

Sermon on **Jeremiah 23:1-6** -Christ the King – 11.20.22

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This week on Tuesday I saw by some estimates that our world population crossed the 8 billion mark. That's a lot of people. That's a lot of governments. That's a lot of everything. Jesus once looked out on the crowds of people following him and "*had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*" (Matthew 9:36). This world stuck in sin brings difficulty and dismay, even with all the blessings God gives to us. Even as Christians we struggle. We struggle more because we seek to live for God in a sinful world set against God and his commands. We bear crosses. But today we see that God knows. God knows each one of the 8 billion. And he cares. He cares about you. He cared about the people of Judah who had been struck and scattered into the exile of Babylon. He sent the prophet Jeremiah to tell them he sees. He knows. He cares. He will be their Shepherd. He will send a righteous Branch, a perfect King for them.

Christ the King Brings Salvation for the Scattered.

"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "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. "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. "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up for 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 Righteous Savior."

Scattered and Scared. That is what the exiles from Judah experienced because of the unfaithfulness and idolatry of their leaders, their priests, many of their prophets, their kings. Many of the people were not innocent, but now they were marched off to Babylon as captives and it seemed there was no one to rescue them, or help them. God in his mercy shows them He still cares. He sees. He cares how they've been treated.

"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" It's a disappointing day as a child when you learn that your role model isn't perfect. In fact, they are sometimes far from perfect, even awful. It's heart wrenching and wounding when you suffer at the hands of or because of the sinful actions or negligence of the ones God placed in your life to protect you, serve you, help you, guide you, shepherd you. Whether it was a parent, teacher, mentor, role model, a church leader, a pastor, or me, I'm sorry. That is not what God intended. God tells these shepherds of Judah who fleece the flock and scatter them so they are harassed and helpless and in fear, "*Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "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.*" God knows and will act on behalf of his people.

Some of you experienced this in big ways in your life and you carry wounds, but all have experienced it or will at some point in this sinful world full of sinful people, and even a congregation full of sinner-saints. What do we do with this? In our disgust and hurt, or from other offenses or sins, even our own, we run but have we run also from the Good Shepherd, the perfect shepherd, our God? Have we run from God's Word instead of run to it? Have we allowed our hurt or failure to turn us to apathy or rejection? While God can use struggle and difficulty to call us back to himself, the devil desires to use it to separate us forever from God, his Word, his Love, his commands. Don't turn away. Turn to God, to **Christ your King**.

And older woman in a congregation, not this one, was at odds with her pastor, her shepherd. It ended in an ugly and strongly worded argument. The next Sunday the pastor came out to lead worship and was surprised to see the woman there in the pews. He wondered to himself about it and as he greeted her on the way out, he said, "I didn't expect to have you come and hear me preach again." She said, "I didn't come to hear you, I came to hear Jesus." I don't know who was in the right, but this woman understood something.

Though we may be disappointed or wounded by those called to lead and serve us, it doesn't change Jesus and his love for us, or the certainty we have in his Word. God is not to blame. He is our faithful shepherd and King, and he gathers us to himself.

God says this, *"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."*

With these Old Testament prophecies of restoration and a coming kingdom we look not only at these words from the prophets, but also how Jesus and the apostles spoke of them. The prophets stood and looked at the prophecies like a person looks at mountains in the distance and can't distinguish the distance the foothills, then the rising peaks, and then the summit. Looking back on what God has done, with Jesus and the apostles it is like we are looking down from a drone fling over the top of the mountains and we see – that these prophecies were only partially fulfilled in the return of the exiles to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity. Read Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther to see what life was like and what the return was like.

These prophecies find their full fulfillment in the New Testament Church as Gentiles and Jews are brought into God's kingdom through the Gospel going out as Jesus commanded us, *"Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28)*, and the summit in our King's return on the last day. Read 1 Thessalonians 4 and Revelation 22. God has blessed the Gospel going out, so that we are part of this fulfillment as we are brought into the kingdom from where mankind has been scattered. Through faith in Jesus we experience these blessings described and will. We join together with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We thank God for faithful shepherds – pastors, teachers, staff ministers, godly parents, leaders who teach us God's Word. They call out our sin and sinfulness that we turn from it and see our desperate need for a Savior from sin, death, the devil, and hell. They show us our Savior King who wipes away our sins in his blood and extinguishes our fears and holds us close so that none go missing. He leads us to serve him in joy and run in his commands, not away from him. **Christ the King brings salvation for the scattered.**

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up for 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 Righteous Savior."

In the end, the kings of Judah failed them. And God cut down that dead King tree with all its fruitless branches. He cut it down to the stump as Nebuchadnezzar sawed it down. But God is faithful to his promises. He promised a *righteous Branch, a King* – a perfect one who would usher in safety and salvation. Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem, God in the flesh. Though he would not sit on a physical throne in Jerusalem, that was never his goal. He tells us *"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* *"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."* And he did. Jesus reigned perfectly and still does – gathering all who would listen and bringing them into the kingdom. He said, *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."* That's you. That's me. The *righteous branch* grew and he gave his life on a cross for the sins of the world, for you and me to deliver us once and for all. Does God care? Does God know? Yes, he does.

"This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior." (or better – *"The LORD Our Righteousness."*) Martin Luther said, "Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness. I am your sin." Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Cor. 5:19ff). Jesus made a great exchange. He took our place to pay for our sins and wipe our slate clean before God. He gave us his righteous life, his perfect, wise, loving life and credited to our account. He is our righteousness. And he rules us in love. We have peace and safety in him.

8 billion people in the world. God cares about each one. God cares about you. Jesus lived and died for all of them, even you. Trust in him whether you feel it or feel it not. Run to him and his Word. Follow him no matter the cost. Share him for he's been given to you as a gift, and you can give him to others. He is your King who loves you and rules for you. You matter to him. The LORD is your Righteousness. **Christ the King Brings Salvation for the Scattered.** Amen.