

# The Righteous Lord

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## **Text:**

### **Jer 33:14-17**

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' "For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.

### **Rom 1:16-17**

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

## **Introduction:**

Today is the first Sunday of Advent 2012, which makes it the beginning of the Christian year. The word "advent" comes from a Latin word which means coming. It is the Latin translation of the Greek word *parousia*—a word of major biblical importance. It is the word that is used in numerous New Testament passages that speak of the second coming of Jesus Christ as the ultimate hope of the Church, passages like James 5:7-8: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

And I John 2:28: “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

The action called for on our part by the promise of his coming is “patient waiting” as we have just seen in the passage we read from James, or as we see in other texts such as in 2Thessalonians 3:5, “And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.” Or, 1Corinthians 1:6-7: “Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This verb “to wait” sets the tone for Christian existence. We wait, because we have confidence in the promises of God; because we believe that he will keep his word.

This confidence in God’s promises helps us to wait in two important ways. First, it gives us a future hope, a firm assurance that the present world is not the final world. We are looking for something far better. We, like Abraham, are “looking for a city whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). Knowing this we are skeptical of all that he does not have a part in building. We agree with the Psalmist when he says: “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1). We willingly pray as our Lord taught us: “Thy Kingdom come”, because we know that all other kingdoms will come to naught. So we begin our year by reminding ourselves that we are still waiting. The past year may have been a good year, or it may not have been so good, and we don’t know what surprises are hiding in the coming year, but we know that beyond all the years of human history stands the King of history, so we are: “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:13).

But this confidence in the promises of God does more than just help us keep focused on our ultimate destiny. It also enables us to live according to the teaching of our King while we wait for his coming. Peter makes this clear when he writes the following words in his Second Epistle:

*“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for*

and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (II Peter 3: 11-14).

Notice how he says in verse 13: “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” This is the hope that keeps us waiting, but then in verse 14 he speaks of the ethical implications of our hope when he says: “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless”.

We are waiting for our righteous King who will establish his Kingdom of Righteousness, and while we are waiting we live according to his righteous commands, trusting him to vindicate us. But, we might ask, why should we have any confidence at all that our hope is sound? What is it that gives us confidence that Our God does in fact reign; that Christ will come, and that he will have the final word? What is it that keeps our hope alive; that keeps us from falling asleep like the foolish virgins in Jesus’ parable?

There is no single simple answer to that question, but those who seek an answer will find it. What I can do that may help you is to share some of what I have discovered in my journey that has given me a deep assurance that Christians have been right in the past and are right to day to “wait on the Lord”. In fact, I would say that this “waiting” sort of life is the only life that makes sense. So what I want to do during this Advent season is to share with you some of the things that strengthen my faith; that have strengthened the faith of the saints throughout history.

All of these things will come from Scripture. What I want us to focus on are some of the major themes of Scripture. I want us to see how God has always been working towards the same goal, and how he is achieving that goal, and especially how Jesus Christ is the key to all of God’s promises. The longer we read the Bible,

and the better we understand its overall message, the more we are amazed at how God has always been at work in human history directing it towards its ultimate goal, and the more we come to rest in him and trust his promises.

## I. The Righteous Lord

I have taken a text from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament as I will be doing each week of Advent to help summarize a key biblical theme related to the overall purposes of God as they are revealed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Let me begin with the New Testament passage. It is the thesis statement of Paul's Letter to the Romans. The entire book of Romans organizes itself around the theme of the Gospel of Christ as the revelation of first, God's righteousness, and then of God's power. It is not my purpose to fully explain this passage. What I do want to do is to begin with a question that puzzled me for a long time before I finally understood a really important biblical idea. Here is the question: "How can the Gospel of Jesus Christ reveal God's righteousness?" When most of us think of God's righteousness, we equate it first, with his moral perfection, and then with his exercise of justice. We understand it more in light of Paul's next affirmation in Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." I had no problem understanding how God's righteousness was revealed in his wrath against unrighteous humans, but how was it revealed in the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ?

The matter is further complicated by the fact that while English uses two related word groups those deriving from "right", and those deriving from "just", both Hebrew and Greek have only one. Since justification by faith, the fact that God finds the sinner just on the basis of the work of Christ, is at the heart of what Paul is teaching in Romans, some explained that what Paul really means here and in Romans 3:21 when he says the "the righteousness of God, without the law", is revealed, is really the justification of the sinner by God. That would make sense. It just isn't what the text says. To find the answer you must go back to the Old

Testament. This was, of course, Paul's starting point. He was a Jew steeped in the teaching of the Old Testament, a believer in its promises. Whatever the gospel is for him it must be "according to the Scriptures". So if he says that the Gospel of Christ reveals "the righteousness of God" he is undoubtedly referring to something that is rooted in the Old Testament, the bedrock of all that he believed.

With this in mind let's look first at the Old Testament text we have read from Jeremiah, and then compare it with a couple of others; then we will come back to Paul for a final conclusion. This passage from Jeremiah 33 speaks in its original context to the time of the captivity when Jerusalem was in ruins and there was no king on the throne of David. It opens with the words: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah." This is our first hint. God makes covenants and he keeps them. He had given his word Abraham, and to David, and to all Israel. He had made an unconditional covenant of salvation with them. It is true that they had failed, but his word was not based on their success. It was an unconditional promise. God being the righteous God that he is must keep his word. So he says: "I will fulfill the promise." I will fulfill it, not because you somehow merit the salvation I am about to send, but because I promised it, and I am righteous and I will keep my promise.

This idea is even clearer in the book of Isaiah where, in more than one passage, God's "righteousness" is a synonym for his salvation. Listen to a couple of them. First in Isaiah 46: 3 we read: "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory." Then in Isaiah 56:1 we read: "Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation *is* near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed."

So the Gospel of Christ reveals the righteousness of God because it reveals God keeping his promise. He has promised salvation. In sending Jesus Christ into the world to be our Savior, he demonstrated himself to be righteous and hence, trustworthy for one cannot be one without the other. It is this demonstrated

righteousness of God in the past that gives us hope for the future; that enables us to wait, to trust in his promises knowing that our righteous God will keep his promises. It is in this light that the Book of Hebrews exhorts us:

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Hebrews 10: 35-37).