

"The Government Will be Upon His Shoulders"

Jeremiah 23:1-8

Imagine this conversation around one of your Christmas gatherings. You're sitting by the fire after supper (roasting chestnuts of course) and there's casual conversation about family or sports or Christmases past and there's a lull in the conversation. Then someone says 'Did you hear what our Prime Minister or Premier or the President or King/Queen said last night?' Someone else is quick to respond, 'Let's not ruin Christmas by talking politics!' But you say "Why not? Christmas is really about politics!"

Think about it:

- Why did Joseph and Mary have to go to Bethlehem? Because of a government issued decree for a census that caused citizens to register in their home towns.
- What were the Magi looking for when they showed up in Herod's palace in Jerusalem? The new born king of Israel. When Herod asked the chief priests and teachers of the law where the Messiah was to be born they quoted Micah 5:2,

²"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, but of you will come for me one who will be **ruler over Israel**, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

- Why did Joseph and Mary flee to Egypt afterwards? Because a tyrant ruler felt threatened by a baby king so he enforced a local genocide on baby boys. And what did Gabriel tell Mary about Jesus?

Luke 1:32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

And of course the Is. 9:6-7 prophecy:

⁶For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Ruler. Throne. Reign. Kingdom. Rule. Government. Justice. Sounds like Christmas is very political!

This morning I want to show you from Jeremiah 23:1-8 that God knows how to govern the world and a day is coming when Jesus Christ will return and fulfill all these prophecies about His literal rule. Jeremiah lived in a time when ungodly rulers and disobedient spiritual leaders led Israel. It was the prophet's job to remind Israel's kings that God expected them to govern by the book- His book, the Scriptures of course.

We, like Jeremiah, live also in a time where unrighteousness and ungodliness describes the government of our country and most of the world. Jeremiah must have wondered (as do we) 'God what are your people supposed to do when the political leaders don't listen to you and don't care about the injustice around them?' Jeremiah not only prophesied numerous times about Israel's coming judgment at the hands of the Babylonians, but he also prophesied about Israel's future hope at the coming of the Messiah. As we conclude Advent what better thing to talk about than the final advent of Jesus Christ.

Ch. 22-23 is one whole section of God's assessment of Israel's last few kings who reigned before up until the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. God tells Jeremiah in 22:1,

This is what the LORD says: "Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there: ² 'Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, you who sit on David's throne—you, your officials and your people who come through these gates.

Jeremiah's message spoke to Josiah's sons Jehoahaz (Shallum), Jehoiakim and grandson Jehoiachin (Jehoiakim's son). When Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar who then placed his uncle Zedekiah (another one of Josiah's sons) as a puppet ruler who had to do what Nebuchadnezzar said. All of these kings did 'evil in the sight of the Lord.' If the people hoped having a new king would change their situation, they were sadly mistaken. And even these kings tried to make alliances with Egypt and Assyria in an attempt to take down Babylon. But they all failed because they were looking in the wrong place for their hope and salvation.

As much as we sometimes think that if we only had the right leader then our country would change, sadly, even those leaders will disappoint us. This is God's way of reminding us not to look to human leaders for hope because as Jeremiah shows us . . .

God Will Remove Government from Man's Shoulders One Day **(23:1-2)**

Israel was a unique nation in that God chose them from the other nations to represent Himself to the world. He chose David to be a King 'after his own heart'. He made promises to David and His descendants that He would establish their line as the kingly line and would one day rule over Israel and the world. Each Israelite king was to obey God's Word and use His Word to rule Israel by. He was actually supposed to write out a copy of the law (Ex – Deut) for himself as a reminder to keep it. But even the best Davidic kings fell short sometimes. In 22:3-4 Jeremiah reminded Jehoiakim, what God expected from them:

³ This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.⁴ For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people. ⁵ But if you do not obey these commands, declares the LORD, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin."

We know God was speaking to Jehoiakim here because Jehoiakim spent a lot of taxpayers' shekels on building a big palace for himself. He was particularly fond of cedar which was imported from Lebanon. But he did that at the expense of people. So God chastised Jehoiakim in 22:13

¹³ "Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his own people work for nothing, not paying them for their labor. ¹⁴ He says, 'I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.' So he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red. ¹⁵ "Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father [Josiah] have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. ¹⁶ He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD.

Yes Josiah enjoyed the perks of being king "food and drink" because he shepherded the people by doing what was right and just, defending the cause of the poor and needy. Sadly none of his 3 sons or grandson followed the Lord. They all did evil in the eyes of the Lord. So God promised to remove government from Jehoiakim's shoulders (and ultimately all ungodly rulers one day) because . . .

Ungodly leadership always hurts people (22:13-17)

Jehoiakim was selfish and used the people's money for himself. He used forced labour and didn't pay them. Because of Jehoiakim's disrespect for God and unconcern for people, God said this of him,

¹⁸ *Therefore this is what the LORD says about Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: "They will not mourn for him: 'Alas, my brother! Alas, my sister!' They will not mourn for him: 'Alas, my master! Alas, his splendor!' ¹⁹ He will have the burial of a donkey— dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem."*

Josephus affirms this in his records that Jehoiakim died in Babylon and received no burial. This is how God deals with ungodly rulers eventually:

God repays ungodly leadership accordingly (23:1-2)

Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. ² 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.

