

Jehovah Tsidkenu

It was getting darker. The light was almost out. Josiah, the last Judean king to take Yahweh seriously, had been killed in battle with Egypt. The reigning king, Jehoiakim (the second eldest son of Josiah) like his older brother, Jehoahaz, continued to reverse his father's righteous gains and to lead the people into the worship of foreign gods. Jeremiah had faithfully and tearfully rebuked sin, warned of coming judgment, and invited repentance; all to no avail. Like Isaiah before him, Jeremiah was despised for His prophecies and bore the pain of rejection. In Jeremiah 15:10 he laments:

Alas, my mother, that you gave me birth, a man with whom the whole land strives and contends! I have neither lent nor borrowed, yet everyone curses me.

During Jehoiakim's and then Zedekiah's reigns Jeremiah announced the certainty of Babylonian captivity (chapters 21-29), the consequences for Judah's unfaithfulness and disobedience. However, like most of God's spokesmen the message had a mixed content. Inserted throughout all the rebuking and warnings was also consolation. In Jeremiah chapter 23 there is the fresh air of hope. It is within this chapter that another name of God is revealed in verse six, the LORD our Righteousness (Jehovah Tsidkenu).

In Jeremiah 23:1-8 light is shed in the midst of the dark night of the souls of Judah. Even in His judgments we hear Yahweh's long standing promise of hope as the true Shepherd of Israel, reaffirming that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather that they would turn to Him in repentance and live (Micah 7:18, Ezekiel 33:11).

In contrast Judah's current leaders are characterized as destroying and scattering the sheep of God's pasture. Like Ezekiel, Jeremiah pins a good portion of the blame on Judah's waywardness on her leadership (Ezekiel 34:2). Woe to those shepherds whose focus is on feeding themselves rather than on feeding the flock. They had not attended to the flock of Judah and so now God was going to "attend" to them! This should give any leader pause and ask the chief Shepherd for a heart search.

But wait; next comes some good news in the midst of the bad. Just as the scattering of the people was literal, so will the regathering be (v.3). Even before the reality of the exile, the return from dispersion had already been announced in 3:15-18. Now it is God Himself who does the work of the true Shepherd, regathering the sheep from all countries. What the scattering shepherds did in driving the people away is now credited to the Lord because He ultimately carried out the penalty brought on the people by their own sins and by the sins of their leaders (shepherds). The people will be returned to their own pasture. Moreover, God will replace the faithless shepherds with faithful ones (v.4). They will rule in godliness under the ideal King (vv.5-6). A number of commentators understand the godly shepherds to be Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, the

Maccabees, and others; but these do not exhaust the meaning of the passage because of the world-wide dispersion that is in view. The fulfillment waits a long range realization (cf. Matt 19:28). The hour when assured peace will be Israel's and none will be missing or lost has not yet come.

There is more good news: not only will good shepherds appear to lead God's people but also a descendant of David (a righteous branch/the Messiah) will appear to rule with justice, righteousness and wisdom (v.5). With Him will come salvation and security. His name will be the LORD our Righteousness. Like most all Old Testament prophecy there is a present fulfillment in view (return from Babylonian and Assyrian exile, godly shepherds), mixed with long term fulfillment in view (return of Israel from among all the nations and the coming righteous King). It is easy to see how the Jews could easily lump it all into the same time span. It was not until the New Testament's clarifications of the unfolding revelation that a more complete understanding was possible.

While the King has come, He is yet to reign personally on the earth, correcting all injustice and acting in full wisdom. Of course that King is Jesus, who came the first time as the Suffering Servant but will come again as the Righteous King. The wounded Lamb of God who has overcome sin and death will reign and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). Jeremiah gives hope to all that would trust Yahweh, Jew and Gentile alike. One day there will be security, justice, and wisdom on earth. Even in Jeremiah's day there was a faithful remnant of believers (Ezekiel, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Daniel to just name a few of the famous ones) who were responding and this light provided great hope and joy. And so today, knowing that there is justice and righteousness on the horizon provides great encouragement. It is living in the light of this unseen reality that we persevere and rest in the hidden substance of hope and the conviction of unrealized promises.

