

# God Gives Us A Secure Dwelling

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] If you could turn with me once more to Jeremiah 23, that's on page 782 in the red Bible you may have been given at the door.

7.8.2 Jeremiah 23 even verses 1 to 8 will be our text for this morning and today what I thought would be a title which we'll try to stick to is God as our shepherd king gives us a secure dwelling. God as our shepherd king gives us a secure dwelling. There's no place like home, huh? We all enjoy going home. The final five hours of work are always clock-watching, waiting to go home. The last day of holidays we're all pleased to be going home, most of us are, and I imagine some here already are thinking about home. It's a great place home. We all love going home, but why? You know it's only like brick and mortar, but I suppose the great thing about home is that it's the place where we feel loved, where we feel secure, a place where we feel safe, even for us leavers, home is a great place, you know. It's a place where I feel secure, where I feel loved, where I like to hang out. But over the past few months on our TV screens the pain of having to flee homes has been all too apparent as we have seen homes which have been transformed from places of safety and love to those where terror rains. In Syria we see yesterday and maybe even today streams of people leaving and upping to go to Turkey in the desperate hope that they will find a home that is safe, that is free from terror. In our own country however, sometimes homes can be places of loneliness and fear, sometimes homes can be places where many tyrants rain over their helpless victims. If Jeremiah the Prophet watched our world today he would suggest to us that times don't change. The people may change, situations may change, but some things remain the same. Jeremiah was a man well acquainted with brutal regimes. He lived in a time of tyranny and the people to whom he ministered were tired of oppression, of the corruption and of the constant battle for survival. For years this has been going on and on. King after king had been corrupted and the people had scattered because of the oppressive rule of these kings. Many exoduses were taking place and the people of Israel, God's chosen people were being scattered throughout the known world and all they wanted was a home, a place of security and familiarity. And like any good American TV show we're going to have to do the previously moment here. What's been going on around the chapter that we have here in

Jeremiah 23? Well in chapter 22 Jeremiah has been delivering a message and it's a bleak message and it's a message against rebellion and it is full of judgment. It is an account of how Israel has abandoned God and how her citizens had pursued false religion rather than the true religion and how a young prophet from Anatoff sought to bring a nation back to their father. And the immediate context in chapter 22 is Jeremiah's confrontations with the kings.

First of all we have him in chapter 22 declaring to Zedekiah that God will fight against him. Next up was Jehoah's who is assured by God that he too will be taken into captivity and he will never see his homeland again. Then Jeremiah gives King Jehoachim the message that as he was dishonest he would have the burial of a donkey and last but not least is finally King Jehoachim will be handed over to the king of Babylon and he too will never again see his home country. And as we study these few verses we are going to look at them under three headings. First God gathers up his scattered people which we find from verses 1 to 4 in chapter 23. Secondly God gives his people his righteousness in verses 5 to 6 and finally in verses 7 to 8 we have God provides a secure dwelling for his people. So first of all God gathers up his scattered people verses 1 to 4. You'll notice at the very beginning of chapter 23 we have a continuation of the judgments that have been given by Jeremiah in chapter 22. As we continue to see this word of judgment we notice that a familiar illustration is used it's one of shepherds and sheep. Now in this context the shepherds here are referring to the kings and notice a plural error so the kings are referring to a number of kings that have been corrupt and the sheep are obviously the people. And these shepherds according to Jeremiah and to

God had all played a part in the oppression of God's chosen people and God was no longer going to allow this to continue. God was no longer going to allow their destructive work to rip apart his chosen people his covenant nation. God is going to act against them he is going to stop them. The ferocity of the reins of these kings is highlighted and emphasized by the word scattering in verse 23. This is not simply a bunch of people who are drifting away to different countries in hope of a better land but not really caring but the idea here is that the sheep have panicked and they've gone in all different directions. They have been mauled they have been oppressed and they're running off desperate just to find somewhere safe and secure. Did these shepherds go out and find them and try to coax them back into this shapefold?

[ 6 : 38 ] Did they bother going out to look for them? Did they bother caring for them or not? Well no they didn't they just left them to scatter throughout the known world and it is for this reason verse 2 that the Lord's pronounces his judgment.

The people are desperate for shepherds that would make them lie down in green pastures who would lead them by still waters who would restore their soul but their experience was of shepherds that were leading them into misery and rebellion towards God. These shepherds were wearing willy jumpers and eating mutton as they saw the sheep scatter throughout the country. Looking closely in verse 3 there seems to be a kind of little contradiction here because initially it says because you have scattered talking to the kings in verse 2 and then it says I myself have driven them. In verse 2 he blames the kings but now he claims that it was his own doing that allowed these people to go to different countries different lands. What's going on here? What's God getting at here? Well what we see in these two verses are the consequences of bad leadership that led the people away from God. The great shepherd had to intervene in judgment and drive the people out of the land because the kings the rulers of the land had gone against God and with them the people too had gone against

