

No, No, No **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

Introduction

I want to show you something this morning. I took this out of the Grace library. This was donated to our church on May 5, 1963 by Oliver Nicklas in honor of Elizabeth Hotz Nicklas. Unless you have been around this church for a very long time, those names don't mean anything to you. Oliver was John Smoots' great uncle, and was one of the charter members of this congregation, as was John's grandfather Adam.

This is called a pulpit Bible, meaning that it typically would be displayed on the church's pulpit. The Scripture readings for the day would be read from it. That would be a bit difficult for us to do today, however, because the Bible is written entirely in German.

I am showing it to you this morning precisely because it is written in German. It's a perfect illustration for this Reformation Sunday. You see, back before the days of the Protestant Reformation, people did not have Bibles of their own. The limited copies of the Scriptures were all owned by the clergy, and since those all were written in Latin, no one except the priests could read them anyway.

Everything the Christians of that day knew about what was in the Bible, they heard from their parish priests. So the people had no way of knowing whether they getting the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Over time the teachings of the church had become slanted toward the political and personal preferences of those who were in authority. That needed to change.

Enter Martin Luther. Luther was not the first person to attempt a Reformation movement in the church. He was just the first to live to tell about it. Previous reformers, like John Hus and John Wycliffe, were martyred for their efforts. But Luther lived and succeeded, primarily because he was able to get the Word of God translated from Latin into German quickly.

Once it was in the German language, the people began to read. As they began to read the Bible for themselves, they found verses like these:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law... (Romans 3:20)

We maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. (Romans 3:28)

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31-32)

Those verses were contrary to what they heard proclaimed from their pulpits. They began to ask questions, and the resulting firestorm is what we now know as the Protestant Reformation. They knew in their hearts that there had to be more to the story than the deep guilt they felt for constantly falling short of God's expectations.

Hang around Lutherans pastors long enough and you hear one of them refer to the difference between Law and Gospel. When you them start to pontificate about this, this is what they mean.

- The Law is the part of the faith that makes you feel guilty. It is all about sin, and rules, and your failure to be good enough.
- The Gospel is where you learn that God has a different way, a way that frees you from all that guilt by bathing you in this thing called "grace." You learn that despite your failures, God loves you and makes it possible for you to live a life that pleases Him by putting your trust in Him.

Jeremiah tells us:

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah." (Jeremiah 31:31)

The old covenant is the Law. This new covenant is the Gospel of faith and grace.

Jeremiah goes on to describe this new covenant, which can be capsulized in three "no" statements:

#1: NO EXCUSES

Verse 33 says:

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. (Jeremiah 31:33)

The Old Covenant – the Old Law – was written on tablets of stone. As you might recall, Moses went up onto Mt. Sinai and watched as the finger of God etched the Law into two tablets. When we think about that Old Covenant, we think of all we cannot do. "Thou shalt not!"

But the New Covenant – the covenant of faith and grace – is written in our hearts and in our minds. Deep within your soul God has placed a longing for things that are just and right. Down in that place, you know there is more to life than what the world offers. That's why your conscience begins to bother you when you stray away from the truth of Scripture.

My Mom used to tell us that God has placed into the heart of every person a sharp-edged triangle. She called that our conscience. Whenever we considered doing

something wrong, the triangle would start to spin, and the sharp points of that triangle would cut us inside.

That hurt, she said, was because God had put within us the knowledge of right and wrong. So I didn't need a stone tablet to tell me something is wrong. , My own conscience would take care of that!

And because God has placed that new covenant in our hearts and minds, there are no more excuses for not responding to the gospel. You can't say "I never saw those stone tablets, so I didn't know."

That's what Paul meant when he told the religiously curious in Athens:

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30)

There are no more excuses.

#2: NO MYSTERY

There is also no more mystery. Verse 34 says:

No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," (Jeremiah 31:34a)

The ultimate fulfillment of this Scripture will happen when Jesus Christ returns. People might debate it now, but when Jesus returns, it will all be different.

At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:10-11)

That's the goal of any sort of evangelistic effort we do – to help people know Jesus. We don't need to start a fire within them. The spark is already there. God wrote it in their hearts and minds. Our job is simply to walk with Jesus, and as His Spirit opens the door for us, help people to know who He is. Help them to understand there is real life and real freedom.

Yes, one day they will know. But they need to know now, so they can live in the fullness and freedom of that knowledge.

#3: NO MORE SIN

I have been working on the Advent worship services these past days, so when I read the last half of verse 34 I was reminded of the third verse in one of our favorite carols, "Joy to the World." First, verse 34 ...

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. (Jeremiah 31:34b)

Do the words I'm thinking about come to your mind?

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found ...*

Early in their marriage George made a major mistake. He confessed it to his wife, and she graciously forgave him. "Forgive and forget. That's my motto," she said. But over the subsequent years of their marriage, she would constantly remind him of that event. One day George had enough. He asked his wife "Why do you keep bringing that up? I thought your motto was 'forgive and forget.'" "It is," she responded. "And I don't what you ever to forget that I have forgiven and forgotten."

That's not how God operates. When we respond in faith to the new covenant within us, He remembers our sin no more. Never to be held against us again.

If you are still struggling with the memory of some past sin, hear these words. God remembers it no more.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

APPLICATION

No excuses. No mystery. No more.

There are two takeaways I want you to get from this message today.

1. The first goes back to that German Bible. The Reformation happened because the people read the Scriptures. They did not rely on what their pastors said in order to know what God said. You need to read. This world needs to read. Don't underestimate the importance of that one.
2. The second invites you to embrace this truth, and to spread it to everyone you meet.

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:31-32, 36)

Let's pray ... Amen.