

OPENING SERMON

for the

Fifty-sixth Annual Convention

of the

CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

delivered by

The Rev. Edward J. Worley, Conference President

Text: **Jeremiah 23:5-6**

Dear fellow-redeemed, who have obtained like precious faith with all the saints through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ:

In order to be saved, we know, on the basis of God's Word alone, that all of us need a foreign righteousness, an alien righteousness, a righteousness not ours by nature and life, a righteousness outside ourselves; for Holy Writ emphatically declares: "*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...*" (Isaiah 64:6a) "*...for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified*" (Psalm 143:2b) "*...for there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not*" (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

The righteousness that saves us is proclaimed in our text for this morning under the theme: "*THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*" Therein we shall hear (I) that Jesus Christ is the gift of the Father, and (II) that Jesus Christ is THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS for salvation.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, renew us in saving Christian faith that we ever put all our trust in Thy Son as our saving Righteousness before Thee unto life everlasting. To this end, bless both the preaching and hearing of Thy Word this morning; for Jesus' sake, *THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.* Amen.

Our text begins with Jeremiah 23:5: "*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.*" "*Behold,*" the Lord says – take notice with all due spiritual attention! "*The days come.*" – What days are these? This is the regular phrase used in prophetic utterances to designate the time of Christ in history. This is "*the fulness of the time,*" as the Apostle Paul says in Galatians 4, when the Messiah is bestowed in God's grace, according to His eternal plan, to save all sinful mankind.

Specially, the LORD, Jehovah, the only true God, "*will raise unto David a righteous Branch.*" The Seed of the Woman, the Virgin's Son (Genesis 3:15), the Seed of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Judah (Genesis 22:18, etc.) was to be also the seed of David (II Samuel 7:3-4, 11-16; cf. I Chronicles 17:1-15). He was to be a true human being, body and soul, to take our place under the Law, as our Substitute (Isaiah 53; Galatians 4:4-5; Philippians 2:6-8; Hebrews 2:9-18, 5:7-9, etc.). The Father would send forth His Son, His Only-Begotten, to become incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary! The Word would be made flesh to dwell among us (John 1:14).

In our prophecy, Christ is called "*a righteous Branch.*" The Hebrew term here refers, not to a

mere ordinary branch on a tree but rather to a growth that springs up from the root to form something new. This means that the Christ will not be a simple branch like all the others on the family tree of David but something far greater and new: A fresh growth that appears out of the house of David as a gift of God, bringing all the Messianic promises to complete fulfillment in history. The Branch is one of the proper names for the Christ and is used also by Isaiah (4:2) and Zechariah (3:8; 6:12).

Take careful note of the descriptive adjective “*righteous*” to describe the Branch. With David all his descendants must also confess: “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*” (Psalm 51:5). Indeed all human beings, conceived and born in a natural manner, are, by fallen nature, sinful and unclean, born of sinful flesh and thus in the same hereditary guilt and corruption. But the Branch is righteous! Mark well: This is not an acquired or imputed righteousness, but Jehovah raised Him up as a *Righteous Branch*. From His very conception He is righteous. This descriptive adjective refers to His nature, being and essence: He is the Sinless One! He will be born, as the angel said to His virgin mother, as “*that holy thing*” (Luke 1:35). The Messiah is the “*Righteous Servant*” of Jehovah (Isaiah 53:11). Scripture designates Him as “*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*” (Hebrews 7:26), “*who did no sin*” (I Peter 2:22) but rather went about, His entire life, doing nothing but good, always pleasing His Father (Acts 10:38; John 8:29). He lived a sinless life according to His sinless nature as the Righteous One. For, by the miraculous purifying power of the Holy Ghost, the supernatural intervention of God, He was conceived sinless. Being free from original sin and having committed no kind of actual sin whatsoever, He could be the sinless Substitute for sinful mankind, to take the place of everyone under the Law, both to fulfill it for us and to pay for all our sins. He was not only able not to sin, but was *impeccable*: Not able to sin! How so? Because the human nature of Christ never existed as a separate person, but from the beginning constitutes one Person with the Son of God; and God *cannot* sin! Truly tempted in all ways like as we are, He never sinned, nor could He sin! As one dogmatician (Philippi) puts it: “Able not to sin applies to the First Adam; not able to sin to the Second Adam, since this Second Adam is ‘*The Lord from Heaven,*’ I Corinthians 15:47” (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol.II, p.76, footnote #41).

