

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

by Jeff Strite

Jeremiah 23:1-23:6

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What was the name of that song in the video?

"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen".

Did you notice the power the video gave to that song? That wasn't done by chance. The carol "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" was meant to be a bold declaration of the strength we have in Christ.

When I hear the title of the song "God rest ye merry gentlemen" it almost sounds to me like it was saying we can go home after church to take a nap. In fact, some people (I'm told) don't even wait that long – they just nod off right in church.

But that's not what the song title originally meant.

"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" is actually an "old English" phrase which means something entirely different. The title of the song isn't about "resting."

In the language of that day "REST" meant "to make" and MERRY meant "mighty" or "powerful". Thus, the title of this song actually meant "God MAKE You MIGHTY, Gentlemen."

And you know, once you know that, the song makes a whole lot more sense: "God make ye mighty, Gentlemen, let nothing you dismay"

Why? How is God going to make us MIGHTY?

And how is He going to make it so we don't DISMAY???

(Sing)

"For Jesus Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day.
To Save us all from Satan's power ere we were gone astray
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy, oh tidings of comfort and joy."

The Song is loudly and proudly declaring – Jesus is our strength.
Because of Him we have no need to dismay or fear.
Because of Him we're saved from Satan's power.
And Because of Him we have comfort... and joy.

Essentially, that's what Jeremiah was prophesying in our text from this morning. Our sermon series for this month is: Do you SEE what I see?" and it refers to the fact that prophets were known as "seers" because they "saw" things other mortals

were not allowed to see.

And what Jeremiah saw, as a "seer", was a nation in trouble.

He saw "lost sheep".

"False shepherds".

"People in need of salvation."

The people of that day were dismayed. They were in fear.

Even if you went by the Old English terminology - there was "no rest"... and there were "no merry Gentlemen."

The shepherds of the people had failed.

The Kings and the priests and the prophets had turned their backs on God.

The nation had become easy prey for invading armies and they were always in danger.

It's against that backdrop that God made a promise through this "seer" Jeremiah: "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. 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 Righteousness." Jeremiah 23:5-6

Now who do you suppose Jeremiah was describing in this prophecy?

That's right = Jesus.

1. Jesus was the King God was going to raise up.
2. Jesus was the "righteous branch."
3. And Jesus would be called "The LORD our Righteousness."

According to what Jeremiah saw - this King, this Righteous Branch, this LORD who will be Our Righteousness - this Jesus was going to give us power, might, confidence and hope.

He was going to free us from that which would enslave us.

And I got to thinking on this.

I saw all those titles that were being given to Jesus, and I asked myself what all these titles were about. What was it about Jesus being all those things that should inspire me to confidence?

And then it came to me (this is so neat).

1st the prophecy declared Jesus was going to be my King.

God said "I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a KING who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. (vs. 6)

Now, Jesus wasn't going to be just any old King.
Back in the Old Testament, God warned Israel about asking for a King. He told them mortal Kings weren't all they were cracked up to be, and that they would soon regret their decision.
But Israel wanted a king just like everybody else had.

They wanted someone who would protect them.
Someone who would administer justice.
Someone who'd lead them to prosperity and success.
Someone they thought they could count on to do what had to be done.

ILLUS: We do the same thing with the folks we want elected to the Presidency. We believe, if only the man/woman I want is elected to office, they'll SOLVE all of our problems. That person will always do what is right (not like the other guy). If my favorite candidate is elected they will FIX everything.

But there's a problem with that kind of thinking.
(Do you know what it is?)
These leaders are all mortals.
They all make mistakes.
They all sin and fall short of the glory of God.
They can be petty and selfish.
They have own agendas... and their agenda just might not be the same one you had in mind.

God warned Israel that if they demanded an earthly King - if he sinned - the nation would suffer.

But the King that Jeremiah saw was going to be different.
THIS King would "reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land." (vs. 6)
He would not act like a MORTAL ruler... because He would not be mortal.

Unlike those mortal rulers Jesus wasn't going to disappoint us.
Jesus would be our King of Kings and Lord of Lords and every decision would be righteous and be what is best for us.
As one person once observed: "No matter who is President, Jesus is still the King."

(PAUSE) So Jesus came to be our King.
A King better and more powerful than any earthly king could ever hope to be.

2nd - Jesus came to be "the righteous branch."
"I will raise up to David a righteous BRANCH..." (vs. 6)

Now, at first glance, that doesn't seem to be a very remarkable name for Jesus.

I've got all kinds of branches out in my back yard. I have yet to be impressed with them as I pick them up and put them out by the curb to be collected by the city.

But apparently, God was very attached to this phrase – the righteous Branch. It shows up several times in the Bible.

