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“Jesus – our righteousness” – Jeremiah 23:1-6 Steve Christian

○ As kids we all loved the fairy tale stories that were read to us. There was always a goodie and a baddie, and through a course of events the goodie always won and “they all lived happily ever after.”

The book of Jeremiah is no fairy tale, and ends with the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the people to Babylon. The city falls and is destroyed. 2 Kings 24 says that up to 10,000 people are taken away into captivity. God had appealed time and time again to the various kings through Jeremiah. He had called the people and the kings back to himself. But they would not listen. It’s not a book with the fairy tale ending – for they don’t live happily ever after. And maybe you feel a bit like that yourself.

Chapter 22 contains the words of judgment upon Jehoiachin, the third king of Judah during Jeremiah’s days of prophecy. His eyes and his heart, ○ God says, **“are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion.”** (v.17) He’s not a particularly nice fellow, God therefore says, **“I will hand you over into the hands of those who want to kill you, those you fear—Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the Babylonians. I will hurl you and the mother who gave you birth into another country, where neither of you was born, and there you both will die. You will never come back to the land you long to return to.”** (25-27)

God treats sin seriously, and perhaps even more so the ones who are placed in positions of authority. The king was meant to be God’s representative and lead the people in God’s ways and toward God. But as shepherds of the nation, many of the kings had failed to do so.

○ Now, there’s a warning here for parents. Christian Dad’s and Mums are responsible for their children. Christian parents set the tone for the home; they are to bring up their children in a godly manner. We are to teach our children God’s Word and pray for and with them. We dedicate our children to the Lord and encourage them to be baptised as we too follow God’s directions. We set a godly example for our kids to follow. Are we taking our responsibilities seriously? Men; as husbands and fathers, do we recognise that we are to submit to the well-being of our wives and children with love and respect? Are we leading our families through servanthood? Or are we failing in our responsibilities?

○ So, as I considered the situation for Jehoiachin and his Mum, when they were exiled into Babylon, how did Mum feel? Was she disappointed in her son? Was she angry with him? Did she fear what may happen next? Did she lay the blame for her demise at his feet? Laying blame has always been the first reaction when we’re upset. At the “Fall,” Adam blames Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. Neither were prepared to accept responsibility. Neither were prepared to bow in humility before an all powerful creator God.

○ And so as we see our world going down the proverbial tubes; as we have watched the culture of our nation change from Biblically based to secular; as we see marriage redefined; as we see a stronger push toward abortion and euthanasia; as we are taken to a place that we don't want to be, we are often driven by ○ fear and anger, and often our reactions and responses are anything but driven by gentleness and respect. In a place where we don't want to be, we want to blame someone and so we blame our shepherds; our leaders.

The apostle Peter was no stranger to reacting out of fear in a world that seemed to be slipping away; taken into a place where he didn't want to be. On the night before He died, Jesus walked in the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples. Tipped off by Judas, soldiers approached Jesus to arrest Him. Peter, in fear pulled out his sword and took a swing at one of the men. Before Jesus could tell Peter to put away his sword, Peter had cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest.

Driven by fear and anger, this younger Peter seems a far cry from the older and wiser Peter who instructed us, ○ **“Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”** (1 Pet 3:15)

“Gentleness” – there is great power in the spoken word, and gentleness is placing that power under control – speaking in love and respect. Did king Jehoiachin need to hear words of anger and fear and blame, or words of gentleness pointing him back to the mercy of God; encouraging him to seek forgiveness? “My son, whom I love, I forgive you, and although our circumstances are not as we would wish, let us repent and seek the Lord and find peace and comfort in His presence.” Are we a people seeking to serve one another in love and respect; with compassion and gentleness?

And so Jehoiachin has been warned as we come to our reading today; ○ Chapter 23. Verse 1, **“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!”** They're doing anything but, what they were meant to. **“Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the Lord.**” (1-2) Jehoiachin was only eighteen when he became king, and so being of a younger age is no excuse for not taking our responsibilities before God seriously. We're responsible for ourselves before God.

As you read these verses you could almost think that God takes pleasure in bestowing punishment – but not so! God warned the people time and time and time again; giving more than ample opportunity to repent. As children we come to see ○ correction or discipline as punishment. God warns us that if we do the wrong thing; if we sin, then there will be consequences that we won't enjoy; that there will be discipline and correction.

