

## **Advent 2020: “A Cry For Justice”**

13 December 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### **Welcome**

**Advent Candle Lighting:** Leo & Lidi Machado

**Hymn of Preparation:** IPH 318 God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

**Prayers of Adoration & Confession:** Lorraine Zipser

**Reading:** Jeremiah 33:1-16

**Reflection:** *O Come, Rod of Jesse*

### **Sermon:**

*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from **Satan’s tyranny**,  
from **depths of hell** Thy people save and give them vict’ry o’er **the grave**.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

#### **I. “Hell on earth” (v.5)**

I wonder if you have ever heard someone say, “this is Hell on earth.” Perhaps a journalist reporting on the war-torn country of Syria because of the destruction of beautiful cities and the devastation of a fertile land, where people have had to leave because it is not safe. Those involved in health care or working in an ICU, overwhelmed with Covid patients struggling to get breathe, might think this is “hell on earth”. We might say it when facing a personal crisis, loss of our job, death of a loved one, a serious diagnosis, an addiction or loss of freedom, dignity, or wealth, particularly when it is not our fault, outside our control, unjust. “Hell on earth” is about destruction, disaster, depravation, and death! It is reserved, of course, for the worst of situations.

The reality for the people of Judah was “hell on earth”. The prophet Jeremiah speaks to a people whose city, Jerusalem, was under siege, sword, famine, and plague (32:24). A place of desolate waste (32:43), it faces the might of the latest political superpower, Babylon. Added to this terrible, hellish situation, Jeremiah is in prison because he is perceived as a traitor who was undermining the national resolve by telling everyone to surrender to Babylon and willingly go into captivity to avoid a bloodbath and more death (33:1). *Added to this*, the people’s big, worldly hope was their neighbour, Egypt, whom the Babylonians defeated at Carchemish in 605 BC. Their plight in the city of Jerusalem is Hell on earth!

It is a relatively simple task to describe this reality; it is a more profound thing to ask, “Why is it like this?” Jeremiah, speaking God’s words, says the reason for this “hell on earth” reality is because God hides His face from the city (v.5): *“They will be filled with the bodies of dead men I will slay in my anger and wrath. I will hide my face from this city because of all its wickedness.”*

God is a righteous and Holy God who cannot be in the presence of sin; He is justly angry at such sin, and He must justly punish such rebellion towards Him as Creator and Saviour. Satan was the first to be punished in his rebellion against God, placed in Hell where there is no good, only darkness and hopelessness. God turns away from those who reject Him and His ways, gives them over to their sin and the original sinner, Satan; and sadly, they are held

in captivity to sin and its effect - death and Hell. The pictures of "Hell on earth" are simply that - pictures of a greater and much more awful reality of the depths of Hell and Satan's tyranny of death. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) and there is nothing we can do about it; it is a justly deserved punishment by a Holy God.

## **II. The restoring of fortunes (v.6-13)**

The situation for Jerusalem was bleak. The situation for every sinner is bleak. However, immediately Jeremiah has something positive to say and it is the reversal of everything consequent upon our sin and its punishment by God; it is the most incredible reversal of fortune. Instead of sickness, there will be healing; instead of war, there will be peace; instead of captivity, there will be security; instead of exile, there will be freedom; instead of punishment, there will be forgiveness; instead of shame, there will be rejoicing; instead of death, there will be life; instead of silence, there will be the sounds of life, in marriage and in commerce.

It is something that the Lord will do (v.11): "*Give thanks to the LORD Almighty, for the LORD is good, His love endures forever. 'For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were before,' says the LORD.*" God is not beaten by Satan, nor does He give up on sinful humanity, nor does sin defeat Him. What Satan captures, what sin deserves, God delights to restore. He frees His people from the tyranny of Satan, He saves them from the punishment deserved for sin and He restores everything - our world, our bodies, our communities, our freedom. The reality of Hell is replaced with the reality of the Kingdom of God and a place called Heaven, a restored earth, where sin is absent, people flourish, and community is perfect - a place where God's blessing is, where heaven and earth meet.

From the depths of Hell, there is the promise of heaven; from the effects of sin's punishment, there is salvation, grace, and forgiveness. The question is, "how is that to come about? What did God do?"

## **III. The promise of the righteous branch (v.14-26)**

In Jeremiah's day there was a lack of good leadership. After the death of King Josiah and his reforms, the people had a succession of poor kings who did evil in the eyes of God. There was an absence of priests and prophets who knew the LORD, who did what was right and said God's words truthfully. Those who did, like Jeremiah, ended up ignored and silenced (literally imprisoned). A lack of good leadership is an awful burden on everyone!

However, God promises to give the people a leader in the line of David: "*In those days and at that time I will make a righteous branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD Our Righteousness'*" (v.15-16).

This righteous branch was from David's line or, as the hymn says, the Rod of Jesse (David's father). We understand and know this promise was fulfilled in Jesus - He was righteous and he did what was just and right.

