

February 16, 2025

Jeremiah 1:4-20:

What Is The Life We Live?

- I. By Nature.
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Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Dear Friends in Christ,

You know how it works: The longer you live the older you get. I know: "Really?" However, if you get old enough you'll stare at the reality that you've lived a lot longer than the time you have left. In his play, "The Rock," T.S. Elliot wrote:

All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the life we have lost in living?

And I like this thought from humorist Josh Billings: "I'd rather know a few things for certain than be sure of a lot of things that ain't so." So how do you see life? How do you see everything in the light of what you have seen from the earliest childhood days you can remember to the present?

WHAT IS THE LIFE WE LIVE?

I. By Nature.

We're all very familiar with this Word: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm.3:23)." As you know, we are by nature sinful and unworthy of God's love. Consider the words God had David write:

For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you. (Ps.5:4-7).

The wicked - the evil - the boastful. These words are describing the person who is doing something wrong, knows it, and does it anyway. They're describing the liar, as Scriptures say: "All mankind are liars (Ps.116:11)." They're describing people who hate and murders, as the Word says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (I Jn.3:15)." And, they're describing the gossip and the one who slanders.

Do we understand who this Scripture is describing? It's describing such as David, the man who took another man's wife and impregnated her. Then he arranged her husband's death; had Uriah placed on the front line of battle knowing he would be killed. Murdered him. Then tried to ignore it until God sent the prophet Nathan to confront him. And after Nathan confronted him, David confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord (2 Sm.12:13)." Immediately Nathan declared. "The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die. (2 Sm.12:13b)." But there would be earthly consequences for David, as there are for us because of our sin.

Do we know of anyone who fits the words God gave David? Of course, us. We can't walk away from that, ignore it. It's talking about who we are without Christ standing in front of us to cover our sin with His blood; what we are by nature, as the Word says "...(we) were by nature children of wrath ((Eph.2:3b)). But look...

II. He Consecrated Us.

In our text, God said to Jeremiah, "before you were born I consecrated you." This also applies to us. We have been consecrated, set apart. Scriptures say, "(God) chose us in him before the foundation of the world (before creation) to be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (Eph.1:4-5)." We were

adopted because we were enemies of God as the result of our sin. However, as the Word says, "...God shows his love for us that while we were sinners, Christ died for us (Rm.5:8)." Paid for our sins and adopted us to be His.

We know, or should, that we have received the greatest miracle; the miracle of faith to understand that while "the wages of sin is death (physical and eternal hell)...the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rm6:23)." And with that God gives us purpose for life. As God called Jeremiah to be His spokesman, so he called us to speak of Him, as God's Word says, "...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (I Pt.2:9)." We are priests, and as priests we offer praise, thanksgiving, and service to the Lord.

As priests, we are salt, as Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth (Mt.5:13)." Salt preserves. In the case of our service, the proclamation of the Gospel can reach into the lives of others and work eternal life; preserve. And salt gives flavor, gives hope and eternal comfort as we labor through this world.

As priests, we have the purpose of being light, as Jesus said, "You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Mt.5:14-16)." It is the light of the Gospel of Christ that shines the way to the love of God in Christ. But, there is something else . . .

III. Knows.

Recall that our text began with these words of Jeremiah: "Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...(v.4)'" Since we have been consecrated, set apart, He knew us before we were born. We can't miss this Word from Psalm 139: "My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them (Ps.139:15-16)." - before we were conceived.

And with that comes this promise of God through Isaiah: "'Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to your gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and I will save (Is.46:3-4).'"

In case we conclude that the remnant of Israel refers only to the Jews of the Old Testament remember what Paul wrote: "...I do not want you be unaware of this mystery, brothers; a partial hardening has come upon Israel (the earthly Israel), until the fulness of the Gentiles (non-Jews) has come in. And in this way all Israel (believers in Christ, Jew and Gentile) will be saved...(Rm.11:25-26)." This, of course, includes us.

IV. He Is With Us.

And what the Lord said to Jeremiah, He says to us. "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you declares the Lord (v.8)." So, who does "them" refer to? Those who want nothing to do with confronting sin, nothing to do with Christ. No, we're not Jeremiah, but we are His people in Christ. No, we have not been sent to nations, but we have been called to be salt and light to others. And, no, we're not prophets in the narrow sense, called to declare something new, revelation from God, but we are prophets in the wide sense; declaring God's Scripture and the love of God in Christ to others.

It's like this: the Lord called us to be His. We know the love, forgiveness of sin and eternal life God has given us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What God said to Israel of old was for His people, His church, us: "Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, I love you...(Is.43:3a,4a)." As the Lord had Paul write regarding the bringing together of Jew and Gentile:

And he (Christ Jesus) came and preached peace to you who were far off (the Gentiles) and peace to those were near (the Jews). For through him we both have access in one Spirit (the Holy Spirit) to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...(Eph.2:17-19).

Those are chilling words: "strangers...aliens." Sometimes we might feel as if we're much of nothing here. But a bloody cross and an empty tomb say otherwise. I truly appreciate these words of Luther:

This life is not a state of being righteous (that is, in and of ourselves), but rather, of growth in righteousness; not a state of being healthy, but a period of healing; not a state of being, but becoming; not a state of rest, but of exercise and activity.

We are not yet what we shall be, but we grow towards it; the process is not yet finished, but is still going on; this life is not the end, it is the way to a better.

All does not yet shine with glory; nevertheless, all is being purified. (Daily Readings of Luther, Templegate Publishers, Springfield, Il., 1987, p.52.)

And as God impresses upon us through Isaiah, "Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, I love you...Fear not for I am with you (Is.43:4a,5a)." We are "fellow citizens with the saints (those who have gone on before us) and members of God's household." That's the life we live . . . forever!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott