

A Righteous Rule Jeremiah 22:1-5

November 17, 2019

1, Thus says the LORD: Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, 2 and say: Hear the word of the LORD, O King of Judah sitting on the throne of David — you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates. 3 Thus says the LORD: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place. 4 For if you will indeed obey this word, then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people. 5 But if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation (NRSV).

The Scripture is very serious stuff. The Hebrew nation is unique, it is in a covenant relationship with God. This is one of most important things to remember and understand. The covenant goes back to Genesis 17:7-9 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.” Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come” (NRSV). Throughout the Bible; the Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, Psalms, other prophets, and into the New Testament, we see this covenant is the real deal. God is in covenant with Abraham and his descendants for all the generations to come. The Hebrew nation is unique because it is in a contractual relationship with God. This is a binding promise. It is everlasting; it does not end. It is not to be broken down through generations. The covenant is God leading people to righteousness and providing care to the people and the people remaining faithful to God, worshiping only God, and obeying God.

The historical Background goes like this. The Hebrew nation is freed from slavery in Egypt. They survive in the wilderness for 40 years. They settle into Canaan; the promised land. Then they go through the period of the Judges where God raised a judge to lead them and to enact justice. Then there is the monarchy where the 12 tribes are united together under one king: Saul, David, Solomon. Then the kingdom divided in 930 BC. The divided kingdom is weaker and in 722 BC Assyria invaded the northern kingdom and the 10 tribes of Israel go into captivity.

It is in 626 BC that the ministry of Jeremiah begins. This is a very difficult time of great stress. It is very important to know what the Exile is, when it occurred, and why it happened. It is a very important historic period; the most significant event in their history. God keeps covenant with the people but humanity does not. Humans fail to repent. Like a drug addict that does not recover until he or she hits the bottom, the Exile is when the Jews and Israelites hit bottom. The main problem is the same problem as always. It is human beings failing to obey God; they fail to keep covenant. Jeremiah is a major prophet during the Exile. He delivers the word of God to the rulers in Judah. He is very unpopular because he calls out their sins and idolatry.

In our Scripture today, the Lord tells Jeremiah to go to the king of Judah (this is the southern part of the divided kingdom) and tell him that he has to act with justice and righteousness. He has to engage in social justice and deliver the people from oppression and do no wrong, and do no violence to aliens, orphans, or widows. The intent of God is that the kings are to rule as God rules. God desires a righteous rule. If obedient then they will receive God's blessing. If they are disobedient then there will be desolation. Obey the covenant, follow the

word of God, rule justly, and the kingdom will continue. Do not follow the word of God and it will end.

The Scripture reveals what God is concerned about. It is an exhortation to repent, which is always significant in the Bible. God is the speaker. Jeremiah is the messenger. The king of Judah is the recipient. The book of Jeremiah is for all of us to learn and obey God's righteous rule. It all relates to the covenant. God keeps covenant and expects people to do the same; to rule in righteousness, and execute justice to the alien, widow, and orphan. The first point God makes is to listen to the word of God. The first thing in the call to obedience is listening to the word. In order to obey the will of God you have to know the word of God. The second point is that God is concerned with social justice. Care as God cares. Rule as God rules. The king must protect the weak and serve as an advocate, act with justice and righteousness, and deliver people from oppression. The king must extent righteous treatment to the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow. The king is not to shed innocent blood. This is not a new idea. Moses pronounced a covenant curse on the people if they deprive an alien, orphan, or widow of justice.

The contemporary lesson for us is that we are to live by the word of God. First you have to know the word of God. You have to know the Bible, not just read the Bible, study it, and engage active in research. Get a good study Bible and wear it out. Study the commentaries. Engage in study groups, help each other to learn and discern the word of God. The second thing is to make an honest and sincere effort to obey the word. What was important then is important now. It is a matter of what God cares about. It is all tied into the relationship between God and humanity. God is concerned about justice; how we treat the powerless, marginalized, and vulnerable. We are all responsible for the care of the stranger, widow, and orphan. The Bible condemns the manipulation of power in order to enhance wealth at expense of the poor and weak. The security of the nation is directly correlated to care for the poor and needy. The righteous rule is the Lord's will and the way for human life. God has generously given us love, grace, salvation, and abundant blessings. Let us show our appreciation by living our lives by God's righteous rule.