

**Jeremiah 33:14-18**

14 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 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. 16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness." 17 For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, 18 and the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time.

Here it is, upon us already, the first Sunday of Advent, the four weeks that lead up to Christmas. This is the beginning of a new season in the church year. It marks something very significant – the birth of Christ. To fully understand the mission and purpose of Christ it is important to understand the Exile. The Exile was the most significant event in Israel's history. We know the Bible stories that take place during the Exile but we don't really know the Exile. We know about the prophets and some of the things that they said and did but we don't fully understand how they are wrapped around the Exile.

It all deals with the covenant that God made with humanity. The God of Abraham is significantly different from all of the other gods. The gods of the world are of human origin. Anything that people did not understand they attributed to a god or gods. The descendants of Abraham were grateful to accept and enter into the covenant with God because of all of the benefits. The God of Abraham is proven to be real and involved with the care of humanity. When the people are freed from slavery and get to the Promised Land, right before they enter into the Promised Land, the covenant is ratified. God tells the people if you keep the covenant then you get to keep the land. If you break the covenant then you lose the land. The covenant is a really good deal for the people. They get freedom from slavery, protection, productive land to settle on, divine intervention, and God as their king. All they have to do, in order to have all of this, is keep the faith. So, the people get the Promised Land and they live a life of conquest and prosperity. But, they fail to keep covenant and so God warns the people through the prophets. Due to widespread apostasy they are conquered and sent into Exile just like the prophets said. It is during the Exile that a promise of restoration and a promised Redeemer is given to the people.

Jeremiah was one of the prophets. He was very devoted to God and warned the kings to obey the Word of God or else. They refused to obey and this put the nation in grave danger. Babylon invaded Judea and besieged Jerusalem and the people were sent into Exile. This was a very difficult and depressing time. Solomon's temple was destroyed and the people were captured. During this time of captivity the people were obviously down and out, despondent, and hopeless. But they had hope in a promise of redemption. It is during extreme suffering that God provides hope for the people. The divine cycle goes like this: devotion, prosperity, transgression, call for repentance, despondency, repentance, devotion, and prosperity. It is during this period of extreme despondency that Jeremiah is in a position to deliver a word of hope from God to the

people. Today's Scripture is the Word of God delivered through God's prophet Jeremiah. It is a promise from God to the people when the people needed encouragement and belief in a continued united Jewish state, never ending Davidic kingdom, and Levitical priesthood. The promise of restoration tells the people that there will be a branch from David of justice and righteousness from which the people will be saved and the throne of David secured forever.

The problem that Jesus faced is easy for us to see here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There was obviously a wide spread societal problem dealing where the will of humans conflicted with the will of God. God promised justice and righteousness and Jesus came at a time when justice and righteousness were seriously lacking. The rule of righteousness and justice is the Lord's rule of righteousness and justice. The human ruler is to be an agent of God's rule. But what the people wanted overlooked the part about justice and righteousness.

The contemporary lesson is to see yourself in Scripture, to reflect on the lesson and learn how it applies to your life. In Jeremiah's day the overall sin was apostasy. The people abandoned God. Political leaders failed to render justice and righteousness, broke the covenant, and refused to repent. The result of that was destruction just like God said it would be. In the Jesus' time the sin was apostasy. Religious leaders claimed to be with God but actually rejected justice and righteousness. In today's time the sin is apostasy. American people claim to be Christian but fail to follow the teachings of Jesus and the character of Christ.

I was talking with a colleague recently who expressed concern about a church that was being led astray by strict self-righteous doctrine. He said "of course, society is led astray because the church is led astray by people who don't see how they are like the Pharisees. The biblical lessons apply to us. We make the same mistakes that they made. We look to God to provide what we want instead of being close to God and doing what God wants. We do our own thing and assume that it's OK. We teach Bible lessons but we don't teach the soul - we don't teach how the lesson applies to me. People see it as being about someone else, the biblical characters - the protagonist, the deuteragonist, and the sinner - ends up being someone else."

The overall real lesson of the Bible is your relationship with God. It is never about some other person. It is always about you changing your life and developing spiritually for a closer relationship with God.