

JEREMIAH 23

“THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”

Woe to those who are appointed to feed God’s people, but take no concern to do them good! Here in this chapter, we find words of comfort to neglected sheep. Although only a remnant of God’s flock may be left, He will find them; and they shall be brought back to their former habitations. Alas! The Church of Christ has often had foolish and destructive pastors; but here it is said that they shall be obliged to make way for faithful ministers, and ultimately for the Chief Shepherd Himself – the One Who is here called (verses 5-6) the “righteous Branch,” the King who “shall reign and prosper,” and “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!” Even men who are well-intentioned cannot fully and ultimately meet and satisfy the needs of the Lord’s people, so the Good Shepherd Himself will come and gather up His sheep from all places where they have been scattered in cloudy and dark days! (Ezek. 34:10-12) O what grace Divine! What mercy unequalled! Jesus is the Branch from David’s family, and He is righteous Himself; and through Him, all His people are also made righteous. He breaks the usurped power of Satan, causing all the spiritual children of believing Abraham and praying Jacob to be protected and saved from the guilt and dominion of sin. In the days of Christ’s government in the soul, that soul dwells at ease. And what is the result of the great and glorious salvation that He brings about? When the Lord Jesus has fully redeemed a soul from slavery to sin, the former deliverance of His people from bondage in Egypt, and the bringing back of His captive people from exile in Babylon (which were only pictures and foreshadows of this infinitely glorious redemption) shall not even be remembered anymore! The deliverances of the people of God from Egypt and Babylon were only temporary liberations, but Christ’s work of redemption from the slavery of sin is an eternal freedom! And when the Church thinks upon this wonderful deliverance, there is indeed a reason for singing! (Rev. 18:2)

Let us take a moment to examine this particular name of Jesus more closely: “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!” Mankind, by his Fall into sin, sustained an infinite loss in the matter of righteousness! It was the loss of a righteous nature, as well as a loss of legal righteousness in the sight of Jehovah. Man sinned against the Lord; and therefore, he was no longer innocent of transgression. He did not keep the command of God; and therefore, he was also guilty of the sin of omission. Both in that which he *committed*, and also in that which he *omitted*, his original character for uprightness was completely wrecked! But Jesus Christ came to undo the mischief of the Fall for His people! As far as their

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A word of woe is spoken to careless spiritual shepherds – verses 1-2
- ❖ The Lord Himself graciously promises to care for His flock of sheep – verses 3-8
- ❖ Words of judgment for the wicked priests and false prophets – verses 9-32
- ❖ Words of censure for the people, who ridiculed God’s prophets – verses 33-40

sin involved the breach of the Lord's command, He has removed that breach by His precious blood. Nevertheless, it is not enough for a person to merely be pardoned; for it is also required of man that he should actually keep God's commandments. Where, then, is the righteousness with which the pardoned man may be completely covered, so that God can regard him as having kept the law, and reward him for doing so? The righteousness in which we must be clothed, and through which we must be accepted, and by which we are made fit to inherit eternal life – it can be none other than the work of Jesus! The life of Christ constitutes the righteousness in which His people are to be clothed! His death washed away our sins, and His life covered us from head to foot. His death was the sacrifice to God; and His life was the gift to man, by which man satisfies the



demands of God's law. In Scripture, Christ's righteousness is compared to fair white linen; and if we wear His righteousness, we are without spot. It is compared to fabric made of gold; and if we wear it, we are dignified and beautiful – worthy to sit down at the wedding-feast of the King of kings! It is compared, in the parable of the prodigal son, to the best robe; and so we wear a better robe than even the angels have. We were once poor prodigals clothed in rags, feeding on the husks that the swine ate; but now we are clothed in the best robe and “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6).

In verses 9-22, we read how the false prophets who had once been among the people of Samaria (in the former Northern Kingdom of Israel) had deluded them into grievous idolatries (verse 13). Yet the Lord considered the false prophets among the people of Jerusalem, in Jeremiah's time, to be guilty of even more horrible wickedness – by which the people were made bold in sin (verse 14). And in verse 15, we have the Lord's sentence pronounced upon them; and an awful one it is! The teaching and example of the Lord's true prophets led people to repentance, faith, and righteousness; but the false prophets led them to rest in outward formalities and ceremonies, and to be secure in their sins. Let us pray for grace that we may not be led astray to follow unrighteousness!

The chapter closes (verses 33-40) by describing the misery of those who rebel against God, and are justly forsaken by Him. The people of Judah jested at the Lord's judgment and mocked His prophets. Jeremiah was directed to tell them that because of their obstinacy in their sins, they would be cast out of His presence. It is a mark of great and daring impiety for people to jest with the words of God! The Lord's faithful preachers, who call upon their people to attend to these things, may be made the jest and the sneer of the infidels; but in the end, it will be plain to see that such persons have only mocked to their own confusion, and brought upon themselves swift destruction!

We praise You, Jesus, as “the Lord our Righteousness” – a sweet name to us who have felt the guilt of sin, and who have seen our need of that righteousness! Amen.