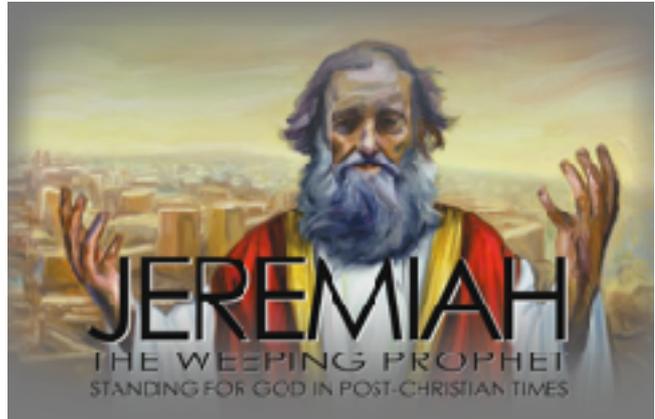


Hope in troubled times

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Jeremiah, and indeed all the prophets of the OT, lived in fairly troubled times. Jeremiah lived and proclaimed the word of God in the latter days of the southern kingdom of Judah. He lived through the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC, and the subsequent deportation of many of the people to Babylon. During that time he remained in Jerusalem.



Much of Jeremiah's message was one of warning to the people - repent, turn back to God, or punishment will follow. This passage, however, conveys the words of God in which he offers comfort and hope. But first he delivers some bad news. The shepherds of Israel have destroyed and scattered the flock. He was referring to the kings. They had led the people astray and introduced the worship of false gods. There was religious apostasy, most people ignored God and didn't care about him. Many went through the motions of worship but that was all. There was sexual immorality of the worst kind. Greed, dishonesty, corruption and violence were rampant.

God says here in our text that he will punish these evil shepherds, these wicked kings, and he himself will call together his people and they will multiply and prosper. He will place new shepherds over them who have the interests of their people at heart, and none of his people will again be lost.

And then comes an even greater promise - at some time in the future, he doesn't say when, simply "the days are surely coming" - he will raise up a righteous king who will rule over his people with righteousness and justice. Out of chaos and disruption will come order. Out of injustice will come justice. Out of sin and brokenness will come righteousness and wholeness. Jeremiah's message here is one of hope in troubled times. It's a message that has great relevance for our age.

We live in very different times and circumstances. And yet there are many parallels. We too live in troubled times. In some ways, they are frightening times. We are witnessing increasing divisions and disintegration in our society. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. Governments are either powerless or lack the will to do anything about this. Some politicians seem to be more concerned about their image and how they can win the next election than they are about the long term welfare of the nation. There is increasing violence in the community. Our young people are bombarded by soul destroying drugs. Marriage and family values are pilloried and instead sexual aberrations are being promoted by powerful voices in our society. Values of honesty and trust are at a low level in many areas of society. One could go on and on listing many more ills in our society that have caused disruption and confusion.

Like Jeremiah we live in troubled times. In his day it was the kings and the leaders of the people who were responsible for leading their people astray. To what extent the government leaders of our day can be blamed for the fragmentation and depravity of our society is difficult to say.

Certainly some of the blame must lie with them, either by allowing evil to prosper or by not encouraging and upholding good. But whether or not others are to blame for the evils of our society is really not our concern. God will take care of that, he will punish the evil doers, we are told. Rather, we need to look to ourselves and ensure that we are not the ones who lead others astray.

What is also important is that we remember the promise of God that he will call his people back to himself and place shepherds over them who will care for them. He will also raise up a righteous king who will keep his people safe by ruling over them with righteousness and justice.

This latter promise of a king we have seen fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. He surely is the king “who will deal wisely, and execute justice and righteousness in the land.” In God’s kingdom there is no injustice and no evil; he does all things well and for the lasting good of his people.

Without Christ the future of our society does indeed look bleak. But Christ can change all that. Where Jesus Christ rules in the hearts of people evil and godlessness are banished, and righteousness and justice prevail. Where Christ rules people are loving and honest towards each other. Christ can remove the fear we have in our hearts and restore harmony. Amidst all the brokenness and disintegration in the homes and families of our nation, amidst all the back stabbing and vicious criticisms we see in parts of our society like social media, Jesus can bring peace and justice, if only he is acknowledged and allowed to rule amongst us.

The place to begin is with ourselves. We must allow Christ to rule in our hearts, and bring righteousness and peace into our lives. When each of us lives with Christ ruling in our hearts, his rule can extend to others. We can act like leaven in the community.

Of course, we see this now only in part. The righteousness and peace Christ brings is only a faint shadow of what it could be because of the sin that is still active in the world and in each one of us. Only in heaven will we see his rule of peace established fully and perfectly. Nevertheless as we struggle on and take up the challenge of Christ to be his followers we have the sure promise that evil will not triumph but that Christ is ruler over all.

God promised through Jeremiah that he would gather his scattered people together and place shepherds over them who would care for them. In the church, through the working of the Holy Spirit, he has called his people together and fed them on the rich pastures of his word. Martin Luther sums it up in his explanation to the Third Article of the Creed when he said, “*The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.*”



Through the church and through its pastors and leaders, the shepherds God has appointed, you and I are called together by the Holy Spirit to be God’s own people. And God promises to keep us safe.

In many ways the times we live in are disturbing, even frightening. There's a lot of brokenness and hurt in our world, many families are fragmented and divided. Many no longer worship the true God. As a church we seem to be shrinking. The forces of evil are so powerful.

But God has promised us that he will call his people together and bring them under the rule of his own righteous king. Christ is that king. When we follow him and live under him in his kingdom we will be kept safe, and peace and righteousness and justice will follow.

He has promised to raise up shepherds of the Gospel, pastors and Christian leaders, who can teach us the ways of God. Let's believe them, let's obey them, and God promises we will remain his people.

Can there be hope in troubled times? Yes, of course there can be. That hope doesn't lie in some new world order promised by presidents or prime ministers, it doesn't lie in better economic times, nor does it lie in the elimination of global terrorism. Instead our hope lies in the righteous king whom God has given us. In Jesus Christ there is hope for troubled times. Where Christ rules there we find peace and safety and righteousness and justice.



Our prayer should be, "Come, Lord Jesus, rule over us and give us hope in these troubled times." Amen.