

01 - Repentance and Remission of Sins - Luke 24:44-47 - 2017-10-01

Call to Worship: Ephesians 1:3, 7

Ephesians 1:3, 7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 130

Sermon: "95 Theses Part 1: Repentance and Remission of Sins" Luke 24:44-47

Lord's Supper: Matthew 26:26-28

Benediction: Acts 3:18-19

But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. (19) Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,

INTRODUCTION

There is a Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

He is the perfect savior, and there is no other.

There is a gospel: forgiveness of sins through the one Jesus Christ by the grace of God.

It is the perfect gospel, and there is no other.

Because the Savior is the perfect savior, whatever is said about Him that is true is the most to His glory and the glory of God the Father. Anything said about him that is not true tends to glorify sinful men instead of Christ, or the creature rather than God the Creator. Therefore it is the ongoing desire of Christ's church to maintain the knowledge of the truth about our Savior, and the ongoing desire of our enemy, the devil, and all who are under his sway, to corrupt the church's doctrines of Christ, so that the church doesn't know and doesn't teach the pure, perfect truth about the perfect Savior.

Because the gospel of forgiveness of sins in the perfect Savior, Jesus Christ, is the perfect gospel, beside which there is no other, whenever the gospel message is preserved unchanged and preached whole, it is the power of God for the salvation of sinners and the building up of the saints. But when the gospel message is not preserved unchanged, but allowed to be corrupted; and when it is preached not whole, but only in part, its power to save sinners and edify the church is greatly diminished. Even worse, when requirements are added to the gospel message, the result is not merely a warped gospel, or another gospel, since there can be no other; instead, the result is a message of righteousness by works, which is no gospel at all.

Having such a corrupted gospel, such a partial gospel, or even such a non-gospel, was the situation for our great-great-great grandparents five hundred years ago. Five hundred years ago? That seems like a very long time ago. Well, yes and no. It is many times longer than our lives. Those of us about 50 years old have lived only 10% of that 500 years, so it seems a long time ago. Yet in the history of our human race it is quite recent. 500 years ago is only

25% of the time back to when Jesus came.

17% of the time back to King David and King Solomon 1000 BC

12% of the time back to Abraham in 2000 BC

10% of the time back to when Moses was born 3000 BC

8% of the history of the whole world back to Adam in 4004 BC

So, 500 years is modern history, not ancient history. It was a long time ago, but not all that long.

What was going on then?

1492

Christopher Columbus sailed across the Atlantic and discovered the Bahamas and Cuba
The muslims were driven out of Spain and Portugal under Ferdinand and Isabella

1507 Martin Waldseemuller published a map with these western continents named "America"

1528 Alvar Nunez Cabeza De Vaca accidentally landed at Galveston after a storm, then travelled west across Texas with an African named Estabanico; they were, together, the first European and the first African to discover Texas

So, five hundred years ago was when America and Texas were first being explored and mapped, making possible their later settlement.

What was it like in church five hundred years ago? One of the Baptist churches that arose in the next century catalogued the state of things in 1500, out of which God brought them by degrees. Looking back, they said that these things had characterized the Roman Catholic church, which dominated Europe, five hundred years ago now.

transubstantiation

teaching that man's works merit salvation

works of supererogation, treasury of merit, indulgences

monks, friars, abbots, priests

masses (in Latin)

advocation of saints

praying for the deceased [because they were in purgatory]

idolatrous holy days of their own invention

 primarily their three great masses

 Michaels-mass

 Christ---or pymass

 Candles-mass

 multitude of saints' days

 St. Allsouls

 St. Mid-summer

preachers that

 were carnal, idle, and blind

 cared not after the flock but the fleece, looking their gain from every quarter

 did not relish or savour what they preached

preaching was an abominable broth not poured out by His Spirit

profaning the Lord's day

hearkening unto homilies (official sermons published by the church hierarchy)

superstitious bowing at the name of Jesus

superstitious bowing to the altar, which was plain and open idolatry

sprinkling children

 in the church with the cross and other ceremonies

 by women at home

the use of pictures and images in worship, a scrap and relic of idolatry

preachers defending this practice

kneeling at the Lord's Supper

prayers, not made in earnest by the pastors, but read from a book

Of course there were a few faithful Christians who objected to these things. In England they were the Lollards, whose movement had been started or strengthened by the work of John Wycliffe in the late 1300s. They had illegal copies of the Bible in English, and learned the Lord's Prayer and the Apostle's Creed in English. But the practices of the Lollards were illegal. There was a law in effect, passed by Parliament and King Henry IV, called *De Heretico Comburendo*, *Of Heretic Burning*, under which numerous faithful Christians were arrested, tried, and burned to death for holding to the truths of the biblical Christian faith, over against the corruptions of the Roman Catholic system.

