Jeremiah 23:5-6 Listen, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, who will reign wisely as king and establish justice and righteousness on earth. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely. This is his name by which he will be called: The Lord our righteousness.

 Sometimes when you are dealing with an Old Testament prophet it is good and beneficial to hear something about the history and the man behind the book. But since there is so much to be said and sometimes so little time, let me, try and give you just a nutshell version of Jeremiah, prophet of God.

 To begin, Jeremiah’s ministry started in 626 B.C. At the time Josiah was the king. Josiah was a Godly king. But when Josiah died in 609 B.C. life decidedly turned for Jeremiah. Although a prophet who foretold the coming judgment of God upon his people because they had abandoned his truth, as long as Josiah was alive Jeremiah had the protection of the king. Once Josiah died, Jeremiah’s life became one of persecution, struggle, imprisonment and tremendous difficulty. Jeremiah was finally delivered to the Lord’s hands in 586 or so. Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 and Governor Gedaliah placed in charge. But Gedaliah was murdered and the group responsible fled to Egypt taking Jeremiah with them. It is tradition that this group stoned Jeremiah to death because he wouldn’t stop telling them they were wrong.

 So you can well imagine that Jeremiah was a prophet of the law, preaching the devastating truth of sin and the judgment that this unbelieving nation had coming its way. Yet there are many sections of Jeremiah where he showed the grace and mercy of God as God kept his promises of a Savior and deliverance from sin. Our section is just one such section of hope and encouragement, a great prophecy of comfort to be found in the Messiah. Let’s jump in and look closer at these words. Our theme will be: **THE RIGHTEOUS BRANCH.**

 Note how our section starts. It says, “**2Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says about the shepherds who shepherd my people. You have scattered my flock. You have driven them away. You have not taken care of them, but I will certainly take care of you, because of the evil things you have done, declares the Lord.”**

 Here is how the problems besetting the Jewish nation got started. It was the “shepherds”. By this word I will include all who are leaders and examples for the people: the kings and all the priests who were to be the Lord’s servants but were not. Complicating this issue was the fact that there appears to have been a large number of leaders who declared themselves the “Prophets of God” but they were not. All of these people combined lead to the demise of faith. God’s truth was not declared. God’s ways and desires were not being followed. Mind you, there was “religion.” In the name of God and with the claim that God’s will was being done, all sorts of godless and heathen things were carried out. It is to this group that God’s true and real prophet spoke God’s Word. Devastating words. Words of clear judgment and threat. **“You have scattered my flock. You have driven them away. You have not taken care of them.”** And then God makes this clear: **“But I will certainly take care of you, because of the evil things you have done.”** Everyone here understands the clear message of judgment the God is giving.

 That judgment is in many cases carried out in Jeremiah’s day. The Assyrians, the Egyptians and the Babylonians regularly trounced this little nation. In 605 B.C. the first waves of Jewish exiles were carried off to far away countries. Because of the false prophets who kept leading the people to believe God was with them, the land was basically under a constant state of war. It was a harsh and terrible time to live.

 By the way, please note that though this prophecy condemns the “shepherds” for their evil ways it is also the sheep, those who blindly followed the false shepherds, those who willingly turned away from the Lord because their leaders said so…these sheep also suffered greatly in this judgment God had brought. It is also true that the few faithful who stuck to the truth and wonder of God, even those faithful few, like Ezekiel, Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego ended up exiled. Sadly many faithful suffered or died because of this judgment. A judgment God had given them a hundred years warning about. Yet the shepherds and the sheep did not repent. The end result was that everyone suffered. At least the faithful suffered knowing God’s will was being done and that God’s grace was still their hope and comfort.

Part of that hope and comfort is found in our next words. **“I will gather what is left of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their pastures. They will be fruitful and multiply. 4I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them. They will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing, declares the Lord.”** Here is God’s Word to the faithful. These words remind them that God will bring them back to their land, that God will in the end bless them and take care of them. Ezekiel, God’s prophet was in Babylon guiding the people in God’s truth. There were other faithful prophets to come. The biggest thing I want to say about these words is how they would come true in 80 years. In 80 years, God would cause it that Cyrus the Great would decree that the Jewish people could return to their homeland and once again rebuild their temple. God would indeed keep his promises. All of this so that the greatest of God’s promise could come true. That God’s deliverer, God’s eternal king would come from the Jews and their faith.

