

The Righteous Branch (TGC 2011)

by Conrad Mbewe

This sermon focuses on the importance of godly leadership as highlighted in Jeremiah 23, emphasizing the impact of leadership on the people of God. It delves into the failures of leadership, the need for righteous leadership exemplified by Jesus Christ, and the ultimate deliverance He brings. The sermon concludes with a call to trust in Jesus for salvation and to fix our eyes on Him as the righteous branch and King of kings.

Scripture: Jeremiah 23:1, Jeremiah 23:3, Jeremiah 23:5, Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 53:11, Luke 1:26, Revelation 7:9

Topics: "Godly Leadership", "Trust in Jesus"

Description

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Transcript

As you turn in your Bibles to Jeremiah and chapter 23, Jeremiah and chapter 23, let me use the opportunity to express my joy in the opportunity that I have to be with you during this conference. It's my first time to be at the Gospel Coalition conference and the fellowship that I have enjoyed here just over the day and a half has really filled my heart seeing so many of you who are interested in ensuring that the true gospel is shared, it's known, it's defended not only across your own country but indeed across the world. I've been asked to deal with this passage, Jeremiah 23, the first eight verses and if you are there I will commence reading.

The Bible says, They warred 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 sheep, 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 will 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, our righteousness. Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when they shall no longer say, as the Lord lives, who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt, but as the Lord who lives, who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them, then they shall dwell in their own land. Let's once again ask for light from heaven.

Let's pray. Eternal God, we thank you for your word, for its ongoing instruction for the church worldwide. Thank you that now we can quieten our hearts to be instructed by you.

All we ask now is that you may speak. Speak, O Lord, your servants listen. In Jesus' name we plead, amen.

As I meditated much on this passage of scripture in preparation to coming to share with you from God's word, the whole subject of leadership and the importance of leadership was burnt afresh in my own heart. Clearly, this is the issue that arises in this passage of scripture that we have just read together. Again and again you find in the Bible that as leadership goes, so go the people of God.

Yes, every so often you will find a people that harden their hearts against what the leadership seems to be suggesting or even commanding them to do. And thus we find the people of Israel, for instance, rejecting Samuel and wanting a king to rule over them. And finally God has to say to Samuel, don't worry, it is not you that these people are rejecting, it is me.

Give them a king. But that is not the norm that we find in scripture. Often in scripture we find phrases like kings leading the people into sin.

In fact sometimes it's referred to as into great sin and clearly pointing to idolatry that has been allowed to infest the nation of Israel and in due season the nation of Judah until God brings his punishment upon them. And as we read in the book of Malachi, God chastising the priests saying it is you, O priests, who have caused my people to desecrate my temple, to bring blind and crippled animals. It's your failure that has brought about this substandard religion among my people.

The reverse is equally true. We find that when revival has come upon the people of Israel, it is because of repentance first and foremost in the palace. As the kings have led their people into repentance, so God has had mercy upon an entire nation.

And indeed therefore this is the issue that occupies Jeremiah as he comes towards the stage in his book when he has been dealing directly with the nation of Israel and now taking his attention around those nations that had to do with the nation of Israel. And what he deals with here is the whole issue of leadership. The need for persistent, godly, fruitful leadership that ultimately brings glory and honor to God.

And how relevant that must be to all of us, whether we are dealing with leadership in the home or dealing with leadership in the nation or even dealing with leadership in the church. Oh that God may help us to see how he views leadership and consequently how we should so deal with our lives that instead of being the cause for which God judges his people that we would be the means by which God would bless his people. And I think at a conference such as this that's even more important because I have no doubt that many of you occupy leadership positions in the various churches, institutions of theological learning, and I think it's important for us to just pause for a moment drinking in the words of Jeremiah and asking ourselves the

question, how are we relating to this whole subject of leadership in the church and wherever we are in such a way that we are relevant to the great cause of God across history? Well that's what we learn in this passage and may God help each one of us to apply the lessons that we will see here to our own lives.

First of all as Jeremiah comes into this final stage as it were of this direct relating to the nation of Israel he shows us in no uncertain terms that God takes seriously the whole failure of leadership among his people because of its devastating effect upon a people whom he loves dearly. And hence Jeremiah begins with those words of condemnation. Listen to these first two verses of Jeremiah 23.

