

Preachment for Advent 1, December 2/3, 2006

Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Seminarian Christopher Gillespie

# The Lord is Our Righteousness

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the meditation for today is based on our reading from Jeremiah 33. What is “righteousness?” Why Do we need righteousness? How do we receive or gain righteousness? In order to answer the question, what is righteousness? we look to Scripture.

God created man in his image. Man had all the characteristics of God. Man was upright, truthful, sincere, honest. Man lived in accordance with God’s plan. Man was right with God. And so, God's righteousness was man’s righteousness.

The Lord gives us a picture of the righteousness of man before the fall into sin in Psalm 15:

- 1 *LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?  
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?*
- 2 *He who walks uprightly,  
And works righteousness,  
And speaks the truth in his heart;*
- 3 *He who does not backbite with his tongue,  
Nor does evil to his neighbor,  
Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;*
- 4 *In whose eyes a vile person is despised,  
But he honors those who fear the LORD;  
He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;*
- 5 *He who does not put out his money at usury,  
Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.  
He who does these things shall never be moved.*

What is self righteousness? What have we done to try to be righteous? What picture of ourselves do we have? Are we righteous by the criteria of Psalm 15? Or are we “only evil” just as God saw the people of the earth before the flood? Even if you were good, generous, humble, patient, kind would it make you righteous before God?

The Lord gives us a picture of our state of righteousness now on this side of the fall in his parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9-14).

*9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner! 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

The Pharisee thinks he is righteous before God because of his works.... his fasting and his thithing. Yet the Publican knows that he has failed to keep the law. He knows that he has failed at even one point and so is guilty of all of it. This is just as James says in his epistle, the second chapter: 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

No, our deeds just as the deeds of the pharisee can never reconcile the chasm that spans between God and man as a result of sin. The works of the Law only give you knowledge of your sin. The works of the Law point us to the need for an external righteousness.

You look for rescue from earthly enemies and torments. You feel entitled to freedom, safety, and prosperity in this world. You declare yourselves worthy of God's blessings. You are unable to keep all of them and so you fail to be reconciled to him. Through one man's sin in the garden, judgment came to all men.

Sin is to reject God's plan and purpose... to act unrighteously. The sin of man threw creation into turmoil. No longer was creation right with God. No, the two were no longer acting as one but were in opposition.

Why is righteousness important? When we stand at the last days in judgment, how will we be judged? "Behold! The days are coming, says the Lord" when I will send a righteous branch to execute justice and righteousness in the land. How will the righteous branch judge you, oh Jerusalem? Will he judge you as righteous? Will justice be made and you be found in the image of God, right with him? Indeed you will! Christ comes to keep the Lord's promise, to save rebellious Judah and give security to Jerusalem.

You recognize that your peril is not in this world but the next. Your fear of judgment is not of what you have done in this world but what you have failed to do for the next. We need not fear! Christ comes to offer comfort, security, rest, and peace. This is not the false security and comfort of the self-righteous. No, this is the true salvation of Judah and the true safety for Jerusalem. By this one man's obedience, even to death on the cross, you are made righteous.

What has He done for righteousness? God promised to Eve a seed who would crush the serpent. Jeremiah tells the promised coming of a branch. The seed promised to Eve will grow from David into a branch, a righteous branch. He did not come not simply to cast judgement, to pronounce his people self-righteous and worthy of death.

We read from the prophet Isaiah 53:3: "He was despised, and we did not esteem Him." Isaiah foretold and history showed that Christ was judged by his fellow man. We continue (Isaiah 53:4-5):

*"Surely [Christ] has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed."*

Christ bore our sins for us. He suffered the judgement of God for those sins. He was smitten and afflicted by his own Father. His will and his righteous is not his own but is his Father's. As incarnate man he binds himself to the will of His Father. His actions are in complete congruence with His Father's. Indeed he is right and true. The two act as one in complete accord.

We see Jesus's obedience displayed at his baptism. John asked him "Lord, why should I baptize you?" Our Lord said "In order to fulfill all righteousness." He saw the cross in his path. He knew that this baptism was not the baptism of life which we receive but a baptism into death for our trespasses.

Isaiah 53:11: God "shall see the labor of [Christ's] soul, and be satisfied... His righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities." But he was not crushed as the serpent was. No, Christ was merely bruised. He was restored and resurrected. In his resurrected flesh, peace is made between God and man over our sin. In Christ's suffering, our unrighteous relationship to God is healed and we are recreated, made right before God. God himself came in flesh to make all flesh right! God was born as man to recreate man... to restore his creation! He comes not so that you may call him righteous but so that you, his new Jerusalem and rescued Judah may be named "the Lord our righteousness!"

How is this made manifest in our lives? Now we as baptized believers have our advocate and surrogate in the divine court. When Christ comes to execute his judgement, he will not see our fallen faces but his own reflection. We were named his in baptism and put on Christ as our garment. Before the judgement seat, our appearance has none of the self-righteous, self-made appearance. No, before Christ we are now a reflection of His own image. The character of God is made right with the character of Man.

We need not fear this coming judgement. "Our righteousness" is for the body of believers. This righteousness unites, equalizes, and levels the playing field. In Christ we stand together before God, as one body of believers. We have one faith... expressed in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. In Christ, our innate desire to elevate ourselves above others is put to death. Now we are all brought up by Christ to His standard... the standard of the Law... the standard of His righteousness. His righteousness is our righteousness.

As a result we see Christian forgiving Christian, arrogance, hatred, envy, and other selfish desires destroyed.... and a unified body living in harmony and in tandem for God's mission. This is as we read in 1 Thessalonians 3:12: "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else." As believers grafted onto the same righteous branch, the execution of justice is not a moment of death but a gracious act of mercy.

Here we see God's Word made manifest, delivered to us as promised. Through his gracious will, we experience not the condemnation we deserve but the eternal rest of Christ. In him, we are safe. In Him, we are secure. In Him, we are named his own. His righteousness is our righteousness.

For the last few weeks under the "end of the church year" our theme has been Christ the King returning in judgment. Now as we enter advent and the beginning of the church year, our eyes look at judgment through the babe in the manger and through the cross towards the judgment. Christ is our Emmanuel... he ransoms captive Israel, saving us from the depths of hell... he gives us victory over the grave. We see God's gracious action... His promised son sent for us... so that His righteousness may be OUR righteousness.

We pray in the words of 1 Thessalonians 3:13: "May [the Lord] strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy [...righteous...] in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."