

## A RIGHTEOUS SHEPHERD-KING

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Jeremiah 23:1–6  
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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Lord, Savior, and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for the sermon is Jeremiah 23:1–6:

**“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord.**

**“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’”**

### I.

You need a king. You might not think so. Americans don't like kings. We affirm government of the people, by the people, and for the people. As a worldly political policy, our American system of checks and balances is good and beneficial. It works. But before God Almighty himself, you need a king, God's kind of human king.

### II.

You don't need the world's kind of king. The kings of the world can prove to be incredibly violent and deadly. One thinks of all the blood that was shed by the kings of ancient Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome, and, in more recent days, absolute rulers such as Hitler, Stalin, Chairman Mao, Pol Pot, and many others.

Kings of the world are typically not righteous in God's way of righteousness. They rule in very unrighteous ways. They establish wicked policies toward the people and in turn lead the people in wicked ways. As goes the king, so go the people.

The root of the problem is this: kings of the world are self-serving. The saying is true: “It's all about power, getting it and keeping it.” Worldly kings seek their own glory and they're own prestige. They often don't really care about their people or their people's plight. They're interested only in feathering their own nest.

What results from these policies and practices? The sheep scatter. Every sinner does his own thing. Every sinner goes his own way, and that way is always away from the true God, their Creator -- always. Without a righteous shepherd-king, the sheep disperse and wander aimlessly. It's interesting to watch a shepherd lead his flock of sheep. As they travel each sheep tends to wander off in its own direction until the shepherd comes and gathers them

together. Sinners are like that. Without a good shepherd-king, everyone does what is right in his own eyes, instead of what is right in God's eyes. As Isaiah confessed for us, "**All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way**" (Is 53:6). This is why the Lord himself would step in and raise up shepherds (Jer 23:4), even *the* Shepherd -- and even at a terrible personal cost. I'm reminded of the hymn O Dearest Jesus, What Law hast Thou broken. Verse 4 reads:

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder!  
The Shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander;  
The Master pays the debt His servants owe Him,  
Who would not know Him. (*LSB* 439:4)

*Paul R. Raabe, Phoenix, AZ*

Ancient Israel can function as a visual aid, as a model of what happens without God's kind of human king. In ancient Israel, the king was supposed to be a good shepherd who would gather his sheep and lead them in the ways of the Lord. Jeremiah states God's own expectations for God's kind of king: "**Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place**" (Jer 22:3).

But a bad shepherd-king will mislead the people and serve only himself. Jeremiah, as well as Ezekiel in Ezekiel 34, condemned the last shepherd-kings of Jerusalem in their day. They attended only to themselves. They were only self-serving. They built their own magnificent palace but did not care for the people by doing what was right before God. Their eyes and heart were oriented toward only their own covetous desires. Their practices consisted of shedding innocent blood and practicing violent oppression. And the worst thing was that they led the people away from the true God toward idols. They corrupted the people, and the people themselves became corrupt and guilty as well.

They were supposed to be good shepherds, to rule the people in true righteousness, to lead the people in God's ways, and to unite the people to serve the Lord in true unity. But in fact, the corrupt practices of the kings corrupted the people and would lead to their dispersion. Jeremiah announced the words of Yahweh, the God of Israel: "**Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!**" (Jer 23:1). And in fact, the sheep were scattered among the nations. In 586 BC, Babylon came, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and exiled the people.

### III.

But God did not end his message there. Through Jeremiah, God announced a wonderful promise of a different future. In the future, God will regather the remnant of his flock out of the other lands and bring them back to the sheepfold. Not only that, but the days are coming when God will "**Raise up for David a righteous branch, and a king Shall rule and act wisely and do God's judgment and righteousness in the land**" (v 5). In contrast to the wicked and unrighteous kings Jerusalem was used to, this future king will be a righteous Branch, which will grow into a tree that will bear much fruit. This future king will rule wisely and do what is truly righteous. He will unite Judah *and* Israel in salvation and safety. No longer will they fear conquering enemies. And through the messianic King, the gift of righteousness will

come to the people from God. The Messiah's name will be "Yahweh is our righteousness." Through the rule of the Davidic Messiah, Yahweh is the author and source of our righteousness.

