

Sermon for November 24, 2013 – Christ the King

Jeremiah 23:1-6 (NKJV)

Theme: Jesus is . . .

- 1) *Your Pastor/King*
- 2) *Your Righteousness and Salvation*

¹ “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!” says the LORD. ² Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: “You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,” says the LORD. ³ “But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. ⁴ I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,” says the LORD. ⁵ “Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. ⁶ In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.** (NKJV)

Members of Immanuel, do you know who your true pastor is? Let me give you a hint: It’s neither me, nor any of the other pastors that served here before me. Give up? It’s Jesus himself.

The word “pastor” is Latin for “shepherd,” and Jesus certainly is your Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for you – his sheep. He purchased you to be a member of his flock. You belong to Jesus.

This is an important thing to keep in mind. Why? Because our trust should always be in Christ and not in men. Every earthly leader is flawed. Pastors, presidents, senators and governors – they will all disappoint us at some point or another because they are all sinful. And when our spiritual leaders disappoint us, we are tempted to leave the church or possibly abandon our faith. This is why it is important to remember who our true leader is – something we will do today, under the theme: **Jesus is:** 1) *Your true Pastor and King* 2) *Your Righteousness and Salvation*

Part One: Jesus is. . . Your true Pastor and King.

Our sermon text is taken from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah. Let me explain the situation. Judah was about to be punished for their unfaithfulness to God. Much of their unfaithfulness stemmed from the fact that their civil and spiritual leaders were horrible. They did more to lead the people away from faith in the Messiah than towards it.

This is why the Lord says: “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!” In Old Testament times, the LORD often associated the various aspects of spiritual and civil leadership with shepherding. Why? Perhaps because the patriarch Abraham was a nomad

who kept flocks. Abraham's grandson, Israel, and his sons were all shepherds, who found comfort in calling the LORD their Shepherd. The term "shepherd" is a wonderful leadership term. Good shepherds cared for their sheep. They fed and watered them. They guided and protected them. When a sheep would stray, they would go out looking for it. Good shepherds had compassion on their sheep – and this is exactly the kind of leadership God wanted Judah's prophets, priests and kings to possess.

But they didn't. *Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them."* What did the leaders of Judah do to cause the LORD to charge them with scattering His people? Didn't the citizens of Judah like their leaders? Many of them did, but their leaders were still bad. They were selfish and materialistic – always looking for more luxury and ease, instead of defending the cause of the oppressed and needy. They loved sensuality and let the people live immorally. They promoted the worship of other gods – or at least did not bother to speak out against it. Sure, many Jews loved their priests and kings. Why? Because they were indulging in the very behavior the people wanted to indulge in: selfish materialism. But all the while the leaders were driving the people further and further away from God.

What would God do because of this? *Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the LORD.* Punishment was about to come for the leaders of Judah. The armies of Babylon would destroy Jerusalem. Many nobles and priests would perish. Those who didn't would be exiled.

But God would have mercy on his people – his scattered flock. Yes, the people were as much to blame as their leaders. They blindly followed these wicked kings and priests instead of listening to faithful prophets like Jeremiah, but God would be merciful. He says: *"But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.*

This is a prophecy of the New Testament Church. Through the world-wide proclamation of the Gospel, the LORD himself, the Good Shepherd, would personally search and gather people from every nation under heaven to believe in him and be saved. Through baptism they would become members of His flock – the Holy Christian Church. The Lord himself would tend to and care them.

When we hear how the LORD would lovingly call back his wayward people as a dear shepherd calling for his lost sheep, we can't help but think of Jesus' parable about the shepherd who left 99 sheep in order to search for one. At one time we were all that one. Each of us was that lost soul that Jesus sought to save. He saved us by laying down his life for us on the cross. He saved us by sending out missionaries and pastors with the Word – calling us to repentance and faith through the Gospel. He saved us by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon us in Baptism, by washing us clean from all sin, awakening faith in our hearts, and sealing us as His own dearly loved children.

