



SESSION 6

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Point

Because God is righteous, He will ultimately make all things right.

The Passage

Jeremiah 33:3-8,14-16

The Bible Meets Life

Life is just not fair. People with poor character, questionable ethics, and skewed morals seem to get ahead in life, while those who seek to do right seem to be passed by. In fact, people are often treated badly because of their right actions and character. We might be tempted to think God is also unfair since He allows this to happen. But God is a righteous God. He is the Lord our Righteousness, and He will ultimately bring justice to bear on all things.

The Setting

The word of God came to Jeremiah in the last days of the kingdom of Judah. Because Jeremiah predicted the fall of Judah, neither he nor his prophecies were popular. Nor was his popularity helped by his call for the people to surrender to the invading Babylonians. Because of his prophecies, Jeremiah had been confined to the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace. But while God had given Jeremiah a message of judgment to proclaim to Judah, He also gave Jeremiah a message of hope as well. God's judgment was not His final word against Judah. Judgment would be followed by hope and healing for the people of Judah and all of God's people.

What does the Bible say?

Chaldeans (v. 5)—The Chaldeans were a tribe of people living in southeast Mesopotamia who achieved dominance over Babylonia in 626 BC, establishing the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626–539 BC).

Righteous Branch (v. 15)—This phrase is a reference to Jesus, God’s Messiah; God foretold that He would raise up a messianic king from the line of David (see also Jeremiah 23:5).

The LORD Is Our Righteousness (v. 16)—In the Bible, the giving of a new name reflects a change in status. God foretold He would one day make Jerusalem (His chosen people) righteous.

Jeremiah 33:3-8,14-16 (CSB)

³ Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and incomprehensible things you do not know.

⁴ For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the houses of this city and the palaces of Judah’s kings, the ones torn down for defense against the assault ramps and the sword:

⁵ The people coming to fight the Chaldeans will fill the houses with the corpses of their own men that I strike down in my wrath and rage. I have hidden my face from this city because of all their evil.

⁶ Yet I will certainly bring health and healing to it and will indeed heal them. I will let them experience the abundance of true peace.

⁷ I will restore the fortunes of Judah and of Israel and will rebuild them as in former times.

⁸ I will purify them from all the iniquity they have committed against me, and I will forgive all the iniquities they have committed against me, rebelling against me.

¹⁴ “Look, the days are coming”—this is the LORD’s declaration—“when I will fulfill the good promise that I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a Righteous Branch to sprout up for David, and he will administer justice and righteousness in the land.

¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely, and this is what she will be named: The LORD Is Our Righteousness.”

Jeremiah 33:3-5 Commentary

Verse 3: After God had freed the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage, He gave them the Law to guide them in how to worship and honor Him. He promised great blessings if the people would obey His Law (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). However, God is just, and He will display His wrath against evil. So, He also promised terrible judgments if they refused to obey Him (vv. 15-68).

The final siege of Jerusalem occurred around 588 BC, when King Zedekiah and the people of Judah rebelled against the Babylonians. As a result, the Babylonians invaded Judah and surrounded Jerusalem. Jeremiah 32–34 details the prophet Jeremiah’s ministry during the last days before Jerusalem fell.

King Zedekiah had ordered Jeremiah to be confined because he had disliked Jeremiah’s prophecy that Jerusalem would fall to the Babylonians and Zedekiah would be taken to Babylon as a prisoner. While Jeremiah was confined, God gave him two important messages. In the first message (Jeremiah 32:6-15), God emphasized both that Judah would be punished for their disobedience and that after the time of judgment God would in His mercy also restore the people to their land. God spoke to Jeremiah a second time (33:1). After emphasizing His authority as *Yahweh*, the sovereign Creator (v. 2), God invited Jeremiah to ask for a divine revelation; the answer would be too “great and incomprehensible” for mere mortals to know, something too difficult for human beings to attain on their own.