#### IV.

Hear the good news. God fulfills his promises of old. He began to restore his exiled people back to the land of Israel in 538 BC and then more in 457 BC. And in the fullness of time, six hundred years after Jeremiah's promise, God brought his ancient promises to fulfillment. God sent his only-begotten Son to join the human race, to become Israel's human King from the line of David. God gave you a righteous Shepherd-King. And what did he do? During his public ministry in the land of Israel, he had compassion on Israel as sheep without a shepherd. He gathered to himself the lost sheep of Israel. He did what a righteous king was supposed to do. He had compassion on the helpless, the widow, the fatherless, the weak, the overlooked nobodies. We can read about his public ministry in the Gospel appointed for this season, the Gospel according to Mark. Jesus saw the people of Israel as sheep without a shepherd, and he gathered them to himself. He continues to do that even to this day. Remember the Day of Pentecost, how the Holy Spirit was sent by the exalted Messiah Jesus and came upon Israelites who had gathered in Jerusalem from around the world.

God gave you a righteous Shepherd-King. Jesus is the Shepherd-King who unites his people like a shepherd unites his sheep. And he adds even more to his flock, those beyond native Israel. Through holy baptism, he brought even us Gentiles into his sheepfold. He gathers his own from around the world and brings us to God his Father. Jesus is the Shepherd-King of Israel, who is better than any of the preceding kings of Israel. In fact, he does something surprising. This Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep, for you. And God raised him up on the third day and highly exalted him. Now Jesus as the Davidic King rules over you by his Holy Spirit. To live under his rule is a blessed life. He brings you to the God of ancient Israel, the true God and makes you part of his own flock. Through his sacred meal, he nourishes you with his body and blood and gives you eternal life with him. You by faith belong to his flock and enjoy salvation and safety under his rule. You need not fear anything. For your Shepherd-King is all for you, no matter what. After those woeful shepherds, **"behold, the days" of "a righteous Branch [who] shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."**

#### V.

Jesus is the righteous Shepherd-King. Through him, you receive true righteousness from God himself. God laid on Jesus, the King, your iniquity and sin. And God reckoned to you the righteousness of Jesus, which he achieved by his own righteous doing and suffering. By faith, you now stand righteous before God. Yahweh, the true God, is now the source of your righteousness. His righteousness has replaced your wickedness. And by his Spirit, he promises to lead you in righteous ways. You belong to the righteous Shepherd-King of Israel. Follow his paths, the righteous paths of your righteous King. And wait with eager anticipation for when Jesus comes again in glory to gather you and all his flock together into his glorious, eternal kingdom. God has given you a righteous Shepherd-King. Enjoy by faith his rule now. Hear the Word faithfully preached and taught by his called undershepherd, your pastor. Receive the Lord's Supper rightly administered by his called undershepherd. And look forward

to the day of bodily resurrection when you will see your righteous Shepherd-King face-to-face.  
Amen.

**Acknowledgments:** The following resources were used in the preparation of this sermon: The Greek New Testament © 1983 United Bible Societies; Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament © 1980 Zondervan Publishing House; A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament © 1971 United Bible Societies; Theological Dictionary of the New Testament © 1964 Eerdmans Publishing; Analytical Greek New Testament © Baker Book House Company; The Holy Bible: English Standard Version © 2001 Wheaton: Standard Bible Society; Biblica Hebraica © 1937 Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart; Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon © 1969 Eerdmans Publishing; Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament © 1980 Moody Bible Institute; The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English © 1987 Hendrickson Publishers; Commentary on the Old Testament by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch © 1989 Hendrickson Publishers; Concordia Self-Study Commentary © 1979 Concordia Publishing House; Concordia – The Lutheran Confessions © 2006 Concordia Publishing House; Concordia Pulpit Resources © 2020 Concordia Publishing House; Luther's Works © 1958 Concordia Publishing House