As parents we do the same with our children. Why? ○ Because we seek to use the consequences as a deterrent to try to promote our kids to doing the right things. If we suffer in some way for doing the wrong thing; hurtful thing; careless or selfish thing; then we'll be less likely to do it again. And for those who are watching on, they may also see the consequences of suffering as a deterrent for themselves.

And so, God's law and the consequences for sin are less about punishment, than they are about being a deterrent. So, for Jehoiachin, for pursuing evil; for being **set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion**, Jehoiachin will suffer the consequences.

But God's heart is still for him and the people of Israel. ○ He says, **"I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord.**" (3-4)

God declares that He will not abandon His people, but will step in and make things right. First, He will gather the remnant of his scattered flock in exile and will bring them together, back to the fold. They shall return to their Promised Land. Second, they shall be fruitful and multiply. And thirdly, God will raise up good shepherds-leaders over them who will shepherd them. These shepherds will not be corrupt or selfish or vain—they will genuinely care for the people. Nehemiah was one such leader; not a king, but a good shepherd none the less. And the people shall no longer live in fear, but will enjoy freedom and prosperity.

God then declares that He will do even greater things, (unthinkable things as Kate mentioned last week) and we live in that wonderful day that Jeremiah wrote about... ○ V.5, **"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up from the line of David, a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness."**

Jeremiah is speaking of Jesus. Approx 600 years before His coming. ○ Over and against all of the other kings in Israel's history who were sinful, self-centred, and all-too-easily corrupt and unjust in the abuse of their authority and power; King Jesus, according to Jeremiah, "shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." In contrast to the earthly kings and shepherds, Jesus would be far greater than what they were meant to be – "The Good Shepherd". ○ In fact His name would be, "the Lord our righteous saviour." "The Lord our Righteousness."

And before we point the finger at the failure of the shepherds of our day, let us remember that **"there is none righteous, not even one."** Apart from Jesus. For **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** Paul reminds us in Romans 3, that as far as being righteous is concerned; as far as being legally in the right before God, not one of us has a leg to stand on and all deserve God's judgement because of our sin. We can do our absolute best; be on our best behaviour; tell God we love Him, and try to be faithful to Him in all things, but we'll never reach God's righteous standard. As Isaiah declared, "Our most righteous acts are but filthy rags before Him."

Jehoiachin was an evil king and was exiled to Babylon and spent 37 years in prison before being released. But Jehoiachin is also listed in the genealogy of Jesus. And so eventually God brings good? No! He brings the best.

Praise God, Jesus is our righteousness. He is the only one righteous, and our right standing with God is achieved through faith in Him. ○ Paul goes on in Romans 3 to say this... **“Apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood - to be received by faith.”** (21-25) Righteousness is a gift from God received by faith. ○

Paul speaks of this amazing reconciliation that we know have with God Almighty. ○ He says, **“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.”** (2 Cor 5:21 NLV) On our behalf, through the One who knew no sin, God caused Jesus to depart from the way of righteousness through His death, in order that through faith we might be declared right with God. God has orchestrated the unthinkable – that sinful people may be able to come into His very presence; be forgiven and have eternal life.

Again, it may be very easy for us to point the finger at our shepherds and seek to remove ourselves from any blame for our failings. But we now live in a day where we have direct access to the Father through our salvation through Christ. ○ And we have direct access to the Word of God, and we are now the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit – God resides within us. We have no excuse! We cannot and must not seek to shift the blame to anyone else but ourselves for our spiritual condition.

Eph 2:18 says that through Christ we share of the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father. God has not left us as orphans, or exiles living in a place we don't want to be, but grants us direct access into His very throne room, and for us to enjoy our relationship with Him as our loving, gracious and merciful Father.

And so as we face situations we'd rather not; as we're taken into places that we'd rather not be; we don't have to live in anger, dread or fear of the present, nor the future. We can live happily ever after because, by faith in Jesus we are forgiven and we're in right standing before our holy God. When judgement day comes for us, we need not fear. Whatever we face we can live happily ever after. Every day is a good day when you're walking with the Lord!

Have you placed your faith in Jesus; His death and resurrection? Are you continuing to place your faith in Jesus? Have you asked for His forgiveness, and have you turned away from your sin? If you know that you're not right with God today, I invite you to do that. Confess your sin and ask for His forgiveness. If the Holy Spirit is prompting you today – don't quench the Spirit. Come forward and we can pray with you.

Let's close our service ...