Verses 4-5: Without waiting for Jeremiah to ask, God delivered His revelation to Jeremiah. The first part focused on the utter destruction that was coming on Jerusalem. Even though destruction was coming upon Judah at the hands of a foreign army, ultimately the judgment was that of *Yahweh*, the God of Israel, on the nation for its sins. The agents of Judah’s destruction would be the Chaldeans. Also known as the Babylonians or Neo-Babylonians, they conquered the Assyrians and defeated the Egyptians, becoming the dominate world power—the Neo-Babylonian Empire, ruling from 626 to 539 BC.

The Chaldeans had been attacking the walls of Jerusalem perhaps for as long as a year (2 Kings 25:1). The walls were thick, but the enemy had built assault ramps so they could use battering rams and other devices to gradually tear away at the protecting walls. The people of Jerusalem would demolish parts of their own houses and even the palaces of Judah’s kings so they could use those materials to fill holes and reinforce the walls. However, all their efforts ultimately would prove to be useless. Because of their sins, God had hidden His face and refused to answer their prayers for deliverance from their enemies. Since the city was under siege and all the cemeteries were outside the city, there would be no way of burying the dead during the battle. Therefore, the corpses of the city’s defenders would fill up what was left of their houses.

Jeremiah 33:6-8 Commentary

Verses 6-7: Though the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and the destruction of the Southern Kingdom of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians was assured by God's word, God promised redemption and restoration for all His chosen people (Judah and Israel). Although He had visited them with judgment, God would purify and forgive His children. God stressed that He would provide health and healing to Jerusalem. His people would experience true peace. Peace would mean not only the absence of war but also personal well-being, the opportunities to work, worship, and raise families.

Verse 8: At the core of God's healing process would be His forgiving and cleansing of His covenant people from the guilt of all their sin. God did not downplay the seriousness of their disobedience. In fact, in the original Hebrew three different terms are used to emphasize the scope of their wrongdoing. The first word (iniquity) translates a Hebrew term referring to something that is twisted, bent, or distorted. The people had twisted and distorted their relationship with God. The second word (iniquities) translates a Hebrew word that pictures an archer missing his intended target or a person missing the way. The people's aim should have been a life of holiness before God (Leviticus 11:44). The third term (rebelling) translates a Hebrew word that stresses the deliberateness of their sinful actions. Though they had the Law and its warnings, as well as God's prophets calling them to repent and return to God, they still refused to obey.

In spite of all their sins, God promised that He would purify and forgive His people. God knew that one day His people would confess and repent of their sinful ways (Nehemiah 1:4-7; 9:1-3). God is always ready to heal and purify His people when they confess and repent (1 John 1:9). Though the overarching theme of God's word through Jeremiah was the coming judgment that would mean destruction and exile, God's message also included forgiveness and renewal based on a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Instead of a city filled with corpses, Jerusalem would become a place filled with "joy, praise, and glory" (v. 9). Though one day soon Jerusalem and the surrounding cities would become "a ruin, without people or animals" (v. 10), God would eventually restore the people and their land so that they would hear the "sound of joy and gladness" (v. 11) and shepherds would be able to graze their flocks in peace and security (vv. 12-13).

Jeremiah 33:14-16 Commentary

Verses 14-15: God's promised judgment came to pass in 586 BC when the city of Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by the Babylonians. Although some of God's promises were fulfilled when the Jews later returned to Judah and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, God spoke of a yet future time when a specific promise would be fulfilled. God declared that He would fulfill His good promise spoken through Jeremiah to both the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

God would cause to sprout up someone from the house of King David, identified as a "Righteous Branch." This Righteous Branch, a king from the line of David, will reign over God's people with justice and righteousness. He will also rule with wisdom (see Jeremiah 23:5) and His kingdom will endure forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Jeremiah 33:17). God fulfilled this prophecy of the promise of the Righteous Branch when He sent His Son Jesus, born of the line of David (Matthew 1:1), into the world to live a perfectly righteous life and to die on the cross in order to provide complete atonement for our sins (Hebrews 9:11-14).

