

*Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD. <sup>3</sup> "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. <sup>4</sup> I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD.*

<sup>5</sup> *"The days are coming," declares the LORD,  
"when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,  
a King who will reign wisely  
and do what is just and right in the land.*

<sup>6</sup> *In his days Judah will be saved  
and Israel will live in safety.  
This is the name by which he will be called:  
The LORD Our Righteousness. (Jeremiah 23:2-6)*

### **Do You Know this King's Name?**

How's your Old Testament history? Today, we're looking at a prophecy from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah. When did he live? What was going on then? The first three verses of the book tell us. They say that these are the visions he saw during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, kings of Judah. Does that help? What if I told you we're talking about the period from 627 to 586 BC? Would that make it any clearer? Which of those two statements makes it easier for you to know what's going on? Personally, I'd rather hear the names than the dates, because numbers don't mean much to me. But I understand that when the Old Testament lists kings and who came after who, it's meaningless for most people because they just don't know those names. But maybe that difficulty gives us a chance to think about something that Jeremiah says today, something that the Bible actually says with some frequency. Jeremiah makes a big deal about a king's name. When we understand why he does that, we'll understand this prophecy. My friends, **do you know this King's name?**

#### **I.**

Of course, you do. This King is Jesus. This prophecy has a lot in common with the one we looked at last week from the book of Ezekiel. That's not totally surprising, since Jeremiah and Ezekiel both served during the years up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel served the exiles who were already in Babylon when Jerusalem was destroyed. Jeremiah served in Jerusalem and lived through the destruction. God sent them both to build up his people at a time when their world was falling apart.

What was going on? Jeremiah's prophecy begins with the kings of Judah. He calls them shepherds for the people. God sent the kings to do all the things shepherds are supposed to do. Sheep are valuable animals. But they're not very smart. They don't know how to avoid danger and they get lost very easily. They don't have fangs or claws to fight off predators. They're not fast and they can't jump high, like deer, so they can't get away. They have to be protected. They have to be taken to safe pastures and clean water or they'll starve. They have to be taken care of. But the kings of Judah didn't do those things, so God's flock – the people of Judah – was scattered. They went into exile. But God said that he would gather his flock together again. He would bring them home to Israel. And he would provide true shepherds who would take care of them.

Now, if you were here last week, you heard Ezekiel say something similar. But there's one big difference. Ezekiel said that God would bring back all the exiles from Israel and Judah, something he never did in this life. He was talking about life after the resurrection. Jeremiah said that God would bring back the remnant of his people. Most of Judah would be lost. But a piece would be left. God would bring that piece back and make it grow again. He was talking about life here. Seventy years after Jerusalem was destroyed, God brought the exiles home. So when the time came, Jesus was born in Bethlehem and he preached throughout Israel.

But don't forget the other part of this promise: God promised to give them new shepherds who would care for them and keep them safe. When the Old Testament prophets talk about shepherds, they usually mean the kings of Israel. But the kings of Israel weren't just politicians. God also called them to lead his people spiritually. When they were faithful to the Lord, they led their people to be faithful. When they worshipped idols, they led their people astray. After the exile, God focused more on the spiritual role of the shepherds. In fact, God didn't give Israel their own kings again for a long time. When he did, they still weren't always faithful. And they weren't able to keep the flock safe. New enemies conquered Israel and scattered many of them again. But that doesn't mean the prophecy failed. In the Old Testament, God often begins a prophecy by looking at one future event and then he moves on to another. In this case, he starts with the return from exile and then he moves on to the New Testament Church. God brought the physical nation of Israel home from Babylon so that Jesus would be born and the New Testament Church would be founded. From that time on, when God gave shepherds, they weren't kings. They were pastors. They were people called to care for a spiritual flock and defend them against spiritual danger, using God's power in the gospel to do it.

God created Israel for one reason only: to bring Jesus into this world. Even when the people were unfaithful to him, God refused to let his plan fail. So God sent them into exile and he promised to bring them back. Then God said, **"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."**

This is where Jeremiah talks about the new king. Obviously, it's Jesus, the descendant of King David. But why call him a branch? Think of a family tree. King David was the trunk and Jesus was a branch on that tree. But when Jesus was born, it wasn't a mighty oak anymore. It was a dead stump. Joseph and Mary – both descendants from King David – weren't living in a palace in Jerusalem. Joseph was a carpenter way up north in Nazareth. And it's clear his family didn't get a lot of respect there. They were nobodies. But God caused a branch to grow from that dead stump. When the royal line had lost everything and it looked like God's promise had failed, that's when God sent the descendant he had promised. God did that so that the whole world could see that this was a miracle. God moved the house of David out of politics because it was never his plan to save one postage stamp sized country in the Middle East. The kingdom Jesus came to rule is more than just the remnant of Judah or even the whole nation of Israel. He is the ruler of the world. And he is the King over the true people of God, the Holy Christian Church.

