

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 21 December 2025. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **The Righteous Branch**

From 1949 to 1957, an American TV programme called “**The Lone Ranger**” enjoyed immense popularity. The show was set back in the days of the “old West”; and the hero of the show was a character named “the Lone Ranger.” In the episodes, the Lone Ranger, and his trusty sidekick, Tonto, were constantly riding around the prairies, rescuing citizens in distress, and fighting against dangerous outlaws. The Lone Ranger lived by a strict moral code, and was famous for his honesty and integrity.

But aside from his upright character, the thing about the Lone Ranger that intrigued millions of TV fans was the fact that no one ever saw his face. He was always wearing a mask; and he never took it off. Also, the Lone Ranger’s name was Captain John Reed; but the only person who actually knew his name was old friend, Tonto. At the end of every episode, after he had brought another outlaw to justice, some amazed bystander would ask, “Who *was* that masked man?”; and someone would answer, “Don’t you know? Why, that was the Lone Ranger!” The show would then end with the Lone Ranger’s jumping onto his faithful horse, Silver, and saying “Hi-yo, Silver! Away!”, as he ride off into the sunset.

So, what is the point of this throwback to the “The Lone Ranger” show? I’m using it as an illustration. Just as everyone wanted to see the Lone Ranger’s face, and to know his name, so many generations of Old Testament saints longed to see *the Messiah’s* face, and to know *His* name. However, as the centuries passed by, the saints “fell asleep” one by one. God didn’t allow them to “stay up” to meet His Son.

Now, it’s not that the Son of God didn’t make occasional appearances to people, in a human form. He appeared many times to believers such as **Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Hagar, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Manoah**, and others: and oftentimes when He appeared, He was called “the Angel (or “Minister”) of the LORD.” Remember when He appeared to **Jacob**, on that night when Jacob was afraid for his family’s lives, and he was praying all night? Somehow, Jacob knew that this man who had showed up from out of nowhere during his prayers was not a man, but was God in human form. Therefore, he caught hold of him, and wrestled with him for the rest of the night, and pleaded with God to bless him. But do you remember what Jacob asked God when the morning broke? He asked the LORD to tell him His name. And what was the LORD’s answer? He said, “*Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?*” The LORD said the same thing, centuries later, to **Manoah**, when He appeared to him and his wife. Manoah asked the Angel of the LORD to tell them His name; but He replied, “*Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?*” A man named **Agur** pondered about that precious name, as well. As he penned the words of **Proverbs 30**, he wrote, “*Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son’s name, if thou canst tell?*”



That question, “What is His name,” was finally answered when the Son of God took on human flesh, and was born of a virgin! **John 1:14** says, “*And the Word [Christ] was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*” When Christ appeared, the “mask” was removed, and His name was revealed; and it was JESUS!

Now, over the last several weeks, I’ve shown you several beautiful names of our Saviour. He is called “*The Branch of the LORD,*” and “*The Branch of David.*” I’ve also shown you what these titles mean: they mean that Christ is both the Son of God, and the Son of Man (particularly, a Descendant of King David). We’ve focused much on *who* Christ is: but now, I will show you what His *character* is, and what His *mission* is. The title of this message is “*The Righteous Branch.*”

## Read Jeremiah 23:5-6.

### I. The righteous character of the Branch

Deep within every one of us, there is something called “a conscience.” The conscience has been planted in us by God, and it informs us of His laws. It also informs us that there is an eternal, conscious punishment for sin beyond this life. Even people who have no access to the Bible, and who have never heard of the Ten Commandments, know that it is wrong to lie, commit adultery, or kill; and they also sense that there is an eternal torment beyond this life on earth because of the wrongs that we have done. Why? Because God has put the realisation of His moral laws within our hearts, and has put “eternity” in our hearts. In **Romans 2**, Paul says that even the Gentiles, who don’t have access to the law, “*shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.*” Deep within us, there is a knowledge of right, and an anger at injustice. That is why the world was shocked and angered this past week, when two men callously murdered 15 Jewish people, and injured many others. All over the world, there was a cry for justice.

Deep in all our hearts, we know that there is a righteous God, who expects us to live righteously, too. Our own conscience testifies to this. That is why many people try to be kind to others, and to be good people. Yet, if this be so, why is there so much evil all around us—such as the murder of those Jews on Bondi Beach in Australia? The answer is: we are *not* truly good, as we think we are. There is a principle within us which exalts *self* instead of God; which puts *self* first, at the expense of others; which hardens the heart, and sears the conscience; which darkens the understanding; which weakens and deadens the will to do right; which turns even “good” deeds into selfish ones; which clings to lies, instead of truth; and which warps the conscience so completely, that we can come to the point of seeing evil as “good,” and good as “evil.” This principle is called “sin”; and sin is not a marginal part of our nature. It is *central* to our nature. It is who we are. Our sinful nature, which has been passed down to us from our father Adam, has corrupted and perverted every part of our being.



