

I Will Raise Up for David a Righteous Branch

by John Piper

John Piper's sermon explores the promise of a Righteous Branch from David, emphasizing the necessity of seeking righteousness through Christ amidst the historical failures of Israel's kings.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:16, Isaiah 66:8, Jeremiah 23:5, Zechariah 12:10, Romans 10:3, Romans 11:26

Topics: "Gods Covenant", "Righteous Leadership"

Description

John Piper preaches about the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7, where God declared that one of his offspring would sit on the throne forever. Despite the disobedience and idolatry of the kings of Israel, the prophets constantly reminded the people of God's ownership, control of history, and expectation of obedience. Jeremiah, a prophet to Judah, prophesied about a 'Righteous Branch' from the line of David who would gather and make God's people new forever, offering hope amidst judgment.

Transcript

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"I WILL RAISE UP FOR DAVID A RIGHTEOUS BRANCH" In 1051 B.C., Saul was made the first king of Israel. About forty years later, David, the youngest son of Jesse (1 Sam. 16:11), began to rule. David was "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14) and stands to this day as the embodiment of a great king even though a sinner. To him, God made a promise in 2 Samuel 7 that one of his own offspring would sit upon the throne and that the throne of his kingdom would be established forever. Verse 16 says, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." But it became very clear after David's death that this promise was in jeopardy.

The demise of the united kingdom with the death of Solomon, David's son, and the idolatry and disobedience of the divided kingdom threatened to bring down God's wrath on Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Samuel had said to the people very clearly at the inauguration of the first king, "If you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king" (1 Sam. 12:25). So for centuries the people lived with this tension. On the one hand, they had a promise that David's kingdom would be made sure forever. And on the other hand, they had a threat that if they persisted in disobedience to God, they and their king would be swept away. The men who kept this tension before the eyes of the people for the next four centuries were the prophets of Israel. And in their message is also found its ultimate resolution.

The ministry of the prophets through the years of the divided kingdom is a constant reminder to Israel and Judah that God still owns the world, still controls history, still has a special claim on the children of Abraham, and still expects their obedience. The main purpose of the prophets was to constantly call the people back to God--to love God and to obey his commandments. As incentives to obedience, the prophets warned that judgment comes upon the faithless and promised that salvation comes to the faithful. These three things made up the prophetic message: commands to forsake evil and follow God in righteousness; warnings of coming judgments; and promises of hope. We should never forget that everything the prophets predicted about the future was always intended to produce obedience in the present. If it was true (last week, 1 Sam. 12:7,25) that Samuel pleaded the past for the sake of the present, it is just as true (this week) that the prophets plead the future for the sake of the present. If the study of prophecy does not produce sanctification it is being studied wrong. If gazing into the future hinders our responsiveness to present needs, we may be sure that we are not gazing with the eyes of God.

What I want to do this morning is unfold for you from Jeremiah 21:11 to 23:8, a typical example of how the prophets preached--how they confronted the wickedness of their own day, how they warned of judgment and how they held out hope. What we will find is that the resolution of the tension between the threat of annihilation for disobedience on the one hand and the promise of a sure and lasting kingdom on the other hand, is found in the distant hope that a "Righteous Branch" will shoot up out of the stump of David, gather his people and make them new forever (Jer. 24:7;31:33).

Jeremiah was born in Anathoth, northeast of Jerusalem, about 627 B.C. He was called by God as a boy to be a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah during its final years. He proclaimed the word of the Lord under the last five kings of Judah: Josiah, Jehoahaz (Shallum) , Jehoiachin (Coniah) , and Zedekiah. Josiah, you recall, was a good king who tried to reform the nation after finding the old book of the covenant in the Temple (2 Kings 22,23). But the rest of the kings were not good. Jeremiah 21:11-22:30 is a collection of oracles which Jeremiah spoke from the Lord against these kings. I want us to look at this whole unit because it all leads up to the prophecy of the coming king in Jeremiah 23:1-8.

First, in Jeremiah 21:11-22:9 the prophet speaks in general to the king of Judah, the house of David (21:11,12;22:1). What he does is describe what God looks for in a faithful king, and commands it. In Jer. 21:12 he says, "Execute justice in the morning and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed." And he couples this command with a warning: "lest my wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of your evil doings." In 22:2,3 he repeats the same general command, "Hear the word of the Lord, O King of Judah ... Do justice and righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place." And then again, as an incentive, the alternatives of promise or threat are held out. Verse four: "If you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David ... But (Verse 5) if you will not heed these words, I swear by myself, says the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation."

