

The Righteous Branch

Jeremiah 23

WHAT WE FOUND

The woe of chapter 23 falls on shepherds, which in the ancient world meant kings: rulers who scattered the flock they did not own. God's answer comes in order: first, "I will gather the remnant of my flock" Himself (23:3), and the gathered flock "shall be fruitful and multiply," the words of Eden; then, in the book's first great messianic promise, a righteous Branch for David, a living shoot from a dynasty about to become a stump, a King who will not merely possess righteousness but *execute* it in the land (23:5).

The Branch's throne name was its own sermon: "The LORD is our righteousness" (23:6), while the failing king on the actual throne was Zedekiah, whose name is built on the very same righteousness-root; many readers hear a pointed wordplay. The last king wore righteousness as a label; the Branch will be what the name says. Six centuries later Gabriel brought the Davidic promise to its fulfillment: "the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David... and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33), words we echo in the Creed every Sunday. And the Shepherd claimed His office in person: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

Against the false prophets who preach comfort without commission, peace on demand, a message that costs the audience nothing (23:16-22), God set the test of His true word: "Is not my word like fire... and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" (23:29). The fire we met in Jeremiah's bones last week is God's own fire. His true word also consoles, but it never merely flatters: a good examination of any teaching is whether it ever calls us to truth and conversion, or only tells us what we hoped to hear.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. John Chrysostom · *On the Priesthood*

St. John Chrysostom famously evaded ordination in his youth because he understood the office, as *On the Priesthood* explains: the shepherd answers to God for the sheep. Anyone you know in ministry carries a share of that accountability, and deserves a share of your prayers.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bernard of Clairvaux · *Advent Sermons*

St. Bernard preached that the Lord comes three times: in flesh at Bethlehem, in glory at the end, and, hidden between them, an intermediate coming in grace to the soul that watches (*Advent Sermon 5*). "The days are coming," said Jeremiah, and they came; and the hidden coming continues,

to every heart that leaves the door open.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *Quoted at CCC 2009*

St. Augustine resolved our anxiety about standing before God in one line: when God crowns our merits, He crowns nothing other than His own gifts. Everything righteous in us is His gift first, and the gift is real precisely because the Giver is generous enough to make it truly ours.

Live It This Week

- Pray daily, by name, for one shepherd: your pastor, your bishop, a catechist, a parent. The woe of 23:1 tells you what their office weighs; carry a corner of it this week.
- Apply the fire-and-hammer test once: after the next sermon, podcast, or spiritual book chapter you take in, ask on paper: did this burn or break anything in me, or only soothe me?
- Each morning this week, before your feet hit the floor, pray the throne name once over your own day: The LORD is my righteousness, and ask Him to make it true in you.

Memory Verse

"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." (Jeremiah 23:5, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Jeremiah 29, and skim chapter 28 for the backstory. A letter arrives in Babylon, and it does not say what anyone wants to hear.

Catechism References

CCC 754 · CCC 436 · CCC 2009