

A Branch of Righteousness Promised to Judah

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Bible Text: Jeremiah 33:15-16
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We read the sacred scriptures together tonight in Jeremiah 33. I preached this in our Wingham congregation a couple of weeks ago as part of an Advent series looking at Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, and also on the occasion of the installation of a new elder. Let's read the entire chapter together. The text for the sermon will be verses 15 and 16.

1 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying, 2 Thus saith the LORD the maker thereof, the LORD that formed it, to establish it; the LORD is his name; 3 Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. 4 For thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah, which are thrown down by the mounts, and by the sword; 5 They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but it is to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury, and for all whose wickedness I have hid my face from this city. 6 Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. 7 And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. 8 And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. 9 And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it. 10 Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, 11 The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land,

as at the first, saith the LORD. 12 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. 13 In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the LORD. 14 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. 15 In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. 16 In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness. 17 For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; 18 Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually. 19 And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, 20 Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; 21 Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. 22 As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me. 23 Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, 24 Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the LORD hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. 25 Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; 26 Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.

We read the word of God that far.

I call your attention to verses 15 and 16.

15 In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. 16 In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the time that Jeremiah wrote down the words of this chapter, the house of David, to whom the Lord had promised an everlasting kingdom and

a son to sit upon his throne forever, the house of David had completely forsaken the Lord and had utterly apostatized and gone and led the people astray into idolatry. If you go backward about 100 years into the days of Isaiah the prophet before Jeremiah, already in the days of Isaiah, things were not looking good in the kingdom of Judah, the southern kingdom. King Ahaz was on the throne at the time. He was in the line of David. And Ahaz was a man who was very wicked, who forsook the Lord and led the people astray into idolatry and all kinds of wickedness, and yet after King Ahaz, his son Hezekiah reigned and he led the people back to the Lord. He brought reformation into the land and the Lord used him for much good. However, after the reign of Hezekiah, his son Manasseh reigned, who, although he was an elect child of God, most of his life and reign were one of great wickedness and he led the people astray into all kinds of idolatry and wickedness. It was so terrible during the reign of Manasseh that it was at that time that God announced that he would send the people away into captivity for their sins. And yet, even after the reign of wicked Manasseh, God raised up godly King Josiah, and he brought reformation again to the kingdom of Judah. It was during the good days of King Josiah that Jeremiah began his ministry as a prophet around the city of Jerusalem. But after Josiah died, the last four kings of Judah were all wicked. All four of them in the line of David, from the house of David, yet they did not walk in the footsteps of David but they led the people astray into idolatry, into apostasy, and it was at that time that God raised up Jeremiah as a prophet to announce especially this main message, which you find repeated throughout the book of Jeremiah, that captivity is coming. God is going to bring judgment, severe judgment upon the kingdom of Judah because of their persistent walking in wickedness and idolatry. The message of Jeremiah was that a mighty empire was going to come from the north and was going to carry them away into captivity, and eventually it was revealed to Jeremiah that Babylon would be that empire that would bring the Jews into captivity. Jeremiah had been ministering in Judah prophesying for many years by the time he wrote the words of our text. The words of this chapter and the preceding chapter were written in the last year of the reign of the last king of Judah, wicked Zedekiah. Jeremiah wrote these words, we might say, on the eve of the fall of Jerusalem. The fall of Jerusalem was only within one year from this time and already by this time Nebuchadnezzar had come and led many Jews into captivity, including Daniel and his three friends. These were very dark days. They were wicked days, days of apostasy and days of imminent judgment and captivity. It had been prophesied, the Lord would do it, and that's what makes it so striking what the Lord says in these chapters.

