Jeremiah 31:34c for I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more.

Ah, here it is again the Festival of Reformation and at the same time the marvel and wonder of All Saints Day. Let’s just remind you of how these two things fit together.

From the earliest church on there was a festival called All Saints Day. All Saints Day was a time when the living members of the church took time to think about, reflect on and give thanks to God for the many wonderful and true Christians who have served the Lord and His Church. It is called All Saints Day because in truth, every true believer in Jesus is a saint, a holy one, not because of what they have done but rather because of what they have believed. They lived and believed that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior from sin and that heaven was their home because of the redemption Jesus Christ gives. Saints because they are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb.

As history unfolded in the centuries, eventually the church found itself in need of some reform. The truth of the matter is that the gospel, the saving message of our Lord and Savior was lost to the church. There were two big factors involved. The first was the rise of the Bishop of Rome. The simple version is that the Bishop of Rome declared himself the Pope and that salvation and all things religious and worldly must go through and be approved by him. (Many of you don’t know, but this caused the first major division of the Christian Church into the Western Church and the Eastern Church, today known as the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church. They split over the teaching of the bishop of Rome being the Pope.) The second thing that happened was that the majority of the Eastern Church was lost because of the rise of the Mohammedans. That pretty well left the Roman Church to do what it wanted and it wanted world power.

This situation went on for about 900 years when finally a champion of God’s Word arose. A young German Catholic Priest, on the basis of God’s Word, challenged his church to abandon all its false doctrines and get back to the truth of the Gospel that men are saved by grace through faith alone. Yep, that young priest was Martin Luther. Martin really got the ball rolling when on the night before All Saints Day, called All Hallowed Eve or All Saints Eve, he posted 95 questions so that a debate on the teachings of God’s Word could be held and his hope was, that because of this debate and study of God’s Word the church would be reformed and the gospel once again preached.

By the way, All Saints Day is November 1st and All Saints Eve is on October 31st. He posted his 95 questions on that day because he felt there was no better way to honor the past believers in Christ than to work at getting back to the teachings of Christ. And thus was born the Lutheran Church. By the way, that most famous quote of Luther is still an awesome thing to contemplate. Here was this man, for all intents alone in his endeavor to get things right on the basis of God’s Word. He faced the fact that he would surely be declared an outlaw and as such could be legally killed by anyone if he did not retract his teachings. After thinking it over for a day Luther’s response was: *“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Sacred Scripture or by evident reason—since I do not accept the authority of popes or councils, for it is evident that they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against my conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”* Wow. One man, one voice based on God’s Word can make a world of difference! And if you don’t know all the things that came about in the world because of the Reformation then please, go and read about that period of history.

Please note that in Jeremiah’s day there was need for reform. Jeremiah served a people who had rejected and spurned the truth of God’s Word. Listen to how my Sermon Studies book spoke about what Jeremiah faced.

*“Here is the Judah Jeremiah found in 600 b.c.: her kings, following the death of Josiah, were weak, or corrupt or both; her judges took bribes; her priests got drunk in preparation for their temple duties; most of her prophets tailored their message to whatever people wanted to hear; the rich exploited the poor; businessmen cheated their customers; and both physical and spiritual adultery ran rampant. Yet the throngs who worshiped at Jerusalem’s temple were convinced that no harm could come to them because they stood in the Holy City and they had* ‘the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord’ *in their very midst. The temple had become a spiritual rabbit’s foot.”*

Those are pretty devastating words. To this group of people God sent Jeremiah. For the most part, he was a lone voice of God’s truth. And for the most part he was a preacher of God’s wrath and coming judgment upon these people. Even when the Babylonians first marched in, looted the temple of all its treasures and began to carry off captives, the false teachers still kept proclaiming the God was with them while Jeremiah kept insisting that God’s judgment had come. Jeremiah was right.

And yet, Jeremiah was also brought to give messages of hope and comfort. Our text is just one of those texts where hope and comfort is given. Let’s consider these words under the theme: **The Days to Come!**

Please note that the first part of our text, verses 31-32, is a reminder of what had happened. God had made a covenant with the people of Israel where He promised to be their God if they promised to follow his ways. But they didn’t. Oh, outwardly they looked good for a while. They carried out the rituals of the Old Testament but they paid no attention to the purpose and meaning of those things. By Jeremiah’s day, they allowed idols and false gods among the people, all in the name of God, but in truth and fact the people of Israel had abandoned the Law, the Word of God for what they wanted to do. They still put on a show of religiousity and pietism, but it was gutted of the truth of God.