So what we see in these first verses (21:11-22:9) is the declaration of what God expects from those who sit on the throne of David: "You and your subjects must let justice and righteousness rule in all your dealings. You must devote your time and energy for those who are oppressed. You must help and never take advantage of those who are most vulnerable: the refugee, the orphan, and the widow." That's for us too isn't it? If that's what kings are supposed to do in the Old Testament, how much more we who serve King Jesus. No matter what your vocation is, the reason you are alive is to celebrate the riches of God by

meeting real needs. God's people, filled with God's Spirit, following God's way will move inevitably toward and not away from the people with the greatest need. And not only does Jeremiah say what God expects from those who sit on David's throne, he also repeats the old tension: if you obey, kings will go on sitting on the throne of David (22: 4); but if you do not then (all promises notwithstanding) this house will become a desolation (22:5).

Then in the rest of chapter 22, we see how each of the last kings of Judah fails to follow God's way of righteousness. First in verses 10-17, we read about Shallum (or Jehoahaz) the son of Josiah who ruled for three months and then was deposed by the Egyptian Pharaoh and taken to Egypt where he died. In verse 12, Jeremiah predicts this death in exile, and in verses 13-17 gives the reasons why God brought this judgment on him. Verse 13, "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages." Jeremiah points him back to his father Josiah (verses 15,16): "Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this (what it means) to know me?' says the Lord." But Shallum only had eyes for gain, not for giving. And so he had no business on the throne of David.

Then in verses 18-23, comes a word about Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, who ruled for 11 years in Jerusalem until he was killed in a revolt in 548 B.C. Jeremiah predicts (in verse 19) that he will be killed and cast outside the gates of Jerusalem. The reason he gives is in verse 21, "I spoke to you in your prosperity, but you said, 'I will not listen!' This has been your way from your youth, that you have not obeyed my voice." Jehoiakim was a rebellious and disobedient man, not only to his human overlords in Babylon, but also to the prophetic word of God. And he had no business on the throne of David.

Then in verses 24-30, Jeremiah describes the judgment on Coniah (or Jehoiachin) the son of Jehoiakim. He became king at 18, but surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar in three months and was taken into exile never to return. 2 Kings 24:9 says, "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father had done." Jeremiah cries out in 22:28, "Why are he and his children hurled and cast into a land which they do not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord!" Coniah did not hear the word of the Lord and therefore the divine decision falls (in verse 30): "...none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David, and ruling again in Judah."

The next and last king (whom Jeremiah passes over here) was Zedekiah, an uncle of Coniah. He reigned 11 years until 586 B.C. when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem, slew his sons, put out his eyes and took him captive with the rest of the people to Babylon. That was the end of the Jewish monarchy on earth. The kings were destroyed and the people driven out of the land. Samuel had said it: "If you do wickedly you will be swept away, both you and your king" (1 Sam. 12:25). So it appeared that the prophetic threat would have the last word.

But the last word concerning the house of David is given in Jeremiah 23:1-8. And it does not stop with a threat, but goes beyond all threats to reaffirm the word to David concerning the permanence of his kingdom. The promise will be fulfilled in spite of all judgment. In verses 1 and 2, God gathers up all the evils of Shallum, Jehoiakim, and Coniah whom he calls the "shepherds" of his people and says: "'Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!' says the Lord ...'You have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings,' says the Lord." But all the judgment of destruction and exile and dispersion still does not thwart the promise. Verses 3-8 hold out the sure hope that the remnant of the flock will be regathered and that God will put a new and righteous king on David's throne.

The promise has two halves: one is the regathering of dispersed Israel to dwell in safety and righteousness in their own land (verses 3-4;7-8); the other is the enthronement of a king in David's line who will execute righteousness and save his people. Let's look at these two promises one at a time and try to understand how they are being fulfilled. First the promise of regathering in verses 3 and 4:

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, says the Lord.

Then skipping to verses 7 and 8 the promise is repeated:

Therefore, behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when men 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 lives who brought up and led the descendants 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.

