

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD'S NAME

Leader pages on pp. 120-123

THE POINT:
WE CAN KNOW
RIGHTEOUSNESS WHEN
WE KNOW AND WALK
WITH JESUS.

JEREMIAH 23:5-6; ROMANS 3:10B-13, 21-26

MEMORY VERSE

Jer. ^{23:5} "Look, the days are coming"—this is the LORD's declaration—"when I will raise up a Righteous Branch for David. He will reign wisely as king and administer justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ **In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. This is the name he will be called: The LORD Is Our Righteousness.**

+
+
+

.....

Rom. ^{3:10b} There is no one righteous, not even one.

¹¹ There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned away; all alike have become worthless.

There is no one who does what is good, not even one.

¹³ Their throat is an open grave; they deceive with their tongues.

Vipers' venom is under their lips.

.....

Rom. ^{3:21} But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets.

²² The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction.

²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;

²⁴ they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as the mercy seat by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed.

²⁶ God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus.

KEYWORDS

Righteous Branch for David (v. 5)—The term for Branch (tsemach) means "growth" or "sprout." The Messiah would be a branch of David's family tree.

Judah . . . Israel (v. 6)—After the death of Solomon, Israel split into two kingdoms, the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Samaria) and

the Southern Kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12). The people of God will be reunited under His Messiah.

Believe (v. 22)—To believe (pisteuo) is the act of having faith (pistis). In this context, to believe is to have faith in Christ.

WHY IS THE NAME OF GOD RIGHTEOUS?

The song "Take Me To the Water" is often sung during baptism services at churches. This African American spiritual contains several stanzas highlighting new believers' affirmations of faith as they begin their lives as part of the Christian community. Members of the community often recall their own baptisms and reaffirm their commitment to follow Christ. One stanza of the song declares that "none but the righteous shall see God." Who are the righteous? What does it mean to be righteous? As new Christians identify with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ by being immersed in and raised out of the water, they are signaling that something has changed inside of them.

The act of baptism itself does not cause the change, however. More than one preacher has said that without an internal change, a person can go in the water a dry sinner and come up a wet one! Thankfully, God does not wait for us to become righteous on our own, because we cannot. Instead, God, who alone is righteous, makes us righteous by grace. When we believe, the Lord begins the transformation in us that will be completed when we see Him.

Righteousness Is Epitomized by God // Jeremiah 23:5-6

Many more books are written about leadership than righteousness. We need to remember that leadership as a quality can be good or bad, depending on the heart of the leader. After King Josiah, Judah had a series of evil kings before experiencing God's judgment at the hands of Babylon. Jeremiah prophesied against these leaders and their nation around the end of the 7th century BC and into the 6th century. Instead of seeking God's righteousness, the kings led the people into further wickedness. God judges people because of their sin, but He holds the leaders accountable.

With a Messianic promise, God told Israel He would raise up a "Righteous Branch" from David's descendants to assume leadership. Later, Jeremiah repeated this prophecy to emphasize God's covenant with David that his heir would reign forever (Jer. 33:14-17; 2 Sam. 7:16). Isaiah also used the imagery of the Davidic Branch to describe the Messiah (Isa. 11:1-5).

The Branch would not only rule in Judah, but over everything. The Messiah wouldn't reign simply



THE POINT: WE CAN KNOW RIGHTEOUSNESS WHEN WE KNOW AND WALK WITH JESUS.

because he was of the lineage of David; God Himself would establish Him. Jeremiah's prophecy included several truths about the Messiah:

- He would reign wisely.
- He would administer justice and righteousness.
- God's people would be saved.
- His name would testify "The LORD is our Righteousness."

Wise leadership manifests itself through righteous actions. Sadly, from foolish kings to wicked priests, corruption seeped through every crack of Judah's society. God's people longed for someone who would treat them fairly and establish a standard of righteousness. God promised the Messiah would rule wisely and justly. His earthly administration will not be consummated until the Messianic reign. However, the influence of His righteousness can be demonstrated in believers of every era.

HOW DO WE BENEFIT FROM THE LORD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS?

God reveals Himself through many names that portray aspects of His character. Among the most important qualities is "The LORD Is Our Righteousness." Only God is righteous in Himself. Righteousness can't be produced by human effort. It comes solely from the Lord.

Over the centuries, Hebrews mistakenly believed they attained righteousness by following the Mosaic law. Through their collective ethnic heritage and personal good works, the Jews claimed a special relationship with God. We should remember Isaiah's declaration that human righteousness is like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6).

The apostle Paul believed in his personal righteousness until he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Through a saving experience with Christ, Paul understood all of his best efforts were worth less than rubbish. Like Paul, our only hope is the righteousness that God grants through faith in His Son—Jesus the Messiah (Phil. 3:8-9).

