

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent  
Jeremiah 23:5-6  
November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Prophetic Bible passages are sometimes the most difficult to understand. What is so confusing for us is that we would like to read and understand the Bible like an encyclopedia. We want to go to a specific text and that text by itself will give us the information we need. However, the Bible does not work that way. Prophetic passages are particularly difficult for the reader because a much “bigger” picture of the whole theme or concept needs to be understood.

For example, one helpful way to understand biblical prophecy is to think of a picture of a landscape. In a landscape picture, one might have some people in the foreground, some animals grazing off in the distance, a few trees even further back, and a huge mountain looming in the distant background. Many miles may separate the objects in reality, yet all the objects appear right next to each other on the surface of the picture.

In a similar way, a single prophecy often shows numerous events separated from one another not by space but rather by time. From our perspective looking at the text, the events can seem to occur in close succession. To make sense of these prophetic pictures in Scripture, we must consider what connects the different events. Once we understand the main theme of the section, the different objects in the text become recognizable... they begin to tie together... and a connection can be made that links what God is showing us in the Scriptures right into our lives.

Now, let’s look at Jeremiah 23 again. As a matter of fact, let’s read it together: “**Behold, the days are coming, declares 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. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’**” Considering the “big picture” as we look at this prophetic picture, we hear how Jeremiah says that God will raise up for David a righteous branch. Everyone knew David. He was that great king crowned by God, the great warrior against Goliath, the great deliverer from the hands of the enemies, the great leader of a chosen people. He lived about 400 years before Jeremiah would write these words. Now, Jeremiah speaks of another from David – a King – a righteous branch – who will reign and deal wisely – who will execute justice and righteousness. This one, looking at the prophetic picture, can be seen in the same photo, but yet is still 600 years from coming as a babe in Bethlehem... some 1000 years after David himself.

We can start to see all the characters in the picture, separated by a thousand years, but coming into focus to give us one central truth. To make the picture even clearer we take a look at the Gospel text for today. This is the story of the Triumphal Entry. Two places during the church-year we hear this text. The first is right here – the first Sunday in Advent. The second time is on Palm Sunday, of course. But for today we tie this reading into the prophetic picture. We hear these words, “*Behold your king is coming to you...*” putting Jesus in this prophetic picture and calling Him a “**King that is coming.**” Secondly, we hear what the people are saying – from their very mouths: “*Hosanna to the Son of David!...*” Yes, the same David Jeremiah speaks of 600 years earlier when he said, “I will raise up for David a righteous Branch.” The “father” is King David and the Branch is Jesus Himself. What a prophetic picture all coming into focus – all the characters in the foreground and in the background set before us and plain as day.

And so, now that we have tied it all together... now that we see Jesus in the prophetic picture from Jeremiah all the way through the Triumphal Entry... so now comes the big, “So

what.” “So what,” is this prophetic picture to me? Great question for Christians who live in this day and age to ask. Why does it matter to me?

Well now, let’s put you in this picture... with David... with the Righteous Branch of David, the King Jesus. You belong in this picture. The reason, because we live in a Holy anticipation of our Lord coming again. In Advent, we don’t count down the days until Christmas like an Advent calendar would. Rather, we are counting the days until our Lord returns again. So, today, we can stand right here in this point in history and say, “*Behold, the days are coming...*” like in Jeremiah and “*Behold, your king is coming to you...*” as it does in the Gospel of St. Matthew. Today we live in the “now and not yet” of the time of our Lord. We are in that celestial, prophetic picture with our Lord – our Lord with us – even anticipating the day of our Lord to come: the last day!

Beloved keep before you the Lord as you go about your day. Each moment in the day can be spent looking for an opportunity to pray – for a situation – for a person. In the same picture and with us always is our Lord. He is the “has come, Lord” and the “He will come again, Lord” but most assuredly for us, He is the “I am with you now” Lord. Keep His law before you as He directs what we are to do for others, or not to do. Keep in mind that our Lord is with us when our sinful desires overwhelm us. Keep in mind that our Lord’s law and keeping His will for our lives is to be a part of the Christian life every moment of our lives. Keep in mind as well that the law of God shows us that we are sinners in need of repentance and forgiveness and the Lord is here right now to show us that very fact.

And then our Lord who is before us today is with us when the darkest times of our lives fill our hearts and minds. Our Lord is a Lord with victims of terrorism, victims of discrimination, victims of violence of every sort, with those who keep the peace, with those who suffer persecution, who suffer loss, who suffer at the hands or even the words of loved ones in domestic violence situations, who feel trapped in a perpetual state of depression, whose bodies are not healing the way it should, who can’t find a job, who are pressed down at every turn because things are just not going our way. Beloved in the Lord, these words are for you: “*Behold your King is coming.*” Behold, your King comes and is with you and loves you and will never let you go and will strengthen you and will see you through gifting you with all you need for this body and this life and the life to come.

In Christ, and at this meal, we are not only set in the same picture with our Lord and our fellow believers, we also are a part of the heavenly glory. When we take communion together we put in the same picture as the angels and the archangels and all the company and heaven. For that reason, we say it like that in the proper preface. Our communion is not just with those are here today but also with our loved ones in heaven. What a blessed picture this is turning out to be.

So beloved, you live in the midst of this prophetic picture – from beginning to end – just as we hear in the appointed texts for this first Sunday in the Church Year. We are blessed to be a part of it all and it is Christ the Lord who connects it all together. Jesus, the Righteous Branch, the Son of David, the King of all kings is our common thread that links us one to another. And not just to each other, but to God’s grace, to His blood shed on the cross, to the hope we have in life everlasting. Our Lord came to be with us, He comes and is with us, and He will come again. That’s the big picture. You’re in it. He is with you even unto the end of the age. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.