

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, I would see Jesus.”

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 33

¹⁴Listen, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the good promises that I have spoken to the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah.

¹⁵In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous Branch to grow up from David's line.

He will establish justice and righteousness on earth.

¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely.

This is what she will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.



My good friend said, “Seth, all I had to do was keep it elevated and clean.” He was talking about the finger he had accidentally lost in a power saw. It wasn't the whole finger, but he had shown me the nub, and he had lost the whole fingernail. It looked painful. He had picked up the end and put it on ice, and the doctors sewed it back on. “All I had to do was keep it elevated and clean. What do I do? *Not* keep it elevated and clean.” He said that with a smile. I knew my friend couldn't leave his woodworking and house-renovating hobbies alone. He was just too much of a sawdust junkie to keep his finger.

The kingdom of Judah, the southern kingdom, which included Jerusalem, was supposed to keep their trust in God and their lives clean according to the Old Testament laws. It was that easy, just keep their trust in God and their lives clean, but it turned out to be quite hard. What did they do? *Not* keep their trust in God or their lives clean. So God called forth the Babylonians like a tree saw and removed the whole tree of Judah. Everything they were proud of – temple, family lineage, theocratic heritage, their good name – was sawed off and hauled away. God's judgment was like a lumberjack harvesting what were supposed to be the best souls – kings who were truly evil, priests who were terribly unfaithful, and prophets with their wagging tongues.

So when the prophecy came that this stump of a nation had some hope for the future, it was really pretty nice to hear. When Jeremiah prophesied the days are coming,” the Jews could still attach to a promise. When Jeremiah said after all the lumberjacking,

Behold! A Branch Is Growing

... Then it could grow into one great big Advent promise that the line of the King was still intact.

Do you know that? After all the world looks awfully stumpy and worthless, the promises of God are good and they are intact.

What does this truly mean, however, that a branch is growing? God said through Jeremiah that He would “cause a righteous Branch to grow up from David's line.” As it turns out, secular literature from Phoenicia shortly after these times use the phrase “righteous branch” to denote the legitimate heir to the throne. After so many bad kings, or good kings like Hezekiah and Josiah who reformed a little bit

but then grew less faithful or just didn't have time to finish, FINALLY one would come who is a legitimate heir. Even the Lord proclaims this "righteous Branch" as His chosen and anointed One. He is the ideal king in comparison to all Old Testament kings. Even David himself fell short.

Of course, this King would be righteous in the absolute sense. He would sit on David's throne as the sinless Son of Man. He would be holy and blameless in the eyes of the holy God. He would be Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and the King of Kings.

Furthermore, Jesus would conduct Himself in a just and righteous manner. This doesn't mean He would rule in the way people expect Him to, just come and punish the wrongdoer, just make sure to reward the exemplary citizen. Instead, this righteous Branch would bring the righteousness that God demands. He would live to satisfy the justice of God, and He would die to bring righteousness to God's people. He suffered as a Substitute in the place of His people and in their place would be nailed to one of those expendable lumberjack trees of God's Law. His body and soul would be divided under the saw of death.

At our last parish, a couple gave us a banana tree that was really quite remarkable. There were no actual bananas, but it grew these broad, beautiful leaves. The parsonage even had an indoor garden where we placed it, next to two-story windows. But when the leaves became too large, we had to cut the whole tree only a foot above the ground. It seemed cruel and silly, to chop this tree down to size. But what we watched happen afterwards was a thing of beauty. Our banana tree would begin to grow again, branch out, and sprout leaves. It didn't take more than a couple months for it to get large and full again. [Then Ellie cut it too low and killed it.]

Such are the promises of the Lord, the God of Jeremiah and the true Ruler of all things. They seem to wither and die, but meanwhile they work in weakness and sprout anew in each Christian.

One way in which God's promises grow in our new King is by renewing His people. We get a sense of this each year as winter comes and Christmas draws near and we bring living trees to our home to be reminded of Jesus' first coming. We are not the branches of those trees, but we do love to see those branches and decorate them with ornaments and special things.

We are also *not* the righteous Branch that grows from the stump of Jesse; but those who trust in Christ Jesus, the new Jerusalem, is called something crazy and strange and seemingly mixed-up. The new Jerusalem – "she" – is called, "The Lord Our Righteousness." This is different than ten chapters ago in Jeremiah, when the righteous Branch to come was called "The Lord Our Righteousness." Here in Jeremiah 33 the new Jerusalem – "she" – is called, "The Lord Our Righteousness." This has seemed so mixed-up and crazy and strange that scholars have crossed out the word "she" in the Hebrew and suggested "He."

But you and I know something. You and I know that it makes sense to call Jesus Christ's kingdom by His name, for through Him the new Jerusalem has attained its righteousness. He has placed His name along with that promise on each child of God at baptism – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has put His body and His blood into your mouths for you for forgiveness, so that your surname might as well be Christ. And hear the words of 2 Corinthians 5:21, which say, "in Him [Jesus] we become the righteousness of God."

The days are coming again, friends. We have been cut apart in our imperfection by our sin and the lumberjack of God's judging Law, but the days are coming again. Just as the King must live again after death, so also the King will come again in a second Advent. Keep your eyes elevated to the Savior's cross in your sin. Keep your lives clean in word and deed. And prepare your hearts for the return of the righteous Branch. Root yourselves in Him. Rejoice in His first coming. Drink richly this

December from the vine of true life, Jesus Christ, the righteous One. Go back to the wellsprings of true life, His Holy Word. Remember the name God has placed on you in love.

Amen.