

It's Christmas, and We're All in Misery - Jeremiah 23:5-6
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

For the Hubbard family, *Christmas Vacation* is probably our favorite, and the movie that has a specific tradition attached. From early in our marriage, Heidi and I watched the tale of the Griswold family on Christmas Eve, after the service and evening family gathering, and when our kids were younger after they were put to bed. We watched ole Clark while wrapping the last gifts and putting them under the tree. As kids got older they were invited in to this tradition, now it is a whole family event. The movie is about one man's attempt to provide the perfect family Christmas. In his mind it was going to be epic, culminating in the greatest gift ever, a swimming pool. Of course, he is depending on his year-end bonus to cover the down payment, but instead his work enrolls him in the "Jelly of the Month Club." Clark, Ellen, and their two kids invite both sets of grandparents, a great aunt and uncle, and of course Cousin Eddy and family just show up. What ensues is a montage of crazy and messed up moments that make us laugh and cringe at the same time.

The movie is funny because it really hits close to home, too close for some. There is a bit of Clark in all of us. We long for things to be right, to be perfect. Whether we are motivated by the desire for approval or control, we like Clark want things to work out the way we plan and have the world notice. The outcome is a performance trap that for many becomes intense and even consuming. The result in so many cases is anxiety, even on a clinical level. Perfectionism can either result in an intense pride or a strong sense of despair, depending on goals achieved. Either way, the pursuit of perfection is never actually achieved, but can and will leave us in the same trap Clark finds himself in, the trap of pressure on himself and everyone else to achieve a certain vision leaving others in the wake of anxiety and frustration.

So, is this longing bad? Actually the desire for perfection in my own life and in the world around is deeply rooted in our humanity. God made Adam and Eve perfect and put them in a perfect world. But sin wrecked everything. The Biblical ideas that articulate the sort of perfection for which we long is righteousness and justice. Righteousness is a reference to right character, living, and relationship with God, an inner perfection and holiness. Justice is about putting the world right, making sure things are fair, the marginalized and oppressed are not discarded, and the very creation is treated as God designed. Here's the problem, the more we long for and try to work toward justice and righteousness the more of a mess the world becomes. But we couple this with the pursuit of justice and righteousness on our own terms.

It is into this broke and completely imperfect world that Jesus, the righteous branch of David is born. Jeremiah paints the fallen Davidic dynasty as a giant tree that got wrapped in invasive vines causing it to tumble. Historically, this was a reference to the Babylonian captivity and the capture of the last Old Testament Hebrew king Zedekiah. This tree was supposed to be the hope for a perfect world, but the kings were far from perfect, most of them being representatives of unrighteousness and injustice as they sought their version of a perfect world while using others to achieve it. Jeremiah's prophetic prediction is that one day a little green shoot will start growing out of the stump, and this righteous branch will eventually become the mightiest tree in the woods ruling as a perfect righteous king and executing justice in the world. The name of the righteous branch is the LORD our righteousness, or Jehovah our righteousness. Don't miss this, Jehovah is the name for God, so this "righteous branch" is God, but also a human King.

Nothing was perfect about the coming of Jesus. The world was a mess from the moment He was born. If there was ever to be a "perfect Christmas" it should have been the first one. Instead it is a hot mess, with one unbelievable exception. The baby in the manger is this Righteous Branch. He is perfection, and like the shepherds we are invited to peer in and see the hope for this longing in Jesus. In His life and ministry Jesus keeps the whole Law, never sins, lives a perfect life, and is the personification of righteousness. He also puts the

world right, calming storms, walking on water, healing the sick, raising the dead, and loving the outcast and marginalized. Yet, rather than being met with honor and worship Jesus is crucified. The LORD our Righteousness dies on the cross in our place and for us. And here is the glory of the story, in His perfect life and substitutionary death Jesus becomes the LORD **our** Righteousness. God made Jesus to be sin for us so that He could make us the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5). Our longing for perfection will never be met in our own effort and self-salvation experiments. As long as we join Clark in the hopes that at the end of the story we can say, "I did it," our longing for perfection is going to fail. But when we look to and believe in Jesus our righteousness God does the amazing. He imputes the perfection of Jesus to us. He changes our account in heaven and our hearts in the now. He makes us righteous, changes us so that in life we become people of justice and righteousness, and one day will rescue us from everything that is wrong in us and in the world. This is really good news for the Clark Griswolds of the world.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Jeremiah 3	Jeremiah 4	Jeremiah 5	Jeremiah 6	Jeremiah 7	Jeremiah 8	Jeremiah 9

Reading from this past week's sermon: Jeremiah 23:5-6

Reading for Christmas Eve service: Luke 2:1-20

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: John 10:9-16

Family Worship

Song - *Hark the Herald Angels Sing/King of Heaven*

https://youtu.be/T3lghOn18VY?si=m_-XqLWYrNZkZDCR

Gospel Project

Unit: Hope for the Captives

Story: Daniel in the Lions' Den

Big Picture Question: How can we glorify God?

Answer: We can glorify God by loving Him and obeying Him.

Scripture: Daniel 6

New City Catechism

Question 52: What hope does everlasting life hold for us?

Answer: That we will live with and enjoy God forever in the new heaven and the new earth, where we will be forever freed from all sin in a renewed, restored creation.

Verse: Revelation 21:1-4

Jeremiah 23:5-6

- What is being communicated by God through Jeremiah when He says, "I will raise up for David a righteous branch?" How does this relate to Jesus?
- Why do we long for perfection in our lives and in the world? Why is this pursuit frustrating and even anxiety filled?
- What is the Bible telling us about Jesus with the name the LORD our righteousness?
- How do we see Jesus perfect righteousness and justices in His life? Why does this matter in our pursuit of perfection?

Prayer

*Pray that we would realize our longing for performance and perfection are actually to show us that Jesus is our righteousness.

*Pray for our Christmas Eve service and that people would come to know the true meaning of Christmas and find Jesus.