He says there, 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 came 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.

Who were these shepherds? The phrase was often meant to refer to kings in Israel but there's no doubt about it that by the time Jeremiah was speaking it wasn't just the kings who had caused him a lot of heartache and pain it was the priests and the prophets as well. In other words every facet of leadership had ended up in a situation of ungodliness and corruption to the point where Jeremiah the weeping prophet wept over this matter. We notice it a little later in verse nine downwards.

Listen to his words. He says concerning the prophets, my heart is broken within me, all my bones shake. I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine because of the Lord and because of his holy words.

For the land he says is full of adulterers. Well that's the prophet but the priests are also included. Verse 11.

Both priests, rather both prophets and priests are ungodly he says. Even in my house I have found their evil declares the Lord. What a terrible time for the nation of Israel that the very people that were supposed to provide leadership in the ways of righteousness, godliness, in the ways of true holiness, consecration to the living God were in fact the very ones who were steeped in wickedness and sin to the point where Jeremiah weeps as he does here.

And the point that Jeremiah is bringing out is that this did not escape the attention of God. No. God was angry with the situation among the entire leadership of Israel and he was breathing threats through his prophet Jeremiah.

Let's think about that for ourselves for a moment because I'm sure you know that if there is one area that ought to concern the Christian church today it is the fact not so much of a people that are going against godly leadership in the churches but we're still leaders in the church of Jesus Christ whose lives are the exact opposite of what his word says. They drink of sin and then pour it out for God's people to also drink. And God in the end responds in wrath not only against the leaders but also against his people.

And in fact that's what this scattering is all about. It's not so much that it was the shepherds who were scattering the sheep directly but it was God responding in wrath, in judgment, in chastisement against his people and consequently sending them into the far country. We notice that when he comes into the third verse and he's speaking about bringing them back.

Look at the way he puts it there. Verse three, then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the country where I have driven them. So it's really a failure by leadership to be good role models, a failure by

leadership to instruct the people of God in the truth.

Consequently their lives become corrupted with sin and as a result of that God comes down in judgment and he blames them for what is happening among his people. Are you a godly example? As a leader in the church or in your community, are you a godly example? Does your mouth produce teaching that gives to the people of God the full counsel of God? So that if God is to judge them, you can safely say my hands are clean. I have given you all that God would have me to give you.

I have not hidden anything from you for the sake of being popular. I haven't done that. Oh are you going to be numbered among those that God should say war to the shepherds for causing me to breathe threats to come in chastisement among my people.

Brethren, God takes seriously the matter of leadership and if you're not interested yet in making sure that your view of leadership, your life of leadership is equally serious, then resign before God comes in judgment upon you and upon the people whom you lead. But that's only the beginning of what Jeremiah tells us in this section. The second is that in with respect to his covenant people, he doesn't just take this matter seriously.

Where there is a perpetual failure in leadership, he himself moves in. He moves in to correct the situation because he's got a grand purpose across the generations of the people of God to the clause of history. So where your leadership is failing, he simply comes in and says step aside and raises a new people, a new leadership to lead his people forward.

That's very clear from the third and fourth verse and I want you to notice the way in which the I will is so emphatic three times over. Jeremiah says, 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.

God himself is saying here that where you fail, oh leaders of Israel, I'm coming in. I will bring about that which you have failed to bring about. I will bring about healing.

I will bring about restoration. I will get my agenda back on track. I will do it myself.

I'm going to raise new leaders who are going to lead my people forward. Isn't this the way in which God has acted again and again in history? You can't miss it. False prophets who survive by corruption, who always say what they know the people want to hear, arise in their tens, in their hundreds, and in the midst of all that corruption and deceitfulness of false prophets, he raises an Elijah completely out of the blues and Elijah leads the people into revival and true godliness.

Similarly, in the decadence of Hophni and Phinehas, again from nowhere, God raises a Samuel to lead the people into the future. In the midst of a disobedient soul who again and again refuses to listen to biblical, godly, prophetic counsel, God raises a David completely to everybody's surprise. They've tried his other brothers and God keeps saying, no, not this one.

No, not that one. And finally, it is the young man coming from looking after his father's ship. This is the one that I have raised to lead my people forward.