- A. **The righteousness of Jesus (v.15):** this is a difficult idea to fully grasp. Jesus was without sin, He was always right in thought and action. When Satan tempted Jesus, he was unsuccessful and left Him until another time, because Jesus knew and followed the teaching of the Scriptures. He was not conscious of sin: "who of you convicts me of sin?" (John 8:46). He claimed to be "the light of the world", morally pure (John 8:12). "I always do what pleases [the Father]" (John 8:29). Others could not fault Him, so the testimony of Pilate: "I find no basis for a charge against Him"

(John 18:38). The early apostles called Him “the Righteous One” (Acts 3:14). And the letter to the Hebrews says, “He was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Added to these statements, we may observe the life He lived as reported in the testimony of the Scriptures. His life is attractive, self-giving, humble, and assured. “*I will make a righteous branch sprout from David’s line and he will do what is just and right in the land*” describes Jesus; He is the promised Messiah.

- B. **Jesus, Our Righteousness (v.16):** If you close your eyes and reflect for a moment, are you not conscious of sin? Over your lifetime, people have pointed out your faults. And for those who read and believe the word of God, you know you do not love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, nor do you love your neighbour as yourself. You are a sinner, unrighteous and deserving of God’s justice. This is our problem and it has led to all the problems we have in our world. Our only hope is that One who was righteous would be our righteousness, and that He would be accepted as our substitute, so that the justice we deserve would be dealt with by him. The cry for justice is answered by the righteous Jesus dying on the cross. We are saved because Jesus is our righteousness; we receive a righteousness by faith and we put on His righteousness as a garment of protection. “The righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

#### IV. Application

- A. **A cry for justice accepted and passed on**

We have heard this morning the good news of a wonderful Saviour and worthy leader who rescues us from the just punishment for our sin, a punishment that is very real and will come if we refuse to repent. He invites us into His kingdom, to life eternally in all its fullness. As we understand afresh that we have been the recipients of great grace, when we understand what we have been delivered from and at what cost, when we see the misery sin inflicts on humanity and the subsequent tyranny of Satan, we desire this justice for others and their freedom. Having accepted Jesus and experienced this wonderful freedom, please consider how you might pass them on to your family, friends, and colleagues. (Each family should have received from me on behalf of the elders and the Church family a card and some postcards with the words *O come, O come, Emmanuel* as a resource).

- B. **A cry for justice in our prayers for others**

I heard last evening on the news of another school in Northern Nigeria raided and girls abducted by terrorists. The focus this term of Church and Chains has been the plight of Christians in Nigeria, the Chibok girls and Leah Sharibu - young girls kidnapped, forcibly married or raped, radicalised, bargained for money or for the release of Boko Haram terrorist fighters; on leaders, particularly State governors, who are neither righteous nor just. Because of such inaction and complicity, many Christians are killed. God is righteous and He is just. He will hear our cry for justice. Let us pray!

### C. A cry for justice in our everyday living

We all understand the painful struggle of living in a pandemic. Undoubtedly, some have suffered more than others and we are aware of the destructive direction it leads to in all aspects of life, even to death. Our hope is in an efficacious vaccine that protects us from the virus. Yet Covid 19 is not our most significant problem. The slavery of sin, the tyranny of Satan, is. We see that tyranny in many forms in our lives. For example, many of us are slaves of fear - fear of others, of speaking out, of being vulnerable with others, of change, of leading. But we have a Saviour and a friend in Jesus who frees us to be all He wishes for us to be - to live life fully, to be free from fear and the injustice of Satan's tyranny. We cry for justice and it comes through Jesus' forgiving presence.

Jeremiah had words of comfort for those in distress, in hopeless situations, and it was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus. The chapter finishes with these words: *"for I will restore their fortunes (or bring them back from captivity) and have compassion on them"* (v.26). We are saved from Satan's tyranny by a leader, one who was righteous and just. His name is Jesus, and we all need Him every day.

*O come, Thou **Rod of Jesse, free Thine own** from Satan's tyranny,  
from depths of hell **Thy people save and give them vict'ry** o'er the grave.  
**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

We cry for Jesus to come in righteousness and justice, and we rejoice that He has come and He will come again.

**Praise:** IPH 646 Great Is The Darkness

**Prayers for Others:** Ethan Boyd

**Closing Hymn:** IPH 325 Joy To The World

#### **Announcements**

**Benediction:** May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

### **Discussion & Application:**

**Accept:** Take a moment to consider the depth of your sin. Then, compare it to the amazing gift of righteousness we are offered in Christ and take some time to praise God with thanksgiving for this precious, undeserved gift.

**Put On:** Last month in Ephesians 6, Paul instructed us to put on the Breastplate of Christ's Righteousness (v.14). What practical steps can you take each day to put it on?

**Pass On:** Having accepted Jesus, put on His righteousness, and experienced the wonderful gift of peace with God that it brings (Romans 5:1-11), how might you pass on this message of hope to your family, friends, and colleagues (e.g. sending a short note of encouragement to let them know you're thinking of and praying for them this Advent season)?

**Pray:** What injustice are you experiencing in your own life? What injustice do you see in the world around you? Set aside some time in this busy season to contemplate these things and carry them to God in prayer, crying to Jesus for justice.