



Lesson 15 ~ Yahweh Tsidkenu

The LORD Our Righteousness

Jeremiah 23:1-6

♥ Heart Talk

When you meet with your small group, share something about your reciting and meditating on **Psalm 23** this week. Have you been able to recite it several times a day? Have you noticed any changes in how you view God or how you handle everyday life? If you haven't been doing this exercise, there is still lots of time to begin and continue doing it for a few weeks! *Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly . . . (Col 3:16).*

Introduction

The Hebrew word *Tsidkenu* (sid-KAY-nu) comes from combining the Hebrew words *tsedsk* (sid-KAY) which means "straight" or "right" and the possessive pronoun *nu* (our) – thus *Yahweh Tsidkenu* – **The Lord Our Righteousness**. The word *tsedsk* (sid-KAY) appears over a thousand times in Scriptures and is translated "right," "righteous," "righteousness," "just," "justify" and "declared innocent." It is only in examining God's character that the word *tsedsk* (righteousness) can be fully understood.

This name of God was given to the prophet Jeremiah at a time when the kingdom of Judah had failed miserably in obeying *Yahweh*. As a result, they were about to be attacked and taken into captivity by the Babylonian Empire. Even though God's people had failed to be righteous, they were still given hope and a promise that someday they would be ruled by a King who would reign forever with wisdom and justice. Not only would this King *be* righteous, but he would also *give his righteousness* to his people, assuring them of a right standing before God forever.

♥ Heart Preparation

Jesus' Encouraging Words to You . . .

*Don't look for affirmation in the wrong places: your own evaluations, or those of other people. The only source of real affirmation is My unconditional Love. Many believers perceive Me as an unpleasable Judge, angrily searching out their faults and failures. Nothing could be farther from the truth! I died for your sins, so that I might clothe you in My garments of salvation. This is how I see you: radiant in My robe of **righteousness**. When I discipline you, it is never in anger or disgust; it is to prepare you for face-to-face fellowship with Me throughout all eternity. Immerse yourself in My loving Presence. Be receptive to My affirmation, which flows continually from the throne of grace.*

Jesus Calling (February 28) by Sarah Young

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently before him . . . Psalm 37:7. Continue to practice **sitting quietly before God, in silence, for 5 minutes** in order to prepare your heart to receive from God. As you sit quietly, letting your body and mind relax, imagine the peace of God creeping down over your head, your shoulders, arms, hands, legs and feet. Gently let go of all things that press upon your mind, setting them aside for right now. Keep your mind fixed on Jesus himself and let the peace of God fill you completely.

A Prayer to Help Prepare Your Heart

*Burn Holy Fire. Cleanse my desires.
Search me inside. Let nothing hide.
Burn Holy Flame,
until the same heart that's in You is burning in me.
Burn all that's dark, selfish or cold.
Soften my heart, possess my soul.
Burn Holy Flame,
until the same heart that's in You is burning in me.*

Clay McLean 1987

Questions

Read **Jeremiah 23:1-6**.

1. For now, these verses are lifted out of context, but from what is said in **23:1-2**, what can you surmise about the present condition of God's people and the leaders who rule them?
 - ♥ What positive and negative effects can leaders have on those they lead? Do you think it is fair that God holds leaders responsible for the condition of the people they lead? Why or why not?
 - ♥ When was a time when you were under "good" leadership? "Bad" leadership? What specific impact did each of these leaders have on you? For you, what defines a "good" or "bad" leader?
2. From what you read in **23:4-6**, what is God's description of a good leader?
 - ♥ What present day examples can you think of where leaders tend to act like shepherds and people tend to act like sheep? When have you seen a "shepherd" lead the "sheep" astray or a "shepherd" take advantage of the "sheep?" What should "sheep" do when this happens?
 - ♥ Whom has God placed in your care and to whom are you a "shepherd?" Do you feel you are accountable to God for those you lead or care for? Why or why not?
 - ♥ The name of God we will study in this lesson is *The LORD Our Righteousness (23:6)*. What comes to mind when you hear the word "righteous" or "righteousness." Why would this be an important trait for a leader?

