

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You know, one of the hardest parts about hunting for a job is preparing the resume. Wouldn't you agree? So much work goes into putting it all together, and yet, you probably wouldn't even think about looking for a job without one. You need to have a resume so prospective employers know your qualifications, your skills, your abilities, whether you'd be the right person for the job.

Well, believe it or not, Jesus also had a resume. We have it in front of us, written throughout the pages of Scripture. This Advent, as we prepare our hearts for the birth of the Christ-child, our Redeemer, we're going to spend some time looking at his resume, at his qualifications. This morning, he who is coming is OUR RIGHTEOUS BRANCH!

That's exactly how our words from Jeremiah this morning describe Jesus, the Righteous Branch. But actually, that word for branch in the Hebrew is literally a sprout. A young, tender shoot. This seedling of a promise, given as a small seed of hope, and not just for you and me.

You see, those words had to have had a profound effect on the Israelites to whom Jeremiah was primarily speaking. Because, they were in a pretty dismal situation. Jeremiah served as a prophet during the time of the Babylonian Captivity, when a large majority of the Israelites were in exile in Babylon, away from their home in Jerusalem, and even more importantly, away from their precious Temple, now lying in ruins.

You can imagine how depressed and hopeless the Israelites must have felt, thinking they would never see their beloved homes again, that they were under the constant scourge of God, brought about by their own sinfulness and their own wickedness.

They desperately needed something to hold on to, some kind of encouragement, some kind of hope to look forward to. That's exactly what Jeremiah provided. This Righteous Branch would be the fulfillment of a gracious promise God had made to his people.

Do you know what that gracious promise is? Or rather, what God's promise of grace is? Well, it's the same promise God made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, right after sin had entered the world. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

It's the same promise God repeated to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that "through your offspring, your seed, all nations on earth will be blessed."

It's the same promise God encouraged King David with when he said, "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever...Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

And now here, the same promise, "I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line." He was making the sure promise of the coming of his Son, a King who would rule forever, who would save his subjects from the greatest enemy, from Satan.

God was promising another royal branch from David's family tree. But why call him a branch?

This isn't the first place in the Old Testament where plant language, like this, was used to describe the coming Savior. Isaiah prophesied, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit...He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4but 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. 5Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. And earlier in this book, Jeremiah spoke similar words to what we have here in front of us, again calling Jesus the Righteous Branch.

So, why call him a branch? Well, at that time when Israel was in captivity, in secular literature from the Middle East, that phrase was used to denote the legitimate heir to the throne. That fits here, with God proclaiming a new heir to David's throne, an heir who would not rule over the physical kingdom of Israel, but who would instead have a greater kingdom, ruling over all creation.

That heir's kingdom and throne would last forever and ever. In that sense, the heir, Jesus, truly would be the Righteous Branch of David's line.

Now, let's look a little further down at some of the attributes on the resume of the Righteous Branch. Do you see how that Branch of Righteousness is described? "He will do what is just and right in the land." Fits right in line with his name. Jesus is the Righteous Branch. It's only fitting he does what is right and good, fair and just.

So do you know what that means? Jesus, the Righteous Branch, the King of heaven, he rules in complete fairness, meaning he punishes the evildoer and rewards the exemplary citizen. No surprise there. After all, this is the God who rather bluntly told Moses and the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me..."

The King wants subjects who are going to remain loyal to him, no matter what. He wants subjects who are willingly and gladly going to obey his commands. Plainly put, the King wants subjects who are just like him, righteous, or in other words, perfect, holy.

Are you and I those subjects? Make no mistake, we want to be, always loyal, always obedient, always righteous. But we aren't. Instead, we allow ourselves to be attacked, influenced by our King's, our Righteous Branch's enemies, the devil, the world, and our own sinful natures. With the King ruling in heaven, we find it so much easier to succumb to worldly temptations while we're here, in the world.

"The King's not here, so I can get away with my little pet sins, the ones I don't think are really that big of a deal." "I know I should be living for eternal rewards, but these worldly pleasures are here, they are visible, they are tangible, you know how tough it is to say no to that and to not focus on living for that instead of living for the eternal and living for God."

And then, doesn't it often come down to you and me giving up and just surrendering? "I've fought hard for my King, tried to live the righteous life he wants me to, but the attacks, they are so numerous and fierce, and where's Jesus to protect me? Where's Jesus to keep me from sinning? Where's Jesus to end this battle for me?"

Christ's always loyal subjects? Unfortunately, that's not you and me. It would be right and just for the Righteous Branch to judge our sins and give us the punishment we unfaithful servants deserve, cast down into the dungeon of hell.

But thankfully, the Righteous Branch doesn't judge us based on our own righteousness, or the lack thereof. You see, Jesus also provided his own resume to the Old Testament Israelites as being "the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." To Jesus, doing what was just and right in the land meant bringing the righteousness he demands, in fact, being the righteousness he demands of every one of us.

Jesus, our Righteous Branch, sprouted so he could satisfy God's justice, which called for punishment for all our sins. Jesus' life of righteousness and sacrificial death on the cross did exactly that.

Jesus did what was right. Jesus lived life without sin. He was righteous, as God requires us to be. Jesus did what was just. Jesus went to bat for us and for our sins. He suffered the consequences of our sins when he took them and nailed them to the cross, when he suffered the torments of hell in our place, but in the process completely and utterly defeated Satan and those sins. And Jesus showed himself to be our victorious King when he rose from the grave on Easter Sunday.

In essence, Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection, did exactly what Jeremiah prophesied he would do in our verses. You see, besides doing what was right and just, Jeremiah also foretold that on account of the Righteous Branch, "Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety."

So much comfort and assurance in those words. First, for those Israelites who were in Babylon, in exile, what a beautiful message of hope, the message that they would one day return to their home, to Jerusalem, and live there in safety.

But also, those same words, just as beautiful and comforting to us, too. Because of the Righteous Branch, because of our coming Redeemer, because of Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection, we have been saved...from sin...from the devil...from eternal death.

And even now, we have an assurance, a promise, from the lips of God, of what is waiting for us at the end of this road, this life, in the new Judah and the new Jerusalem. There, we have our Righteous Branch waiting for us. The King who is all powerful. The King who has and who will continue to deliver us from all our enemies. The King who is our eternal refuge. We will live with him in the kingdom of heaven, and there we will dwell in safety forever.

How about that for starting off the Redeemer's resume? The Righteous Branch, the King of heaven, come down to earth to save his subjects, you and me, so he can one day bring us all to the impregnable fortress of his heavenly kingdom, where we'll be safe forever.

And even now, he's looking after us here. Look at the final verse of our sermon text: "This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."

Can you guess who the it is? It is Jerusalem and Judah. The "it" is you and me. Because of Jesus' work to save us, you and I now bear the name of our righteous King. It's Jesus' mark on us. We are his. His righteousness is ours.

That's what gets us excited for the coming birth of our King. That's what keeps us looking forward to Jesus' second coming. Because then his righteousness which we possess now will be ours completely and ours eternally. Amen.