

The Lord Is Their Righteousness

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the righteous branch that has saved Israel, Judah, and all of us, Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.

Have you seen any of the three Marvel Comics movies called Guardians of the Galaxy? (SLIDE) I think there's three of them out so far. The first two were pretty good and featured some classic music from the 1970s. Ever since the first Guardians came out back in 2014, one of my favorite characters has been this guy... (SLIDE) His name is Groot. In the first movie Groot was thought to have been killed off. He sacrificed his own life to save his friends. Sound familiar? His best friend, a talking Raccoon, named Rocket, refused to believe Groot was really dead, so he planted a small part of Groot into a planter. In the second movie, guess what -- A branch is growing in the pot! No matter what that branch says, it always comes out, "I am Groot." The other characters in the movie can somehow understand him. The whole interaction between Groot and the others, especially with Rocket, the talking Raccoon, is a highlight of these movies for me. Here's the thing. Sometimes once you think of something you just can't unthink it. Every time I read from the scriptures where God is going to cause a righteous branch to sprout from David's lineage or a branch will sprout from the stump of Jesse, now I can't get the image of Groot out of my mind! I mean, there's Jesus in the manger and his first words to mother Mary are, "I am Groot!"

(SLIDE) Then there's all those miracle stories of Jesus turning water into wine or

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healing the 10 lepers, or making the blind to see and after each miracle, Jesus simply says, “I am Groot!” (SLIDE) How about those thieves on the cross next to Jesus, one who derides Jesus and the other who begs Jesus to remember him. To both, Jesus proclaims, “I am Groot!” (SLIDE) And Finally, on the road to Emmaus, after the crucifixion, Jesus was opening and explaining all the scriptures, including all the prophecies which predict his birth, life, and death, but those two disciples don’t recognize Jesus until he proclaims, “I am Groot!” Then their eyes are opened and they say to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us?” I’m sorry if my brain works a little differently, but now I smile when I read these prophecies about Jesus...

God’s promise of a Savior isn’t some new development that began after “Plan One” failed and humankind fell into deep sin. God’s promise was “baked in” all the way back to the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree, God still loved them. Scripture says God made them clothing out of the skins of animals. (SLIDE) Most of my life I read that verse and glossed right over it. Then one day it occurred to me that animals had to sacrifice their lives in order for God to make clothing for the worlds first exiles. Animals have been sacrificed for human sin ever since, until God finally brought forth a righteous branch from the stump of Jesse for David. No amount of animal sacrifices could ever cover up human depravity and sin. No amount of animal

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skins could cover up such wanton rebellion against God. At least not until God brought out his final and ultimate sacrifice his only son, Groot, er, I mean, Jesus!

(SLIDE)

I could talk about Marvel Comic Movies all day, but it's time to get serious about this prophecy and this prophet, Jeremiah. Jeremiah lived during the last days of the southern Kingdom of Judah. Israel had split from the united Kingdoms and was subsequently destroyed by the Assyrians. God first called Jeremiah as a teenager to warn God's people to repent or face the consequences of their sin. Over and over again Jeremiah brought God's Word of judgment to the King, but he would not listen. Now Jeremiah is watching his beloved homeland of Judah crumble before his eyes. This time it was the Babylonians who had already raided many of the key towns, cities, and villages of Judah. Even now, the capital city of Jerusalem is under siege. (SLIDE) Jeremiah tried to make the people understand their problem was a lack of belief, trust, and faith in God, along with an absence of fear that caused them to take God for granted. (Nothing like our situation today...) It's easy to be lulled into a false sense of security, especially when your focus isn't on God. The nation of Israel, just like many nations today, had stopped putting God first and had replaced Him with false gods. We like our God to not make us feel guilty or convict us of our sin. In the Bible we read of God's mighty acts of power in delivering God's people from bondage in Egypt.

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We read about God performing miracle after miracle, even parting the waters of the Red Sea for his people to walk across on dry land. In spite of all these displays of God's power and God's love for all people, we continue to return to the same old false practices and false idols. (SLIDE) Humans will never learn. Generation after generation we make the same mistakes over and over again. It's almost like there's no way we could ever, on our own esteem or merit, work our way out of this sin problem.

The truth is we have no righteousness of our own. We are all bound to our sinful nature. (SLIDE) All we have is this rotting old sinful flesh. From the time we're born we're already rotting away. Humans have no other road to travel, except death and destruction. Even the best humans who ever lived have no hope without God. On our own the best hope of humanity is a grave. It's a good thing God NEVER leaves us alone, ever! God's been making sacrifices for us from the beginning. From the Garden of Eden until Jeremiah was about 4000-5000 years, then from Jeremiah to the birth of Jesus another 600 or so years. The promise of Christmas, first made in the Garden of Eden took about 5000 years before that righteous branch finally took root. (SLIDE) Humanity had been waiting for God to bring forth this righteous branch, Groot, for a long, long time.

Considering humanity had been waiting for the coming Messiah for all those years, it's not that much to ask of us to wait a little bit for Christmas each

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year. The Season of Advent is only about 4 weeks long. Considering how long God's promises stood before becoming flesh and blood, it certainly doesn't seem unreasonable for us to wait a few weeks. Having said that, I have zero patience for waiting. I mean PJ and I already have our Christmas gifts for each other. (SLIDE) New desk chairs for our home offices went on sale at Sam's Club and well, who can wait anyway? ... We're probably not the only ones who are guilty of not wanting to wait. Our modern culture was built on instant gratification. (SLIDE) We crave the instant high brought on by clicking on stuff on Facebook and elsewhere on the internet. Studies have shown brain chemicals and hormones are released that give us instant pleasure when we click and the screen changes. One click on Amazon and your wildest dreams can be delivered by 10:00 pm tomorrow. Now where's my credit card again... ...

There is a righteous branch that has sprung up for David. His name was not Groot, but Jesus. (SLIDE) This Jesus famously said he did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill the Law. He did what no other human being ever could. Jesus is the Lord, He is Our Righteousness. He doesn't enable you to live sin free, he lived sin free for you. And it cost him his life, by the way... It's not your faith in Jesus that saves you and all Jerusalem, it's the faith of Jesus that saves you and all people. He is our righteousness!

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May the Lord's righteous branch, Jesus Christ be your righteousness today. May you stop trying to live up to God's impossibly high standards and start simply living in Christ where safety, security and real joy abide. May your home be there, now and forever, amen.