So, five hundred years ago today, the church of our great-great-great grandfathers and grandmothers had not preserved the gospel unchanged, but had corrupted it and allowed it to be corrupted practically beyond recognition. The church did not preach the gospel whole, but left out crucial parts of the good news. Worst, the church had added man-made requirements to the gospel, and so produced a message that was not the true good news of the glory of God's free grace in forgiveness of sins for all who repent of sins, trusting in Christ, but the fake news of man's ability to work himself or even buy himself into heaven. Thus the people five hundred years ago lived in the shadow of grand cathedrals, but those shadows formed a deep darkness in which sinners never saw the light of the gospel. They heard the frequent ring of church bells, but the clamour of those church bells drowned out the faint sound of the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ crucified was always lifted up before their eyes, but in the form of dead stone statues, rather than in the form of lively gospel preaching.

In place of the sound doctrine of the gospel of God's grace, the doctrine of purgatory had taken hold of the church. According to this doctrine, even the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ had to spend time after death having their sins purged away by fire before they could be fit to enter paradise. Those Christians who had died with much sin unconfessed might have to spend as much as hundreds of years in the fires of purgatory before being allowed into heaven. The Lollards and others who opposed the doctrine of purgatory, insisting that all the redeemed, upon their death, fly straight to paradise to be with the Savior, were, ironically, burned to death by order of church authorities, to purge such ideas out of their minds to fit them for heaven. Thus were the people of England and the rest of Europe deprived of the pure gospel and of those who might have restored it to them. The sheep wandered through a wilderness, with no green pastures or still waters.

Crouched on the ten hills of Rome, gazing down hungrily at this whole continent of shepherdless sheep, loomed the anti-Christ wolf of Rome, the pope, fat from eating the flesh of the sheep, drunk with their blood, but hiding his snout, with its fangs, under all the wool he had shorn from them. From his lair in the great city, he sent forth his pack of cardinals, bishops, and priests to run down and sink their fangs into the throats of the poorest and most ignorant peasants. By the terror of the threat of years of burning in purgatory, the hierarchical rulers of the church, with the pope as its self-proclaimed head, kept the people of Europe terrified into sending their money year after year into the coffers of the pope in Rome.

In the early 1500s, right at 500 years ago, Pope Leo X wanted to refurbish the great basilica at Rome, St. Peter's, to make it even more glorious. For that he needed vast sums of money. So, the great wolf sent more of his pack into the far corners of Europe to dig their sharp claws into the souls of the poorest and most ignorant peasants. The blood-curdling howling of the wolves about the flames of purgatory terrified the people into emptying their slim purses to buy letters of indulgence from the pope, upon the promise by the indulgence preachers that as soon as they paid the price of the indulgence, the soul of their tormented loved one would fly free out of the flames of purgatory into the blessings of paradise with Christ.

As the worst of these wolfish indulgence sellers, John Tetzel, hawked his blasphemy in the German region called Saxony, by God's mercy our Lord Jesus Christ raised up a shepherd, who came to the defense of the flock. An Augustinian monk named Martin Luther had been reading the bible, and was rediscovering the great gospel truth of justification through faith alone in Christ alone. Using the skills of his academic training, and the gifts granted Him by our Lord, Martin Luther wrote in opposition to the abuses of the indulgence preachers. He penned his opposition in the form of 95 Theses, which he posted October 31, 1517, which will be five hundred years ago at the end of this month. The 95 Theses were published on the new printing presses and distributed throughout Europe. Soon after, the churches in Europe started experiencing a recovery of the biblical gospel so great that to this day it is referred to simply as "The Reformation." We, the free churches of today, are the heirs of Martin Luther and the other Reformers, having inherited what they had to work so hard to achieve, and at such cost in broken bones, spilled blood, and burnt flesh. We praise our Lord Jesus Christ for His kindness toward us in bringing in such a re-forming of His church.