Righteousness Is Not in Us // Romans 3:10b-13

Someone has described two axioms of religion as: (1) There is a God, and (2) It's not you or me. Righteousness is like that. Only God is righteous in Himself. Humans, on the other hand, might claim to be righteous, but God sees our hearts. God looks across our globe and declares that there is "no one righteous, not even one."



DIGGING DEEPER JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

In Jeremiah 23:5, the Lord declares through the prophet that God will "raise up a Righteous Branch for David. He will reign wisely as King and administer justice and righteousness in the land." Christians recognize this promise to be fulfilled in Jesus. As we await the culmination of the kingdom of God, we as followers of Christ are to live by kingdom principles today. Jesus' teachings reveal his concern for righteousness. In the Beatitudes, Jesus declares "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matt. 5:6). Throughout the Sermon on the mount, Jesus provides instructions, that if followed, will allow us to improve our relationships and ultimately foster a more just society. Righteousness deals with our standing before God and our willingness to behave differently as result of that standing.

What is the relationship between individual righteousness and justice as seen in society?

Writing under divine inspiration, the apostle Paul reminded the Roman believers just how needy we are. Referencing various Old Testament texts with the familiar refrain "as it is written," Paul wrote:

- We don't understand.
- We don't seek God.
- We all have turned away and are worthless.
- We don't do what is good.

To say no one understands doesn't mean no one has intelligence. Each of these statements refer to human relationships with God. The term understands involves spiritual and moral perception. We may have various degrees of knowledge or even wisdom, but our understanding was flawed by the Fall. Sin warped our comprehension of God and His ways. On our best day, we can't perceive God's righteousness or our sin. Only God can grant spiritual insight through His Word by His Spirit.



Unfortunately, people don't naturally seek to know God. The truth is that God seeks us. Some people may be politely interested in theological ideas or desire some type of spiritual experience. However, the word seek means to search out sincerely. God promises that people who seek Him with all their hearts will find Him (Jer. 29:13).

Turning away from God results in our being worthless before God. This term describes our

sinful behavior that proceeds from sinful hearts. Translated "unprofitable" or "useless" in other translations, Jesus used this word to describe the doom of a sinful servant (Matt. 25:30).

Paul drew upon other Scriptures to clarify the heinous nature of our sin. Iniquity characterizes even the way we speak. Using staggering imagery, Scripture describes our throat as "an open grave," our tongues as full of deception, and our lips as containing "vipers' venom." We probably recoil at such word pictures. People usually see themselves in a forgiving light rather than in the glare of God's righteousness. Like Isaiah who saw his true nature in the mirror of God's holiness, without the Lord we are undone because we are sinful people (Isa. 6:1-9). Thankfully, God doesn't leave us there.

HOW DO WE OFTEN TRY TO BE RIGHTEOUS ON OUR OWN?

Righteousness Is Through Christ // Romans 3:21-26

God doesn't condemn sin to make sinners squirm. To allow people to continue in sin without warning would be an act of hate, not love, because sin separates us from Him. He wants us to be saved, but we can't attain His righteousness through the Law. God gave the Law to educate us about our neediness (Gal. 3:24). The Law and the prophets attest to God's righteousness.

Using the same word from which we get "martyr," attest means to bear witness. Jesus said He had not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). God's righteousness has been fully revealed in Jesus. Through Him, God made it possible to impute righteousness to believers.

Paul wanted Gentile and Jewish people to understand they were in the same boat. They all were sinners and had fallen short of God's glory. God makes no distinction in ethnicity or any other quality. Every person needs salvation, and every person can be saved through Jesus.

God offers grace freely. Justification and the imputation of righteousness comes through redemption. Each of those words is important. Justification is God's declaration of a believer's

THE POINT: WE CAN KNOW RIGHTEOUSNESS WHEN WE KNOW AND WALK WITH JESUS.

right standing with Him. Imputation indicates He gives without our meriting the gift. Righteousness characterizes God's essential nature of holiness.

In connection to Jesus's sacrifice, Paul's reference to the mercy seat is important. Paul's phrase "mercy seat" can also be rendered "propitiation" or a satisfactory payment for sin "Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). God presented Jesus's blood as atonement for our sin. The term presented means "to set forth" or "to purpose." God determined the manner of our salvation through His Son's sacrifice. Numerous Scriptures aid our understanding of Jesus's atonement:

- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- Ephesians 1:7
- 1 John 4:10

Jesus's sacrifice fully demonstrates God's righteousness. God's forgiveness of our sin required the sentence of death to be carried out. We call this sacrifice a substitutionary atonement because Jesus died in our place. In this way, God is just in forgiving sinners who repent and place their faith in Christ.

HOW CAN WE LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY WITHOUT BECOMING SELF-RIGHTEOUS?

