

## GOVERNMENT WE DESERVE

JEREMIAH 23:1-6

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

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SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH, LUMSDEN

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When we compare the Canadian Constitution with the American Declaration of Independence, we find the type of government we expect for ourselves. We in Canada expect our country to provide us with “peace, order and good government”, while the Americans have decided to found their country on the principles of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

For the most part, I think both countries have gotten what they are looking for. As Canadians, we live in a very peaceful and orderly country. We have avoided many of the wars, civil rebellions, and fights with our neighbours that plague much of the rest of the world. We have a better reputation as peacekeepers than as meddling aggressors. Regardless of how we feel about a particular Prime Minister, we have had a good run of good and responsible government.

I think American’s should be equally happy that they have the government they deserve. Apart for gun and violent related deaths, they have one of the longest life expectancies on the planet. Before 9/11, they also had a strong tradition of liberty, particularly if you were white. If money can buy happiness, the United States also has the highest per capita Gross National Product in the world<sup>1</sup>.

So it seems that both of our governments have done a good job of living up to the type of country we wanted for ourselves. Both Canadians and American’s have gotten the type of government we deserve.

Mind you, that doesn’t prevent us from longing for the glory days of the past. Those old enough to remember the heady days of Trudeaumania in the 1960’s might long for a leader who has charisma and a “let’s take on the world” sort of attitude. Modern leaders seem better destined to be corporate boardroom types, better suited at counting beans than at instilling pride, vision, and values.

Jeremiah lived in a difficult time. His country was under control of Babylon. It’s true that Judah had it’s own king and it’s own government, but that government could only do what Babylon allowed it to do.

King Zedekiah wasn’t really a bad king but he was weak and indecisive. And Judah wasn’t really in bad shape as a country but many of the leaders of the country were always trying to get King Zedekiah to rebel against Babylon. “After all,” they argued, “why should we keep paying taxes to a foreign government? Those taxes should come to us!”

The choices seemed obvious to Jeremiah: Babylon was much too strong and powerful for Judah to fight. Jeremiah’s advice to Zedekiah was to keep Babylon happy and ensure that the country was well managed.

But finally Zedekiah gave in to those who wanted a rebellion and Babylon ended up destroying Jerusalem in 587 B.C. after a long siege, during which most of the city starves to death, and wiping the country of Judah off the map. Zedekiah for his part watches his sons die before the Babylonians stab him in the eyes, bind him in chains and take him back to Babylon.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.economist.co.uk/countries/>

Jeremiah's harsh words in our first lesson this morning are directed at those "leaders" who put their own selfish ambitions above the needs of the people and encouraged Zedekiah to rebel. These greedy selfish leaders are the "destroying and scattering shepherds".

Clearly the people of Judah did *not* get the government that they deserved. In the end, they got destruction and ruin.

Yet, Jeremiah holds out hope for the people. He promises them that tomorrow will be a brighter day. "The days are coming, says the Lord," when God will raise up a new king. He will be a king like David, the greatest of all kings. He will be a king that the country can be proud of—a king that the country will deserve. And this new king "shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely." (v. 5-6a)

Today is Christ the King Sunday. When we speak of Jesus as King, we don't usually talk of him as making tax policy or deciding how to spend the government surplus. We don't think of Jesus as King in the sense that he gets to decide whether we need new submarines or new helicopters or whether we should engage in a continental missile defence system.

When we discuss whether Jesus is our King, it's more in the sense of whether we're prepared to let Jesus instill his vision and values in us. When we look at the things that Jesus stands for, are those the things that we want to stand for? Are we prepared to let Jesus lead us to be the sort of people God is calling us to be? Are we prepared to help grow the kingdom of God by inviting others into the plan?

To answer those questions, first we need to start with a simple question: Is Jesus the sort of king we deserve?

Do we deserve a King that loves everyone? A King who wants the hungry to be fed, the homeless to be housed, and the naked to be clothed? A King who is only too quick to forgive our sins and too slow to hold a grudge? A King who cares for us and takes a personal interest in the things we do and the goals we want? A King who we can talk to and share our thoughts with. Do we deserve a King who offers us sound advice and strong values when we need help making tough decisions?

If Jesus is our king, then we already know what we can expect from him and we can dwell safely and securely in the knowledge that "The Lord is our righteousness."