That's God. Denominations have arisen, faithful to begin with, but somewhere along the line they have imbibed liberalism. They have imbibed low levels of morality and although on the outside they have continued, before long God has raised another denomination and clearly it has been one that has been in love with the good old gospel.

And God has worked through that again and again. That's how God brings true religion back and blesses his people. Oh brethren, let us be one.

If you are there in comfort and sin, thinking that you are the one who is in control and everything will continue as they are, you are only deceiving yourself. The God of the universe will not allow his agenda to be hijacked by ungodly, selfish leaders. He will raise another in your place.

You see, Jeremiah here is not simply referring to human leaders. The ultimate leader of the people of God is a promised king. And it is this king that he has spoken about all the way from Genesis to the book of Revelation, or as we are in the Old Testament all the way to Malachi.

Again and again, when the situation is dark, when it looks hopeless, when people are sitting in a state of gloom, he always reminds them of a promise. I'm sending you someone with a capital S. He does the same thing here. Notice what he says in verse 5 and verse 6. 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 do 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. Brethren, this is the promise of the whole Bible.

If God was to simply raise human shepherds over his people, sin would always bring about their downfall. The great promise of God is that he is sending another with a capital A. And who is this? Well, he's referred to in this passage as a branch, a righteous branch. And clearly, the phrase branch has to do with his relationship to David.

David here was the root, he was the main stem, and out of this Davidic kingship is to come another king growing out of that, and that's the one being referred to. And in that sense, therefore, it is someone in David's life. But secondly, the branch imagery has to do with a branching out, not simply following things as they have been thus far, bringing in a new dimension.

We see the use of the word branch in that way in Zechariah and chapter 6, and it's a very interesting way of putting things, so I'll just quickly read that for you. Zechariah and chapter 6, verse 12. And said to him, thus says the Lord of hosts, behold, the man whose name is the branch, for he shall branch out from this place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord.

So whoever this one is, is one who will do his work, not as the stem did it, but in a rather different way, a different phase, a branch branching out. And how is that? It's this emphasis on righteousness. Righteousness.

You see, what is it that has destroyed Israel to a point where God should send them into captivity? Well, simple. It is unrighteousness in the leadership that seeps through and becomes the unrighteousness of the people. And therefore, if there is to be a real restoration from a place of judgment, then the wrath of God, which is essentially the justice of God, has to be lifted off from the people that were under its chastisement.

And that could only be done with the satisfaction of justice through another. And beyond that, it must be that this new leadership must be in himself righteous, because any other position would still mean there is a debt to be paid and consequently would be right back to square one. So who is this who provides leadership to Israel on the basis of righteousness? Who is this? Which person is this? You don't need to search very far to realize that there is only one across the whole of history who answers to this description, Jesus of Nazareth.

Isaiah and chapter 9, and then of course the famous Isaiah 53. Let me begin with Isaiah 59, rather Isaiah 9 and verse 7, the passage we often read related to Christmas. I begin with verse 6, for to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and he shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. On the throne of David, so it's essentially the same promise we're reading in Jeremiah, and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it, and listen to this, with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. A few things about his person.

First of all, this is God. Whoever this person is, is God, for he is described in this passage not only as Wonderful Counselor, but also as Mighty God. This child who is to be born, who is to be given to us, is the infinite and most glorious being that angels have worshipped from eternity to eternity.

The one who through his hands has brought into being the universe as we know it. He who governs all the rolling spheres across the entire universe, including the minutest details of our lives, and he who ultimately will judge the living and the dead, including all of us in here. This is the person that is being spoken about here as the King.

He is the person who one day in the midst of all the confusion and sinfulness that was there in Israel, Palestine was born as a little baby. That's what Isaiah is telling us here. He is also being told secondly that he will occupy the office of King.

He will lead his people. He will be the deliverer of his people so that all the enmity under which they presently are, the yoke of slavery that they live under, he will come in as a King and deliver them from all that and lead them into true prosperity. How? Through justice, that which no angel could provide, no fellow human being could have provided.

This Jesus was to provide it completely, to satisfy the laws of God, the penalty for sin, justice, to satisfy even the preceptive aspect of God's law through his own righteousness, everything to be satisfied. And as Isaiah would put it, the Lord himself will do that. Chapter 53, Isaiah 53.

One is tempted to read the whole of that chapter, but I won't. I just read to you verse 11. Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied.

By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their. The thing about this servant King is that he was to suffer, to suffer for his people. Out of the anguish of his soul.

Brethren, God the Father said, I'm sending my son to come and do that for my people that nobody ever could do. And the most important aspect of it is to deal with that which invariably causes me to pour forth my wrath upon them and send them into captivity. Justice, justice.

Jesus did not simply come as a teacher to teach us a few moral precepts so that we can try and follow the ways of God. He did not even come to simply be a good role model so that by looking at his example we can then begin to live a life like him. If that's all he did, he would have completely failed in his mission because we are born sinners.

We are born with corrupt natures. Our hearts are corrupted. Indeed, our minds are corrupted.

Our wills are corrupted. The disease is on the inside. No mere outward moral examples can reverse that.

Jesus had to suffer to become this king and carry out the work of deliverance. And hence, again and again, he said to his disciples, my soul is in anguish even to the point of death. Shall I say to the Father, save me from this hour? No, for that was why.

And as he made his way to the cross, he fell on his knees before God and pleaded with him. The pleading amounted to something like this. If there is any other way, please, if there is any other way to achieve this purpose, to bring that which is the apple of your eye, your elect people into your kingdom without me going through this excruciating pain, the darkness of my soul.

Please, oh Father, let this cup pass away from me. And yet, not mine, but yours be done. We know the end of the story.

God sent an angel to strengthen his son. And finally, he went to the cross. He suffered.

He paid the price that no one could ever pay. As Isaiah puts it here, my servant will make many to be accounted righteous and he shall bear their iniquity. He finally paid that price.

And three days later, God raised him from the dead. The price has been paid. Now he could, as it were, open the next chapter.

He could go back to the Father and say to him, let me have the promised spirit so that I can send him into the world in order to convict and convert my people, in order to occupy them, in order to lead them and guide them, in order to change their hearts, taking out those stony hearts that cause them to be rebellious and sinful against what you say and instead turning them in the ways of righteousness and in the process inspiring a leadership whose love is for you and ultimately leading your people to obey you. And consequently, he went and received the blessed Holy Spirit whom he has sent into the world. But one more passage and that is in the New Testament, Luke and chapter one.

This is now the birth of Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. Verse 26, Luke 1 verse 26. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

And he came to her and said, greetings, oh favored one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. Listen to this, he will be great and will be called the son of the most high. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, who'd be a branch of David.

And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, not for two weeks, not for 40 years, not even for a million years, forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end. Oh brethren, it is this Jesus who's being spoken about by Jeremiah.

There's no other person across human history who in even the minutest way begins to approximate to this person. It is about Jesus of Nazareth. But allow me to add very quickly that although at this point Jeremiah is primarily concerned with the nation of Israel, when you read the rest of Holy Writ, it becomes very clear that it wasn't just the Jews who were to benefit from this King Jesus, but it was to be for the Gentiles as well.

That's the bigger picture. For instance, we quickly notice in Psalm 2 verse 8 where God says to, again it's fairly clear it's referring to Jesus, the King that's been set on the hill of Zion. That it is, if you ask of me, I will give you the nations so that you may rule over them.

It is too little a thing that Jesus should only bring in the people of Israel. Or as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 5, I think we know the passage referring to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ that he bore the sins of the world. The world.

In other words, not just the Jewish nation, but you Gentiles too. And therein lies any hope of true, progressive, sustained, godly leadership over the people of God. It's not on the arm of flesh.

If it was on the arm of flesh, it would fail again and again and again. But God is saying I'm moving in, and I'm moving in the person of my own Son. Indeed, I'm moving in the person of my Spirit who will do the carrying out of the work to the very end.

And therein ought to be our hope as well. Jesus is the center of any hope that we will have a godly leadership that will see his people making progress for time and for all eternity. And this is why this passage ends on such a glorious note.

Wow. What a glorious note. It shouldn't surprise us because we are no longer talking about a fallen creature in charge.

We're talking about God the Son himself. So look at the way Jeremiah ends this section. He says, therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when they shall no longer say as the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

But this is what they will now be saying, as the Lord lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them, then they shall dwell in their own land. What is he saying? He's saying the leadership that this King will give, King Jesus, is in such a way that it will overshadow even the great exodus from Egypt that Israel experienced. Compared to what Jesus will do, Moses and what he did will be a storm in a teacup, nothing whatsoever.

