read in the latter few chapters of Job, is actually quite extraordinary. Because we find that Job is overwhelmed and utterly humbled in the presence of God.

[4 : 3 0] And in the end, he says, I have to put my hand over my mouth, because of all I've been saying. He felt ashamed, because of what he had been saying, when he caught a glimpse of the power, the might, the glory, the majesty of God.

And of course, we know that the Lord lifted Job up again, and blessed the latter end of Job greater than even the former. But throughout this chapter, throughout this book, there are many great truths things that Job is taught. And one of the truths that Job, because we've got to remember that Job is somebody who is being accused of as being a hypocrite. And Job is defending himself so often.

And one of the things that Job says here, and this was so true of Job, yet the righteous holds to his way. If there was ever a person, you would say, would be justified in turning their back upon God, it would have been Job, after all that he suffered. But he never. It was even though his wife told him, curse God and die, he didn't. He, despite every crushing blow, we find that he still clings to the Lord. A man of amazing faith. And he gives this great declaration here, that the righteous holds to his way. And if ever there was a person who had the right to say that, it was Job. Because despite all he went through, he held on to that way. And so, we find here that there's this great description given of the believer, that the righteous holds to his way. And it's one of the great, I suppose, differentiating marks between what we would term a hypocrite, a hypocrite being somebody who is making out that they're following the Lord, but they're not really, and the true believer. So, the true believer here is termed somebody who is righteous. And that doesn't mean that today, every believer in here feels righteous. You are righteous, whether you feel it or not. [6 : 50] And the fact is that very often, you will feel anything but righteous. Because today, probably, you feel you're very aware of your sin. And when you're aware of your sin, you don't feel righteous.

Because, in fact, it's often the very reverse. You feel that you come in, sometimes you might be sitting here in church today, and you feel you're the worst person in here. And you're saying, if only people could see, if only people could see inside, if only people could see what I'm thinking, if only people could see my heart, they wouldn't believe it. And so, you have this sense, not of being righteous, but of being really unrighteous. The hypocrite, on the other hand, is somebody who actually often feels very righteous. They feel good in themselves. They feel good about themselves. They often congratulate themselves on how good they are. They feel morally upright. I suppose a classic example of that is the Pharisee in the temple. Remember, there's a time when the publican and the Pharisee were in the temple. Jesus highlighted that. And the Pharisee was congratulating himself and telling God about how good he was. His whole prayer really was about telling God the things he did, the good things he did. And he was not only very proud of himself, but he was also very judgmental of others. He was looking down on others. And he thanked God that he wasn't like the publican who was over there in the corner. But the funny thing was, the publican was somebody who was so aware of his sin, and he was saying, all he could say to the Lord was, Lord, Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner. But you know this, at the end of the day, God didn't listen to the prayer of the Pharisee. Because it wasn't really a prayer. He was only talking about how good he was. But he listened to the prayer of the publican, and he went home justified. So, I'm not saying that that's always the case. But very often, those who think or maybe say that they're following the Lord or that they're Christian, but they aren't, that they will have this sense of, a sense of their own right, their own goodness, their own uprightness. Because the bottom line is, they're actually trusting themselves. Do you know the biggest problem in life with regard to salvation is ourselves? Trusting ourselves. Thinking that somehow, that by the end of the day, that we're good enough in ourselves. That God will have to accept me.

That we say that to ourselves. Oh, God will accept me. I haven't done anything major. I have done lots of things that I know that aren't right, but so does everybody else. But I'm a decent person. But God looks at it way beyond simply whether we're a decent person or not. God looks at it in terms of his demands of his law. And because we cannot keep the demands of the law. That's what sin is, coming short. When we're coming short all the time of the glory of God. It's often described as somebody like shooting arrows at a target and you never reach the target. You're never able actually to hit it. It's just coming short all the time. That's actually what sin is. When we're coming short, what we're missing. But the believer is termed as righteous. And as we say, it's not righteous because they feel righteous. And it's not righteous because of their striving to be right. They are righteous because they are trusting in Jesus Christ. And because of that, the righteousness that is Jesus has been put to our account. That's the amazing thing. That as God looks upon those who trust in him, as God looks on them, he's looking at them through Jesus. It's an amazing thought that. That's how he looks at us through Jesus. And he sees Jesus' perfect righteousness covering us. That's the amazing thing. It's just like the great example given to us is in the Old Testament at the time of the

[11 : 28] Passover. You remember that awful night in Egypt when the angel of death passed over and right through the land and the firstborn were killed. But every house where there was blood, remember how the Lord told the Israelites to take a lamb and to kill it and to put the blood on the

doorposts and on the lintel.