- A little later in Jeremiah we read: "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land." Jeremiah 33:15
- In Zechariah 3:8 God declared: "...behold, I will bring my servant the Branch."
- And in Isaiah 11:1 God said "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."

In fact, that word "branch" in the Hebrew is "Netzer", and Netzer is where we get the word "Nazarene." That's why in Matthew 2:23 we read: "And he (Jesus) came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Now obviously, this "Branch" thing is VERY important to God...
But you've got to ask yourself the question: WHY?
Why would calling Jesus "the branch" even matter to me?

Well the answer is found in a couple of the verses I just quoted:

Notice again what it says in Isaiah 11:1

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; FROM HIS ROOTS a Branch will bear fruit"

Jeremiah 33:15 says it a little differently: "I will make a righteous Branch sprout FROM DAVID'S LINE..."

What God is saying is: This BRANCH (this Jesus) will have a root.

This branch wouldn't just appear one day and say "ta da"!

When this branch showed up, you'd see His roots - His credentials, His paper trail.

Did you realize that in the Old Testament there are over 300 prophecies about the coming of a Christ/Messiah? (Christ and Messiah are the same basically the same word. Messiah is the Hebrew word for "anointed one" and Christ is the Greek word for that phrase).

Over 300 times in the Old Testament God repeatedly hammered home that someone was coming – a Messiah, a Savior, a hero for His people. In fact this anticipation of a coming Christ was so much a part of the fabric of the Jewish nation

that, when John the Baptist came preaching and baptizing people for the repentance of sins, one of the questions the Pharisees asked him was: "Are you the Christ?"

By the days of Jesus, at least 5 or 6 people had appeared proclaiming that THEY were the promised Messiah.

And Jesus Himself prophesied that there would be many false teachers saying: "I am the Christ," and they will lead many astray" (Matthew 24:5) But there was only going to be one individual sent by God to be Messiah... and these folks weren't Him.

So, how could you tell if someone were sent by God, or if they were just putting you on? Well, you could tell by their CREDENTIALS.

ILLUS: Let's say someone comes to your door (knock on pulpit) and knocks on your door this afternoon. You open the door and there is someone who is dressed like a policeman. As an American citizen you have the right to ask for proof... for their credentials. What could a policeman possibly show you that would prove they are who they say they are?

That's, right. They have to show you their BADGE. That badge proves they have the right to do and say what a policeman does and says. But if they don't have that badge, they don't have that right. And they probably aren't who they say they are.

Credentials are important.

ILLUS: About 500 years BEFORE Christ a man named Siddhartha was born. We know him as Buddha. He was a powerful teacher and he had many things to say about how people could live decent lives on earth. When he died people built a religion around his teachings that we call Buddhism.

But hundreds of years before Buddha was born, nobody ever said that somebody like Buddha would be born, or where he'd be born, or what he'd say, or do, or teach or how he'd die. Buddha simply popped up in history and his teachings began a world religion.

About 500 years AFTER Jesus was born, there was another man named Mohammed. People thought Mohammed was a powerful teacher and a major world religion (Islam) has grown out of his writings and teachings. But hundreds of years before he was born, nobody ever said that somebody like Mohammed would be born, or where he'd be born, or what he'd say, or do, or teach or how he'd die. Mohammed simply popped up in history and his teaching began a world religion.

These founders of major world religions had no paper trail.

They had no credentials to say they had the right to say what they said.

They had no roots.

BUT Jesus was different.

For hundreds of years before He was born God declared (over and over again) where He'd be born, how He'd live, what He'd teach and how He'd die. For hundreds of years God hammered home: someone's coming. And when Jesus did come, He fulfilled all the prophecies out of the Old Testament about the Messiah who had been promised.

No other world religion can claim anything of the sort.

We have a great King who was the "righteous branch".

He had the credentials to claim to be the King who we should honor and obey.

But then God declares that this King - this Righteous Branch - was going to have a special name.

"This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness." (vs. 6)

The LORD our righteousness?

What's that all about?

Well, first - it's a play on words.

The King of Judah at that time was a man called "Zedekiah".

Zedekiah was NOT a very good king.

He was an evil and wicked man who had rejected God.

But his name was interesting.

ILLUS: At our Saturday Morning Prayer breakfasts we're studying the men of the Bible. We pick a man's name at random from Scripture and discuss what the Bible has to say about him. And one of the questions we are challenged to look up on each of these men is: "what does this man's name mean?"

So I looked up "Zedekiah" to find out what his name meant.

You know what it means?

"Jehovah is Righteous"

God was telling an unrighteous King - whose name meant "Jehovah is Righteous" - that He was going to raise up a much better King than Zedekiah would ever be.