After 70 years many of the exiles taken to Babylon returned to Judah and rebuilt Jerusalem. But this return cannot be the final fulfillment of what Jeremiah promises here. For two reasons: one is that the picture is of a wonderful era of freedom from fear and dismay (verse 4). But Israel was still under foreign overlords after the exile and has never known real security since. The other reason is that (according to v. 8) Jeremiah predicts that the regathering of Israel will be from all the countries where God scattered them, not just from Babylon. The comparison with the exodus from Egypt in v. 7 shows that probably all the tribes of Israel are included in the return not just the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin who went into captivity to Babylon in 586 B.C. Verse 6 makes this the most likely interpretation: "Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely." That is, both the northern tribes (called Israel) and the southern tribes (called Judah) will be regathered to the land.

Nothing has happened, since Jeremiah spoke those words, which can be called their final fulfillment. The return after the Babylonian exile was a partial fulfillment; and the establishment of modern Israel and the return of many Jews to that land today, is I believe also a partial fulfillment.

The reason I say that these are only a partial fulfillment of the prophecy is not that all Jews have not returned to Palestine. I don't think the prophecy requires that every single Jew reside in the borders of Israel. What is required is that there be a gathered people and that all who want to return to the Lord and to the land can do so. None of them will be missing (verse 4). The reason I say the fulfillment to date is incomplete is this: If we were to say Jeremiah, "Your prophecy is being fulfilled. A nation has been created for Israel. The people are turning from all countries just as you said. They dwell in prosperity and have not been routed by their enemies," he would say, "Yes, yes, and the King? The Righteous Branch? The Son of David? What of Him?" And we would have to say, "Well, most of them don't believe in him. The liberal ones have sort of demythologized the idea of Messiah into an ethic of love and others rejected him when he came and still wait for another." You know what Jeremiah would say? He would say, "You mean they have come back without their King? They presume to dwell in prosperity and enjoy security without the Christ? They are seeking to vindicate themselves? Maintain their own right. They live in the land in rebellion against the Righteous Branch, the Son of David, the King of Israel? You call that fulfillment of my prophecy? It's blasphemy! It's idolatry! We're back where we started!"

And he would be right. Zionism without Christ is idolatry. The attempt of Israel to fulfill the first half of Jeremiah's prophecy without submission to the second half is insurrection against the King. Verses 5 and

6 give the second half:

Behold the days are coming says 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 (Jehovah) is our righteousness.'

And this king is no other than Jesus Christ, even as many devout Jews recognized 2000 years ago. Like Zechariah who said at Jesus' birth: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old."

Jeremiah said his name would be "Jehovah is our righteousness" (verse 6). This means, I think, that God alone can save or vindicate or justify his sinful people and he will do it through this King. "Jehovah is our righteousness." But this is the Messiah's name. Therefore, the people of God must seek their righteousness, their vindication, their hope from Jehovah, and must seek it through the Messiah-King.

To reject the King is to reject all hope of righteousness before God. Is it not still true what Paul said of Israel 2000 years ago (Rom. 10:2-4):

They have a zeal for God, but it is not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the goal of the law unto righteousness to everyone who believes.

Zionism without Christ is a massive attempt at self-justification through works of law. It is insubordination against Jehovah and his righteousness and it is insurrection against the Son of David. Therefore, even those of us who see in this historical development a possible step toward the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, even we have cause to weep with Jeremiah and Paul that Israel is forever lost without Christ (Rom. 9:3;10:1;11:14).

But it is not as though the word of God through Jeremiah has fallen. For millions of people, Jew and Gentile, have submitted to God's righteousness. Millions have stopped trying to establish their own righteousness, and have put their hope and trust in the King of Kings whose name is "Jehovah is our righteousness." And not only that, but (and here is the ultimate resolution) there will come a day when God will draw "all Israel" (Romans 11:26) into the family of the redeemed. Broken off branches will be grafted in to the Righteous Branch of David (Rom. 11:24). This does not mean every Jew who ever lived will be saved, rather in the future the people as a whole will turn dramatically to their Messiah, Jesus Christ the crucified. Zechariah 12:10 describes it like this:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps for a first-born. (See Rom. 11:26,27)

Jeremiah's word of hope has not fallen. The King has come, he has died for sins, he has risen again, and he is now pouring out a Spirit of compassion and prayer upon the world. Everyone moved by this Spirit to abandon self-justification and to cry out to Christ for righteousness will be saved. And one day that Spirit will sweep over Israel and create a Christian nation (Isaiah 66:8). The breeze is already blowing. May we say with Paul, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (Rom. 10:1). Even

so, come Lord Jesus!

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