Yes, we all were once like lost Judah, but the LORD himself had pity on us and, as a shepherd carries his hurt, lost sheep back home to nurse it back to health, so the Lord carried us home to Himself in order to care for us.

The LORD says: *I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,*” says the LORD. Who are the under shepherds the LORD would place over the sheep – to care for them on his behalf? An obvious answer is: parish pastors. They even hold the title “shepherds”, and have been entrusted with the task to care for God’s people – not for selfish gain or self-interest, but out of love for God and the sheep entrusted to their care. It is God’s will for them to protect the sheep from all spiritual harm and to feed and water them with the pure Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

But they aren’t the only shepherds over God’s people. This text applies to every church officer and board member who has been entrusted to help direct the congregation. It applies to every Sunday School teacher to whom God has entrusted his precious little lambs.

It applies to every husband. Men, God has made you the head of the household - pastors to your families. God commands you to shepherd your families by having family devotions and bringing your children to Sunday school, church and Bible study. God’s Word is crystal clear on this matter. Men, you have an incredible responsibility to lead your family in the way of Christ.. And if you don’t? The Lord will hold you under the same judgment that he held the leaders of Judah.

Mothers, God has also chosen you to be His special under shepherds over his precious lambs. God wants you – together with your husbands - to take special notice of what kind of music your children are listening to and what kind of programs they are watching on TV. Are they wholesome, or do they glorify sexual immorality, pride and violence?

All of us need to consider the fact that we are all our brother’s keepers. We are all shepherds of each other. As we pray for and encourage one another with God’s Word, Jesus – our dear Pastor - both shepherds us and others through us. May the LORD forgive us for not taking this truth to heart, and for being unfaithful shepherds to those entrusted to our care! And if you are repentant, then know this: the LORD does forgive you for Jesus sake. He has taken your sin away and covers you with His righteousness and salvation so you can be the faithful shepherd and sheep God has called you to be.

Part Two: Jesus is . . . *Your Righteousness and Salvation*

Our text continues: *“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.*

Jesus is the righteous branch from David’s line that would arise from the dead stump of Judah’s monarchy. He is our eternal King, of which every other Jewish king was merely a symbol.

⁶ *In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely;*

Judah and Israel represent all of God’s people from every tribe people language and nation. Every believer is a member of spiritual Israel – as the Scriptures say: *Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.* (Gal 3:7 NKJV)

And believers are certainly saved in Christ Jesus. Saved from what? From sin, Satan and unbelief. All their sins are forgiven. They dwell in safety. Even though the devil rages against them, even though the world is out to get them, even though they might have to suffer much for Jesus' sake, Jesus still watches over them. They can dwell in safety, knowing that the LORD sends his angels to protect them from all spiritual harm. They can say with the apostle Paul: *the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.* (2Ti 4:18 NKJV)

Our sermon text continues: *Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

What a wonderful verse: Jesus is not only our perfect pastor and king, he is also the very righteousness we need to stand before God.

Understand this verse correctly. It is not merely confessing Jesus as the holy and righteous God – which He indeed is. Jesus is our righteousness. He covers every believer with Himself, so that when God the Father looks at them, He sees his Son, His only Son whom He loves, and welcomes the believer into His kingdom and home.

Jesus is our righteousness. What does this mean? The apostle Paul put it this way: *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* (Gal 2:20 NKJV)

Brothers and sisters in Christ: today we remember Jesus as our eternal King and Shepherd. He is your true pastor. Listen to him by listening to His Word. Listen to Him by listening to his under shepherds when they speak His Word. The Lord wants you to be where He is, so follow His voice.

And, fellow shepherds under Christ (fathers and mothers, Sunday School teachers and Church offices, elders and council men), be faithful in your duty – remembering that the LORD has called you to take care of his precious sheep. Lead them in humility. Promote their welfare and not your own. Remember your heavenly Shepherd, who cares for his sheep – and for you too. Always lead them to Jesus. When you sin, ask Jesus to forgive you and be confident that He does. Why? Because He is your righteousness and salvation. He is your loving Pastor and King. Amen.