Verse 16: Again echoing the future nature of this prophecy, God foretold that the Righteous Branch would restore Judah and Jerusalem, guaranteeing the safety and security of their inhabitants. Jerusalem would also be given a new name: "the LORD Is Our Righteousness." In Jeremiah 23:5-6, the same title is given to the coming Davidic ruler, the Righteous Branch. "LORD" is the English translation of the Hebrew name for God usually transliterated as *Yahweh*, the name of God by which He revealed Himself to and established His covenant relationship with Israel. In the Bible, when a person or place was given a new name, the name would reflect some change in the status of that person or place. The only one who could change the people of Jerusalem and make them righteous before God is God's Messiah, that is, Jesus the Christ.

Some Christians believe that the final fulfillment of this prophecy will come when Jesus returns and sets up His millennial kingdom in Jerusalem. They cite Isaiah 60:11-22 and Ezekiel 48:30-35. Other Christians believe that these prophecies will be fulfilled in "the holy city, new Jerusalem" that comes down from heaven after the final judgment and the creation of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:2; see also Revelation 21:22). Whenever and however God chooses, one day Jesus will return and will bring perfect justice and righteousness to all the world. This time of perfect righteousness will include all of God's people—not only the faithful of Judah and Israel, but all who have put their faith in Jesus Christ.

FOUR QUESTIONS GROUPS SHOULD ASK ABOUT PRAYER REQUESTS

BY DWAYNE MCCRARY

In almost every Bible study group, prayer requests are shared. In fact, we may even feel cheated if prayer requests are eliminated from our group! Unfortunately, gathering prayer requests is as far as it usually goes. But what if we saw a prayer request as an opportunity?

Here's what I mean: some prayer requests require ministry action. For example, if a couple uses the prayer time to announce that they are expecting a baby, passing that information along to the Preschool Sunday School leaders would be important. Deacons and other ministry leaders could be informed about hospital stays, family crises, and deaths of family members. In this way, the prayer request becomes an opportunity for ministry action, reaching all areas of the church.

Prayer requests also represent opportunities for church leaders. By knowing needs, leaders can make wise choices when they plan events, host fellowships, and train leaders. The pastor could better understand the needs of the church and prepare sermons that meet the needs expressed in the prayer requests. Being aware of specific needs makes him a better pastor.

How can we efficiently gather accurate prayer requests? Notice the two words, efficiently and accurate. A Bible study group could spend the majority of their time gathering requests, but that would compromise their time of actually studying the Bible. For me, making a sheet of paper available during the study time for people to record their requests has been the most efficient. The second element is accurate. We want to make sure that the requests shared are up to date. There is nothing worse than telling someone that you are praying for their loved one, only to find out that the loved one passed away a month ago.

How do we communicate the requests? This question involves both form and medium. How we word something is very important. If someone requests prayer for a nephew who hates his job and is looking for a new one, that request could be worded when shared with others as a request for a nephew who needs wisdom about his future. We don't know who may read the requests, so we need to be careful. Hospital stays and other events requiring time away from home become important information if it falls into the wrong hands, which brings us to the medium: should we post all our requests on social media? What are the risks of making a request public? Do we really want everyone on Facebook to know about Dave having surgery and being in rehab for six weeks? How we communicate is important.

To whom should we communicate these requests? We have already mentioned sharing requests with the pastor and other church leaders. Who else needs to know about the prayer request? In the case of a couple announcing an addition to their family, who all needs to know about that particular request, and why?

How can we encourage those making a specific request? Gathering prayer requests is certainly about being aware and knowing how to pray intelligently, but it is also about encouraging those for whom we are praying. There is nothing like getting a note from someone who is praying specifically for you. Those notes lighten the load and help us face whatever challenge we are facing. Part of this is celebrating God's answers as well. Both the one being prayed for and the one praying are encouraged by answered prayer, so finding a way to include answers to requests is also important.

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