God. So bad leadership had led the people away from God and so yes God had then to act in judgment against his own people to drive them out. But that's not the last word. The great shepherd will gather up his people once more. After all the doom and gloom of judgment there is hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel. The judgment will lead to blessing. The judgment will lead to restoration. The restoration is an ingathering of the sheep that have been dispersed. The sheep are going to be found again. The sheep are going to be brought back. When we sin, when we come face to face with the consequences of our sin, the discipline that we receive from God is for our restoration and not for our harm. That is the depth of God's love for us. He is not motivated by a desire to crush us, to see us humiliated, to see us knocked down and kept down. He wants us to flourish. He wants us to grow. He wants us to develop into increasing

Christ's likeness. He wants us to have the best life. Notice again, God has promised the people a safe passage home. But what will home be like? Will it be a place that they want to return to? Will the scars of history not run deep? Will not the painful memories of brutality still remain? Why would they go back? Is it going to be the same or is it going to be transformed? Verse 4, it's going to be transformed. God has an amazing promise for them. New undershepherds will be put in place over them. What tormented them in the past will no longer be their experience. God will set over them good shepherds that care for their sheep, that will look after them, that will keep them safe and secure. These good shepherds, the rubble, Ezra, Nehemiah, would be faithful. They would be wise. They would lead the people in the ways of God. The reign of these men would remove the terror and fear that they once experienced. They would dwell securely in the land. They would receive all the blessings that came from being God's people in God's land and not one will be missing. All will be gathered in. That is why the long lists in Ezra are so incredible. It's so amazing because it's categoric proof that God came and took each and every one home. Not one was missing. Not one was left behind. All were taken back to this new land, this renewed land. But God doesn't stop there. God doesn't stop at the promise of a few good men to lead the people forward. No. He is going to take the idea of a good shepherd and he's going to expand it and increase it so it becomes a perfect shepherd, a great shepherd. God is going to give the people something above and beyond all that they had wished for, all that they had expected, all that they could have imagined or desired for. He was going to provide a shepherd that was perfectly good, a shepherd who would give up his life for his sheep. As we reflect on this great shepherd, our minds are immediately drawn to the good shepherd in John 10. This great shepherd reflects, and Jeremiah reflects the good shepherd. Jesus Christ, as we have seen portrayed in John 10, is the good shepherd.

This good shepherd, Jesus Christ, knows his sheep. He has a relationship with them. When he calls to them, they will follow, for they know they can trust him. Christians, we have a personal relationship with the good shepherd, and the good shepherd loves his sheep. If we are distressed, if we are saddened, if we are lacking assurance, if we are feeling life-hard, we can go to that good shepherd for care and a place of solace. He will protect us. He will lead us by still waters. He will remind us of what he has done for us, and he will lift our eyes to remind us what we have in ahead for ourselves. Another aspect of the good shepherd is that he goes out to find his sheep. Jesus Christ will find the sheep that are lost. Other sheep that are not of this sheepfold, John chapter 10 verse 16 says this, I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The shepherd has other sheep, and this to us as Christians must be our spur to evangelism and to mission. Notice in verse 16 he says must. This is a strong word. They are compelled to come in. It is irresistible. Why then is our evangelism so weak, so timid? If the shepherd calls them, they come. They cannot stay away. Look at our world. So often we think it is easy for the lost sheep to ignore the call of the good shepherd to stay away. However Jesus says no. If I call they will come. You go out, stop being so timid. When you look around

[ 14 : 32 ] Edinburgh, remember there are lost sheep who must come into the sheepfold. It looks helpless. It looks hopeless so often, but the shepherd is gathering his sheep. Pray for the lost sheep of this city. Pray that we would see with the eyes of the good shepherd. The good shepherd sees a world of lost souls who need to be found and taken back to his flock. Let us remember that the shepherd has sheep still to come in. We must be involved in that process. Secondly, God gives his people his righteousness in verses 5 to 6. God gives his people his righteousness in verses 5 to 6. To understand this next section, we have to be mindful that ever since King David, the people have been expecting a greater king. The one who would overshadow all that King David achieved. The one that would fill all the requirements of the perfect king. The one who would rule with justice. The one who would surpass even the wisdom of King Solomon. And that great king was the

Messiah. At this time in history you can imagine the nation becoming increasingly disillusioned. There's no sign of hope. King after king after king has been corrupt. They have led the people away from God. No king is stepping up to the plate in who can say with all honesty that he follows God's wisdom. You can just imagine the kind of woe of a syndrome infecting the nation. There was seemingly no hope. They are stuck in a far off land and there is little hope of any sort of return. However, God comes in and says our righteous branch is sprouting. It may be only a bud at this time but it will flourish. It will bloom and it will usher in a new era. An era characterised by hope and fulfilment but the time of his arrival will be kept from his people. Until then they must trust.

They must trust God and they must obey him. Indeed from now on in the Old Testament people of God use the imagery of a righteous branch to describe their expected ideal king. For example in Zechariah chapter 3 verse 8 we have these words, listen oh high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you who are men symbolic of things to come I am going to bring my servant the branch.

