

## Waiting for the Righteous One

Jeremiah 33:14-16      Luke 21: 35-36

November 28, 2021

Rev. L. Bryan McClain

As we begin the season of Advent, I want to take a different approach to how and why we should take this season of spiritual preparation seriously. Of course, we acknowledge as we do year after year that we prepare for the birth of our Savior. We also, in spirit, prepare for his coming again.

What Advent is all about is being in search of and prepared for the coming of the Righteous One of God, the branch of David. The one who is to come and establish righteousness.

What is righteousness, and what does it look like? Those may sound like silly questions, but I think we'd all be surprised to discover what the answer to them really is. So to begin to look at Righteousness during this season of Advent as we go in search of it, we begin with where the lectionary readings point, and that is the Prophet, Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was a very young man who had a very deep concern for his people and how they measured up before God's standard. He was obviously concerned about righteousness. Righteousness is the opposite of wickedness, and Jeremiah observed daily the wickedness of Judah, the people of God.

Unfortunately, most people tend to lump wickedness or sin into a small group of activities that we were taught not to engage in, which makes everybody want to engage in it that much more. Smoking, drinking, most of us who go to church know there are a few more than those—lying, cheating, carousing, taking the Lord's name in vain, murder, of course. Being so jealous of someone or wanting what they may have that we would do anything to get it, even lie, cheat, steal, or kill.

While all of these things are wrong either in the sense that they all cause harm either to yourself and our relationship to God if we do them, these are what I call personal sins; that is, they do more harm to us or directly between us and God as we destroy our own bodies or what Paul calls the true temple.

If we suggest to some youngster that these bad habits are good for you and ok, we are setting some bad examples, and our righteousness is compromised even further.

As a people of faith, we should attend to these things, for they deal with our Character before God. As Pastor Rick Warren, author of the Purpose Driven Life, said in an interview on CBS

This Morning a few years back, “The only thing we take to Heaven with us is our character.” And that is, even more, the case when we look at the things Jeremiah and all of the other prophets were concerned about.

Sure they were concerned about the little personal sins, but bigger things were happening that he was more concerned about. They were concerned about what the overall condition of sin was doing. The condition of sin is what leaves us separated from God. Things like the poor being taken advantage of, cheating people out of their homes and their land.

Mainly Jeremiah was aiming at the King of Judah, who was behind all of this or at least allowing it to happen. Of course, once Judah had been captured and taken into exile, Jeremiah went with them and prophesied God’s steadfast love to them. Though the well-to-do would pay for their sins in a foreign land, Jeremiah was there to prophesy the message of repentance; to return to the Lord, that is, start doing the right thing for the right reason. Put God back in your life, and God will come to your rescue.

That is to say that our condition of sin, which includes those personal sins, can be overcome by God’s steadfast love, a love that always is reaching out to us, even in our worst moments. God’s steadfast love and his desire that we follow God in it is what Righteousness is all about. The point here is that Righteousness is the character of God. It is what we are to look for in the one who is to come. Righteousness is justice, but the righteousness of God is justice wrapped in the emotional bonds of love.

The sins or wickedness Jeremiah speaks to go far beyond the little personal habits that may be bad for us; they are the things that we human beings do to one another to set each other back because we want to get ahead, or we are jealous, or we are angry. We want vengeance. In short, Jeremiah is speaking to the condition of sin we all live under as flawed human beings.

Without righteousness and someone who is righteous to show us the way and be the example for us, we are lost. So we are miserable; we are bent on settling the score and taking what we think is rightfully ours and then some because they did it to us after all.

We can see our world living in less and less righteousness every day. We witness injustice, and in some places, nothing is ever done about it. And in other places, justice is really vengeance in disguise.

When we dismiss the authority and righteousness of God, when we fail to honor God give Him priority in our lives, we find ourselves caught up in that chaotic and unjust world that gets crazier and crazier.

That is when it gets tough for people of faith, yet we are encouraged to maintain faith that the righteous one will come again. Why is righteousness important, and why must it be established? It is what keeps life in order. It is what allows us to live with dignity and in peace with one another, no matter where we come from.

No regular human being can set such an example. Yet, we needed a human example; we needed to see what real righteousness looked like. Real righteousness was not rich, yet it did not need riches even though it was not rich. It is not powerful, but though it is not about power, it embodies authority. It is not glamorous, but still, it is most beautiful because it is just; it lifts up all who live for righteousness and mercy.

As we search for the righteous One throughout Advent, I invite you to look for more clues of the righteous one. Such as why was the promise of Righteousness made? And how does being righteous prepare us for the Kingdom of God?

Ask yourself these questions; does my life reflect the righteousness of God? Where do I need to spend a little more time preparing and waiting for the coming of the Savior and less time preparing for a holiday? So come, let us wait for the righteous one.