Historical Background - As we have seen in these lessons, God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt and led them to Canaan, the Promised Land, making them his very own nation, ruled and governed by his commands and laws. Israel was to be a nation different from all the nations of the world, acknowledging and worshipping the one, true God, *Yahweh*. Through Israel, *Yahweh* was going to bless all the nations of the world by sending the Messiah, a Savior, who would provide for the reuniting of all people's back to God, their Creator. For this reason, it was very important that Israel, as a nation, remain faithful to *Yahweh*, loving and obeying him and living life as he prescribed. When Israel strayed, God would raise up a judge or leader or king or prophet who would call the people to repentance and lead them back to God.

Jeremiah was a prophet sent by God to speak to the kingdom of Judah, calling them to repentance and warning them of what would happen if they continued in disobedience. For 40 years Jeremiah pleaded with the people to return to God - and warned them what would happen if they didn't - but hardly anyone listened. Because of his message, he was rejected by family, friends and neighbors, laughed at by those he was trying to save, and even thrown into prison when the king got tired of hearing him. Jeremiah is often called the "*weeping prophet*" because he wept and grieved deeply as he shared God's heart of brokenness over the sins of his people. Read about Jeremiah's call in **Jer. 1:1-10**.

3. Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, what two choices did Moses give God's people and what were the consequences of each choice (**Deuteronomy 30:15-18**)?

- ♥ Why did God let the people choose whether or not they would obey God's commands instead of just making them obey? Are we given the same choice today? Why or why not?
 - ♥ Why does God give us "rules" – do's and don'ts – to live by? Are these "rules" for his benefit or ours? How so? What is your general attitude towards God's "rules?" Why?
 - ♥ What are some of God's "rules" that we are to live by today? What, would you say, are some blessings of obedience and some dangers of disobedience?
4. Jeremiah stood alone, speaking for God, during the reign of the last five kings of Judah, all of whom except one, "did evil in the eyes of the LORD." According to **2 Kings 21:1-6**, what, specifically, were some of the sins of the "shepherds" (kings) of Judah?
- ♥ How important is it that our leaders (shepherds) today obey God's commands and live life as God prescribes? What are we to do if they don't? What can we learn from Jeremiah's example?
 - ♥ How would you define idolatry? Why is God opposed to it (**2 Corinthians 6:14-16**)? What are some present day idols (**Colossian 3:5; Ephesians 5:5**)? How do we "get rid" of an idol? How is idolatry like "spiritual" adultery (**Jeremiah 3:19-20**)? How does unfaithfulness affect a relationship?
 - ♥ In **Leviticus 19:31** and **Deuteronomy 18:9-13**, God's people were expressly told not to have anything to do with mediums, spiritists, psychics, sorcery, witchcraft or fortune-telling. Are these commands for us today? Why or why not? Why is God opposed to these things and to what can these practices lead?
5. Just like Israel and Judah, we all sin and wander away from God. When we do, what is it that God desires us to do (**Jeremiah 3:11-14**)?
- ♥ We see that sin and disobedience provokes or arouses God's anger (**Jeremiah 3:12; 2 Kings 21:6**). Can you think of some reasons why this is so? Is God's anger like human anger? Why or why not?
 - ♥ Josiah was a good king during Jeremiah's time, who, when confronted with God's Word, showed his repentance by tearing his robes (**2 Kings 22:11, 19**) and instituting immediate reforms (**2 Kings 23**). We don't "tear our robes" today, but how do we repent, showing sorrow for our sins (**Acts 3:19; James 4:8-10; 1 John 1:8-10**)? What has repentance looked like in your life? What is the purpose of repentance?
 - ♥ What comfort does **Psalms 103:8-14** give when it comes to disobedience, confession and repentance?
6. Despite all of Jeremiah's warnings, the shepherds of Israel refused to repent and return to God. What were the consequences of their continued disobedience (**Jeremiah 25:8-11**)?
- ♥ Is God warning you about anything? Are you paying more attention than Judah did? How has God warned you in the past? How did you respond?
 - ♥ God used Judah's ungodly enemy, Babylon, to bring judgment on his people for their disobedience. Was this fair? Why or why not? How does this show the power of *El Elyon* and *Yahweh Sabaoth*?
 - ♥ God judged Judah for the sins of *idolatry*, *immorality* and *injustice*. Are these sins a problem in our country? Do you think we will be judged someday (**Psalms 96:9-10**)? If so, what might this judgment look like? Is there anything, as individuals, that we can do?

