

December 1, 2024
First Sunday in Advent
Jeremiah 33:14-16

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”

What promise is it that God is talking about through His prophet Jeremiah here? If you were a Jew in Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah you probably would have thought of the promise to Abraham from Genesis 17:8, *“And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”* Good promise. Big problem with that though. God had already come through on that promise and Israel blew it.

The northern ten tribes of Israel had already been carried off to oblivion by the Assyrians because of their long-standing refusal to repent and turn from their idolatry and faithlessness. Jeremiah declares this prophecy from his imprisonment for speaking God’s truth in Jerusalem as that city lies under siege by the Babylonians who shall destroy it and haul the remaining Israelites off to exile—punishment for Judah’s continued idolatry and faithlessness.

But as the prophecy continues it becomes obvious what promise to which Jeremiah refers: *“In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”*

We know this is the promise of Christ, the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, but what is this righteousness that He is and that He will execute? That’s a question worth addressing.

We tend to have a pretty black-and-white idea about righteousness—it is keeping the law, and usually we mean keeping it perfectly to be perfectly righteous. Christ did that as a human man living without sin, and we rightly understand that His human righteousness is given to us as a free gift in exchange for our sins which He takes from us to His cross.

But there is another understanding of righteousness that is more about doing things rightly, yes according to the law, but more along the thinking of operating as designed—being rightly operating in a right relationship with our Creator. It’s a bit tougher to understand, but in the context of Jeremiah and the people of Israel this understanding of righteousness is more front and center.

From the day Israel received the Law on Mt. Sinai they were never able to keep the Law righteously. This whole arrangement starts out with that whole golden calf debacle, remember? But what they received at Sinai was a worship system by which they could live in faithful repentance, make ritual sacrifices to God that pointed forward to the once-and-for-all sacrifice of the promised Messiah. This faith was to be lived out in love of God and neighbor and in doing so, by grace, God saw Israel in a righteous relationship with Himself, despite their sin, because they stood forgiven.

But this is where Israel really went off the rails, they didn’t value the righteous relationship. In fact, it seems they valued just about every other relationship they could find—false gods, idolatrous worship, lascivious living and every kind of perversion under the sun. It’s weird because they usually kept Yahweh in the mix of all this, as if they could appease Him

through the black and white righteousness of keeping the sacrifices going. But that right, righteous relationship of they being His people and He being their God...not so much.

Enter the advent of Christ, His life, His work, His sacrifice, His victory, His reigning forever. Jesus executes justice and righteousness in the land; justice, by standing in for us on the cross as the punishment for our sin is meted out upon the innocent Son of God there; righteousness not only by conferring His purity to us, but by restoring the right relationship to God. We are once again the holy children of the Father. He is our God and we are His people—right and righteous!

Value this relationship! Through no merit of your own Jesus Christ, the beloved son of God has established righteousness—a righteous relationship between you and a just and holy God! God has followed through on His promise and established you as His people in His kingdom and one day, when all things come to completion, a dwelling in the new Promised Land forever!

Learn the lesson from ancient Israel. They considered their relationship with God a trivial thing—a thing they could put to the side and maintain like a religious appliance or something that would still function the way they wished while they ran off and loved every other relationship of the world they could find. God kept calling to them through the prophets, but they wouldn't have Him. At the last He called to them through His own Son, but still was rejected. Yet it was through the cross that Jesus established the relationship God wanted with His people—you!

Most people think this season we begin today is about the advent of Jesus in the world at Bethlehem. Historically, it is more pointed at the advent of Jesus on the Last Day in incredible glory ushering in the resurrected eternity of all His people. Truth be told though, the most important advent of Christ for each one of you, is His presence in your heart each and every day.

St. Paul writes *“May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”*

Jesus is the source of your salvation. I'm all for keeping the law and looking all nice and righteous, but the cause of your true righteousness is only and always a right, repentant, relationship with Christ that receives the gifts of His cross—most clearly so in the formal ways He has ordained; His Word and His sacraments—but most surely in the simple faith lived in prayerful praise and devotion.

You have a glorious Savior. He is not a side-feature in life. He is the God of your salvation and He loves you and desires you stand in a right, righteous relationship with Him forever. He died and rose and has made this your reality. Shun relationships with the evil of the world. Live the good relationships with which He has blessed you in the world to His glory. Value above all others the right relationship You now have with God. The LORD is your righteousness.

Amen.