This particular section of the book of Jeremiah is extraordinary when you consider all that background. Jeremiah 27, 28, 29, and especially 30, 31, 32 and 33 contain some of the most glorious and comforting promises in the whole Bible. It was at that time that the Lord saw fit not only to raise up Jeremiah to bring prophecies of doom and judgment, but also for the comfort of his people. To give prophecies of comfort, he says through Jeremiah repeatedly in these chapters, "I will bring you back from captivity. I will return the captivity of Israel and the captivity of Judah. I will restore joy and comfort and peace and prosperity. You will again hear the sound of children singing in the streets. You will come back and you will dwell safely and there will be salvation. I will make a new covenant with the house of Judah and with the house of Israel and I will write my laws on their heart, and I will be a God unto you, and you will be my people." There is a glorious

blessed future coming, that was also part of Jeremiah's message, and at the heart of all of these glorious prophecies is the prophecy of the branch of righteousness, the prophecy of the coming Messiah, the Savior, and a king from the house of David.

There's a similar prophecy in Jeremiah 23, which was written around the same time. Jeremiah 23:5 and 6, "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." And a very similar prophecy occurs in our text. I call your attention to the text under the theme, "A Branch of Righteousness Promised to Judah." Notice first of all, the promise of a kingly branch; in the second place, it's a promise of a righteous branch; and in the third place, it's a promise of a saving branch.

The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah in that last year of the reign of the last king of Judah, a wicked king, was this: in those days, those days of the future when I will return the Jews from captivity, I will cause the branch of righteousness to grow up unto David. What an amazing and glorious prophecy that must have given hope to the children of God in Jerusalem and Judah in those days. Notice two things, first of all, about that prophecy. It's a prophecy of a king. God was promising through Jeremiah to raise up a king and a king from that very house of Judah, that had forsaken the Lord, that had led the people astray, that had totally apostatized and had gone after the service of idols. The house of David in the days of Jeremiah did not have a good sound to it. The house of David represented all that was wicked and apostate and unrighteous and idolatrous, but God shows his unswerving faithfulness over against the unfaithfulness of those kings when he says through Jeremiah, "I will stick to my promise. I will keep my promise. I will raise up a king from that house of David, just as I said I would." The house of David was about to crumble and fall under the might of the hand of Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar, but God was saying, "I will raise up a king from the house of David."

If you recall, God had promised to David way back in 2 Samuel 7 when David was sitting upon the throne of all of Israel, God said to him, "I promise to you, David, that I will establish your house. I will establish your kingdom and your throne so that you will always have a son to sit upon the throne over my covenant people." And God kept that promise. From age to age to age even down to the days of Jeremiah, there was always a descendant of David sitting on the throne. In the dark days of the prophet Isaiah, about a century before Jeremiah, when Ahaz was on the throne, he made some very glorious prophecies as well. Through Isaiah, the Lord announced in dark times, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of his father David, from henceforth even forever." And now in the darker days of the prophet Jeremiah, when the last of those physical descendants of David was sitting on the throne, he makes the prophecy of our text, "I will cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David. I will raise up a King, a messianic King, the true and everlasting King whom I have promised. My promise stands sure even in these dark times."

God wanted to make sure that the people understood in those days how serious he was about that promise. Notice in verse 17 after our text, "For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel." Again in verse 19, "the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne." The Lord was saying, "Do I have a covenant with the day? Do I have a relationship with the day so that the day always comes morning after morning after morning? Yes, I do. Do I have a covenant with the night so that the night always comes day after day after day? Yes, I do. Are you sure of that? Are you sure that the day will always come and the night will always come? Then also be sure of this, I will keep my promise to David. I will raise up a Branch of righteousness to sit on the throne of my servant David."

That first, it's the promise of a king but it's a promise of a kingly branch, that in the second place, a branch of righteousness, God says. We have to understand that that word "branch" which appears many times throughout the prophets, in the original Hebrew it means "a sprout, a little tender sprout." That prophecy that spoke of the coming Messiah as a tender little sprout began with Isaiah, once again, about 100 years before in the dark days of Ahaz. Isaiah 11:1, God said through him, "there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." God was saying, "In the days of Isaiah, I will cause a little sprout, a tender little shoot to grow up out of the stump of the house of Jesse." Because the house of David was going to be cut down, the tree of David was going to fall, but out of that stump and out of those roots God promised a little sprout will grow, a small, tender, lowly, weak by all human standards, and yet he will grow up out of the house of David, out of the roots of Jesse. Jeremiah repeats that same idea using a different Hebrew word in our text. When God says, "I will raise up a Branch of righteousness," it's a synonym of that word in Isaiah 11. It's a sprout. It's a shoot. It's a tender little plant, so small that's going to arise out of the stump of the fallen house of David.

