

The Righteous King

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you, Yah and Brendan, for those greetings.! Perhaps that person or persons are your parents, particularly when you're young, providing you with assurance and comfort that you'll be safe.

Maybe even now, though you're older, they're always there, aren't they, to give you timely guidance and counsel so that you might not go astray. And I'm sure that there are people that may feel like they've missed out because, you know, they didn't have someone like that in their life.

And so they're feeling a bit lost, anxious maybe as they step through life because they're not sure whether they're making right choices or headed in the right direction.

And, you know, as the world around them charges ahead, they feel a bit lost at sea, confused, disorientated in life.

Well, today I want to show in the Bible that God has prepared such a person for all of us in our lives. Someone who will watch over us and allow us to live with purpose and peace and joy and hope.

[1 : 4 1] But first, I want to take you all the way back in history to a time when God provided the people of Israel these very things in their life. No, it wasn't garden angels in the sense of real angels that God appointed.

But as we read in our passage in Jeremiah, there were shepherds who sadly failed to do their job. That's why when we hear in that reading from chapter 23, we hear God's great disappointment and lament over them.

Verse 1, Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture. Imagine, shepherds destroying and scattering sheep, declares the Lord.

Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people. Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done, declares the Lord.

Now, of course, God's not literally talking about shepherds and sheep, you know, the type that you might see on ABC Landline or a farmer wants a wife.

[2 : 5 7] I know you guys don't watch that show, but you know about the farmers that do sheep farming. They're not even the kind of shepherds in the olden days, you know, the ones that round up the sheep with a staff rather than going around on a quad bike.

But God instead is using this as a figurative expression for leaders in Israel. Kings, priests, prophets, for men to do spiritually what a normal shepherd would do for physical sheep.

And so their job is to ensure that the people, the sheep, God's sheep, are well fed and kept safe from predators. And here again, we're not primarily talking about physical care and protection, but feeding the people with God's word so that they can do what's right and live well in the land.

They don't just protect the people from the nation's armies that are around them, but actually the other nation's idols and false worship.

And this is a job that God says they collectively failed to do. And as a consequence, they've scattered and driven the sheep away.

[4 : 14] And of course, these shepherds or leaders didn't do this directly. But instead, because they failed to teach the people rightly, what ends up happening is that the people themselves fall into sin, into idol worship.

And God had repeatedly warned them, if they failed to obey Him, if they persisted in this, then He will drive them out of the land into exile. Hence, scattering and driving them away.

But the shepherds, they're the ones that are responsible for this. Because instead of warning the people when they're about to go astray, you know, what they end up saying is that, oh guys, you know, all will be well.

You know, you can do whatever you like. Nothing's going to happen to you. They failed in their duty to God. And now, the people are suffering.

And God says, so will the shepherds. They will be punished. Now, in these verses, it's not exactly spelled out what this punishment is, so we're not going to dwell too much on it. But, as we read on, the comforting thing is that even though these sheep have strayed and are being punished by God, God in His faithfulness and compassion wouldn't leave them untended or forsaken forever.

[5 : 35] So, let's keep going. In verse 3, God intervenes to say, Well, some time will pass before this will happen because you see there that it's only the remnant, the leftovers that are brought back.

But God says that no matter how far they have been scattered, God has not forgotten them. God will bring them back from all the countries. And the pasture they will be gathered to is God's promised land.

And He says He will again place shepherds over them. And notice there that God will cause them to be fruitful and increase in number. That phrase there is really Genesis creation language, isn't it, from Genesis 1.

They will flourish and live as God intended them when He created humanity, as though they were back in the Garden of Eden. And this time, He says, There will be new shepherds who will help them to do the right thing.

And I love the phrase there, It's really quite a beautiful and idyllic picture, isn't it, of peace and security.

[7 : 13] It's like a happy childhood, isn't it? I don't know whether you remember that or it was too long ago. You know, remember that when you were young, there was no care in the world, is it?

You know, if you were hungry, there was always going to be food. You woke up from your nap, and you didn't have to work.

The next thing you did was to have fun. Play with toys, right? Sit in front of the TV, watch Teletubbies, or whatever you were watching back then. It's a picture of a happy and peaceful and joyful life, isn't it?

And that's the life that God intended for Israel. These were blessings that He had promised them, all the way back to the time of Abraham. And so, God didn't make good on some of these promises, because even though they were exiled, they went to the land of Babylon for a time, God did bring them back after 70 years.