And whenever I see the blood, the Lord said, I will pass over. There will be no death. I will pass over. That's where we get the Passover from. And that's what the Lord continues to do as he looks at the finished work of Jesus. As he sees the blood of Jesus having been shed, he passes over our sin. He no longer brings us into condemnation. And so the believer, as we say, is somebody who is righteous. But the believer should also be somebody who is righteous in their life or is right. And what do we mean by that is there should be right dealings. A Christian should be somebody who deals in a right way with other people.

There should be an honesty and a sincerity and a genuineness about the dealings of the Christian. In all our dealings, one with another, there should be that openness. And the thing is that, now it's not a rule of thumb, but very often a person who maintains and says, oh, I'm a Christian, but they're not really, that very often what they are in life will begin to show.

There should be a tying in with a profession and a confession. Confession and profession should go together. That doesn't mean that a Christian is somebody who never makes a mistake. Of course we do.

And sometimes we make bad mistakes. And sometimes we do things and we say things and we regret them. And if we do, we have to be open and confess. Confess before God. And if we've done wrong to somebody, we have to confess to that person as well. The Bible asks us to do that. And sometimes that might be very difficult. But that's what is required of us.

[13 : 41] But you find that probably the great example in the Bible of somebody who wasn't what he appeared to be is Judas Iscariot. Judas was one of the twelve. And Judas appeared to everybody else to be exactly the same. Because the likes of Andrew, when Andrew looked at his brother Peter and looked at Judas, he didn't notice any difference. All the disciples, they seemed just the same. Because when Jesus said that one of them was going to betray him, nobody automatically said, oh, that'll be Judas.

They all began to say, is it me? So Judas wasn't a standout bad guy in any way. But there was something wrong in Judas' life. And Judas had a problem, and his problem was money. He had the bag. He was the treasurer. But he was also a thief. The others didn't realize that. Jesus knew that. And Jesus, in fact, highlighted that once. Because he said, have I not chosen you twelve and one of you as a demon? He knew who that was. He knew it was Judas Iscariot. But you see, what happened in Judas' life was this. Although there's no doubt whatever that he did love Jesus at a level, he loved money more.

And there came a day when he had to make a decision between money and Jesus. And money won. Because Judas had a deal where he was going to get reasonably rich at the expense of Jesus. And he betrayed Jesus for the money. And that's what I'm saying that very often it will become evident within a life of what is really there. But we read here that the righteous holds to his way. Now, as we said, there are people who maybe make a profession or maybe start out and they say that they're believers, they say they're Christians, but they don't hold to the way. That's one of the sad things in life. There's lots of people who start things and they don't finish it. But spiritually, in the Bible it tells us that not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom. I find that an incredibly challenging and solemn thing. But the fact of the matter is that those who do truly follow the Lord, that they will persevere. That doesn't mean it's going to be easy. Because you know there's a moment that you, well it's not, but you know what I mean. The moment you sign up as it were, sign up by faith, the moment you, the Lord begins to work in your heart and draw you, you might be, you'll be absolutely persuaded that there are loads of voices and loads of pushes and loads of powers at work trying to pull you back. It's not all plain sailing. You don't just march on to glory as it were, oblivious to everything that's happening and saying, oh, it's easy. It's not. Because constantly there are voices trying to draw you back, trying to derail you. You have an enemy of your soul who hates what's happened to you. The world hates what's happened to you. Your own inner being, the sinful part of your need, hates what's happening. Satan hates what's happened to you. And so all these forces are at work trying to derail you. You remember, it's beautifully illustrated in the Pilgrim's Progress when Christian left the city of destruction. And you remember that they went out, they started to run after him, calling him to come back. Hey, don't leave us. What are you doing? Leaving us. And you remember what Christian did? He put his fingers in his ears so that he wouldn't hear. And sometimes spiritually, that's what we have to do as well, because there are times, and sadly, there are times we give in. There are times we yield. Sometimes the influence and

the power and the lure is so powerful. Sometimes we're sucked aside. But the great thing about the Christian, again, this is one of the great evidences, that if the Christian does stumble, if the Christian does fall, they get back up again. Psalm 20, 37 tells us, the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.