He is that because he is more than a man. Jeremiah said: **"This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."** For us, a name is almost random. Some people make up names because they like the way they sound. New parents will often say a first and middle name out loud just to make sure they sound good together. Nobody wants their child's name to sound funny, right? In my family, every Sunday during football season we get a smile out of the name Jim Bob Cooter, because it just strikes us funny. In the Old Testament, it was different. Names meant something. When the Old Testament makes a point of saying, "This is what his name will be," it's telling us more than just, "This is the name his parents are gonna like." It's saying, "This is who and what this person really is."

The promised King would be the LORD. Jesus is the son of David. He's a real human being just like us. But that's not what makes him our king. He is also the LORD. In Hebrew, that's a special name for God. The LORD is the God who keeps his promises. He makes covenants with his people and then binds himself to them. That's all true about Jesus. But first of all, the LORD is the one who is and who was and who will always be. That baby that was born in Bethlehem and laid in the manger was the very God who created the universe. Now, he was God the Son, not God the Father. But he and the Father are one. Together they rule all things.

Jesus had to be God to overcome the sin of Israel that sent them into exile – and to overcome our sin, too. He had to be God so that his life and death and resurrection would count for every person on earth. You and I are bought and paid for and forgiven because God walked this earth and died in our place and rose again. But he also had to be a real man so that he really could do all that for us. God's law applies to us human beings so a real human being had to keep it. Death applies to us humans. For God to die, he had to become human. Hell is for humans and for evil angels. To spring us humans, our Savior had to be able to suffer hell as only a human can do. So almost 600 years before it happened, God promised to give us exactly the Savior we

need: Jesus, God made man. That's the real answer to our question: **do you know this King's name? He is Jesus, the LORD.**

## II.

But that's not all that Jeremiah says about him. He says his name will be the LORD *our Righteousness*. What does that mean? It means that when he is righteous, we are righteous – at least in God's eyes – and that's all that matters. This is one of the greatest mysteries of God's love. We can't be righteous for each other. If I teach catechism class and one of the kids is messing around while I'm teaching – if he has his phone out and he's surfing the web and sending texts to his friends, and then when I call him on it, he's rude and disrespectful and refuses to put that phone away, I would not be a happy camper. There's a good chance his parents would be here that same day to talk about how long his suspension was going to be. But imagine that when I sat down with his parents, they said to me, "OK he did all that stuff. But his brother was sitting right next to him. He was paying attention and taking notes. He was totally obedient and respectful. Since he was obeying all the rules, you can't punish our other son. You have to give him credit for how good his brother was."

That would be utter nonsense to us, right? But that's the amazing thing that God did, and only God could do it. He sent Jesus to take our place. On the cross certainly. He died there for us. He suffered hell there for us. In the empty tomb as well – his resurrection powers our resurrections. But before he did all that, Jesus was perfect in our place. So now, God looks at us and counts us as holy and perfect. God says that we didn't sin. Ever. Not once. Our whole lives long.

Is that true? I mean, can you think of at least one time in your life when you sinned? Of course you can. Can you think of at least one sin that bothers you, one sin that you don't want me or anybody else to know about, one sin that keeps you up at night? Do you think God knows about it? Of course he does. He's God. He knows everything. He's right next to us every time we sin. Jesus the Judge is right next to us. He never forgets anything. But in some way that only God can do and that we can't ever understand, God chooses not to see our sin. Instead, he looks at us through Jesus. All he sees is his perfect Son doing everything that we are supposed to do, having a heart that never even thinks a sinful thought or has a sinful feeling. He sees Jesus and he calls us perfect. Jesus is our Righteousness.

That's why he is our King. Jeremiah saw him ruling justly over his people. In heaven and after the resurrection, we will live under him in his kingdom forever. But we're also living under him right now. Jesus holds all things in his hands and all that he does for his people is right and perfect. But that's not always easy for us to see here. When Jesus allows a child to die, when Jesus allows some terrible person to commit some horrible crime – pick any recent shooting that you thought was terrible – it's hard for us to see that all that he does is just and right. It is. But we don't have the perspective to understand all that God is doing. But when he comes back, we will understand. When he comes back, he will openly rule all things and we will see the justice of all that he has ever done. And we will rejoice.

We know that's true now because of who he is and what he's done for us. **Do you know this King's name? He is Jesus, our righteousness.** Because he is, we know that all that he does even here must be right. Today is Christ the King Sunday. It's the last Sunday of the church year. On Wednesday, we'll start the new church year when we start our Advent services. But before we start over, we are reminded what he was doing: saving us, bringing us into his kingdom, ruling and protecting and providing for us, now and forever. That is who this King is. Amen.