

“In the Hands of the Righteous Shepherd”—Jeremiah 23:5-6

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “In the Hands of the Righteous Shepherd”, is Jeremiah 23:5-6 → *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 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 is our righteousness.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“You’re in good hands with Allstate.” This insurance company’s slogan was supposed to convince you that you can place your property and life into their hands, depending upon them to take care of you in the midst of calamities and tragedies . . . for a price, that is. It is very difficult to entrust yourself, your property and even your children into the hands of others and trust they will act wisely, carefully and in your best interests. This is especially true when parents drop their children off at daycare or school and sign all kinds of permission slips waving liability for school, church and other group trips. It becomes a more intense concern when it comes to your child’s marriage and you place his or her life into the hands (i.e. care) of another person permanently.

I've often wondered about God's concern in placing His people—His children—into the hands of others to take care of them, acting wisely and carefully in their best interests **for Him**. Unfortunately, so many times those entrusted with the care of His people took advantage of them and led them into lives which had no respect for Yahweh, leading them into idolatry and hell. Such was the situation during the prophet Jeremiah's day and thus the LORD scolded "the shepherds" of Israel for neglecting to care for His "flock" properly and faithfully.

The relationship picture of the shepherd and his sheep was a familiar one to His people. We use this picture in a "concrete" way in our church tradition by using the Biblical title of "pastor" which means "shepherd" to describe one who has spiritual oversight of our souls. A pastor also considers those on the membership list of the congregation to be God's flock entrusted to his spiritual care. Thus, it would be natural for us to see these scolding words directed at the "religious" leaders in Israel. However, since God's people were a theocracy, the "shepherds" of God's people included both the religious (i.e. priests, prophets, etc.) and political leaders (i.e. kings, elders, family heads, etc.).

The rulers and false prophets of Jeremiah's day led the people into idolatry, provoking Yahweh's love in His justice. Instead of leading them in the righteous life God demanded they led them into sinful disobedience and rebellion against Him. Some behaved in obvious

wickedness, others behaved in sin couched in religious motions and actions which appeared very righteous. Not only were those to whom God entrusted His children responsible for this disobedience but his children were also responsible for their actions in following them. In Ezekiel 18:4 Yahweh declares: *Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine: the soul who sins shall die.* Everyone is ultimately responsible for their actions no matter what influences come to play in their choices.

God's love for His children is steadfast and He knows that for sinners rules without relationship produces rebellion. Thus, His desire for a loving relationship with them. When we choose to jeopardize relationship with Him by stubborn, sinful, disobedience, He will take action to bring us back into relationship with Himself by disciplining us through His proclaimed Word. In our text God's Word proclaimed by the prophet Jeremiah (and others Yahweh sent in His name) was rejected so the discipline finally came through captivity to Babylon.

Through the Word the Holy Spirit call us to confess that we have sinned against His Will, pronounces the forgiveness of our sins and empowers us to live in a new relationship of loving obedience to Yahweh. **This is a relationship which He creates and sustains** as you can readily see by His promises of "I will" mentioned five times in six verses within our text. So, how will He do it?

Yahweh promised that He would establish and sustain a relationship with us by placing us into the hands of a *righteous* Shepherd. By always keeping a *remnant of His flock* (cf. Jeremiah 23:4), verse 5 of our text promised that He would *raise up for David a righteous Branch*. Isaiah 11:1 describes Him as *a shoot from the stump of Jesse*. The reason He is pictured as *a shoot from a stump* is because the stump was leftover from the tree being cut down—another picture of God’s judgment upon the obstinate rebelliousness of His people. *Jesse* was King David’s father. Thus, it is the promise of bringing forth new life from that which appears dead because it will be *a branch from David’s roots* which *shall bear fruit* in relationship to Yahweh again. This *righteous Branch* is Jesus Who was a descendant of David. (cf. Matthew 1:1,6)

Notice verse 5 of our text describes how this Shepherd would *reign*—*He shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land*. Jesus’ *reign as king* took Him to the cross where He executed *justice and righteousness in the land* by being mocked and crucified as “the King of the Jews.” (cf. Matthew 27:37-44) The *justice* which He executed was taking upon Himself the punishment which our sins deserve. It was executed in *righteousness* because He lived under God’s Law perfectly for us and was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. The hands of our righteous Shepherd bear the scars of the nails where, *for our sake*, God actually *made Him to be sin . . . so that*

in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21) Notice His name in verse 6 says He is Yahweh ***our*** righteousness!

Describing His relationship with us as *the good shepherd* Who *lays down His life for the sheep* (cf. John 10:11), Jesus also made it clear that His steadfast love was not coerced or forced. He says in John 10:18 → *No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord.* (cf. John 10:18) Jesus willingly took all of our sins for all time upon Himself so that we are forgiven and declared righteous in Yahweh's sight through faith in Him. (cf. Romans 3:23-28) Our lives are totally in the hands of the righteous Shepherd Who is *the LORD is our righteousness.* (cf. Verse 6)

Thus, you can have the confidence of Yahweh's promise in verse 6 of our text that you are *saved* and can *dwell securely* in the land. He entrusts you only into the hands of the perfect and righteous Shepherd, Jesus, the Christ. By faith in His Person & Work you are saved from eternal death in hell and have the certain hope and security of eternal life in perfect relationship with God. We are not led by a shepherd under *fear* and *dismay* but rather under a comforted, guilt-free conscience and peace. Romans 5:1-2 says: *Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Yes, satan is always on the attack, striving to destroy our faith, our

comfort and our peace. He wants us to listen to others before we listen to the voice of our righteous Shepherd. (cf. John 10:3-5) However, Jesus came to destroy satan's power and take care of us spiritually, keeping us in His righteous hands forever! They are the hands of love which provide for us, nurture us, guide us, discipline us and carry us forever! Thus, we've gather here to do what Psalm 95:6-7 invites His sheep to do: *Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, **and the sheep of His hand.*** We are in the hands of the righteous Shepherd; the hands which were nailed to that cross so that we might be declared righteous in God's sight; the hands which hold us in God's love, grace and forgiveness daily; the hands which lead us in the right paths in daily living. You are in perfect hands with Jesus. Amen.

*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them,
and they follow Me.
I give them eternal life, and they will never perish,
and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*

(John 10:27-28)

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