So, it has now been 500 years this month. Wow. Many of our brothers and sisters in the Reformed churches these days have taken to calling October 31 every year, "Reformation Day." Some seem to be making a religious holy day out of it, and celebrating it even in the worship services of the church. That has never seemed proper to me, at least the part about celebrating it in the church, because it seems like the very making of man-made holy days that characterizes the Roman Catholic system.

But that doesn't mean I am unmoved by the occasion of it having been five hundred years since the posting of the 95 Theses. It does move me. It moves me to thankfulness, and it moves me to zeal for the gospel, and a desire to make sure we maintain what had been lost in the Dark Ages, and was given to us again by God's kind hand through Martin Luther and others. I want to take the opportunity afforded by this momentous anniversary to preach the same gospel truths Martin Luther preached, to guard the flock of Jesus Christ against today's gospel corruptions, and to proclaim the good news of forgiveness of sins to sinners who up til now have lived in the shadow of the church without having their eyes opened to the light of the gospel. So I begin today to preach the good news of Jesus Christ, from the bible as always, learning from the points raised in the 95 Theses. I intend to make this a five-part sermon series, but it may happen that I don't cover all that seems edifying in five sessions, in which case I plan to carry on a few more weeks. I don't plan to cover all 95 of the theses, but instead to pick and choose the ones that I understand the best, and that seem the most applicable to us. This will produce the unusual effect you will see today of having a sermon that has five points: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 according to which of the 95 Theses I have chosen to use in the sermon. As I use certain of the 95 Theses for points in these sermons, I will retain some of their original wording, but will also paraphrase them as necessary to show their application beyond the original context of the 16th century Roman Catholic system.

When I began to study for this several weeks ago, I found it beautiful that Martin Luther's 95 Theses begin by taking up the matter of repentance and remission of sins. The beauty of it lies primarily in its agreement with what our Lord Jesus told us.

When He began preaching, He came preaching, "Repent!"

When He instructed His church what to do until He comes again, He said that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations. So, then, I say that it is beautiful to my soul to find that the 95 Theses start right in, re-establishing our Lord's doctrine of repentance and remission of sins, which had been perverted so badly.

You flock of God, hear the truth about Jesus Christ your Savior, and His gospel, and enjoy the green grass and still waters.

You rebels against God and against His Christ, come out of the shadows, to see the light of the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins.

TEXT

Luke 24:44-47

BODY

Hear how the first part of the 95 Theses deals with the very heart of the life of the church on earth: preaching repentance and remission of sins in the name of Christ.

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent," (Matthew 4:17), [and when He commissioned His church to preach repentance,] He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance
 - a. he means the entire life as contrasted with a one-time act
 - i. not: Repent! Yes, I already did.
 - b. there is indeed an initial repentance
 - i. our Lord Jesus said that at the preaching of Jonah the men of Ninevah repented
 - c. but that initial repentance is just the beginning of life-long repentance
 - i. 1689.15.4
 1. repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives, upon the account of the body of death, and the motions thereof
 2. so it is every man's duty to repent of his particular known sins particularly
 - d. It seems there was nothing so common back then as a person who wanted to be forgiven His sins by God because of some one-time act of repentance rather than by a whole life of repentance and faith in Christ Jesus the Savior.

2. [The repentance our Lord and Master Jesus Christ preached and commissioned His church to preach] cannot be understood as referring to [any religious exercise], as administered by [a pastor or by any person]
 - a. not the sacrament of penance as in the RC church in the time of Luther
 - b. not coming down front and praying a prayer
 - c. not praying a prayer with your parents
 - d. not getting baptized
 - e. not learning the catechism

