

Jeremiah 1:4-10 and Matthew 20:1-16

Jeremiah said: “Then the Word of the Lord came to me, saying, “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.*”

God knew Jeremiah, even before he was born. So, does God know all of His prophets – also known as pastors or preachers? How are prophets called today? Does a man “make a decision on his own” to be a pastor/preacher/prophet? Or does God still call pastors/prophets? Could it be that “the Word of the Lord” comes to men today saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations?’”AND THE ANSWER IS:

God still calls prophets – by the Performative Word He calls them - even before they were born – God knows His prophets, by His Word He sanctifies a man, makes him Holy, sets Him apart for God's purposes. I fear for any man who “figures out on his own” that God wants him to be His prophet and preacher. He has put himself in a precarious position between God and His people.

God gave His Word to all of HIS prophets. The Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. Ten to twenty years after Jeremiah, God would give His Word to Ezekiel. And we hear about it especially in Chapters 33 and 34 of Ezekiel where God warns the prophets **and the people** about hearing His words of warning. For the pastor who hears God's words of warning about sin and death and does not warn God's people there will be condemnation. But, for the pastor who is faithful to preach God's law and gospel to God's people, there will be **no** condemnation. Likewise the people will be condemned when they hear and do not heed God's word of law/warning preached to them by His prophets. Those who hear and keep God's word are not subject to His condemnation. For these, God has forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

For you see, whether pastor or layman, our lives belong to God. And whether one believes or does not believe their lives are in God's Hands. GOD IS our Creator and Sustainer. And our parable from Matthew 20 about the gracious owner is a case in point. Though this parable is not usually thought of in this way, it shows that we are in God's hands. He is gracious to us. Jesus shows us in this parable that God deals with us and His creation as He will. He gives His children good things. He gives us what we need. He even gives those who do not believe in Him what they want – that is He gives them over to their own sin. He gives them over to their own depravity. He gives them over to their eventual destruction.

And so, Dear Ones, you see from this parable of Jesus that God provides for you as He will and as He wishes. He gives you what He promises to give you. He gives to you out of His great bounty and never ending mercy. He gives you everything you need to live in this world - food, shelter, and clothing. But more than that, He graciously gives you forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through His Son. It is not our doing, but it is God's doing that matters in this world.

Would we be like the servants hired first? Would we think that somehow our good works matter? Would we complain that we only receive from God forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation? Would we complain that after all our hard work for the church – that after all our good works for our neighbor – that after all our striving and trying to do and keep the Ten Commandments – would we complain that “all we get” is the same as the late coming sinner who repents and confesses his sins believing for the first time shortly before he dies – would we complain that God forgives him, too? Heaven forbid, literally, **heaven forbid**. The only thing that really matters in our gospel text today is the grace of God. Length of service doesn't matter. Productivity doesn't matter. Bloodlines don't matter. Everything in the parable of Jesus today centers on God's grace being variable and passing. Only the grace of the master is constant. Nothing matters except that God graciously forgives our sins through faith in Christ.

God is faithful to His promise to forgive us. Would He send His Son into the flesh? - to the Cross? - to the grave? - raise Him from the dead? - seat Him at His right hand in power and glory? - would He do all that to then somehow go back on His promises to us given and fulfilled through His Son? And the answer is no. There is one thing and one thing only in this life you can depend on – not your job, not your parents, not even your spouse completely, **especially** not yourself – the only thing in life you can depend on is God and His promises. And that “promise” and “promise fulfilled” is God's grace in Christ Jesus our Saviour.

He gives you His Holy Word. Remember your Holy Baptism when you confess your sins and receive absolution. Come now to the Holy Table of the one and only, true and living God. He provides for you right here everything that you need - for the forgiveness of your sins - for the strengthening of Your Faith – pronounced through the mouth and given through the hands of a sinner-preacher-prophet who is saved, like you, by God's Grace. He has sent His Word and Promises to you in the Scriptures. Now His Son comes to you miraculously and mysteriously in the bread and wine to forgive your sins and strengthen your faith. Soli Dei Gloria. All glory to God. The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the Creator and Sustainer of all things by His life giving Word. Amen.