But, you know, it wasn't perfect, because it was only the southern kingdom that came back. Those were the two tribes, one of which was Judah. And although they did have some good shepherds thereafter, who watched out for their welfare, guided them into right relationship, and if you want to find out more about that part of history, you need to look at the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

[8 : 35] There were descriptions of that. But what they never had was, again, a king to rule over them as a nation. Instead, even during that time, there was always another empire, you know, whether it's the Babylonians or the Greeks or the Romans, that subjugated them, even though they were back in the land.

And so, God then makes one further promise, that He would raise up an ultimate shepherd. And that's in verse 5, where the Lord declares, the days are coming.

Now, whenever you see that phrase, the days are coming, that's a signal that this is about the end times, right? When I will raise up for David a righteous branch, a king who will reign wisely and do what is right and just in the land.

In his days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called, the Lord, our righteous Savior.

And all these words here give us clues, don't they? All the clues we need to identify who this king will be. So, he will be a righteous branch of David.

[9 : 45] That is, from the line of David, the royal lineage of Israel. In his days, God says, not just Judah, which is the southern kingdom I spoke of, but Israel, which is a reference to the rest of the other ten tribes.

So, all twelve tribes of Jacob will be saved and will live in safety. Because the twelve tribes of Israel was divided during the time of Solomon.

But now, by naming both Judah and Israel here, God is promising to reunite all the tribes and bring them under one king. Thirdly, though, this king will be called the Lord, our righteous Savior.

Now, in the Bible, whenever the word Lord is spelled out like this, L-O-R-D in capital letters, right? There will be L-O-R-D where the O-R-D is small letters.

But when it is in capital letters, what it's referring to is actually God's own divine name, Yahweh. And so, it's saying here that this ultimate shepherd is the Lord himself.

[10 : 51] He will be divine. And he's also going to be called righteous because, as was said earlier, he will reign wisely and do what's just and right in the land.

And thirdly, he will be called a Savior because he will save and rescue. Now, I'm sure that none of you are going to be surprised, because you're in church and you've just sung carols, that this ultimate shepherd is Jesus, right?

All the familiar carols that we've been singing, they refer to Jesus as the one born in the city of David, Bethlehem. He's the son of David.

He's the son of God. So, Jesus is this divine and sinless shepherd. He's righteous. But the question I want to consider today is this.

How does he go from reigning wisely as a king to being Judah and Israel's savior? And in particular, why does he need to be a righteous savior?

[11 : 55] Because if you think about it, you're caught in a house fire and a fireman comes to rescue you. Do you ever stop and worry about whether this fireman is righteous or not?

No. If a huge dad that you've got and a white knight comes along and he offers to cancel your dad, you don't really worry about where the money is going to come from, right?

Whether it's sort of, is he a shyster or not? No, you just take the money, right? When you're in need of rescue and salvation, you just take what's on offer.

You don't worry about whether that's a good guy that's rescuing you or not, right? Even if he's a gangster coming to save you from your fire, you say, yeah, grab his hand. But this is not so for the salvation that Jesus offers, isn't it?

And the reason for that is what we find in the second reading in 1 Peter, because we're told that Jesus saves us by dying for our sins. But first, in chapter 2, verse 22, it says that Jesus committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth.

[13 : 08] Now, this is a reference from another part of the Bible, but it demonstrates that Jesus is the righteous one, the sinless one. And then Peter says in verse 24, And so Peter is saying that he who was without sin instead bore our sin on the cross.

Now, remember I said earlier that the shepherd's main job was to protect the sheep, not from physical threats, but from straying from God's commands and worshipping idols.

And so that makes us realize, doesn't it, that Israel's greatest need was to be saved from themselves, really, from their own sin, that of straying to worship idols other than God.

It was their heart that needed guarding. Yes, there were enemies around, but the most important thing, the most important need that they have was actually to be saved from themselves, not external enemies.

But sadly, the shepherds, the good ones as well as the bad, they could not prevent the people from sinning. And so the ultimate shepherd, in order to save the sheep, had to take the punishment for them.

[14 : 29] And that's why it says there in verse 24, By his stripes we are healed. And friends, that's the same thing today. You know, when we look around the world, we think that there's a lot of bad stuff going around, isn't there?

And we are right. There is a lot of bad stuff. Wars that keep going on forever and ever. And then even in our own city, there's things that are not right.

Social unrest. People marching. Some against immigration. Others against racism. Some for the Palestinians. Some in support of the Jews.