God would raise up a King who will live up to the name "The LORD Our Righteousness".

BUT this title "The LORD our Righteousness" was more than just a play on words. This prophecy is saying that Jesus would be "OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS"

1 Corinthians 1:30 says that "Christ Jesus (was made) our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

Now I could preach a whole sermon just on that one verse, but I want to zero in

that term:

"Jesus is OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS"

What does that mean?

It means... you NEED what He's got.

Without Jesus you don't have God's Wisdom.

You are not sanctified.

And you can't be redeemed.

But not only that... but you don't have any righteousness to brag about!

In the Bible there's TWO kinds of righteousness:

- There's GOD'S righteousness.
- And there's YOUR righteousness.

In fact there's a term that describes YOUR righteousness....

It's called "SELF-righteousness."

That doesn't sound too appealing does it?

It's something of an insult to say that someone is "self-righteous."

But even worse than that, most people realize that their own righteousness isn't enough.

For example, if you asked most folks the question: "Are you going to heaven?" do know how they'd answer?

That's right: "I hope so."

Do you know what they are saying?

They're saying: "I HOPE I'm righteous enough to get into heaven."

But they're not sure.

How come?

Because they know they've messed up.

There are things in their lives that they don't want you knowing about.

There are things they've said, done or thought that would make them hide in shame if anyone ever found out.

And the same is true of you... and the same is true of me.

These folks believe their only hope is to have done enough good things to balance out the bad things they've done in their lives. That way they can MAYBE get into heaven because they've done enough good things. In fact, they believe that their good deeds (if they outweigh the bad) will buy them a ticket into the heavenly choir and God couldn't keep them out if He wanted to because their own "self-righteousness" will have earned them a spot.

But the Bible is very clear on this: You're not good enough to be good enough for God.

You're not good enough to be good enough to get into heaven.

Your sins would keep you out.

But the Bible also teaches us, that's OK.

Why? Because Jesus is willing to COVER YOU with HIS righteousness.

That way, when you stand before the throne of God...God won't see YOUR sin.

He won't see your unrighteousness.

What God will see is the blood of Jesus.

CLOSE: A man had a dream. He dreamed that - after living a "decent" life - he died.

He said: "In my dream I was sitting on a bench in the waiting room of what looked like a court house. The doors opened and I was instructed to come in and have a seat by the defense table. As I looked around I saw the "prosecutor." He was perhaps the most evil person I have ever seen.

Then I sat down and looked to my left and there was my lawyer, and HIS look comforted me. And there was something vaguely familiar about him... but I couldn't place it.

The corner door flew open and in came the judge in full flowing robes. There was a power and a fearsomeness about Him that startled me. I couldn't take my eyes off of him. As he took his seat behind the bench, he said, "Let us begin."

The prosecutor rose and said, "My name is Satan and I am here to show you why this man belongs in hell." And then he proceeded to tell about the lies that I had told, things that I stolen, how I'd cheated others. And he continued to list one embarrassing thing after another from my life. The more he spoke, the further down in my seat I sank. I was so humiliated that I couldn't look at anyone, even my own lawyer.

But as upset as I was at Satan for telling all these things about me, I was equally upset at my representative who sat there silently. He did not offer any form of defense at all. I mean - I know I'd been guilty of those things, but I had done some good in my life! Couldn't that at least equal out part of the harm I've done?

Satan finished with a fury and said, "This man belongs in hell, he is guilty of all that I have charged and there is not a person who can prove otherwise."

When it was his turn, my lawyer asked if he might approach the bench. As he got up and started walking, I was able to see him in his full splendor and majesty. I realized why he seemed so familiar. This was Jesus representing me.

He stopped at the bench and softly said to the judge, "Hi Dad," and then turned to address the court

"Satan is correct in saying that this man had sinned, I won't deny any of these allegations. And yes the wages of sin is death, and this man deserves to be punished."

Jesus took a deep breath and turned to his Father with outstretched arms and

proclaimed, "However, I died on the cross so that this person might have eternal life and he has accepted me as his Savior, so he is mine. He has believed in me, he has repented of his sins, he has confessed me as his Lord and Master and he has died to his sins and has been buried in the waters of baptism and risen up a new creation. His name is written in the book of life and no one can snatch him from me. This man is not to be given justice, but rather mercy."

As Jesus sat down, he quietly paused, looked at his Father and said, "There is nothing else that needs to be done. I've done it all."

The judge slammed the gavel down. And declared "This man is free. His penalty has already been paid in full. Case dismissed."

Jesus is our advocate with the Father. The nail prints in his hands and feet and the mark of the spear in His side are our only hope of salvation... because it was HIS righteousness that gives us the promise of heaven.

INVITATION