If he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, because the Lord upholds him with his hand. I think that's just so beautiful. I think we used the illustration before, if you're walking with a little child, holding the little one by the hand. Sometimes when they're wee, they trip and they stumble.

[18 : 34] And their feet will go and they'll kind of half fall down, but they won't fall all the way down, because you're holding them. And that's how it is for the Christian, whose hand is in the hand of the Lord. They may stumble, they may slip, they may trip, they may fall to a certain extent, but they will not fall all the way down. They won't fall, in other words, without recovery. I think the great difference, you'll see the great example is between Judas and Peter. Both of them fell badly.

Peter fell really badly. When we're going through the Gospel of John, we were looking at that. Because remember, when Peter denied any knowledge of Jesus, he didn't just say once, are you a follower of Jesus? Oh, no. He did it vehemently. He did it repeatedly. He did it with oaths and with curses. In other words, he was swearing, he was bringing down judgment upon himself, that Jesus Christ meant absolutely nothing to him, that he had nothing to do with him. It's quite extraordinary. This man who was said to Jesus just a little before, I'm ready to lay down my life for you. I'll go to prison for you. I'll die for you. And yet we find him with oaths and curses saying, Jesus means nothing to me. So there you have on the one hand, Peter falling, on the other hand, Judas falling. But the great difference is that Peter didn't fall all the way down. There was recovery. He was brought back up. He was lifted up. He was restored. In fact, he became a brighter light than he had ever been before. That's a great thing with the Lord, is that the Christian life, it never ends. And indeed, it's full of new beginnings. And often the new beginnings are better than what's been before. That's the way the Lord works. And so that's one of the great differences.

But you know, there are various things that display and reveal whether a person, you might be saying today, I actually don't know where I am. I love the Lord, but I feel, you know, I feel such a failure.

I often feel so empty. I feel I struggle so much. And I wonder if I can really be a Christian. Well, there are different things that can reveal. For instance, time is a great revealer of what is really there. Time shows often what is really there. And maybe you're a Christian of 10, 20, 30, maybe even 40 years. And today you feel, you say to yourself, you know, if I was a Christian, if I am a Christian, maybe some of you, that's the way you're speaking. You are, but that's the way you're speaking. I was far better 30 years ago than I am today. I was a far better Christian. I was a strong, no, actually you weren't. You might think you were. Because you know, Christian growth is downwards. That's how growth, growth is often down. In order for something to grow really strong, there has to be, there has to be roots. And that's how it is in the Christian faith. That although we're growing up, we're growing down as well. And that's how often we cannot see our own growth. And so often we feel that we're not going anywhere, but we are. And the very fact that you are still following, despite all that's happened in your life, maybe despite lean periods and black periods and troubles and trials, you're still following. Because as it says here, the righteous holds to his way. temptation often reveals what's within our heart. You know, I think we've said this before, it was Martin Luther who said that it's one of the three great things that God uses to regulate Christian growth. Temptation is one. And temptation is difficult because we don't like being tempted. You know, because the thing is, there's so much within us that sides with temptation, that agrees with it. [23 : 01] Temptation wouldn't be temptation if there wasn't something attractive in it. It's just that drawing to do what's wrong. And because we're sinners, that is a major problem. Because we're enticed, we're being pulled in that type of direction. But the amazing thing is that the righteous, although we're bombarded, though we may give in, we actually will overcome at the end of the day.

And again, one of the great things that exposes or shows what's really in the heart are dark providences where difficult things come into people's lives. You know, sometimes you'll hear a voice within you, Satan will say to you, you know, if such and such a thing happened in your life, you'd walk away. You would say, that's me finished with the Christian faith. You would turn your back and you'd say, I'm done, I'm out. No, you wouldn't. Satan said that about Job. Remember we said Job was this exceptional believer. And Satan, we read about it, that he spoke to God and he said to the Lord, of course Job fears you. Job's a good man for one reason only, because you have

really prospered his life. Everything is going great for him. That's why he loves you. And Satan said, you know, take away everything he has and then you'll see the real Job. He'll turn his back on you. And God granted

Satan permission to do to Job what he wanted, with the exception that he wasn't allowed to take his life. It's an extraordinary thing where we see the forces of evil at work. And that's exactly what happened. You read Job chapters 1 and 2. It's horrific. Just one calamity after another.

Satan got it completely wrong, because Job made an extraordinary declaration halfway through this book. Do you know what he says? Do you know what he said about the Lord? Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him. I think that's probably one of the greatest declarations that anybody has ever made.

Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him. That was the level of faith and trust and commitment that Job had to the Lord. And so that's what I'm saying is that even although you might be tempted to think, if something really bad came into my life, I would go, I would turn my back. But you know this, and there are many in here, and we know that people have suffered some awful providences, some heart-rending providences. And yet the amazing thing is that the faith is still shining, probably even shining brighter, just as it was with Job. And that is what is revealing what is really there.

[26 : 29] And the wonderful thing about this, where it says that the righteous holds to his way, is because it's all really of God's doing. We are held by the eternal love of God. It all began with God. His love to us, you know, this is the thing about God's love. It's unchanging. Our love can change. Our love for people can change. Our love for things can change. There are some things you say, oh, I love that.

And then later, maybe in life, you say, oh, I used to love that, but I hate it. Now, maybe sometimes the words we use love and hate are too strong. But we know that with regard to people, people can fall out of love. God cannot fall out of love with his people, ever. And we love him because he first loved us.

That's where it all began. His love for us is a reason that we love him. Because his love is a disarming love. It's a love that breaks down every barrier. It removes all the obstacles. All the things that held us back are removed because of his love. And it's a love, as I say, that won't change. Jesus' death on Calvary is tied up to where you are today. You see, it would be impossible for Jesus to die for you and then to say, no, I don't think I'm going to save him after all. No, I'm not going to save her after all. No. This love, this eternal love, heavenly love, it is because of this love that was from all eternity that Jesus came into this world to do for us what we couldn't do ourselves. And so we will continue along that way. Yes, we need to pray for the grace, pray for the strength, because we feel weak, we feel troubled at times. But the Lord will enable us to go on day by day.

[28 : 43] And we will continue to grow, whether we think it or not. It's amazing, even if you've gone through a period of backsliding, even if you've struggled as a Christian for a while, you know, the Lord will make sure that you still grow.

It's just like in the course of the year, we have our frosts and we have the heat in the summer. And yet we need the whole lot over the course of the year for the good of the soil.

And so it is in the Christian life. There are the cold times and there are the warm times. But what is so important is what happens between seed time and harvest time.

So it is spiritually, from the moment that we come to faith until the moment that the Lord calls us home again. Are you on this way?

The upright, the righteous holds to his way. The fact of the matter is that if today you are outside of Jesus Christ, you are not growing in him.

[29 : 57] You might have more knowledge. You might have a greater interest. There might be a lot of things that have developed. But growth in Christ hasn't.

Because you have to have that divine seed. You have to have faith in Jesus. It's only when faith begins does faith grow.

So you ask the Lord today, if you are still outside the kingdom, say to the Lord, Lord, I need to get in. Help me, Lord, to trust you with all my heart.

And that's a cry and a prayer that he won't turn away from. He loves to hear a person call to him. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we ask that you will bless us today. We ask, Lord, that you will grant us grace and that you will be with us throughout the remainder of this day.

[30 : 54] We pray, O Lord, that you will help us in all that we're about as we go through life. And we pray to bless a cup of tea and coffee in the hall after. Watch over us, we pray, and do us good and

take away our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen. Our concluding singing is Psalm number 52. Psalm number 52. And this is from Sing Psalms.

And we're going to sing from the middle of verse 5, the last four stanzas. Again, you have this great, in some ways, a quite frightening contrast. The middle of verse 5, Psalm 52.

He'll snatch you from the land of life and carry you away. The righteous, seeing this, will fear. Then they will laugh and say, this is a man who, for his strength, on God did not rely.

He trusted in his wealth and power to raise himself on high. But I am like an olive plant in God's house growing free. I trust in God's unfailing love to all eternity.

[32 : 05] I'll praise you ever for your deeds. My hope is in your name. And in the presence of your saints, I will extol your fame. Psalm 52, from the middle of verse 5.

He'll snatch you from the land of life. I'm coming you away.

The righteous Jesus will hear. And they will love us.

The righteous Jesus will hear. And they will love us.

The righteous Jesus will hear. The righteous Jesus will hear.

[33 : 14] His wealth and power to raise himself on high.

But I come like an olive plant in crosshairs growing free.

I trust in God's unfilling love to all eternity.

I'll praise you evermore, your deeds. My hope is in your name.

And in the presence of your saints, I will extol your name.

[34 : 31] Amen. May the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.