When we look at the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament, we are struck by a couple of things. First of all, God says that the Messiah when he comes will have this name, "The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, Jehovah our righteousness." That will be his name. God is revealing to those prophecies that the Messiah would be God himself, that Jehovah himself will come into the world, God himself will enter human flesh and be our Messiah and our King. But on the other hand, the prophets make plain that the coming Messiah will be tender. He will be lowly. He will be despised and weak and rejected of men. God made clear already through the prophets of old, that the Messiah when he comes will not be like David in all of his power, and all of his earthly splendor and riches and glory, but the Messiah when he comes will be lowly and weak by human standards.

Many years after Jeremiah, God raised up another prophet, Zechariah, after the return from captivity to repeat the very same message of Isaiah and Jeremiah in Zechariah 3:8,

"behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH." The sprout. "He will come. I will raise him up from the house of David." And in Zechariah 9:9, he prophesied, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

God reveals to us in the New Testament scriptures that he has fulfilled the prophecy of our text. He has sent, he has raised up this branch of righteousness already in history. This is a prophecy now fulfilled. He has fulfilled this prophecy causing this branch to sprout in the womb of a virgin who was in the line of David, who was a spouse to a man also in the line of David, the kingly royal line. In the womb of that virgin, he caused this branch of righteousness to sprout, to be conceived and to be born into the world.

When the father of John the Baptist heard that the mother of his Lord was in his house, he sang those beautiful words in Luke 1:68 through 70, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began."

Jehovah God kept his word. That's the message of scripture. The scriptures show us that God not only prophesied, but he also fulfilled what he prophesied. He did what he said he would do. Jehovah himself entered into our world. Jehovah himself entered into our human nature in the womb of a virgin, was conceived and born. And he was not just conceived and born in the womb of any virgin, but as I said, in the womb of a virgin of the house and lineage of David, from the tribe of Judah, the royal tribe according to his promise. God came into the world to be our King. God came into human nature in the line of David to be the rightful heir of the throne of David, to be the fulfillment of the promise to David, the long-awaited King of the Jews whom the wise men sought when they saw his star in the east and travelled to Jerusalem and said, "Where is he born King of the Jews?" And it was in Bethlehem that they found the babe, the little child.

But Jehovah fulfilled this promise too, by becoming a tender branch. When Jehovah God came into human flesh, he was not born in royal splendor and glory of an earthly kind but to a poor virgin in the stables of Bethlehem wrapped in swaddling rags, and laid in a manger where the cattle were eating, because there was no room for them in the inn. And when Jehovah God came into the world and lived in this world, he lived a lowly life. He lived a life of poverty. He lived a life of being despised and rejected and hated. And he fulfilled that prophecy of Zechariah riding into Jerusalem upon the colt, the foal of an ass, not a mighty white stallion which would be fitting for a king, but on the colt of an ass he rode into Jerusalem.

God kept his promise. He raised up this branch of righteousness, this king. Jesus is the branch of righteousness. Jesus is our lowly king who came into the world to be our king but a lowly king, a suffering king, a humble and humiliated king. As Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 53, "He will rise up as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground. He will be despised and rejected of men." And that he was but he arose from the dead, and God

exalted him to the highest heaven, to his right hand, where he now sits at the throne reigning over the whole of the universe and also reigning over the church.