That’s where our last section of this prophecy comes in. It is about Jesus. It says, “**Listen, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, who will reign wisely as king and establish justice and righteousness on earth. 6In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely. This is his name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.”**

Here is another promise of that descendant of David who is coming in the future. This descendant has a number of very unique qualities. First, he will be “righteous.” The word here means that this person will be pure and holy, a person without fault or flaw. Second, this person would become a king, a wise king, no doubt a king who would do and carry out the wonder and marvel of the Lord God himself. Third, this king would establish justice. Not just any justice but justice after the heart and mind of God. It would be a justice that is equal and fair, where the facts and only the facts of a person’s life are considered. For those that God knows to be holy and good or those that God knows to be wicked and evil will get exactly their just rewards. It will be flawless and perfect justice.

Fourth, there will be righteousness. Notice the difference. The king will be righteous, that is holy and pure and this king will give or bring righteousness. Simply put, holiness and purity will be available for the people he serves. Let that sink in. But don’t miss the fifth thing about this King. The fifth is that this king will be over “the earth.” The way this is written makes it clear that this word encompasses “all the earth,” and in that sense you could understand the whole world or as I prefer, the world as a whole, that is the world of all time.

Does anyone here not grasp that this is pointing to Jesus? Jesus came into our world, born of a virgin, born at exactly the right time, born to carry out the will and desire of his Father and our God to bring us eternal life and salvation and declare us to be God’s forgiven children. Jesus, descendant of David. Jesus who lived a holy and perfect life, tempted in every way and yet was without sin, came to atone for us. He did that on the cross. There through his suffering and death, sin was paid for and the justice of God was served. Keep that in mind. We are told that Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world! It is this Jesus who will and has been declared “King.”

He is king because of his resurrection from the dead. That’s how we know that Jesus is everything, the fulfillment of all that God promises. God had promised that the way we would know who God’s Son is, is because He would die and rise again to life. With that resurrection Jesus would bring to all the world justice and righteousness.

Let’s talk of the righteousness first. God has given us the righteousness of Jesus. Just because we believe in Jesus we are declared by God to be righteous, that is, holy and pure before the Lord our God. This righteousness comes to us from Jesus. This righteousness satisfies God’s justice. Remember what I said earlier about this justice? I said, “It would be a justice that is equal and fair, where the facts and only the facts of a person’s life are considered. For those that God knows to be holy and good or those that God knows to be wicked and evil will get exactly their just rewards. It will be flawless and perfect justice.” God simplifies this justice. Believe in Jesus and you have the forgiveness of sins. With this forgiveness, as far as God is concerned you are holy, pure, and perfect. Your reward is heaven. But without this faith in Jesus, then God says you will stand on your own. This will not be good.

You heard these truths uttered in our Epistle reading: **“We are rescued…we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins…God was pleased through him…to reconcile all things…by making peace through his blood of the cross.”** This is what Jesus is about. Salvation, our salvation! Our being bought back and given eternal life and salvation. Our becoming children of God and heirs of eternal life. All because of what God’s king, Jesus would do for us. Fact is, those people who on Good Friday, put the sign on the cross that Jesus was King, they had no idea at the time of the utter truth they had written. King of kings, Lord or Lords, all that we might be forgiven and gifted with eternal life in Jesus.

And the truth is, we do grasp this name that Jesus has; The Lord our Righteousness! He is our Lord, our God and ruler because of the great love and sacrifice he made for us. And it is true, he is our righteousness, our God who clothes us with his perfection, grants us his forgiveness, and gives us the eternal gift of heaven. Even the thief on the cross, who at his dying moment came to faith in Jesus, even he is given this eternal gift! God’s grace and mercy is sure and certain for all in Jesus.

But please, don’t forget that in this name of Jesus there is a pronoun. It is “our.” That pronoun tells you that this is personal, that this Righteous Lord must become your Righteous Lord. Allow me again my favorite illustration here. If you tell me you are a banker, then work in and be involved in the service of the Bank. It is not good enough to tell me that you know where the bank is or that you know what the bank does or even that occasionally you even go into the bank. None of that makes you a banker! You are not a banker unless you work in and are involved in the Bank. The same with faith. Don’t call yourself a Christian unless you hear, follow and believe in Jesus. Don’t call yourself a Christian unless you are hearing and believing God’s Word, the entire Bible! It is clear that you cannot deny the Bible and still have the truth and wonder of Jesus in your life. Faith is not a free for all. Faith is not wht you say but what God decrees. So note that in this name of Jesus, the word “our” implies faith and personal application of this Righteous Lord to your life.

There you have it. The wonder of the salvation that God has given. I pray that the wonder of these words, the terrible and righteous judgment part and the awesome and gracious saving part will be embedded in your heart. God help us to confess Jesus as the Lord our Righteousness. Amen.