

6

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS



*As a kid, what made you say
"That's not fair!"?*

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Because God is righteous, He will ultimately make all things right.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I have ten grandchildren, and I find myself repeating some of the same things my dad would say to me. For example, I'll sometimes hear one of them complaining about something that happened at school, and I'll hear: "That's just not fair!" In those moments, I echo what my father said to me: "Who said life would always be fair?"

I'm guessing you've heard that too. And if you're a parent, I'm guessing you've also said it.

Life isn't fair! It's frustrating when we see people with poor character and questionable morals seem to get ahead in life; meanwhile, those who seek to do right often fall behind. Such events might cause us to think that God is not fair. *Why doesn't He punish the unrighteous and reward the righteous?*

We are not the first ones to raise that question. God showed us much about Himself through the prophet Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 33, God revealed Himself as Our Righteousness; in so doing, He helps us deal with those "unfair" moments.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Jeremiah 33:3-5

³ Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. ⁴ For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege mounds and against the sword: ⁵ They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans and to fill them with the dead bodies of men whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their evil.

Nearly a hundred years after Assyria had taken the ten northern tribes of Israel into captivity (see 2 Kings 17:6-18), Judah also stood on the brink of collapse. Jeremiah was God's spokesman during the latter part of these tumultuous years. His ministry began during the reign of the good king Josiah, who was profoundly moved when he rediscovered the Word of God. As a result, Josiah restored the temple and revived worship. (See 22:8-13; 23:4-25.) Unfortunately, the revival and reform which occurred during Josiah's reign ended abruptly after the young king's untimely death. (See 23:29-30.) Spiritual decline led to rapid moral decay and oppression; violence and political unrest were the order of the day.

We pick up the narrative over twelve years later, during the reign of King Zedekiah. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was Judah's primary nemesis. Zedekiah sent two priests to Jeremiah asking the prophet to inquire to the Lord on their behalf. (See Jer. 21:2.) The prophet's response was an unexpected warning: God was going to use the Chaldeans to bring judgment upon His own people. (See vv. 4-7.) The Lord invited Judah to display the fruits of repentance and be restored (see 22:3-4), but Zedekiah and the people ignored the warning of the prophet and rejected the kindness of the Lord. Zedekiah imprisoned Jeremiah in the guards' courtyard, in an attempt to silence the prophet. Jeremiah told Zedekiah he would soon see Nebuchadnezzar face to face because he would be taken captive to Babylon. (See 32:1-5.)

What captures your attention about God's character in these verses?

QUESTION #2

The people of Judah must have wondered how to understand Jeremiah's message in light of God's promises and purposes for His own people. Had not God promised to establish David's throne forever? (See 2 Sam. 7:10-16.) Yet the people brought this on themselves through their own disobedience and sin!

God disciplines us just as He disciplined the people of Judah, but His purpose is to bring us back to Himself—and even into a closer walk with Him. God invites us to call to Him. We find the answers we seek and the hope we need when we call to Him. Then He reveals to us “great and hidden things that you have not known.”

The “hidden things” God would reveal remind us our knowledge is limited but God's knowledge is unlimited. God desires to answer the prayers of His people, but we must first cry out to Him.

Jeremiah had an even more dramatic word from God. God would raise up a Righteous Branch from the line of David, a King who would bring judgment and justice to the earth. He would be called “The LORD is our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6)—*Yahweh Tsidkenu*.

Jeremiah 33:6-8

⁶ Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. ⁷ I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. ⁸ I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.

The bad news is eclipsed by the good news that follows. God now would extend mercy to them—mercy that would result in health, healing, and an abundance of peace and truth. Both Judah and Israel would be brought back from captivity and reunited.

But the very best news of all was that God would deal with their sin. God Himself would bring health and healing, and the past sufferings of the people would be replaced by “abundance of prosperity and security.” This unusual phrase suggests a lasting peace. God also promised His people would return to their land and rebuild the nation as it was before the two kingdoms were divided. While God's judgment of sin is just, His mercy and kindness are abundant. His restoration of His people would be complete.

This good news culminates in the promise that God would deal with their sin problem. The Lord used three words to describe sin:

- ▶ **Avon.** A word rooted in the idea of twisting or bending.
- ▶ **Chata'ah.** A word that carries the idea of missing the mark.
- ▶ **Pesha.** A word that means to resist authority or to rise in opposition against a ruler.

Despite the rebellion of God's people, His desire was to forgive and restore. The problem of our sin and rebellion is one that runs throughout the Bible, but alongside it is the testimony of God's desire to redeem and restore. The depravity of humanity is clear, but equally clear is God's solution. We want things to be just and right. We want life to go well—and so does God! Yet in those moments when it doesn't seem that life is either just or right, we should remember that God is at work!

Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”

By announcing, “Behold, the days are coming,” Jeremiah declared the time was near at hand when the people would see the fulfillment of “the promise” for both the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The promise concerned the restoration of the Davidic line. God would make things right!

How have you experienced God's restoration?

QUESTION #3



Righteousness is not just a description—He is a Person! “The LORD is our righteousness.” God would “cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David,” who would “execute justice and righteousness in the land.” Of course, this “righteous Branch” referred to the coming Messiah.