But brethren, think of what he is calling nothing. Remember the plagues that came one after the other until the mightiest potentate in the known world at that time finally bowed down and said, come on, go, go, go before you drive me mad. Remember the way in which as the people left, he changed his mind and consequently began to chase after them.

We all know that story. The way in which finally that great army of Pharaoh chased this nation of unarmed civilians. Remember the way in which suddenly there was a great cloud in between them with all their

arsenals and these unarmed people and they could do nothing whatsoever to close in on them and cause a major routing of the people of Israel.

I mean, friends, remember the parting of the great sea and two huge walls of water went up into the air and an entire nation walked through a river on dry ground. Remember that. Remember how as Pharaoh's army came in at the stroke of Moses's rod, the waters covered and the mightiest army on the planet at that time crumbled, crumbled, came to nothing.

Has there ever been such a deliverance from the beginning of time? That's the kind of deliverance that's been spoken about here by this King Jesus will make that child's play. Let's face it, this was not fulfilled in the 1940s when Israel became a nation. We need to search further than that.

We need to go and scan the New Testament passages and ask ourselves the question, what kind of deliverance can this be that would so overshadow that which we have seen in the days of Moses? Which one can it be? Perhaps we may think of the salvation of souls. When an individual soul comes from death to life, when the chains that have bound him or her in darkness and the fields of sin are completely shattered and broken, the person knows the experience of sins forgiven, a heart that's been transformed and begins to walk with the living God. To borrow the words of Charles Wesley Long, my imprisoned spirit lay first bound in sin and nature's night.

Then I diffused a quickening ray. I walked the dungeon filled with light. My chains fell off.

My heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed thee. But even that doesn't quite fit.

Yes, there's something to be said for it, but not enough. What is it? Friends, my own mind goes to the day that will break, bright, eternal, when all the ransomed throng of God who come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, when they shall come with singing and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads, when sin is finally done away with completely, when there will be no more suffering, no more crying, no more death. Indeed, when Satan himself will receive the final blow at the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Indeed, when we will know what it means finally to worship God with an unseemingly heart, to love him perfectly, never, never, never more to sin again, when Jesus, our great shepherd, will himself lead us into eternity. There's something of this that is captured in the very last book of the Bible, and I trust that that's where we ought to go again and again when we are thinking about the final fulfillment of this promise. Revelation 7 and verse 9. Revelation 7 and verse 9. After this I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped, saying amen, blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanks, and honor, and power, and might be to our God forever. I'm interested in the 17th verse. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be there.

I've given them a new shepherd. I've given them a new king. I've given to them this righteous branch, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Oh friends, isn't this that great deliverance that will completely overshadow what happened in the days of Moses at the hands of our great King, the Lord Jesus Christ? Very well then, what do we conclude from this? And four quick points as I close. First of all, those of us who are preachers and elders in the church need to remember that the great shepherd of the sheep wants us to be true leaders, that we should bring his sheep from the far country and be faithful in watching over his flock. Are we doing that? Are we? But secondly, let us always remember that God has finally walked onto the stage in the person of his Son.

We are in a new era. By his Spirit, Christ is walking among the lampstands. His saving and sanctifying work continues.

He will never fail his elect people. Not one of them will be lost. Thirdly, am I talking to someone in here tonight who is in the far country and feeling the chains of sin around his ankles? Oh, please call upon the King to come and deliver you.

He's here and he wants to save you. Stop trying and start trusting in him. But finally, let your eyes see the faithful, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who will lead us in the paths of righteousness.

May with your eyes, may you see the nail prints on his hands and on his feet, the price that he paid for you. And oh, may you love him dearly. May you worship him forever.

Ultimately, he is the one who will lead us into that great deliverance. Oh, then brethren, let us stand as children of the promise. Let us fix our eyes on him, our souls until the race is finished and the work is done.

Let us walk by faith and not by sight, looking up to this righteous branch, our great God and King, Jesus Christ. Amen. Let us pray.

Great God of heaven, thank you for the righteous branch. That's all we can ask. That's all we can say.

For the new era he has brought about, we look forward to that day when we will stream in from every direction with the glory of God shining in our faces. Nevermore to know sin and its consequence. Help us to love the Lord Jesus and to worship him.

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