Jehoiakim received a just punishment for the injustice he caused others. While Paul tells us to pray for **all** government rulers in 1 Tim. 2, (so that they might be saved) we have to leave it with God to deal with them in His time and in His way if they don't repent. That doesn't make it easy, particularly when you have an evil oppressive government as some places do in the world. But God is the final judge and He will make all things right. This is the encouragement we have from Jeremiah 23.

God made things right in 586 BC when He sent Nebuchadnezzar to destroy His own temple and capital Jerusalem. God used that to refine His people; to keep a remnant safe in Babylon so that in 70 years they could come back and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. But when they went back they had no king and the temple was smaller and they were few in number and ever since then, Israel has not had sole possession of all the land God promised them nor have they been free to rule themselves. So vv.3-8 speak of a future day that has yet to happen.

³ *"I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number."⁴ I*

will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD.

This return is from all the countries where He has scattered them (v.3) and they will have godly leaders over them where they will no longer live in fear. That certainly doesn't describe their return in 536 BC when they were afraid of their neighbours (read Nehemiah) and certainly doesn't describe today where all their neighbours would like to remove them. So God is talking about a future Jewish return to Israel because this speaks of a time . . .

When His people will live in peace and security (vv.3-4)

God describes through Jeremiah a future time when Israel will be at peace. Israel won't experience peace until the end of the 7 years of tribulation, after the Anti-christ has tried to wipe them off the face of the earth. During that time Zech. 13:8 tells us 2/3 of Israel's worldwide population will die. That's 9-10 million by today's numbers. A final gathering of nations according to Daniel 11 and Zech. 14 will surround Jerusalem ready to annihilate Israel except they fail because Jesus, the righteous branch sets foot on earth once again. This is the time . . .

When His Son will rule with righteousness (vv.5-6)

⁵ "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. ⁶ 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.

There are numerous Old Testament references to a righteous "branch" shooting up from the cut off stump (but not cut down) of David's line. At first glance we might wonder, 'Does this not contradict what God said about Jehoiachin not having a descendant rule on David's throne? Because Matthew 1 traces the genealogical line of Jesus' legal earthly father, yet Jesus was not a blood descendant of Joseph but Mary alone who also traces her lineage to David through a different son of his, Nathan (Luke 3:31).

There can be no doubt that God is talking about a literal rule of Jesus in the land of Israel with a reunited (Israel – Northern Kingdom and Judah – Southern Kingdom). Jeremiah's audience would have understood this clearly. All other prophecies affirm this. Revelation 19 affirms this as does Gabriel's words when he announced to Mary about Jesus' rule one day in Luke 1:30,

"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

Jesus' rule is described in such a way that didn't describe His first coming. He did not reign when He first came. He did execute justice and righteousness in the land. Jesus came the first time to die in our place and deal with the unrighteousness of our sin. This speaks of a very specific future time when Jesus will rule . . .

In Israel (v.5) and For Israel (v.6)

If we just read what it says we'll have no problem. Jeremiah prophesied about a future time of the Messiah's reign when Judah (south) and Israel (the northern kingdom) would be reunited and

dwelling in their land. Less than half of all Jewish people (6.6 million out of 14.4 million) in the world today live in Israel. But God will bring them back, forgive their sin and they will turn to Him and to Jesus their king in their land in a time of peace and security. This describes the 1000 year rule of Jesus. Jesus will come back here once again and rule the world with justice and righteousness. Sadly, when He returns many people in the world will still reject Him but they will have to live very carefully because Is. 11 says of that time,

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

Crime will be minimal. The poor will have their needs met and the oppressed will be defended. When God establishes His government at the return of Jesus in Israel, from Jerusalem it will be so historic and miraculous it will be remembered . . .

As a new exodus (vv.7-8)

⁷ "So then, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when people will no longer say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' ⁸ but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' Then they will live in their own land."

This new exodus will be greater than the original because there God took the nation of Israel miraculously out of one geographical location (Egypt) whereas in the future He will gather them from the 4 corners of the world and bring them back to their land fulfilling His promises to Abraham, Moses, David and the new covenant completion announced in Jeremiah.

But that has yet to happen and we still live in a world dominated by injustice and unrighteousness where poverty and oppression still abound. Do we just sit around and wait for God to put the government on Jesus' shoulders? The best way we can show people we believe God will give Jesus the rule of the world one day is to

Show Others that Jesus Rules Us!

Jesus announced the kingdom already began but only for those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and accept His rule for our life. This unseen kingdom has started spiritually through you and I. If we want the world to believe Jesus will change it one day, they have to see how He's changing us now, as we submit to His rule and standards of godliness for our life. And as we try and make changes for injustice, and minister to the poor and oppressed. Kingdom citizens of Jesus show they're not living for this world but by faith in the new world order that Jesus will bring. How else can we show Jesus is ruling us?

Matt. 6:19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus' followers are to live more for eternity than the present. We should spend more on what lasts than what doesn't.

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*

Jesus' kingdom citizens are willing to suffer by living by Jesus' rules when they clash with the world's rulers.

John 13:12 *When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*

Jesus' rule is completely different from the world's. He did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom. Jesus left us with marching orders: love God and love others. That's how people know we are serious about Jesus being our King and Lord when we show we love each other and serve others as Jesus loves them.

God will continue raising up and bringing down worldly rulers until everything is in place for Jesus to return and establish His kingdom rule on earth. In the meantime let's pray as we're commanded to pray for earthly rulers but let's show the world that when we say Jesus is our Lord, we mean it by our attitude and actions.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net