That is why the prophet Jeremiah said, ***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”*** Though we all have a conscience, our knowledge of what is “just” and “unjust” is shattered and obscured by our sinful desires. Your conscience prompts you to be angry when you see evil; yet, you are prone to see only the evil in *others*, because your sinful nature blinds you to the evil in your *own* heart (or finds a way to excuse it). Your sinful heart desires to follow after your own lusts, regardless of what God says; yet, your conscience tells you that your unlawful desires are an offense to your Creator. Therefore, your heart devises its *own* standard of righteousness, which is tailor-suited to *you*. Your sinful heart says, “Yes, I’m doing this bad thing; but it’s not really so bad, because I’m also doing this *good* deed, which erases my bad one. Yes, I tell lies; but they’re not *big* lies. Yes, I commit fornication, or adultery; but it’s all right, because no one knows, and I’m not hurting anyone. Yes, I do sometimes have a selfish motive for helping others; but I’m still doing good things: so what’s the problem?”

Sin redefines evil, and makes it look acceptable. This is what Paul called “going about to establish your *own* righteousness.” In **Romans 10:1-3**, Paul expressed his earnest desire that his own countrymen, the Jews, would be saved—***“For,”*** he said, ***“I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”*** And what *is* God’s standard of righteousness? What *is* ***“the righteousness of God”***? Paul states it in the next verse. He says, ***“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”*** That is God’s standard of righteousness. Jesus Christ *is* Righteousness incarnate. Not only did He keep the Law perfectly when He was here on this earth, but He is the very righteous God who *gave* the Law. We, on the other hand, have all sinned against a righteous God; and that is why, if we would see God, and enter Heaven one day, we *must* obtain a righteousness that is not our own. That is why we need *Christ*, and *His* righteousness.

My friend, Satan doesn’t mind your having “good morals”—as long as you try to live out your “good morals” without submitting yourself to *Christ*. Satan doesn’t mind if you set up a good moral template to follow—as long as *Christ* is left out of it. I was reminded of this fact this past week, as I was researching about “The Lone Ranger” show. I discovered that **Clayton Moore**, the actor who played the part of the Lone Ranger, was so deeply affected by the character that he played, that he continued to wear the “Lone Ranger” mask whenever he was in public, for many years after the show had ended. It was as though he were trying to *be* the Lone Ranger, because he saw the Lone Ranger as the embodiment of right living. Moore often admitted that he had “fallen in love with the Lone Ranger character,” and that he “strove, in his personal life, to take The Lone Ranger Creed to heart.”<sup>1</sup> But what *was* the “Lone Ranger Creed”? Well, among other things, the “Lone Ranger Creed” said that ***“Everyone has within himself the power to make this a better world.”***<sup>2</sup> But is that what the *Bible* says? Let’s see.



### Read Romans 3:9-20.

The Bible says that we are all fundamentally evil, and that we all have poisonous lies in our lips, and murder in our hearts. Yet, the “Lone Ranger Creed” (which is, in fact, the *personal* belief of countless people) says that we can make this world a “better place,” because we have that “power” within us. So, which is right—the Lone Ranger Creed, or the Bible? One thing is certain: they can’t *both* be right. How about *this* “Lone Ranger Creed”: **“All things change but truth, and...truth alone, lives on forever”?**<sup>3</sup> On the surface, this may sound good: but what *is* “truth”? No standard for “truth” is named in the Lone Ranger Creed. This seems to imply, then, that we all just “know” what the truth is. But what if *one* man’s standard of truth conflict with another man’s standard? Which is right? Sooner or later, we end up with what happened at Bondi Beach—people committing *murder*, because they think they are doing right! Folks, the sobering fact is that we are *all* “lone rangers,” because we *all* have wandered away from God, made our own “moral code,” and done what is right according to our own darkened hearts. **Isaiah 53:6** says, ***“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”***

My friends, there is only one standard of Truth and Righteousness: and that standard is the Word of God. And when I say “the Word of God,” I’m speaking not only of the Scriptures, but of the *Author* of Scripture—the *living* Word of God, Jesus Christ. Christ said, ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”*** He was born into this world that He might ***“bear witness of the truth.”*** He lived the perfectly righteous life that you and I have *not* lived, because He is the ***“God who cannot lie.”*** He is the Branch of Jehovah: and at the same time, He is the Branch of David. He sprang up like a tender plant from the town of Bethlehem, in which David was born; and He shared David’s blood, through the lineage of His mother Mary. Yet, He did not share the *sin nature* of His ancestor David, because He had no human father. That ***“holy thing”*** that was planted in Mary’s womb was sinless, because He is the Son of God.