And then when we look around in our suburbs, there's increase in violence, knife crimes and gangs and carjackings. And so you may not be convinced when I say it, actually, the biggest danger in your life that actually needs guarding is your heart.

That if I could put it bluntly, the biggest problem in our lives is actually ourselves. Now, I don't know how you reacted, but this week, there was a bit of a shocking incident in a school in Keysborough Secondary College.

[15 : 42] You heard about that? Now, when I first saw the outline of, you know, the headline, sorry, I thought, oh no, here we go again. Teens and gangs, you know, bringing their turf war into the school.

But then it turns out that actually, the stabbing of the principal was by another staff member, right? You can guess who's the one that did the stabbing, okay?

But it's the one on the left. Now, as I... But you look at both of them, right? Okay. And then further details emerged because I read another article that said that this actually, this teacher, he actually has a PhD.

And in fact, when he was in year 12, he got a perfect score for his ATAR. Right? And so you look at him and you go, this is a smart guy, right?

He's a good kid, not a bad kid. He looks normal. He does. Trust me. And yet, it's reported that when he found out he lost his job, he snapped mentally, right?

[16 : 59] Something in him just went off and he could not control his rage. And he said it happened when a door was slammed in his face. Right?

No doubt by that other good guy on the right as well. Now, I don't know about you, but, you know, I... When I just... If I care to sit down and be honest with myself, I have to think that actually I'm not beyond something like that myself.

Like, I've lost my temper before. I've said things out of anger that I really don't want to. And so I can imagine that if I were put into that amount of pressure or pressed into some situation like that, then I could snap as well.

Now, if you've ever sort of been in such a situation, you literally do scare yourself, don't you? To think what kind of person you could be.

If you've allowed your mind, you know, when there's a deep anger for someone to wonder into some of the thoughts of what you might do to someone, it can be scary, isn't it?

[18 : 10] Or when you've read a message, whether it's a text or an email, that's really hurtful, and you're so tempted to write something back and then send it, thankfully you don't, you know what you're capable of, isn't it?

And that's the thing that Jesus has come to save us from. But the only way that he can do that is by firstly bearing our sins on the cross for him.

And then when we are freed from the burden of sin, we then might be able to die to sin ourselves and live for righteousness, as the verse says.

Friends, when we give our lives over to Jesus, and when we live, we let him be king in our lives, then that is what he will do. Then he will watch over us as our ultimate shepherd.

That person that I talked about at the very start, someone who will watch over us, that's what Jesus will do as the ultimate shepherd. And here's the wonderful promise that Peter ends in verse 25 with.

[19 : 21] And I'm going to read it slowly just to let it sink in. Because Peter says, For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your soul.

So yes, we are like the sheep in Jeremiah 23, scattered, going astray. You know, a lot of times we think we might know where we're going. We have dreams and goals.

But here Peter is talking about our soul. Do we know where our soul is headed for eternity? You see, our bodies will one day fade away.

All that we've achieved in life one day will just fade into the past. But it is our souls that will live on. All of us, we have eternal souls.

And Peter says, only Jesus can shepherd that soul because He is the righteous Savior who died on the cross for us. He alone will guard our hearts so that by believing in Him, He will help us to die to sin and live for righteousness.

[20 : 36] So friends, as we lead up to Christmas this year, do you have Jesus as the shepherd of your soul? Not the shepherd of your life, this life, the practical things you need to do from one day to the next, to the year to the next, but do you know Jesus as the shepherd of the soul that will lead you, that will guide you for all eternity?

Well, friends, I hope that you will come to Jesus if you haven't. Allow Him to reign in your life as that righteous King, that righteous Savior, and then He will guard your heart.

He will shepherd your soul. Now, if you want to find out more, we're going to be checking this out over the next few weeks as we look at the Bible because there are more promises about Jesus that will encourage us to keep coming back to Him as the King of Christmas.

And then again, if you want to search the Bible even more, at the start of next year, we'll start an in-depth look at Jesus in one of the Gospels.

It's a course that we run called Christianity Explored. And we will do that so that then you can truly believe that Jesus is this shepherd that will watch over your soul.

[21 : 59] He is that righteous King that has given His life to save each and every one of us. So, let's pray now. And if you want to come and speak to me afterwards about this, then please, why don't you do that?

But let me, please join me in prayer as I pray. Father, we thank You for raising up Jesus to be the ultimate shepherd.

Thank You that He bore our sins so that we might be healed and live for righteousness. Father, I desire to live under His righteous reign.

may He watch over us and shepherd our souls for eternity. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen. Amen.