

**+ Jeremiah 15:15-21 + Christians Don't Get What They Deserve +
+ 15th Sunday after Pentecost + 21 September 2014 +**

"He got what he deserved." An elite athlete receives a Most Valuable Player trophy and commentators go on and on about how much he deserved that reward for his hard work, discipline, and excellence.

"He got what he deserved." A criminal gets a major sentence for a major crime or a bad guy on screen gets a just punishment. You hear people say the criminal or the bad guy got what he deserved for his evil activity.

Same statement—two completely different outcomes. Most people see hard work, faithfulness and discipline as qualities that deserve reward, while cheating, lying, violence, brutality, and disregard for the law deserve punishment. So what do we deserve?

Everyone has their own opinion, but when we start talking about "getting what we deserve" as Christians, it's ultimately not up to us to decide. In fact, we're confronted with a couple questions: Do Christians always get what they deserve? Do Christians always deserve what they receive? Well, the Lord has answers this morning as he responds to the complaints of the frustrated, weary prophet Jeremiah.

You see, Jeremiah thought he deserved better. The Lord had called Jeremiah to a very difficult ministry. His primary purpose was to proclaim judgment on the kingdom of Judah because they had rejected the Lord. We're not sure when in Jeremiah's ministry he lamented to the Lord, but we do know it followed another crushing sermon of God's holy Law. God had condemned Judah. **"You have rejected me... You keep on backsliding. So I will lay hands on you and destroy you; I can no longer show compassion... I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know, for my anger will kindle a fire that will burn against you."** (Jeremiah 15:6,14)

Who would want to listen to preaching like that? Instead people, from the lowliest slave to the king himself, ridiculed the prophet. They mistreated him. They persecuted him and made him suffer. When Jeremiah came around, people either glared or turned their backs to snicker. He had few friends and no family. His life was lonely, and there was little relief from the daily preaching of God's holy Law. Nothing seemed to go well for him, but when no one listened, Jeremiah didn't give up. No, he remained faithful. So you can understand why Jeremiah thought he deserved better. You can understand why Jeremiah cried out to the Lord.

"You understand, O LORD; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering—do not take me away..." Jeremiah knew his only hope for rescue was the true God—the Lord of free and faithful grace, but he feared that God would allow him to be swept away. He wanted quick deliverance.

So the prophet reminded the Lord of his faithful service. **"...Think of how I suffer reproach for your sake. When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty."** People taunted Jeremiah and blamed him for the problems in their society. He was SO negative! Yet he remained faithful to the Lord, basically "consuming" the Word of God—his joy and his heart's delight. Nevertheless, Jeremiah impatiently demanded that the Lord come through for him. "Why don't you act fast enough, Lord?"

Jeremiah's lament poured out. **"I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation."** Jeremiah was very lonely. His message often excluded him from others, especially when God filled Jeremiah with anger for their pagan reveling. Jeremiah thought he deserved something better from the Lord.

So the frustration he kept inside soon boiled over. **"Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?"** Why didn't the Lord act? Why did the Lord continue to show patience for those people who clearly rejected him and made his prophet's life miserable? Why didn't they get what they deserved? Was the Lord like a dried-up spring to a thirsty man? Jeremiah blamed the Lord for his problems and forgot what he himself really deserved.

How often don't you and I indirectly blame the Lord too? We often think we deserve better for serving Christ. I mean we get up on a Sunday morning to get here for 9 AM Bible Study and Sunday School and 10:15 worship. We haul the kids out of bed and make sure they're here. When there are activities at church, we're there. When there's a sign-up sheet to help, we're often the first to sign. We take part on the Council or in Ladies' Guild or in the choir or help with kids' programs or put together fliers. We're here nearly every week. We might even have devotions or personal Bible study time at home. We struggle to refrain from the gossip or bad

language we hear at work or the peer pressure at school. We can look back on years of faithful service to the Lord, just as he has called us to do, but every once in a while you start wondering, “Don’t I deserve something for serving Jesus?”