Jesus is the Branch of righteousness. Jesus is the son of David. Jesus is the King long-awaited, long promised and prophesied. Jesus is our King. He is the King of the church. He is the King of this church. He reigns over you. You are a part of his kingdom. You are a manifestation of his kingdom and he reigns over you. He reigns over you through his word and Spirit. He reigns over you through office-bearers. He reigns over you through pastors and elders.

I preached this text also on the occasion of the installation of an elder in our congregation, and I pointed out then and I point out now to you what a joy and what a cause for thanksgiving it is when the King of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ, gives to his church as a gift faithful elders. The office of elder is the kingly office in the church. The office of pastor is the office of teaching especially, the office of deacon is the office of mercy especially, and the office of elder is the kingly office, the office of government and rule. What a blessing when Christ gives elders to us as a church who are men who know themselves to be kings, who have the gifts of government and rule, but kings under the King of kings. Men who know themselves not to be absolute rulers over the church, but kings under Jesus, under the Branch of righteousness. Men who know their calling and embrace their calling to carry out the will of the King in the church and not their own will.

The Lord Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 20, "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them," dominion, "and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." When Jehovah God came into the world and took on human flesh in the line of David to be King, he came to give his life a ransom for many. He came to minister unto us, not to be ministered unto. And Jesus said to his disciples, "This is the way it will be in my kingdom. You want to be great, don't desire worldly greatness, don't desire worldly dominance. The way it is in the world is not the way it will be among you. But if you want to be great, then become a servant."

What a cause for thanksgiving when Christ gives elders who know that to be their calling. When Christ gives elders who do not think of themselves as high and mighty and lofty but lowly, who place themselves under the King and under his people as their servants, when Christ gives men to be elders who do not enter into their office out of a lust for power or a lust for control, or a lust for influence, or a desire to use the sheep, or certain of the sheep for their own personal gain or gratification or lusts, or to fulfill their ambitions, when Christ gives elders who take that kingly office and serve but they don't use it to boost their own egos, they are meek and lowly like the King of kings was riding into Jerusalem on a baby donkey, and who seek to feed the flock, to care for the sheep, to rule by example, to rule by service, for such elders we have great reason to give thanks. The Apostle Peter writes in his epistle, chapter 5, that elders are called to feed the flock

of God, to be examples to them, not to Lord over them, to govern, to rule, but to do that in the way of lowliness, serving the sheep.

In the second place, we notice in the text that God was promising through Jeremiah to give a Branch of righteousness, "and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. So that in his days Judah and Jerusalem shall have this name, The LORD, our righteousness." The church will be given the name Jehovah our righteousness in the days of the Messiah. What a gracious promise. When we consider the days in which this promise was given, the days of Jeremiah, these were days when Judah had come to the end. It had thoroughly apostatized. They had thoroughly forsaken the Lord. There was still a remnant of God's elect people there, there were still believers there, but the nation as a whole had fallen away, had forsaken the Lord. The kings had forsaken the Lord. The prophets, the priests had forsaken the Lord. It was bad. It was corrupt. It was wicked.

They were terrible dark days. That's indicated throughout the whole book of Jeremiah, but just notice Jeremiah 32, the previous chapter, verse 28. The Lord says, "Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it: And the Chaldeans, that fight against this city, shall come and set fire on this city, and burn it with the houses, upon whose roofs they have offered incense unto Baal, and poured out drink offerings unto other gods, to provoke me to anger." The Lord was observing this, that on their rooftops they're burning incense to Baal. They're burning incense to other gods, and it provoked him to wrath. They did it again and again and again, generation after generation without repentance.

Verse 30, "the children of Israel and the children of Judah have only done evil before me from their youth: for the children of Israel have only provoked me to anger with the work of their hands, saith the LORD, this city hath been to me as a provocation of mine anger and of my fury from the day that they built it even unto this day; that I should remove it from before my face, Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction. But they set their abominations in the house, which is called by my name, to defile it." It's a picture of a city filled with idols on every corner and on every rooftop and even in the temple of the Lord himself.