### Read Luke 1:26-35.

In **Jeremiah 23:5**, Jeremiah prophesied that the LORD would raise up a ***“righteous Branch”*** unto David. This “Branch of David,” whoever he is, could not possibly be an ordinary man, because his ancestor, David, was far from perfect in his judgments. During his reign, David made some big errors, because he was a sinner. So did *all* the kings in the royal line of David—even the most righteous ones, such as Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah. But when Jesus Christ, the Branch of David, sits down on *His* throne in the 1,000-year Kingdom one day, He will execute perfect ***“judgment and justice in the earth.”*** Righteousness and faithfulness will be His girdle.

### Read Isaiah 11:1-5.



Jesus Christ is the Just One; and we are *“the unjust”* ones. Make that personal. *You* are unjust; and *you* deserve God’s eternal wrath, in the Lake of Fire. That is exceedingly bad news. However, I am here to give you some good news! This brings me to our second point.

## II. The imputed righteousness of the Branch

**(Read Jeremiah 23:5-6 again.)** Nearly every time God gave a vision of Heaven to one of His prophets, the prophet was so struck with the realisation of God’s holiness, that he fell down on his face, and bewailed his own sinfulness. When **Isaiah** saw God upon His throne, he cried out, *“Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”* When **Ezekiel** saw God on His throne, he fell down prostrate on his face. This is what the realisation of God’s holiness *should* do to us. When we see God for who He is, our own sinfulness is exposed; and we realise that we stand guilty before a holy God.

Now, the last time I checked, none of us here has ever seen God on His throne. Very few people in history have had that privilege. However, you don’t *have* to see a vision of God on His throne in order to see His righteousness. Why? Because God’s perfect righteousness has been revealed to us in the Person of Jesus Christ! **Second Corinthians 4:6** says, *“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* Remember when Jesus commanded Peter to cast the net on the other side of the boat, and Peter reluctantly obeyed; but then, he drew in such a huge catch of fish, that the net began to tear, and the boat began to sink? On that day, Peter saw his sin of unbelief for what it was; and he fell down at Jesus’ feet and said, *“Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”* Why did he do this? Because the *“light of the knowledge of the glory of God”* had been revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. Peter looked into Jesus’ eyes, and saw God’s awesome righteousness.

Now, none of us has seen Jesus face-to-face, as Peter did; but we *do* see Jesus’ perfect righteousness in God’s Word. As we look into the pages of Scripture, we see the portrait of a perfectly sinless, holy Lord; and as we behold His glory, we *should* fall down, as Peter did, and say, “I am a sinful man,” or “I am a sinful woman, O Lord.”

My friends, we are all sinful and undone. *“There is none righteous, no, not one.”* Not one of us can get to Heaven by his own righteousness. But there is good news: Christ’s righteousness can be put on *your* account, as though it were yours. Isaiah prophesied of this wonderful transaction 700 years before Christ’s birth.

**Read Isaiah 53:1-12.**



Repeatedly in this passage, Isaiah prophesied that Jehovah's Servant would take *our* sin, and the *punishment* of our sin, upon Himself. In **verse 5**, Isaiah said, ***“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”*** In **verse 6**, he said that ***“the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*** In **verse 10**, we are told that it would please the LORD (God the Father) to ***“bruise”*** His Servant, and to put Him ***“to grief.”*** In that same verse, Isaiah said that the LORD would make His Servant's soul ***“an offering for sin.”*** In **verse 12**, we are told that ***“he hath poured out his soul unto death,”*** and that ***“he was numbered with the transgressors.”*** (In other words, He was counted as a criminal, because He was condemned as a criminal.) The chapter then ends with the words, ***“He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”*** Time and time again we are told, in different ways, that *our* sin would be placed upon Jehovah's Servant, and that He would pay our penalty.