From the time God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, giving them his Law and making them his nation, to the time when they were taken into captivity by Babylon (a period of about 800 years), the Israelites were never able to completely live up to God's standards of righteousness - "To love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to keep his commands, decrees and laws" (**Deuteronomy 30:16**). As a nation they failed and as individuals they failed - just as every nation and individual has failed throughout all of history. God's pure and holy character is the standard by which righteousness is measured. Fallen, sinful human beings will *never* be able to attain or achieve God's righteous standard by their own efforts, no matter how sincerely try (**Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:10-12**). For this reason, God announced through Jeremiah that at some point in the future, he was going to make a *new* covenant (agreement) with his people that would *not* rely on *human performance*. Instead, God said, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people . . . They will know me and I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**.)

7. Read **Jeremiah 23:1-6** again. What hope and promise did God give his people even though they were reaping the consequences of their disobedience?

- ♥ God has promised King David that his royal line and throne would last forever. Who is the King that God will raise up "who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land" (**23:5**)? Is he ruling now? How so? When will his kingdom be made complete?
- ♥ What is implied in God's name *The LORD Our Righteousness*? In other words, how is the name *The LORD Our Righteousness* different from a name like *The LORD, the Righteous One*?"

JESUS - YAHWEH TSIDKENU - THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

8. Righteousness means *to be right with God*. Read **Romans 3:20-22** in both the *NIV* and *NLT*. Under the new covenant, how is righteousness *not attained* and how is it *now obtained*?

- ♥ There is something we must *do* to be right with God - but it is not trying to be good or trying to keep God's law. What must every person do to be *righteous - right with God* (**Romans 3:22; Ephesians 2:8-9**)? Are you *right with God*? How do you know? Will anything ever change your status?
- ♥ Discuss the meaning of this statement with your small group: *Righteousness cannot be attained, but it can be obtained*. (A dictionary might help with word meanings.)
- ♥ How does **2 Corinthians 5:21** sum up God's name, *Yahweh Tsidkenu - The LORD our Righteousness*? How did Christ become "sin for us"? How are we made right with God? Is there any other way?

♥ Heart Therapy

Willing Obedience - We cannot earn our right standing with God, but once we have been made *righteous* through faith in Christ, we, out of gratitude and because we are brand new persons in Christ, are called to obedience. God's *do's and don'ts* are given solely for our good and if we continue to knowingly disregard or disobey God's commands, we put ourselves in harm's way and wreak havoc on our souls. Obedience is also necessary if we want to stay vitally connected to Christ's love. Jesus will always love us, no matter what, but we will not *feel or experience* the wonders of his love unless we obey his commands (**John 15:10**). Obedience is also the way we show Jesus our love for him (**John 14:15**). For the Christ-follower, our goal is not merely to *do* what God says, but through obedience to *become - more and more - like Jesus*.

Self-examination - Block out some time to be alone with God. Consider the following Scriptures and do an *obedience check*. Where are you living *your way* and not *God's way*? What is the Spirit saying to you?

Exodus 20:1-17 Matthew 5:21-7:6 Ephesians 4:17-5:4 Galatians 5:16-25 1 John 1:8-10