When we consider that and then we look at ourselves and we realize, "And that's what I am too by nature. I'm also corrupt. I'm also depraved. I'm no better than them. I have my idols that I worship in my home, that I worship before my television, that I worship in my bedroom and in my living room, and that I worship in all sorts of different ways." Think of all the ways, verse 33, that we have turned unto God the back and not the face, even though from Sunday to Sunday he teaches us rising up early on the Sabbath morning we are taught of the Lord and at Sunday night we are taught by the Lord, we're constantly being taught by the Lord, and yet how often do we turn our backs against him and not our faces, worshipping our idols, our pleasures, and our treasures, and all the things that we

love of this world. We also deserve what Jerusalem was about to receive, the invasion of Babylon breaking through the gates of the city and setting fire to the walls and the houses, the buildings, and the temples until it all became a place of rubble and desolation. We deserve that but it was in those days that God raised up Jeremiah to prophecy, "I will keep my gracious merciful promise. I will raise up the Branch of righteousness and the Branch of righteousness, unlike all of you, will execute judgment and righteousness so that you will receive the name, The LORD our righteousness."

Gracious promise. God was promising to come into our flesh to be our righteousness. Jehovah himself is righteous. He is perfectly righteous in himself. There's no darkness, there's no wickedness in him. He is perfectly pure and he promises, "I will come into your human flesh, and I will be righteous. I will work righteousness." He would work righteousness in his life. He would work righteousness in his death. And just compare the prophecy of this Messiah to come with the wicked kings of that day working unrighteousness. They were not leading the people properly. They were unjust. They were wicked. They were corrupt. God says, "I will raise up a righteous Branch. He will work righteousness. He will work righteousness by keeping all of the commandments of God with all of his heart." Unlike the evil kings and princes and priests and prophets, unlike the ungodly inhabitants of Jerusalem in those days, unlike you and unlike me, he would keep the commandments and he would work righteousness, especially in his death. Isaiah prophesied, "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord hath laid on him, the Messiah, the iniquity of us all."

In the prophets, God is promising that he will take all of our unrighteousnesses and place them on the Messiah, place them on himself and carry that burden and work righteousness in his life and in his death, in his suffering. The gospel is that God fulfilled this prophecy in Jesus. In Jeremiah 23, the prophecy says that the name of the Branch of righteousness will be "The LORD our righteousness." That will be the name of the Branch. That will be the name of the Christ. That's Jesus' name, Jehovah, our righteousness. Jesus is the one and only man who is also truly God, who is perfectly righteous in his very nature and who was perfectly righteous in all of his life, and who was perfectly righteous even unto the death of the cross. Unjustly condemned by Pontius Pilate and nailed to the cross of Calvary, he worked righteousness for you and me. When he took our iniquities upon himself and suffered what we deserved and bore the curse and the wrath and the indignation of which Jeremiah speaks repeatedly in his book, all that was poured upon the Branch, upon Christ, upon Jesus at the cross.

And because he is our righteousness, we also bear the name, "The LORD our righteousness." Notice the difference between the text in Jeremiah 23 and our text. They both prophesy the coming of the Branch of righteousness, but in Jeremiah 23 he says the Messiah will have that name, "The LORD our righteousness." In our text he says Jerusalem will have that name. This is your name, beloved. This is the name given by God graciously to the spiritual Jerusalem, to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is your name, "The LORD our righteousness," because that's our confession as the church. The Lord is our righteousness. I have no righteousness. I have no righteousness to offer

to God. I'm a sinner. All I have is unrighteousness and iniquity and sin, but the Lord is my righteousness.