But here is the most wonderful statement of all. Look again at **verse 11**. In this verse, we are told, first of all, that the Father would be ***“satisfied”*** by His Son's offering on our behalf. Then, the Father Himself “takes the microphone,” so to speak, and says, ***“By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.”*** Now, let's park right there, and I will break this down. First, please notice how God the Father described His Servant. He called Him ***“my righteous servant.”*** Then, look at that word ***“justify.”*** What, exactly, does ***“justify”*** mean? Does it mean to “make an excuse” for someone (as in, “The mum tried to justify her child's bad behaviour”)? No. God cannot “excuse” our sin, because He is a righteous God; and the wages of sin is *death*—eternal death, in hell. What does “justify” mean, then? Well, let me put it this way: the Hebrew word for ***“righteous”*** is *tsadiq*; but the Hebrew word for “he shall justify” is *yatsediq*. Do you see the similarity? They are both based on the same word. *Yatsediq* literally means “he shall *make* righteous,” or “he shall *cause* to be righteous.”

Do you see what Isaiah is saying? God doesn't *excuse* our sin, or *overlook* our sin: instead, He Himself *paid the penalty* for our sin! Christ, the righteous Judge, took off His judicial robe, stepped down from His judicial bench, entered our world, took on human flesh, allowed Himself to be nailed to a cross, and there paid *our* death penalty, which His own justice demanded. And since He has already paid our penalty, He now offers us *His own* perfect righteousness in exchange. When you repent of your sin and believe on Jesus, you are receiving Christ's death on *your* behalf, as a free gift from God; and in exchange, God takes Christ's perfect righteousness, and puts it on your account. God imputes *Christ's righteousness* to you, and accepts you as His child on that basis. **Romans 4:5** says, ***“But to him that worketh not [who is not trying to earn his salvation by his own good works], but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”***

### **Read Romans 4:1-8.**

Every Christmas, the world gives a very faint nod to the Christ of Christmas—not because they believe on Him, but because it boosts their bottom line. In the shops, for example, we occasionally hear the words of “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.” Yet, who really understands



its lyrics? We *who have been redeemed* do! At the end of the last verse of that hymn, the words go: “Adam’s likeness now efface, stamp thine image in its place; second Adam from above, reinstate us in thy love.” Those words are precious to every true child of God; and they are based 100% on Scripture. When you place your faith in Christ (the “second Adam”), God judicially removes your sin from His sight; and instead of seeing the old, sinful image of your father Adam in you, He now sees *Christ’s* perfect, righteous image. That is what Paul means in **1 Corinthians 1:30** when he says, “***But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.***” Christ *is* Righteousness; and when you humble yourself, and receive His gift of salvation, Christ becomes *your* Righteousness. It becomes *personal*. That is why Jeremiah said that the righteous “Branch of David” is called by the name *Jehovah Tsidkenu*—“***THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.***” Christ *is* Righteousness to all who believe on Him. Judicially, His righteousness is counted as your own when you receive God’s gift of salvation. *That* is what the “Righteous Branch” does. He removes sin, so that we might be counted righteous, and accepted by God the Father. We read this in **Zechariah 3**, as well.

**Read Zechariah 3:8-9.**

This passage is a prophecy of the future day when *all* the nation of Israel will believe on Jesus, and be saved. (And, as I promised a couple weeks ago, we *will* delve into the full meaning of this verse before December is over.) However, I want to direct your attention to that last statement in **verse 9**. The LORD says, “***I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.***” Jesus is Jehovah’s Servant, the BRANCH; and what He will do for the nation of Israel one day, He can do for *you* today. He can *remove your sin* from His sight, and receive you. Have *you* received God’s gift of salvation? If you haven’t, don’t put it off. Believe on Jesus today!

### III. The imparted righteousness of the Branch

**Read Zechariah 3:1-7.**

A few moments ago, we read **verses 8 and 9** of this same chapter. In those verses, Joshua, the high priest of Israel, symbolically represents Israel’s Messiah, the Branch. (You’ll remember from last week’s message, that Joshua represents the Messiah in **Zechariah 6**, as well.)

However, in these first seven verses of **Zechariah 3**, Joshua represents something quite opposite of the Messiah: he represents the **nation of Israel**. Now, how do we know that Joshua represents Israel? Well, we know that Joshua doesn’t represent the Messiah here, because he is clothed in *very filthy* garments (representing sin); and the Messiah is *sinless*. There is only one other “person” that Joshua could represent, then: he represents God’s covenant people, Israel. We know this to be so, because Joshua is pictured as “standing before



the Angel of the LORD” (who, in the context of this passage, obviously *is* the LORD). The phrase “standing before the LORD” is often used to describe the priests, who stood before God, in the Holy Place. Also, in **Exodus 19:6**, God told Israel that they were to be unto Him **“a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”** Joshua, then, represents Israel collectively. As a nation, they were *supposed* to be functioning like a holy “priest,” and representing Jehovah before the nations of the earth. They were *supposed* to be attracting the Gentiles to the God of Israel, through their holy testimony.

