

We are spending a couple of weeks looking at names of God and what we can learn from them. Last week we thought about the name Jehovah Rohi – the Lord my Shepherd. It tells us of the care, provision and protection we receive from God.

Despite that we sometimes turn our backs on God, sometimes even walk away from him. Maybe you are here today and you are only really here because it's communion. Maybe you are here giving God one last chance. You have been hurt by someone, or things haven't worked out the way you expected. You have become a little bitter and angry. It may not have been intentional but gradually you have drifted away. So God is asking, "Where are you and why did you walk away?"

Today the name of God we're going to think about is Jehovah Tsidkenu and it means, 'The Lord, Our Righteousness'. Righteousness is a fairly churchy word, you don't really hear it anywhere else these days but it means right or straight.

And so, here's the deal, is if you look at the story of God all throughout scripture, what you are going to see is that God is always right. And I know that a lot of you have a lot of stuff going on in your life that makes you question, "What is God doing? I can't believe He is allowing this to happen. What is it that is going on in my life?" And what we want to do is anchor you in the truth that all that God has done and all that He says is right. He always walks on a straight path. He never veers to the right. He never veers to the left just a little bit. He is consistent. God is infinitely holy. He is pure. He is without blemish. He is absolutely perfect.

What is the opposite of righteousness? The opposite of righteousness is sin. God is utterly opposed to sin. He is utterly perfect and sin has no place with him. That's the problem for Jeremiah. Jeremiah is a young man at the start of the story and God calls him to speak to the Israelites in Jerusalem. At that time Jerusalem was the main city where everything you could imagine was available. The problem was that they had once been really connected with God – there had been a time when God's glory was clearly visible in the Temple and although those days were long gone they had been close to him. God tells Jeremiah that he is to go to the people and tell them that they have sinned and ask why they have turned their backs on God.

And here's what you have to understand about Jeremiah. He is also known as the weeping prophet. Whatever breaks the heart of God breaks the heart of Jeremiah. So, he's about to walk into the city. You can see it ... this scared young man is about to go into the city, confront these leaders, hold them accountable, say, "Here's the deal. What's going on? Why have you walked away," and all of a

sudden it hits him and his heart breaks, and he realizes that these people were once so connected but now have walked away.

So, Jeremiah chapter two, he walks into the city and begins to speak for God. In Jeremiah chapter 2 he begins to speak about their past with God Jeremiah 2:1-3 *The word of the Lord came to me: ² “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: “This is what the Lord says: “I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown. ³ Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them,” declares the Lord.*

When they were hungry, God fed them; when they were thirsty, God gave them water. They were connected with God and he was with them. It's interesting that this is how God saw that period in their history. When you read the story they seem to do nothing but complain and grumble.

In Jeremiah 2:4-5 *Hear the word of the Lord, you descendants of Jacob, all you clans of Israel. ⁵ This is what the Lord says: “What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.*

Then v11 *Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols.*

As I was reading this I was thinking how stupid they were – they had everything, including ongoing relationship with God, and they walked away. And that's when it hit me – it's not just the story of the Israelites; it's my story too. I remember in Inverness being in a church that had lots of great people and good youth work, and good teaching – all you might look for in a church. After a couple of years there I began to feel a bit stifled and eventually began to make excuses for not going. I was very busy at work but it was more than that – I was walking away from God. I would still have called myself a Jesus follower, but there was something missing. Eventually I decided that I would need to find another church and that changed things.

I think God is asking the same question Jeremiah had to ask, “Why is it that you've gone so far away from Me?” He said, “Don't you remember what I've done?” So, my question is the same for all of us right now. Remember what God has done for you? How can you walk away from Him?

Maybe you have become a bit complacent – the kids take over the house, work is hectic and there just isn't enough time. So time with God goes first because

that's the easy thing to stop. You've been saying I'll read and pray tomorrow, but you've been saying that for months. What was once a burning flame is now a smoldering pile of ash. Maybe you are struggling with a particular sin, a habit you can't break, or an addiction. You have chosen to walk away from God even although everything seems ok to everyone else. One of the best stories in the bible is the story about a son who walked out on his father and took off with his share of the family money. He squandered everything and decided to come back home as a servant. His father was watching for him coming and ran to meet him. That father is a picture of God and he stand with arms wide open ready to take you back.

How do you do that? The first thing is to note that Jehovah Tsidkenu is calling you back to the path of righteousness and it's a simple process. Number one, confess your sin to him. Put it all out on the table and give it God. Having confessed you need to thank God that he has forgiven you.

