

Prayer of the Day:

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Protect us by your strength and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Alleluia.

(Revelation 22:20 cf. NIV)

Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴ "'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.

¹⁵ "'In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.'

Sermon Text:

What do you say? What do you say when sickness makes its presence felt within the family within someone's life, dishevels the home? What do you say when someone seemingly makes all the right choices and all the right moves and yet seems to be met only with hardship as a result? What do you say when it comes to you and your life, when the doctor calls and the news is anything but good? Basically, what do you say when the darkness of sin and the consequences of living in a sin-filled world make their presence known, when words come hard and sound so empty? God Himself speaks in such a situation in our lesson today and as He does, He offers **HOPE TO THE HOPELESS.**

In the book of Jeremiah, the chickens have come home to roost. Israel's sin, idolatry and inability to listen and live as God spoke to them has come to a head and punishment is literally at the door. Nebuchadnezzar's army has encircled Israel. Terrible atrocities are occurring as the army cuts off food and supplies from the people of Jerusalem. Jeremiah is locked up in the courtyard of the guard because he has repeatedly prophesied doom and gloom and a victory not for the people of God but for the army outside their hallowed city. The situation is bleak and hopeless. But in the depths of despair, God has Jeremiah pen three chapters of comfort, promise and hope. Our lesson is among them.

In my Bible, I took a little advice once given to me. I was told that in the book of Jeremiah it was interesting to underline the many times God says "I" or "me". It drove home a simple point. When it comes to promises of salvation, deliverance or comfort the first singular pronouns explode with meaning. ¹⁴ "'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. ¹⁵ "'In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land.

Do you hear it? In hopelessness of our sin, **HOPE COMES FROM GOD ALONE.** That of course carries comfort with it. For in the despair and turmoil caused by sin, we can't fix it. Deep down we know this. We got ourselves into the situation. Sin and the consequences of it are brought into this world by human hands. God, on the other hand brings our salvation and when He moves, there are no mistakes, only rock-solid promises. For the people of Israel, it means restoration after the deportation. It means rebuilding after destruction.

Ah, but what does this mean for us? Leave our Old Testament Lesson now for just a second and move to the Gospel lesson. (Okay, that will take more than a second cause it was kind of

long.) There God spoke of Judgment Day and at the end of the lesson He said this, *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man. (Luke 21:34-36)”*

Do those words give comfort and peace? I have to admit that they don't produce such an effect in my heart. I know I'm not a great watchman. Things can get past me, have gotten past me and as for traps, well Satan could produce a list of all the tricks he has used to plant me on my face in the mud of sin. I am willing to guess that I'm not alone. Far too often we look like Jerusalem, encircled by the enemies of sin, death and hell as Satan's armies gnash their teeth at our walls while their general, Satan, runs amuck within our hearts and minds. So are hearts are weighed down with dissipation and the anxieties of life. Far too often we stumble around in the drunkenness our own selfish ambition and greed. So that final day, it looks frightening, even hopeless.

But then God speaks, and it's not wrath and woe. Instead, we hear something far different. His promise for Israel is also a promise for us all. ¹⁴ *“The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. ¹⁵ “‘In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.’*

God alone goes to work for you and me. As He does, His gracious promise given throughout the ages and all the pages of God's Holy Book is on His mind. He will fulfill it. He will raise a branch, a shoot from the line of David. Hold on to that as we continue to walk through the lessons of the Advent season and as Jesus is born exactly as He was foretold in our celebration of Christmas.

Notice something else. This branch is righteous. He is perfect. He does what is just and right in the land, a perfect watchman. He stands sinless before the judgment seat of God. This however, is not in order to shame us or show us our short comings. In those days Judah will be saved, Jerusalem will finally be safe. You and I will be saved. This is of course the cross of our Savior. That child born in Bethlehem, from David's line, who lived perfectly, dies to save us. His blood is the payment for our sin so that we no longer need to fear the judgment of that last day or the wrath of a righteous God over our sins.

Finally, notice the strangeness of that final sentence. *This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.* Perhaps we expect it to read this is the name by which He will be called. But it doesn't read that way. Instead, after talking about this new city, the church, you and me, He gives it a name, His very own name: *The LORD Our Righteousness.*

That's beautiful isn't it? Everything the Son will do, He does for you. His righteousness is your own. So that we are perfect in the judgement just as He is perfect. Heirs of the promise, fulfilled in the fulness of time, you and I have nothing to fear. This truth brings us hope.

So, when the life is touched by tragedy, when despair threatens to weigh us down and Satan's traps seem too much to bear, when sin and the consequences of it encircle us and threaten our faith, when words seem hollow and times are hard, God speaks once more. He points us again to our Savior, to His Son, to Jesus. His life, His cross, His resurrection defeat sin, overcome the world and conquer death. Yes, Hope comes from God alone that His righteousness might be our own. As He sets that victory before our eyes again tonight/today there is **HOPE** even **FOR THE HOPELESS.** Amen.