

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The more that people turn away from God, the more they look to the state as god. They look to the state to regulate every aspect of life. The civil government of China plays God, and has a social credit system that mimics Christian sanctification. Some are concerned that in future there might be such a system in the United States. (<https://thehill.com/opinion/finance/565860-coming-soon-americas-own-social-credit-system>) Certainly, the civil government in the United States grows more oppressive with each passing day. Last year, President Donald Trump worked with the Centers for Disease Control to limit the spread of COVID-19. Among other measures, he directed the Centers for Disease Control to ban the eviction of residents who failed to pay rent. Then he directed the Center to issue a moratorium on the collection of rent. When Joe Biden succeeded Trump, he ordered an extension of the moratorium on evictions. Biden admitted that most legal scholars he consulted agreed that his order was unconstitutional, but said he hoped that it would do some good before the courts blocked it. Biden has also issued a vaccine mandate, which courts have blocked. Nicolás Gómez Dávila has written, “Dying societies accumulate laws like dying men accumulate remedies.” (Nicolás Gómez Dávila, *Sucesivos Escolios a un Texto Implícito*) Thoughtful Christians have warned of tyranny. C.S. Lewis wrote:

Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron’s cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience. They may be more likely to go to Heaven yet at the same time likelier to make a Hell of earth. This very kindness stings with intolerable insult. To be “cured” against one’s will and cured of states which we may not regard as disease is to be put on a level of those who have not yet reached the age of reason or those who never will; to be classed with infants, imbeciles, and domestic animals. (C. S. Lewis, “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment”)

J.R.R. Tolkien wrote, “The most improper job of any man, even saints (who at any rate were at least unwilling to take it on), is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity.” Men would have heaven on earth, but they cannot have it unless they have as their ruler Jesus Christ, king of heaven and earth.

After the Great Flood, God promised that He would never again destroy the world. With His calling of Abraham, He began to save it. He made a covenant with Abraham in which he promised that he would make of him a great nation, and that in him all the nations of the world would be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3) Later, God told Abraham that kings would come from him. (Genesis 17:6) God repeated His promise to Isaac, and to Jacob. (Genesis 26:2-5; 35:10-12)

After God mightily delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt, He through Moses made a covenant with them in which He gave them His law, and promised to be their God, so long as they obeyed Him. He said to them:

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye

shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. (Exodus 19:4-6)

The people agreed to terms, saying, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.” (Exodus 19:8) Israel were a kingdom, and the Lord was their king.

After the death of Joshua, Moses’s successor, judges administered the affairs of Israel. When the judge Samuel reached old age, he appointed his two sons, Joel and Abiah, as judges, but they were corrupt. The Scriptures say, “And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.” (1 Samuel 8:3) So, the elders of the people demanded that Samuel give them a king. Their demand displeased Samuel, who took it as repudiation of his administration. The Lord reassured Samuel that Israel had not rejected Samuel so much as they had rejected God Himself. He said to Samuel, “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” (1 Samuel 8:7) So, God in His wrath told Samuel to give Israel a king, but first to warn them how tyrannically such a king would rule them. (1 Samuel 8:7-18; Hosea 13:11) The people disregarded Samuel’s wisdom, and so, on God’s instruction, he gave them a king.

The first king to rule Israel was Saul. Saul began well enough, but he soon declined. He looked after his own interests, and not after the interests of God, and rebelled against God. So, God would remove Saul and replace him with a man who would do His will. Samuel the prophet said to Saul:

Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee. (1 Samuel 13:13, 14; compare 1 Samuel 15:28)

The Lord gave the kingdom to David, who was a man after God’s own heart. (1 Samuel 16:7; Acts 13:22) Saul, who was in the beginning reluctant to rule, refused to relinquish power. In the end, after the Philistines defeated Saul in battle, he committed suicide. (1 Samuel 31:4-6; 1 Chronicles 10:4-6) It was God who killed Saul, however. The Scriptures say:

So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; And inquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse. (1 Chronicles 10:13-14)

David was, unlike his predecessor, a righteous king, and He fulfilled the will of the Lord. The Lord told Solomon, David’s son and heir, that David walked “in integrity of heart, and in uprightness.” (1 Kings 9:4) David understood that he ruled for God and was bound to execute God’s will. He ensured that God’s law was upheld, so that there was righteousness in the land. The Scriptures say, “And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people.” (2 Samuel 8:15) David had one great lapse, when he took to himself Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, and had that good man killed. In the end, David repented for his sins, and the Lord forgave him, but that episode forever remains a black mark on an otherwise unblemished record. The Scriptures say, “David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned

not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.” (1 Kings 15:5)