One word of caution, while there may be future implications in this revealed name of God (what is characteristic of the Son [Messiah] is true of each person of the Trinity) as a disclosure of the source of our personal righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:26-31), we could miss the point if we are not careful. In our interpretation of the Old Testament we are often quick to put a New Testament spin on it and as a result miss the true significance of the Scripture. While it is true that the coming King will be the source of personal righteousness, the point here is that finally we will have a righteous ruler. Yahweh is our righteousness not "my" righteousness! This is in contrast to the unjust and selfish leaders of Judah. The coming King will be the opposite, and He will be called "Yahweh our Righteousness", bringing salvation, righteousness, and peace. When the word for righteousness is used to refer to God it describes the nature and will of His character from which comes His actions. The Lord is the just judge (II Chr 12:6; Ps 11:7; Jer 12:1; Lam 1:18) even to the utmost degree as the Judge of all the earth (Deut 32:4; Ps 119:137; Isa 5:16). Therefore His standards, His judgments set out in His word are righteous (Ps 119:144,

160, 172). Being everlasting, they are the confidence of His people and will not fail. God's hate of sin and love of righteousness (Ps 45:7) express His essential righteousness. Therefore righteousness and judgment are the "foundations" of God's throne, i.e. they always characterize His actions (Ps 97:2).

Since I arrived on this earth, I've seen eleven US Presidents come and go with the twelfth on his way out. While some might have been more righteous than others, all pale in comparison to the righteousness of the coming King. As a matter of fact, all earthly rulers are temporary and any righteous gains prove in the long run to be temporary at best. But there is a day coming when righteousness will reign in wisdom and security, bringing true peace. I long for that day. Most likely you're like me, I tire of all the earthly leadership follies, and yet we can look forward to the coming reality of the Righteous King. Many of us cry out today, like the martyrs under the Revelation throne, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging...". Jeremiah points us to that day with all the assurance of God's spoken Word. We wait, for His timing with great anticipation while continuing in the life He has given us to live for Him today, with a confident "Maranatha" on the tip of our tongues: : "Lord come quickly." What a strong tower to run in to: Our God is our hope of righteous rule today and forever.

Assignment:

1. Before considering Jehovah Tsidkenu, read the following quote from A.W. Tozer. Do you agree with his assessment? Reflect on how God has been revealed in His names thus far. Reflect on the stories and the people. What has your response been? Has there just been an accumulation of information? Or have you by God's enabling grace increased in your longing and trust for Him. Is He becoming more and more of a strong tower to run to? Have His revealing words been received in humility and repentance?

"A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.

It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity.

All the problems of heaven and earth, though they were to confront us together and at once, would be nothing compared with the overwhelming problem of God: That He is; what He is like; and what we as moral beings must do about Him."

2. Read Jeremiah 23:1-7. Remember this word is coming in the midst of warning and impending judgment. What is your impression? How would the righteous have responded? How do you respond? Do you ever grow weary of world leaders? How does this Scripture encourage you?

3. Consider the following Scriptures. What do you learn about God and His righteousness?

Psalms 97: 1-12

Psalms 94:1-3

Daniel 9:7

Revelation 15:3-4

Revelation 19:11-16

4. For centuries God's people have run to the conviction and hope of God's coming righteous rule. God has sustained them during times of great persecution and injustice with this promise. For the one who runs to our Strong Tower there is an ultimate light at the end of the tunnel. How about you? Can you receive the word of the Lord in humility and repentance? Will you allow the work of God to give you an eternal perspective? Will you move from the collection of Biblical data to digesting the word of God like good food that nourishes your spirit and soul? Like Jesus will you exalt the Father as the source of everything?