

10/26/08

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Almighty God, gracious Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and comfort them in all temptations, defend them against all enemies of Your Word, and bestow on the Church your saving peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Jeremiah 31:31-34 (*God's new covenant is based on forgiveness.*)

31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

THE EPISTLE LESSON Romans 3:19-28 (*We are justified by faith apart from works.*)

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. **28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.**

THE GOSPEL LESSON John 8:31-36 (*God's Son sets us free, free indeed.*)

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

34 Jesus replied, "**I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

Jeremiah 31:31-34

31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

INTRO - I have never seen it before, but it seems that this year's presidential campaign has a theme. I suspect you all know what that theme is. We are hearing about the need for "change." Both major candidates are admitting there are problems which our country faces, and that it would be good if there was change in the economy, change in decision making. And, both candidates suggest they are the one who can bring this needed change.

I. God is talking in our Old Testament lesson of a need for change for the Israelites.

A. The Israelites will have a new covenant, a new relationship and understanding with God.

1. The reason for this covenant is that the Israelites had not kept up their part of being God's people.

2. **32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.**

3. The sinful behavior of the Israelites, their rejection of God, their idolatry, required new behavior, and a new relationship with the Lord.

B. Today is Reformation Day. This is a traditional verse used to celebrate Reformation Day.

1. Lutherans celebrate Reformation Day for historic reasons remembering a historic change in the Christian Church.

2. In the 1500's the Christian Church had become so corrupt, so far from Scripture, and so far from God's way of saving people for eternal life in heaven through His love in Jesus, that the church needed a change.

3. God used Martin Luther to bring the needed change, and we are thankful to

again know that Scripture says we are saved by God's Grace, through faith in Jesus.

C. But, we fool ourselves if we think it is only the country, or the organized church which needs to change it's sinful life.

1. In the Gospel lesson Jesus says, "**everyone who sins is a slave to sin.**"
2. The truth is, it is not just the nations of the world, or the organization of the church that constantly needs refining from the Lord, but each of us needs change from our sin.
3. God's people continue to rebel, continue to serve themselves, continue to need daily repentance.
4. We need daily to turn from our greed, our selfishness, our hatred, and turn to the Lord. We need new lives and a new covenant.

II. Please Consider with me for a minute the reality of our current political campaigns again. Even in this country that has perhaps been most blessed with freedom and material wealth in the history of the world, *has there ever been a time when change of some kind would not have been good?* There are always problems. There is always a need for change.

A. In truth, the Israelites needed a change in attitude and behavior, but they could not accomplish this on their own.

1. The truth is that this nation that went into exile because of their idolatry tried very hard to do a better job of serving the Lord.
2. In the long run, they became proud of their efforts to change and become more obedient, and their pride became another sin that rejected God.
3. This change is impossible for us to accomplish on our own.

B. We each need to change our own lives.

1. But we cannot do it ourselves.
2. We are sinners, and lost in our sin.
3. A person in a 12 step program has to say, "I am powerless on my own to deal with my addiction." We are all in the same situation with our sinful behaviors.

III. The story is told of a young boy visiting his grandparents on their farm. He was given a slingshot to play with out in the woods. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit the target. Getting a little discouraged, he headed back for dinner. As he was walking back he saw Grandma's pet duck. Just out of impulse, he let the slingshot fly, hit the duck square in the head, and killed it. He was shocked and grieved. In a panic, he hid the dead duck in the wood pile, only to see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing.

After lunch the next day Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Grandma, Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen. Then Sally whispered to him, "Remember the duck?" So Johnny did the dishes. Later that day, Grandpa asked if the children wanted to go fishing and Grandma said, "I'm sorry but I need Sally to help make supper." Sally just smiled and said, "Well, that's all right because Johnny told me he wanted to help. She whispered again, "Remember the duck?" So Sally went fishing and Johnny stayed to help. After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's he finally couldn't stand it any longer. He came to Grandma and confessed the he had killed the duck. Grandma knelt down, gave him a hug, and said, "Sweetheart, I know. You see, I was standing at the window and I saw the whole thing. But because I love you, I forgave you. I was just wondering how long you would let Sally

make a slave of you."

- A. My Christian friends, we do need change in our lives, just as the Israelites did.
 - 1. We cannot overcome our sin on our own. We are slaves to sin,
 - 2. God, however, in love accomplishes this change.
- B. Listen to Jeremiah 31 again.
 - 1. Verses 33 and 34 say, **33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.** God will change hearts and minds.
 - 2. **I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD.** There will be new relationships.
 - 3. **"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."**the power to create this new relationship is God's forgiveness.
- C. Because we live this side of the New Testament we know that this change and forgiveness is accomplished in Jesus.
 - 1. It is God who was wronged, but He gave His own son to forgive our sins.
 - 2. Guess what, God is at the window of your life, ready to forgive.
 - 3. God's forgiveness changes us. He changes our hearts, and, even if in this life we do not do so perfectly we live for God because Jesus died for us.

CONCLUSION - This month we have been considering behaviors of Christians that set them apart. Christians are different, set apart, because they live by faith. You see, Christians trust God, and His forgiveness, and the new life HE gives. As our text says, **"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."** Or, as our epistle from Romans says, **28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.**