The name of God that affirms His righteous character will also become the name of Jerusalem because the city will take on His character. Jerusalem would be restored and become what God always intended it to be—a city marked by righteousness. (See Isa. 1:26, 62:2-4; Jer. 3:17.)

Paul spoke of his own “righteous” accomplishments based on his strict adherence to the law. In Christ, he saw those accomplishments as mere rubbish. (See Phil. 3:4-7.) Why would this religious man consider his own righteousness as rubbish? “Because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (vv. 8-9).

On those days where life doesn’t go right, trust that God will ultimately make all things right. He will bring His righteousness to bear on all things, including the lives of those who follow Him.

How do the promises in these verses point forward to Jesus?

QUESTION #4

How can our actions and attitudes demonstrate that we follow God who is our righteousness?

QUESTION #5

GOD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Use the following acrostic to describe some things that you look forward to God making right one day. (An example has been provided.)

R-relationships that are pure and holy.

I-

G-

H-

T-

Write a prayer of thanks to God our Righteousness, thanking Him ahead of time for all that you know He will do because of who He is.

"Our righteousness is in Him, and our hope depends, not upon the exercise of grace in us, but upon the fullness of grace and love in Him, and upon His obedience unto death."

—JOHN NEWTON

LIVE IT OUT

God is Our Righteousness. How will you let that truth make a difference in your life? Choose one of the following applications.

- ▶ **Confess.** Because God is righteous, He stands apart from sin. Enter into a relationship with Him, or restore your fellowship with Him, by confessing any sin in your life.
- ▶ **Trust.** Life is not always fair. Even when it feels like the wrong side is winning, God will have the final say. In the meantime, trust Him. He loves you, and in His righteousness, He will make things right.
- ▶ **Stand.** The trend in our culture is to believe we can each have our own definition of righteousness. Instead of becoming a standard to ourselves, Jesus is the standard for righteousness. Stand with Him and stand for Him in doing and proclaiming what is right.



We all have plenty of examples of life not being fair. Thankfully we know all will be made right in the end by *Jehovah Tsidkenu*, God Our Righteousness.

My thoughts



MEANT

BY TONY EVANS

You've probably heard someone say something they probably shouldn't have said or done something that lacked tact, but someone else tried to cover it up with, "They meant well."

What they were saying is that even though what the person said or did created a negative reality, that was not their intention. Their motives were pure.

But that was not the case with Joseph's brothers when they stripped him of his coat and dumped him in a pit. Nor was that the case when they greedily plucked him from the pit and sold him for a profit to slave traders headed to a foreign land.

But God meant ...

We read, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20).

God's sovereignty does not only include good things, but it also includes the bad and what other people mean for harm.

Very few people get to God's intended purpose for their lives quickly. It takes time not only to develop you for your destiny but to develop your destiny for you. God is the master weaver, and things are rarely as they appear. That is why it is so critical to walk by faith and not by sight.

Have you ever seen an orchestra when musicians first come out and are getting ready to play? All of the instrumentalists are warming up at the same time, and it sounds like chaos. It sounds like no one on the platform even knows how to play. That is because all of the different sounds are discombobulated all over the place. There is no harmonizing taking place.

Then all of a sudden, out of nowhere it seems, a conductor walks out. He stands confidently and quietly in front of the musicians. He pulls out a small stick and raises it slightly. When he does, everyone in his or her chairs who had been playing their instruments sit up straight and look directly at him. Then when he taps the stick a couple of



times and begins to wave his hand, what had once appeared to be pure chaos now makes sense. The random, disconnected tunes that had previously polluted the air suddenly turn into a beautiful, powerful harmonious song.

Friend, if you feel like your life is in chaos, with so many disjointed and disconnected noises, don't leave the concert hall before the symphony swells. Don't check out on your faith. Wait for the Conductor to appear, because when the time is just perfect, He will bring harmony to discord. He will show up and turn a disappointment into a destiny.

Detours begin to make sense when God brings life's ups and downs into harmony.

It may look like God has your life in bits and pieces right now. You can't possibly see how, or why, any of it could amount to much good. There doesn't appear to be a real connection to a lot going on. The delays are bitter. The disappointments leave a bad taste in your mouth. But when you allow God, in His providential care, to mix it all together according to His purposes and plan, all things will work together for our good. I promise. And the reason why I can promise is because God says so in His Word. It's probably a verse you have heard so many times that it may have somehow lost its impact, but if you will let the truth of it truly sink in, it can change your entire life.

"We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). And that good will always be connected with conforming us to the image of Christ. (See v. 29.) For God is not just concerned about our circumstantial deliverance, but more importantly, He is concerned about our spiritual development. To that end, He will use all things to work together for good.

Even those things that others may have meant for evil.

All things means all things.

Tony Evans is founder and senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, founder and president of The Urban Alternative, former chaplain of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys, and present chaplain of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks. His radio broadcast, "The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans," can be heard on nearly 1,000 U.S. radio outlets daily and in more than 130 countries. For more information, visit TonyEvans.org.