Then comes the one that might take a bit of explaining. If, today, you are choosing to follow Jesus then you are the righteousness of Christ. When you confess sin and choose to follow Jesus something amazing happens. Jehovah Tsidkenu takes his righteousness, his holiness, his perfection and deposits it deep into the core of who you are. It's called the doctrine of imputation. He imputed his righteousness to you. So here's what it means to us: when God sees you, He doesn't see the hurt. He doesn't see the shame. He doesn't see the struggles and addictions. Do you know what He sees? He sees Christ. He looks at you and He sees holiness. He looks at you and He sees perfection, because He has given you His righteousness. But so many of us are struggling and just trying to live up in sin management kind of world, but the reality is, we are already the righteousness of God. That's what He sees when He looks at you.

I believe that when many of us asked Jesus Christ to come into our life or came to a point in our faith journey that we realized that we were actually following Jesus, after a certain period of time, we've forgotten what that actually means. We've forgotten how life-changing, how super natural, how divine that all of Heaven rejoiced when we gave our life to Christ. Scripture actually tells us that something inside of us died that day. Colossians 3:3-10 ³ *Your old self has died, and your new life is kept with Christ in God.* ⁴ *Yes, Christ is now your life, and when he comes again, you will share in his glory.* ⁵ *So put everything evil out of your life: sexual sin, doing anything immoral, letting sinful thoughts control you, and wanting things that are wrong. And don't keep wanting more and more for yourself, which is the same as worshipping a false god.* ⁶ *God will show his anger against those who don't obey him, because they do these evil things.* ⁷ *You also did these things in the past, when you lived like them.*

⁸ But now put these things out of your life: anger, losing your temper, doing or saying things to hurt others, and saying shameful things. ⁹ Don't lie to each other. You have taken off those old clothes—the person you once were and the bad things you did then. ¹⁰ Now you are wearing a new life, a life that is new every day. You are growing in your understanding of the one who made you. You are becoming more and more like him.

We need to learn to follow Jesus and that includes deciding to behave differently – ‘so put everything evil out’; it doesn’t just happen, you have to take action. You have taken off those old clothes – and you are wearing a new life. You are growing in your understanding – it is a process; it has a big churchy name – sanctification: becoming more like Jesus. Because it is a process we still commit sins and feel unworthy, but we must remember that everything has changed, even if we don’t feel it. In order to grow we need to commit to spending time with God in reading, praying and in fellowship with other believers.

When you chose Christ your old self died and God made you righteous. You might not feel like it but it’s not about feeling. I don’t know if you watched the Great British Bake Off but the winner was Candice Brown. She was one of the favourites from the beginning and was star baker three times. She was the second best of all time in the technical challenges and she was known for wearing bright lipstick. However, after winning she was shown making a comment that tells so much and possibly more than she intended. What she said through her tears was, “I’m good. I’m good enough.”

How many people are going through life thinking they aren’t good enough? How many people over the years have come to a table like this thinking they aren’t good enough? In fact, none of us are good enough to come to this table but we have Jehovah Tsidkenu, and he is more than enough. We don’t come in our own righteousness, because we have none of our own. We come in his righteousness. When we are tempted to sin we need to remind ourselves that we are the righteousness of Christ.

It may be that you are here today and you don’t have a relationship with God. In that case there is nothing you can do to earn a relationship with God. Isaiah 64:6-7 *We are all dirty with sin. Even our good works are not pure. They are like bloodstained rags. We are all like dead leaves. Our sins have carried us away like wind. ⁷ We don't call to you for help. We aren't excited about following you, so you have turned away from us. We are helpless before you, because we are full of sin.*

The only hope we have is to turn to God and ask for his forgiveness. 1 John 1:7-10 ⁷ *We should live in the light, where God is. If we live in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood sacrifice of Jesus, God's Son, washes away every sin and makes us clean.*

⁸ *If we say that we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ But if we confess our sins, God will forgive us. We can trust God to do this. He always does what is right. He will make us clean from all the wrong things we have done. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we are saying that God is a liar and that we don't accept his true teaching.*

In our reading today, Jeremiah 23, it says this verses 5-6 *This message is from the Lord: "The time is coming, when I will raise up a good 'branch' from David's family. He will be a king who will rule in a wise way. He will do what is fair and right in the land. ⁶ When he rules, Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety. This will be his name: The Lord Makes Things Right for Us.*
Jehovah Tsidkenu!

God left heaven in the person of Jesus, putting human skin, born as a baby and walked the earth. He was that 'good branch' Jeremiah spoke of. He is 100% God and 100% human so he understands us. He came to deal with sin and it cost him his life – that's what we remember today. He took the punishment for our sin, so that we can be forgiven and be made right with God.

Look at Jeremiah 61:10 *I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.*

I know the things that are wrong in my life and the sin that is so prevalent and I need to be reminded that I am not who I was – that I am wearing a cloak of righteousness given to me by God himself. Today God wants all of us to understand that; to ask for and accept his forgiveness; to receive his Spirit and to commit to growing more like Jesus every day.