The sad thing that I will tell you is that this gutted faith would go on for the next 600 years or so. Even though the nation was carried away to captivity just as God had said and even though they were able to return to their land some 80 years later, just as God had said, the people never did repent, never did get the truth of God right. Just that fact that after the return from exile, God was silent for 400 years. And consider what is found in John 5. Here is Jesus being confronted by the Jewish leadership because he healed a man on the Sabbath. As a result of this Jesus says very clearly to them: (37-40) **“The Father who sent me—he is the one who has testified about me. You have never heard his voice or seen his form. And you do not have his word remaining in you, because you do not believe the one he sent. You search the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them. They testify about me! And yet you do not want to come to me in order to have life.”**

Here is Jesus telling these men they are godless and lost in sin. And yet note that Jesus acknowledges that they have and study God’s Word. It is useless to them because they do not believe it. He even says, **”You have never heard his voice…”** implying that the word of God was absolutely empty to them. The Scriptures from beginning to end are about Jesus and his salvation. They didn’t get it. They were close minded to its truths. They thought the secret to salvation was man and what man was all about.

But note that Jeremiah’s prophecy tells us that the day will come when this will change. If you haven’t grasped it already, the last part of Jeremiah’s words were pointing to the time of Jesus and what Jesus will do. The words are awesome and wonderful, filling us with hope, comfort and the joy of our salvation.

Verse 33 says: **“But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds, and I will write it on their hearts.”** Now, please, pay attention to what has been said. These words are speaking to us about the end result of the life and times of Jesus. For “after those days” we will find things changed. They will be changed because of Jesus. Jesus will reveal and declare the wonder and marvel of God. Jesus will completely and surely reveal the grace, mercy and love of God as he carries out his ministry, revealing and fulfilling the truth of God’s salvation. As a result of what Jesus has done, God, Father and Son, will send the Holy Spirit who will make the blind see and the dead alive. God’s Holy Spirit will lead us to know the Word of God and to have that Word of God near and dear to our hearts because that Word of God is Jesus.

Look at the next line: **“I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will each one teach his neighbor, or each one teach his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.”** In these words, we are being told that the days of the Lord, the days that are coming will be days were God and his wonder are revealed. I have always viewed these verses as a prophetic way of God telling us His Son, the fullness of the deity in bodily form would be among us, would walk among his people. That’s why they didn’t have to teach each other, for the Lord himself would be among their midst.

I have to tell you, that as I contemplate these words I marvel all the more at God’s promises and the wonder they are. The entire world can get to know God the Father just because they can get to know Jesus the Son of God. To study God’s Word, to contemplate the life of Jesus, to let the teachings of Jesus sink into our hearts, to let the sacrifice and then the resurrection of Jesus be our foundation and hope…all of that is what causes us to be children of God, heirs of eternal life and salvation. It is all made clear, all made sure in just what Jesus has done.

And the last part, don’t miss these words: verse 34c **“For I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more.”**

Those words are all about Jesus. Why does God forgive our guilt? Why does God remember our sins no more? The answer is found in Jesus. Please note that many churches try to get around Jesus and his redemptive work. Make no mistake, that is exactly what is happening when a church disregards the Bible as God’s Word or especially when a church refuses to believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. I can guarantee you that if they deny the resurrection they also deny that Jesus was on the cross to pay for our sins. And yet that is exactly what Jesus is about. God forgives us because in love he sent his Son. God forgives us because Jesus in love went to the cross and paid for our sins. Listen to 1 Peter 3:18, a passage we studied this past week in Bible class: **“Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”** There is the point of Jesus and our faith. To understand what Jesus has done for us. To grasp our forgiveness and salvation in Jesus. Because we simply, of God’s power and grace have been called to faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior from sin.

That’s what this prophecy of Jeremiah is all about. About what would be and what would come with the life and times of Jesus. He is our Savior. He grants us eternal life and salvation. It is not a free for all. It is not just automatic that if you live in this life you get to go to heaven. It happens only because of and with Jesus. As our Romans reading told us today, it is not about us and our works. We cannot earn our way to heaven. The righteousness that gets us into heaven comes how? Romans says, **“through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe.”**

Dear people, Jeremiah was a reformer, but nobody listened and God brought upon them his punishment. Jesus was a reformer and even though the majority didn’t listen, Jesus served to fulfill the Law and bring eternal life and salvation to the world by the gospel in Word and Sacrament. It is sad when people refuse today to hear God’s Word. It is sad when people today don’t believe, maybe even don’t know this wonder and awe of Jesus. May we, as Christians, Lutherans, filled with the wonder of Jesus continue to do a few important things! May we continue to put our entire focus on Jesus and His redemption revealed and sealed to us in his Word! May we fearlessly go into the world and proclaim this wonder of Jesus, each and every one of us, that God’s Spirit call, gather, enlighten and keep souls in Jesus Christ. May we never waver from the Word of God and its glorious truth. Here we stand. God help us. Amen.