3. Yet [the repentance our Lord and Master Jesus Christ preached, and commissioned His church to preach, does not mean something that does not produce] outward mortification of the flesh
 - a. hear this in John the Baptist's preaching of repentance
 - i. Luke 3:3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,
 - ii. Luke 3:8a Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance . . .
 - iii. Luke 3:9 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."
 - b. hear this in James's doctrine of faith
 - i. James 2:14-17 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? (15) If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, (16) and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? (17) Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.
 - c. true saving repentance produces effects in the penitent person
 - i. godly sorrow over sin in the flesh
 - ii. detesting of sin in the flesh
 - iii. abhorring of your own flesh for its sin
 - iv. praying for pardon from guilt of sin
 - v. praying for strength of grace
 - vi. purpose and actual endeavor or attempt to walk before God well-pleasing in all things, by supplies of the Holy Spirit
 - d. therefore even if you call something "repentance" or say that you have repented, if mortification of the flesh does not take place, then the thing you are calling "repentance" is not what our Lord Jesus meant when He preached, "Repent"

6. [A preacher] cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God
- a. to “remit” means to pardon, to forgive; so “remission” means pardon or forgiveness
 - b. concept
 - i. not:
 1. if you do what I tell you, you will be forgiven by God
 2. you have done what I told you, so you are now forgiven by God
 - ii. but:
 1. if you repent and trust in Christ, you will be forgiven by God
 2. if a person, during this life, has repented of sin and believed in Christ, he is forgiven his sins by God
 - c. false practice
 - i. RC: priest pronounces worshiper absolved of any guilt
 - ii. note false practice at funerals
 - iii. note false practice when someone has “prayed the prayer”
 - d. true practice
 - i. declaring remission of sins to all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ
 - ii. note that one and the same apostle, Peter, pronounces remission of sins upon repentance and upon faith
 1. Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 2. Acts 10:43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."
 3. not meaning one or the other
 4. the two are linked, hooked, inseparable
 5. e.g. Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, (15) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."
 6. e.g. Acts 5:30-31 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. (31) Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

7. God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him submissive
 - a. at issue in the RC system in Luther's time was the practice of a prideful, unsubmitive person going through a ritual, like the sacrament of penance or the buying of an indulgence, and thinking himself to have guilt remitted before God, while he himself remained prideful and unsubmitive
 - b. it is the normal Christian experience for our flesh not to be in agreement with our spirit as to humility and submission
 - i. inside, the Christian has been born again; so, he is humble before God and delights in submission
 - ii. but the flesh has not yet been so changed; the flesh still has pride and hates submission
 - c. so it is normal for the true Christian to have a fierce struggle going on inside himself or herself
 - d. but what if you have no such struggle going on inside?
 - i. if the struggle is not inside you, between your flesh and your inner man
 - ii. if you do not have in your inner man humility before God and submission to the human authority He has instituted
 - iii. instead, pride and non-submission characterizes your whole being
 - iv. the struggle is between your whole being and the submission that is being imposed on you from outside
 - e. then you should not think of yourself as having been forgiven your sins before God; you should not think of having received remission of sins, which is for those who repent
 - f. granted, we know that it takes time, often some years, for a new Christian to understand submission to authority
 - i. to his parents
 - ii. to his boss at work
 - iii. to her husband
 - iv. to his church pastors
 - g. yet humbling before God is so much a characteristic of the repentant soul that where all former pride remains in full strength, and no humbling occurs, it should not be thought or said that repentance and remission of sins has taken place

CONCLUSION

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent,” (Matthew 4:17), [and when He commissioned His church to preach repentance,] He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance

[The repentance our Lord and Master Jesus Christ preached and commissioned His church to preach] cannot be understood as referring to [any religious exercise], as administered by [a pastor or by any person]

Yet [the repentance our Lord and Master Jesus Christ preached, and commissioned His church to preach, does not mean something that does not produce] outward mortification of the flesh

[A preacher] cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God

God remits guilt to no one unless at the same time he humbles him in all things and makes him submissive

Therefore, let all here heed the gospel message, the voice of the Savior, commanding all everywhere to repent, to believe in Him, to have remission of sins in His name.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Prelude: Trinity 155 “All Praise to Thee, Eternal Lord”

Camille: piano

Noah: trumpet

Anna: clarinet

Trinity 326 “This Is the Day the Lord Hath Made”

Camille: piano

Noah: trumpet

Anna: sing

Trinity 461 “From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee” (Psalm 130)

Camille: piano

Noah: trumpet

Anna: clarinet

Trinity 415 “God Be Merciful to Me” (Psalm 51)

Camille: flute

Noah: trumpet

Anna: piano

Grace 133 “Our Song from Age to Age”

Camille: sing

Noah: sing

Anna: piano