

Beliefs, Duties and Blessings

Psalm 119:145-152

Over the last few weeks, we've been looking at the means of grace, the normal ways through which God blesses His people. We've shared in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we've celebrated the gift of the Church, and we've been reminded of the miracle that we can talk to God in prayer. And so we come to the Holy Scriptures, the clearest way in which God talks to us. As we read in our responsive reading this morning, the Scriptures were written by those who were moved by the Holy spirit. The Scriptures are thus inspired, breathed-out by God. So, what does the Bible tell us about God Himself? And what do the Scriptures have to say about the way we should use this message from God in our everyday lives?

In today's passage, we first learn of God's steadfast love. The term "lovingkindness" used in verse 149 means that God loves His people in a faithful way, that God enters into relationship with His people because He desires to, because He chooses to. Better still, this is the sort of love you can always count on, because it isn't conditional on our faithfulness or on our obedience. No, God in His steadfast love is determined to keep on loving His people, even if they don't love Him back. Unlike so many human relationships, this sort of love never gives up on us. It never walks away, no matter what.

But at the same time, even in the same verse, we also learn of God's judgment, His justice. It is because God is just that He never goes back on a promise or changes His mind. But that also means that He can never change His law. He can't just let someone get away with sin. He can't just let rebellion against Him slide. Sin deserves God's anger and punishment, and because of His justice that's how God has to deal with sin.

So, if God's faithful love is very good news for us, we might not be so enthusiastic about God's justice. And the third thing we learn about God also has this two-edged quality to it – verse 151 tells us that God is near to us. Now, God's nearness will either be good news or bad news, depending on our relationship with God. If we are on good terms with God, His nearness to us will of course be a source of great comfort and peace. But if we are living in a state of rebellion against God, the last thing we would want is for God to be close at hand. We would much rather be far away from Him, in hopes that He might not notice all our disobedience.

So, how do we determine whether we are living in a right relationship with the God Who is loving and just and always near? How do we know whether what we have learned about God is good news or bad news? Verse 151 tells us that all His commandments are true, and verse 152 reminds us that God's testimonies have been founded forever. In other words, the fourth thing we

learn about God is that God cannot lie. That means that God's word always perfectly reflects God's will. We never need to guess about what God desires for us. We never need to wonder about how God wants us to live. Through His apostles and prophets, God has written down for us everything that we need to know in a way that we can understand it.

So, that leads us to the next main point. If these verses teach us four beliefs, four things about God, this passage also tells us two duties that God requires of us. In verses 145 and 146 we find that we should keep God's statutes and observe God's testimonies. Those are two ways to say basically the same thing: God hasn't just written His Word so that we can satisfy our curiosity about Him. God gave us His Word in order that we might obey Him. It's not enough to know God's Word, or even to believe that God's Word is true. No, if we are really trusting God, we will do what He says, even if it doesn't make sense to us, even if our own desires pull us in very different directions.

So, the first duty we have is to obey God's Word. But how can we do this? How can we live the way God wants us to live, obeying His law that we already know is true and permanent? Verse 148 gives us a second duty: we need to meditate on God's Word. That means we need to think about it, rehearsing His promises in our minds even in the dead of night or early in the morning, especially when we are tempted to worry about our problems. God's Word needs to be as real and as present to us as God Himself is.

And if we will hold God's Word in our minds and hearts, trusting God enough to obey Him, then we can count on great blessings, for that is the third main thing we learn from this passage. Verse 147 tells us that the Scripture is a wonderful source of hope, even in times when we are in great need. Focusing our hearts and minds on God's Word, and especially on God's steadfast love and His justice to keep His promises, is a powerful way of dispelling the doubt and despair that all too often come our way.

But how can God's Word be such a great source of hope for us? We've already learned that God is just, that He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. And when we read God's Word, the fact that we are all sinners, the fact that we have all fallen short of the glory of God becomes crystal clear. So, given what we know about God's justice, how can God's Word bring hope to sinners like us?

Look at verse 149. God can quicken us, He can give us the blessing of life instead of death, God can satisfy His justice at the same time that He is pouring out His steadfast love upon us because of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. It was because God loved us so much that He

gave Jesus to die for us. And in Jesus' death, God's justice was fully satisfied on behalf of all of His people.

In short, the blessing of hope we gain from God's Word and the blessing of life we gain from God's loving justice comes from the blessing of salvation given to all who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. We see the psalmist cry out for that salvation in verse 146, but there we also see the reason that God pours out all these blessings on us: God gives us hope and life and salvation so that we might observe His testimonies. No, God doesn't save us because we have done His Will – we don't earn our salvation by our good works. But God does save all those who trust in Christ so that we might start doing good things, so that our lives might be transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ, so that we might live according to God's law of love.

So, will we take the time to read what the Scripture tells us about God? Will we believe the good news of God's love and justice and His saving grace? And in response to this truth, will we do our duty to God? Will we trust Him and give our lives to Him and do what His Word tells us? And in all these ways, will we receive the great blessings that flow to all those who trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?