LIVE IT

How can you live a life in line with the righteousness that God has given you?

A person's name implies more than identity. It becomes associated with one's reputation. We can know righteousness when we know and walk with Jesus. Making God's righteousness a priority for life produces a good reputation and, by it, a good name. Here are some steps you can take to appreciate God's gracious gift of righteousness in Christ. Choose one of the following applications:

+ + +

- **Consider.** Spend some time alone with God, considering what He has saved you from. Thank Him for not leaving you in your sin. Pray for the Holy Spirit to continue conforming you to the image of Christ.
- **Study.** Use the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, or a similar resource, to study the topic of "righteousness" in the Old and New Testaments.
- **Apply.** Use the beginning of each day to commit to living out God's righteousness by walking with Jesus. At the end of the day, consider how it worked out.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ida B. Wells-Barnett advocated for justice for African Americans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She worked as an educator, advocate for better educational systems for African American students and a journalist. As a journalist, Wells-Barnett investigated inhumane treatment that African Americans suffered. As Jim Crow took hold in the southern United States, African Americans found virtually all aspects of life restricted. Laws restricted where they could live, work, and play. Additionally, African Americans were also terrorized by lynchings. Wells-Barnett viewed calling this out as part of her Christian duty, saying "the way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them."³ Her personal faith and work for justice went hand in hand.

Biblical Truth: Christians are called to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:14-16).

What can be done to bridge the gap between movements for justice in society and the mission of the church to spread the gospel?

DAILY READINGS

1. A RIGHTEOUS TRUTH // PSALM 91:2-7

The thing about God's righteousness is it offers protection. On this final day of the countdown allow this timeless truth to settle in your heart. God takes delight in covering you—His child—with layers of protection because of His great love. God is not only a safe place. He is a fortified wall of trust impenetrable to Satan's shrewd schemes. That means you have no reason to fear what tomorrow or even the new year brings. God almighty armed with His protection is there. This truth is not a promise of eternal life on Earth never encountering one bad moment. The truth is no person is exempt from hurt in any form or depth.

What is true is that no hurt, harm, or danger can destroy your soul. It is eternally protected.

2. A RIGHTEOUS REFUGE// PSALM 91:1-2

These days safety is a top priority. Each new year brings another safety concern. But God's shadow is a refuge. Think about refuge's definition. It implies respite from distress. Now think of all the ways distress has plagued your year. Mental stress leads to physical stress afflicting your body with unidentifiable ills, aches, and pains. God is offering shelter for your mind . . . freedom from the constant nagging of worrying about what may happen. Refuge from a worry-laden mind is also an invitation to physical refuge. A worry-free mind makes room for smiles and the opportunity to enjoy living life which releases chemical endorphins that are literal medicine to the body.

Will you accept God's invitation to dwell, rest, and refuel in the safety of His righteousness?

3. GOD'S CORRECTION // JEREMIAH 23:5

"He will reign wisely and administer justice and righteousness . . ." One of the reasons Jesus had to be God's vehicle to righteousness was because of man's unrighteousness. Though Jeremiah is speaking to the Israelites while they are walking through a period of judgment, this portion of the prophecy was not a part of that. God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn them. He came to

save and correct. The same is true for all of us. As the new year rolls in, be open to receiving God's gracious correction. He saw our unrighteousness from afar and corrected it by laying every one of our sins on Jesus. We need only embrace the correction.

His rod and staff will guide us back to the path of righteousness, now and forevermore.

4. RIGHTEOUS WISDOM // JEREMIAH 23:5

"He will reign wisely . . ." Jesus has the wisdom of the ages encapsulated within Himself. This passage paints Him as a king who knows how to reign mental, emotional, and physical healing over the land. All of which are entangled in justice and unrighteousness. All of which were weaknesses of the previous kings. Today, we tend to follow "kings" incapable of bringing justice and righteousness to our lives. The best thing we can do at the start of the new year is follow His will and way without deviation or hesitation. Resist the urge to ask God that familiar question, "What do you want me to do in the new year?" Instead, follow the wisdom of His Word.

Look for the work of His hands and dare to follow His voice.

5. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS GOD'S WORK // JEREMIAH 23:5

Jeremiah writes saying, "This is the LORD's declaration . . . I Will raise up a Righteous Branch . . ." The first reminder in our countdown is a necessary one. Righteousness belongs to God, comes from God, and depends upon God's work. Some of our end-of-year weariness comes from the unnecessary burden of trying to be righteous. We have been invited into righteousness through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Earning it is not possible. Jeremiah's words to the burdened Israelites are just as applicable today. The Lord God has declared that righteousness belongs to Him. The better news is that though it originates and emanates from Him it is for us. Allow His righteousness to work in and through you each day. Rest in that and Him.

How kind of one who is so High and Holy to make rest for the lowly.