It never seems to work out that way, does it? Loved ones grow ill and pass away. Financial problems loom on the horizon at home or here at church. Ministry programs don’t blossom and draw as many souls as we would like. Conflict rears its ugly head between spouses, parents, kids, members and even the pastor. Friends move away. Prices keep inflating, and it gets harder to daily remain faithful as a Christian in an increasingly anti-Christian world. Even friends or family members might give you a hard time. “You drive how far to go to what church?” “You won’t do what because you’re a Christian?” “You actually believe that?”

Jeremiah wasn’t the first to think he deserved better than he got, and he’s not the last. At some point, every one of us has thought that way. You might have even found yourself talking like Jeremiah. “Come on, Lord! Why don’t you come through for me? Why can’t something go right? You promised to deliver me. Will you fail me too?” In a sense, we blame the Lord for our problems, while forgetting what we really deserve.

So what do we deserve? The prophet Isaiah once wrote, **“All our righteous acts are like filthy rags...”** (64:6) We don’t deserve a trophy, a blessing, or even a pat on the back from the Lord. **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”** (Romans 3:23) We all deserve God’s holy wrath and punishment. We deserve it for our sinful price and for our complaints against the Lord. That’s what Jeremiah deserved too, but the Lord of free and faithful grace didn’t respond that way. No, he proved **we receive what we do not deserve.**

The Lord’s response to Jeremiah was amazingly calm. **“If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them.”** God made it clear that Jeremiah’s complaints were offensive and the prophet needed to repent. Nevertheless, the Lord showed his grace—his undeserved loving kindness—by turning Jeremiah from sin and restoring him. Those complaints were worthless words, so the Lord gave him worthy words. Those complaints made him God’s enemy, so God restored Jeremiah to himself with forgiveness and mercy.

Then the Lord showed his grace once more. He made Jeremiah a worthy and steadfast proclaimer, **“a fortified wall of bronze”** against which the people would crash, but not overcome. Then the Lord poured out a promise that surely took Jeremiah’s doubts away and renewed his strength. This was a promise anchored in the perfect life and innocent death of the coming Messiah. **“For I am with you to rescue and save you... I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel.”** Jesus, the **“Redeemer”**, would come to pay the ransom price for Jeremiah and all people by his own willing sacrifice. Christ, the Redeemer, would come to conquer the power of sin and Satan and death forever. Because of God’s grace, Jeremiah received what he did not deserve.

We, too, receive what we do not deserve. We sometimes question the mysterious will of God, but still we receive the grace of God in Christ. It’s amazing! When we’re at our lowest, Christ’s power is strongest, as Jesus once told Paul, who was suffering from some unknown ailment, **“My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** (2 Corinthians 12:9)

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus spoke of taking up your cross to follow him. Taking up your cross is only possible, because Jesus did it for you first. The Lord doesn’t promise to give you a victorious life right now, but he does promise to rescue and save you, even in your weakness. He continues to crush Satan’s power with his forgiveness through Holy Baptism and through the strengthening of your faith for the forgiveness of sins in the Holy Supper. Nowhere do we see that grace of God more than in Christ crucified who allowed himself to be defeated to gain eternal victory for us.

None of us deserve that. None of us deserve Jesus’ life as a substitute for our sinful lives. None of us deserve Jesus’ rescue, but by the grace of God we received it as Peter reminds us, **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”** (1 Peter 1:18-19)

In Christ, we receive the grace we do not deserve, but like Jeremiah, we also receive the privilege of proclaiming Christ. None of us are called to be prophets of the Lord like Jeremiah, called to bring a specific

message from God to a specific people at a specific time. Yet the Lord does call us to serve him faithfully and to actively take the opportunities he presents.

He wants us to utter worthy words that speak of his rescue and ransom and salvation through Jesus Christ. He wants us to continue to turn away from those who would lead us down the path to sin and false teaching, and by faith in him, we continue to walk in his righteous ways. The Lord doesn't promise to make life better, but he does promise to be with you and save you as you carry out that privileged task of proclaiming Christ.

Christians don't get what they deserve...and thank God for that! When your sinful pride tries to rear its ugly head again, give it what it deserves—a deadly drowning in the waters of your Baptism. Then through faith in Jesus, return to the Lord, who always gives us more than we deserve. Amen.