The Lord is our righteousness and that name is given to all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the gospel is preached in the nations through missions, all those who, by the grace of God, believe the gospel and believe in Jesus as this Branch, as the fulfillment of this prophecy as the true Messiah, they have the name, "The LORD our righteousness," and they make the confession, "The LORD is my righteousness," and they are righteous by faith in Christ. It's because of the righteousness of the Branch that God says to us what he says in verse 8 of this chapter, "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me." The gospel to you and to me today is God forgives you. God reckons you righteous. Perfectly righteous. So perfectly righteous that it's just as if you never sinned. It's just as if you perfectly kept all the commandments of God, even though you didn't. God declares to all who believe in Jesus as the Branch, "You are righteous today and for all eternity. How blessed the man whose trespass hath freely been forgiven."

And then we must notice too that the prophecy was to raise up this Branch of righteousness to execute judgment and righteousness in the land. To execute judgment, righteous judgment in the land, in the church. What a comfort that too must have been to the people of God in those days. You have to remember the days. The kings, the princes, the priests, the prophets, the judges in the city, the judges in the land didn't do that. They were corrupt. They were wicked. They were selfish. They were bowing the knee to idols. They didn't care about righteousness. They didn't care about justice. They didn't care about doing the right thing and making the right judgment. So the people were left without righteous judges. The kings just did what was convenient for them. They did what was expedient for them. They did what served their own personal welfare, their own glory, their own riches, their own power. Where was righteousness in the land? Where was justice? Where was just judgment? In those days, nowhere to be found but the Lord said, through Jeremiah, "I will cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David. He will be a Branch of righteousness. He will be righteous in all of his judgments, righteous in all of his decisions, in everything that he determines, in everything that he says."

And now once again, I make application. As Jesus our King reigns in heaven and gives us elders in the church, how terrible when elders do not exercise just judgment, when elders make judgments based on their own whims and fancy, based on their own reputation and not on the basis of what's right and what's wrong, according to the will of the King in the scriptures. But how thankful, what a cause for thanksgiving when we have elders who render just judgment. That's a gift of Christ. That's the work of Christ himself through those elders whether in the consistory, or whether at the classis, or whether at the synod. Christ uses faithful preachers and faithful elders to bring righteous judgment in the church. And through preachers he preaches righteousness. He preaches justice. He preaches the law as the standard of what is right and what is wrong. And he preaches the need for justice judgment. Through elders, he renders just judgment. Through faithful

elders, humble, godly elders who love to do what is right, he exercises discipline upon the impenitent. He turns the keys of the kingdom of heaven upon those who refuse, who stubbornly and obstinately refuse to repent of their sin. He excommunicates them. He deposes them from office. He puts them out of the church.

He renders just judgment. That's the work of Jesus himself in the church and a cause for thanksgiving, but the hope that we have as the church because there is no perfect judgment down here on earth, and there are no perfect elders here on earth who always perfectly and consistently make the right decisions, because of that the text gives us hope when it says that the Messiah is the one himself personally who will render just judgment. And we know from the rest of scripture that he will do that when he comes again. On the clouds of glory with the hosts of heaven, then and there at the last judgment, he will render perfect righteous judgment upon all evils that have been done, all evils that have been covered up, all evils that have been done in secret and have never been brought to the surface. Every idle word that is spoken, every private sin that is committed will come to the light when the books are opened and the Judge himself makes all things right.

Jesus will do that and that's our hope, and then, finally, we notice the great hope we have in verse 16. "In those days," in the days of the coming of the Messiah, "shall Judah be saved," he's a saving Branch, "and Jerusalem shall dwell safely." What a comfort in the days of Jeremiah. When the Jews literally were seeing their world crumble before their eyes, no doubt many of them had friends who had already been carried away into captivity in Babylon, and they knew that Babylon was coming for them, they knew that the walls of Jerusalem would not withstand the battering rams of Nebuchadnezzar, and they knew that God himself had prophesied, "You will go into captivity for 70 years." Where was safety? Where was security? Where was salvation? There was only fear and anxiety and gloom and doom. But then the Lord spoke in the last year of the last king, "I will raise up the Branch and in his days Judah shall dwell in safety and will be saved."