When David was king over Israel, God made a covenant with him in which He promised that one of David’s descendents would inherit his throne and reign forever. God said to David:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. (2 Samuel 7:12-16)

When David neared the end of his life, he reminded his son, Solomon, who would succeed him, of the Lord’s promise, and he charged his son to be faithful to the Lord. (1 Kings 2:1-4) When Solomon was king, he dedicated the temple to the Lord, and prayed to the Lord, reminding Him of His promise to David. (1 Kings 8:25, 26) When Solomon completed construction of the temple, the Lord answered Solomon’s prayer, saying:

And if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments: Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel. (1 Kings 9:4, 5)

Sadly, Solomon did not walk before the Lord as His father David walked, and his kingdom was, after his death, divided. Most of the kings that followed Solomon were not righteous, but rebelled against the Lord, and led the people in rebellion. The Lord punished the northern kingdom of Israel by sending the Assyrian army to conquer it, and carry the people away into exile. About One-hundred and twenty years later, He punished the southern kingdom by sending the Babylonian army to conquer the southern kingdom of Judah, and carry the people away into exile in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, placed on the vacant throne in Judah, Zedekiah, son of Josiah. The Scriptures say of his reign:

And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel. Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 36:12-14)

God through Jeremiah the prophet told Zedekiah to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, or be destroyed. (Jeremiah 27) Zedekiah, in order to resist the Babylonian monarch, made an alliance with Egypt, that ancient enemy of Israel. When Nebuchadnezzar learned of the alliance, he sent his army to lay siege to the city of Jerusalem. During the siege, Jeremiah prophesied to Zedekiah his sure destruction. (Jeremiah 32) Although Jeremiah prophesied that Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed because of the wicked rulers and their

wicked subjects, there was hope. Jeremiah prophesied the coming of a righteous ruler for Israel and Judah. He said:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness. (Jeremiah 33:14-16)

God had made a covenant with David, in which He promised that one of his descendants would inherit his throne and reign in righteousness forever. David ruled righteously, but imperfectly. The heir God promised him would rule perfectly righteously, and forever.

Zedekiah refused to listen to Jeremiah, and so he met his doom. After eighteen months of siege, the city finally fell to the Chaldeans. They captured Zedekiah, and when they did, they slaughtered his sons in front of him, and afterward put out his eyes, and carried him away in chains into Babylon, leaving the city and the temple in ruins. (2 Kings 25:1-7)

Some years later, as Jeremiah prophesied, the Jews returned to Zion from Babylon. They rebuilt the city of Jerusalem, and the city. For many generations, the people waited for that branch of righteousness to grow. Finally, nearly six hundred years after Jeremiah's prophecy, the Son of God came into the world. Many of the Jews were wicked, however, and rejected Him. They refused to recognize Him as king, and they killed Him. This was no defeat for Him, however, but victory, for by His death He atoned for the sins of His people, and by His resurrection He gave them new life by His Spirit. He is now by His authority and power executing judgment and righteousness in the land. His first great act of judgment was to destroy Jerusalem and the temple because the Jews rejected Him, and persecuted the Church, His body. He said:

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. (Luke 21:25-28)

Jesus told His followers to look expectantly for this judgment because it would to them be a sure sign that He had ascended into heaven, as Daniel prophesied, and it would be for them deliverance from their persecutors. He said:

Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. (Luke 21:29-33)

Jesus told His followers to look for this sign, and that it would take place in the lifetime of those then living. He warned them to watch also themselves, to live as His true disciples, so that they might escape the judgment that was about to come upon the unbelieving Jews., He said:

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. (Luke 21:34-36)

Jesus did ascend into heaven, as the apostles bear witness, and He did receive His dominion. Moreover, about a generation later He did destroy the city of Jerusalem and the temple, thereby avenging Himself against His enemies, the Jews, and relieving His people from their persecution.

The Son of God came once into the world to die for the sins of His people, and He ascended into heaven to claim His kingdom. He will come again into the world to raise the dead and to judge all mankind in righteousness. Saint Paul wrote to the Thessalonians telling them that he prayed for them that they might be ready to face the Lord Jesus at His second coming. He wrote:

Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13)

Jesus told His disciples to love one another as He had loved them, and that if they would love each other as Christ loves them, then people would know they are His disciples. (John 13:34, 35) The Christian ought to love all men, but especially other Christians. If a Christian loves other Christians, then He loves Jesus, and will stand righteous before Jesus when He returns.

On this, the first day of Advent, let us recognize Jesus as that Branch of righteousness promised to David. Let us understand that He ascended to His Father to inherit His kingdom. Let us keep ourselves from sin as we look for His coming again.

Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God or Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.