Yet, Israel had failed grievously in that holy calling. That’s why, in **verse 1**, Israel’s old enemy, Satan, is seen standing on Joshua’s **“right hand,”** and accusing him. The word **“right hand”** indicates that Satan was in a seeming position of advantage over Israel. There was Israel, wearing the *machlatzoth*—the costly, beautiful garments that the high priest wore every day of the year, except on Yom Kippur. Yet, his garments were **“filthy.”** (This literally means “excrement-stained.”) Israel was filled with lies, fornication, adultery, murder, idol-worship, sodomy, and a thousand other abominations; and Satan was saying, “See? See their sinfulness, O God of *Israel*? Are you *really* going to continue to own *them* as your ‘covenant, chosen people’? Cast them off! Cast them off!” But then, something wonderful happened. The “Angel” before whom Joshua was standing (and, yes, that *is* the “Angel of the LORD”—the Son of God), spoke up. And what did he say? He commanded to remove the filthy garments from Joshua! Now, at this point in the vision, Zechariah was so excited, that he suddenly blurted out, **“Let them set a fair mitre upon his head.”** (The “mitre” was the bonnet that the high priest wore.) And so, that is what they did: and they clothed Joshua with beautiful, high-priestly garments. This represents the future day, at the time of Christ’s return to earth, when **“all Israel shall be saved,”** by believing on their Messiah. This whole scene represents the removal of Israel’s sins, and the *imputing* of Christ’s perfect righteousness to them.

But that’s not all. Look at what the Angel of the LORD (and remember, that is Christ!) said to Joshua after his sin was removed, and his righteousness was imputed to him. He said, **“If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.”** What does that mean? It means that now that Israel was justified before God, God could continue to use them for His glory in His Temple, and give them free, unhindered access to His throne, and free communion with Him, *if* they would continue to serve Him faithfully.

Christian, what will be true of Israel in the future is true for us, right now. We who are saved have been justified before God. That is our judicial standing; and that is how we are still saved, and not cast off from Christ. Satan accuses us before God, and hisses, “Cast those Christians off from your presence, for they have *sinned!*” But God owns us still, because it is *His Son’s* righteousness by which we are saved. **However**, if you want to have access to God’s throne, and have free communion with Him, you must continually keep your heart right with God. Christ not only has *imputed* His righteousness to you *judicially*, but He *imparts* His righteous character to you. This can only happen, though, as you submit yourself to him.



Yet, how often do we, as God's people, *not* partake of His righteous character? We come to church once a week, and think we have done our duty to God; but we are worldly and sinful in our daily lives. Like the church of Laodicea, we are ***“lukewarm.”*** And why? Because we are ***“rich, and increased with goods,”*** and think that we ***“have need of nothing.”*** Little do we know that in God's sight, we are ***“wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”*** While Christians in persecuted nations *literally* sell all that they have to advance the Gospel (just as Jesus requires), we are reluctant to give God *anything*. While other believers are suffering in prison, and being mercilessly beaten every day for the name of Jesus, we won't even speak a single word of witness to anyone, because we are afraid of being laughed at. While believers in China, and Iran, and other nations, are fasting, and gathering together for hours and hours to hear the Gospel preached, and staying up into the wee hours to pray for the salvation of their nation, we don't even feel the need to go to church every time the doors are open, or to go to an hour-long prayer meeting. While other believers are passing around one Bible between all their church members (since they don't have their own Bibles), and are memorising whole books of the Bible, we won't even open our precious Bible every day, and read it. Instead, we fritter away hours on our phones, or at the telly, often watching things that are sensual at best, or downright wicked at worst. If you are saved, but spiritually asleep, Jesus' words come piercing through like a thunderclap: ***“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”***

**Conclusion:** Perhaps you're thinking, “Pastor, this is the Sunday before Christmas. Can't we just end the message with a sweet, cozy manger scene?” Brethren, if I did that, I would be disobeying the Lord. God has called us out of this world, so that we might be holy; and I *must* exhort you with that message. Christ is the *Righteous* Branch; and He has called us to live righteously, too. If there be sin that you need to confess to God, Christian, don't put it off! Confess your sin to God today, and repent! If you have never been saved, Christ is calling *you* to repent and believe on the Son, and receive His gift of salvation. In your heart, trust *only* in Christ, and in His sacrifice on the cross, and turn from your sin to Him. He will then come into your heart, start removing the sin from your life, so that you can be righteous, as He is.

<sup>1</sup> “Clayton Moore,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clayton\\_Moore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clayton_Moore)

<sup>2</sup> “The Lone Ranger,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lone\\_Ranger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lone_Ranger)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*