Again in this passage like the Zechariah passage we are confronted with a prophecy that points us straight to Jesus Christ as the Messiah King, the great wise King. Again that's why we have the detailed genealogy in Matthew because Matthew wants the Jewish readers to understand that Jesus is from David's household, that he is from the Davidic line, that he is the Messiah, he is the righteous branch that they've been waiting for. In these verses we notice in verses 5 and 6 the King has several excellent qualities which mark him out from all other kings. First he shall reign wisely. The wisdom he has is God's wisdom. This is one who will lead the people closer to God and in doing this he will lead the people into increasing contentment. This is the King who will perfectly keep all the commands that were given to the kings later on in the book of Jeremiah. He will be the perfectly wise King. Secondly we notice that justice and righteousness mark the policies that this King will implement. Here we have the true descendant of David who in his day had done what was just unright for all his people, 2 Samuel 8 for 15. This was held out before David's successors as the mark of the ideal King. However King after

King had fallen short of this ideal and so often God had sent prophets time and again to tell and to remind the kings what was just and what was right. Then we have revealed at the end of verse 6 the name of this great King. This King who would fulfill all the covenant promises, the one who would match and outweigh all that they have that they could have dreamt of in a ruler and the name is the Lord our righteousness. The Lord our righteousness. The kings had fallen short.

[ 19 : 51 ] The people needed a King of integrity, one who would do what was right. The people of God need our righteous King for their present King is unrighteous. Indeed not only was King Zedekiah unrighteous the people also were unrighteous. They too had strayed from the King. Both King and citizen alike had strayed away from God and both needed to return. We too like Zedekiah like the people of Israel are unrighteous. We have gone our own way. We have drifted far from God and we find ourselves separated from God. There is no one righteous, no not one as the Apostle Paul put it. However the Kings righteousness, the righteousness of the perfect King will be given to his people. They will be infused with his righteousness. The righteousness which was unobtainable to them and to us is attainable through Christ who gives us his righteousness. If we know Jesus Christ, if we are under the rule of King Jesus, he has given us his righteousness. We now have the righteousness of the perfect King. His moral perfection has been credited to us. We no longer stand in the place of judgment but we stand with

God as part of his family. This is the answer to the problem of our sin, of our drifting away from God. This is where we find hope in the darkness of our rebellion. As the Bible tells us we are all far from God like the people of Israel scattered and the Good Shepherd gathers us up and takes us home because we have been given his righteousness. This is our hope that even though we are outside of the flock that we find ourselves far from God and Messiah has come, our Savior has come and he will give us a righteousness we could not attain ourselves. He gives us all that we lack and through him we can have peace with God. Jesus is the righteous branch. He was the promised one from God who will lead us too out of that far-off country. He will take us into God's kingdom and he will rule over us in complete perfection. Thirdly and finally God provides security for his people verses 7 to 8. We've just received two pictures of what Christ is like but what is life like in God's flock? What is it like to have Christ as our King and as our Shepherd? Well the final couple of verses point us to that time when we will live and dwell in a land of complete safety and where we will dwell forever. Jeremiah here is telling the people you thought the exodus is good. Well you ain't seen nothing yet. You can expect something much greater than an exodus to occur. You remember how God sent the plagues onto Egypt, the boils, the rivers of blood, the gnats. You even remember the fact that he killed the firstborn of the Egyptian household. You remember when Moses was at the water's edge and he struck it with his rod and the Red Sea opened up before them and they walked through. You remember when the greatest army of the time came chasing after them when they entered into the Red Sea. All came down destroyed the army around them. You remember the provision of manna which was given to them as you walked and went to this promised land. You remember your great military victories well. They are as nothing. They will be overshadowed by something much greater, much more majestic, something much bigger is happening than these things and these verses are also to be grasped by us. This is pointing us to heaven. This is pointing us to our home, our real home.

Jeremiah's message was for his people yes and it is also for us. Jeremiah is raising the our eyes heavenward. You remember back across all redemption history. You cast your mind back across your own life even to your own conversion well you ain't seen nothing yet. There will come a day where you will see clearly all that Christ has done. You will experience in all its fullness the blessings of being sons and daughters of the most high God. You and I will one day live securely in a perfect promised land. You and I like Jeremiah and the people of Judah have been gathered together by the Good Shepherd. You and I are under the reign of a perfect King. You and I are going to a better home where the King's kingdom will be a perfect place, a secure and safe dwelling where night is extinguished, where death is defeated, where crying ceases, where pain is no more, where separation is gone, where joy abounds, where hope finds its fulfillment, where love is perfected. This is God's land and we are all going there as Christians. God's got a place for each and every one who follows him in that perfect place. Don't ever lose sight of where we are going.

Remember that one day we will dwell completely secure, where you will not only experience the security of living under a righteous King, but you will one day gaze upon that righteous King, for he has given us his righteousness. Listen to the words in Revelation 21, this is our home to come. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Luke, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new. Then he said, write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. This is what awaits us. This is for us. This is for those who have heard the call of the Good Shepherd and who have responded to his call. If you are not within his kingdom, all you need to do is go and ask. Go to God and seek his forgiveness and he will give it. He promises. Let the Good Shepherd take you home and let yourself enjoy life under his righteous rule. Let yourself experience a glorious home, a home where there will be everlasting security and love. In conclusion, God as our Shepherd King gives us a secure dwelling. Amen.