The Messiah is also called a King who “*shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth*” (v. 5). He is the true Melchisedek, the “*King of Righteousness,*” whose kingdom shall never end. As the angel Gabriel told Mary, Luke 1:32-33: “*He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.*” His everlasting reign shall also be one in which He shall “*prosper.*” As one commentator (Dr. Theo. Laetsch) explains:

The Hebrew term denotes...the necessary prerequisites for a successful activity, to have insight, act with intelligent understanding. The King knows fully the will of the Lord, since He Himself is Jehovah (v. 6); cp. John 1:18; 3:12-13. He is not only willing (Psalm 40:6-8), but able (Isaiah 9:6-7; 52:13-15; 53:10-12) to carry out God’s plan of salvation to successful completion. He knows also the plans of His enemies and how to foil and utterly defeat their schemes (Matthew 4:1-11; 26:1-5, 45; 27:62-66; John 2:24-25; 12:7; 14:30). (Theo. Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, p.191).

The King shall have certain success — He shall accomplish all His Father sent Him to do! He shall “*execute judgment and justice in the earth.*” This phrase refers to the work of our “*King of Righteousness,*” His vicarious satisfaction for us under the Law, the all-sufficient

righteousness He procures for us before God as He fulfills all the demands of God for justice. Indeed the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is “*THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*” for salvation, as our final verse declares (Jeremiah 23:6): “*In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*” He shall save His people from their sins, living up to His sacred, God-given Name, Jesus. For “*in His days,*” the entire lifetime of the Savior from conception onward, He shall do all that is required as our Substitute under God’s Holy Law, thereby earning the divine right to be called “*THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*” Mark well that little word “*our.*” Here is that righteousness outside of us, that foreign, alien, righteousness of another, that holy fulfillment of God’s Law that alone avails in God’s sight for salvation. But more — this name is “*His name whereby He shall be called,*” for sinners are to be brought to the knowledge of this truth, to believe in their heart this Gospel, and confess with their mouth this saving righteousness! Saving faith is that God-wrought gift through the Gospel that acknowledges that the holy life of Jesus is our sole, saving righteousness before God, even as the holy, precious, innocent shed blood of Jesus is the sole payment for our sins before God. Remember that divine justice required that our Substitute not only bear the full, damning punishment for our sins against God’s Holy Law, but also that He fulfill the Law by a perfectly holy life. He had to render the total obedience to the Law of God that we are obligated to render but utterly fail to do. He was made under the Law (Galatians 4:4) to fulfill it in our place, as Paul declares in Romans 10:4, “*For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*” The active obedience of Christ is a vital part of His substitutional satisfaction. The *Formula of Concord* rightly states:

Since Christ is not man alone, but God and man in one undivided person, He was as little subject to the Law [that is, obliged to keep the Law...], because He is the Lord of the Law, as He had to suffer and die, as far as His Person is concerned. For this reason, then, His obedience, not only in suffering and dying, but also in this, that He in our stead was voluntarily made under the Law and fulfilled it by His obedience, is imputed to us for righteousness, so that on account of this complete obedience, which He rendered His heavenly Father for us, by [His] *doing* and suffering, in [His] *living* and dying, God forgives our sins, regards us as godly and righteous, and eternally saves us. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, III, 15, *Triglotta*, p. 919.)

The Apostle Paul declares in Romans 3:21-26: “*But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*”

God remains just and also is able to be the Justifier because He Himself has met the obligations of His Holy Law for righteousness and redemption in His Own Son, who kept the Law and shed His blood! “*Christ Jesus*” is the One, “*who of God is made unto us...righteousness...and redemption*” (I Corinthians 1:30). Romans 5:18-21: “*Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience [the] many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall [the] many be made righteous. Moreover the Law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more*

abound, that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” By faith alone, the gift of God through this very Gospel of righteousness and redemption, we are enabled to call Jesus “*THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*” The Apostle Paul confesses that a true Christian is found in Christ “*not having (his) own righteousness which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*” (Philippians 3:9). Only this Gospel gives a sinner a clear conscience and assures our hearts before God. Dr. Pieper notes:

This teaching of Scripture is of great practical importance. In his life of faith the Christian continually resorts to Christ’s vicarious fulfillment of the Law. Luther: “He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; to Him I cling; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me. Thus the Law is silenced.” (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375).

We need not fear death nor the judgment to come with the righteousness of Christ put on our account and His blood blotting out all our sins from God’s record! As we sing in the beloved hymn #371:

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
my beauty are, my glorious dress.
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
with joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in that great Day,
for who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully through these absolved I am
from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

(*TLH 371,1-2*)

He is both our Righteousness and our Propitiation, Jesus Christ the *Righteous Branch*, the *Everlasting King*, the Savior of the whole world.

God grant us to ever put our full trust in “*THE LORD, OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*” for our eternal salvation. In His saving name, Amen!

Soli Deo gloria!