He says that repeatedly throughout these chapters throughout this section of the book of Jeremiah. Again and again and again, he prophesies, "I will return your captivity. I will bring you back from captivity. I will restore you to the land. I will give you peace and joy again." And that's a comfort to us too. Although I wouldn't say it's true that our churches are crumbling as they were in the days of Jeremiah, by God's grace he has preserved us as a church and as a denomination, and yet we've gone through troublesome times and you've gone through troublesome things in your life. All of us have. We felt the chastening rod of the Lord. We continue to feel those things. We sin against him, we miss the mark of his glory, and sometimes we suffer the consequences of our sins. Sometimes we feel as if our enemies rise up against us and seem to triumph against us like Babylon surrounding the city. We feel as if we might be carried away into captivity, a kind of personal captivity, a kind of personal suffering. Trials and tribulations come. Our hearts feel overwhelmed. We have anxiety. We have fear. And God says to us, "But through all of your chastening and through all of your sufferings and all of your trials which I send for your good, because the thoughts that I have toward you are thoughts of peace and not

thoughts of evil, the day will come when all those sufferings will be finished and you will be saved and dwell safely."

God kept those promises in a typical way already in the Old Testament. After 70 years, he raised up a man from the house of David named Zerubbabel and Zerubbabel led the Jews back to the land of Promise, and he restored them to the city of Jerusalem. He did. He gave them joy. He gave them security and safety. He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. He kept his promise. But that was only a type. Ultimately, God fulfilled this promise when Christ came into the world, the Branch of righteousness our Lord Jesus Christ. Through his suffering and death, he has accomplished salvation for all of the church, and now throughout this present age, through his word and Spirit, he showers down upon us the blessings of that salvation, and he gives us in small measure, he gives us a foretaste of that salvation and that safety, that security, that peace, that freedom from fear so that even in the midst of our deepest and darkest hours, we can cling to the cross of Christ, and we can cling to Jesus as our hope. He saves us but the final and ultimate fulfillment awaits the future.

So the text as it gave hope to the Jews in those days, still gives hope to us today. We will be saved, saved from our sin and saved from the consequences of our sin. Saved from the sufferings of this present time. Saved from all of our trials and tribulations, all of our captivities. When Jesus comes, when he comes for you personally and takes you to heaven, and when he comes for all of us on that great day of days, and when after the final judgment he leads us into the everlasting kingdom and gives us our inheritance, that's when we will be saved fully and completely. That's when Judah will dwell safely and securely. When at last we enter into the kingdom of God in the new heavens and the new earth, there will be no more tears and no more sorrow. No more sufferings and no more chastening. No more death. But we will dwell in perfect safety and security. Our minds, our hearts, will never feel troubled again. Our minds and our hearts will never feel overwhelmed again. There will never be more anxiety or fear. But we will dwell safely. We will dwell securely. There will be no more enemies to attack us. No more threats. No more dangers. No more prophecies of doom and judgment but everlasting peace.

When Jesus comes again, that's when it will be fulfilled perfectly what we read in verse 11 of our chapter, that when we emerge out of all the desolation, out of all of the wickedness, all the corruption, all of the sufferings of this present time, then will be heard in the New Jerusalem which will come down from God out of heaven into the new creation, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, Jesus, and the voice of the bride, the church, that shall say, "Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever." That's the hope of the gospel. May God fill us with joy as we lay hold upon it. Amen.

Gracious God in heaven, we thank thee for thy word, the prophecies of old, the gospel of Christ, and the hope that thou dost give us for time to come. We pray, Father, that thou would use this preaching of thy word today to give us joy and gladness already now, even if it's only a foretaste, we pray for it. Fill our hearts with joy. Fill our hearts with peace. Grant that we might lay down in peace at night and sleep knowing that thou,

Lord, only makest us dwell in safety. And grant that we might by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ experience the blessedness of those who are justified by faith, knowing all our sins are forgiven and that we are right with thee. Lord God, bring the day pf the great judgment and of our perfect inheritance. In Jesus' name. Amen.