

Martin Luther: The Work of a Shepherd

The Reformation

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I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 4. We'll start reading in chapter 3, verse 14. I want to mention next Sunday Wayne Mack will be preaching, Dr. Mack will be preaching next Sunday morning so I want you to be aware of that opportunity to receive the word of God from one we love so much.

This morning I'm going to share the second part of a message I shared last time and I'm sharing from the trip that we took a few weeks back to Italy, actually to Messina, Sicily, and I had the opportunity to minister at Messina Bible Church there and the Italian Theological Academy there in Italy, and we were doing on the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, we were doing a conference called "Luther: Shepherd of Souls," and it was a blessing to really look at Luther from that standpoint of seeing his shepherding heart, his shepherding work. So a couple of the messages I shared there I wanted to share with y'all.

Last Sunday, we looked at the heart of the shepherd or the heart of a shepherd, and we saw that for Luther, he did have a shepherd's heart. That's what motivated his faithfulness. I mean, his own experience of the grace of God was formative but his own concern for the well-being of the people in Wittenberg and indeed throughout Europe, is what led him to continue the faithful work of standing on the truth and preaching the word of God. He wanted others to experience what he had experienced and so that was the heart of the shepherd we looked at last time and we saw that he had an unshakable confidence in the authority of Scripture. Today we are going to look at the work of the shepherd. The work of the shepherd and basically the work of the shepherd, if the word of God is that which when we have it we have God's revelation to us, his authoritative revelation as to how we should live, it's the one place that we can depend with absolute certainty, it's the one foundation of our faith, if that is the nature of the word of God, then the work of the shepherd and the heart of the shepherd needs to be confident in that. The work of the shepherd is to proclaim the Scriptures. It's to, as Spurgeon said, let the beast loose. It's to let the mighty word of God loose into the hearts of the people and so that's essentially the work of the shepherd is to, as we read earlier this morning, to feed the sheep.

Jesus in recommissioning Peter, you know, Peter had denied him three times, and so Jesus asked him three times, "Do you love me?" And each time he answered, he basically gave him an instruction which was to care for the sheep and two of those three verbs are "feed. Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. If you love me, feed my sheep." Because we saw the last time the word of God is sufficient. It is to us the very bread that we live by. Man does not live by bread alone but by the word of God, by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. That's what we live by. If that's what we need to live more than we need physical food, then the work of the shepherd is to proclaim that word. And I want to this morning look at six characteristics of a faithful shepherd and as we do that, we are going to be looking at how do you recognize a faithful shepherd. How should we as we look at a church, have opportunity in the future to look at a church, as we evaluate the ministers and the elders over us, what are these things? How do you recognize a faithful shepherd? And also, of course, how do you become a faithful shepherd? Those who primarily the preachers and teachers in the church, but also all Christians are called to shepherding so it has application to all of us as we try to minister the word to one another, but particularly as we look for those that would lead us.

Now, before we dive into that, I want to take a moment and deal with a preliminary matter and that is something I encountered a little bit at the conference in Italy. I was kind of surprised a little bit by a couple of the guys that were there, pastors who had sort of a negative view on Luther, and it's not really uncommon to have a negative view on Luther. There are a lot of people who have really negative views on Luther, especially Roman Catholics have unsurprisingly negative views of Martin Luther. And there are reasons that we should have a balanced view. We can sometimes have a romanticized view of Luther, like everything he did was perfect, and that certainly is not the case. He had areas he struggled in. I mean, he had theological areas he didn't really work out very well and he had practical things that he really struggled in, and there are things, errors that he taught but on the main things, he was truly a gift of God to the people of God. And I like what C. S. Lewis, a term that I remember reading in one of his books, he talks about chronological snobbery. A very helpful concept. He says that we tend to look at people in the past and we tend to be chronological snobs, that is, we judge them by our present standards, by the things that we know today. We look back at someone in the past and we look down upon them as if they should know everything that we know today, and he said that's foolish and ridiculous. You have to put yourself in the position of the person. What were they up against? What were the battles they were fighting? Then he goes on to say if they were able to look at us, they would be tempted to look down on us too because they saw some things in the 16th century much more clearly than we do. I don't know what those are because we don't see them in the 21st century. But Luther and Calvin would say to us, "What are you thinking?" in so many areas.

You see, we have to understand that each person is in a particular circumstance and when you think about, when you put yourself in Luther's position, I mean, it's humbling. He was the point man for this great work that God was doing. He was pioneering through just the densest, darkest jungle, as it were, swinging his ax, and if you're swinging an ax, it's not a precise thing you're doing. So sometimes he overshot in some areas. But I was reading a couple of books about him over the last few months and one of the guys was

talking about how actually there is a quote and Piper has got a quote in his book on Luther and the demands on him. When you think about that he was the guy leading the Reformation, everyone was looking to him continually for everything. I'll find that quote in a minute, maybe. I thought I had that note written down. Well, I'll just tell you what he says. Sorry about that. He basically said, you know, in addition to preaching 4,000 sermons in his life, he was writing books and pamphlets all the time, as many as 130 publications in one year. That's one every 2 ½ days. He is writing tracts and booklets about various issues. He had an unceasing stream of visitors coming to ask him continually, "Luther, what do we do about this? What do we do about that? How do we organize the children's ministry?" I mean, they were redoing everything. He was writing hymnals. He was doing everything and if you're trying to be an expert on everything, you're going to miss some things. And you just look at it with common sense and wisdom and of course he was off in some areas, but overall he was a great gift of God. The Protestant Reformation which the Lord used him to inaugurate, is the greatest movement of God since the early church, since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and so we should be grateful. So anyway with that, but acknowledge that there are some weaknesses and problems that he had.

Now with that said, one of the things that we can look to him as a model of is that he was an outstanding shepherd and he knew what shepherds should be about. Now, he himself was not the lead pastor of the church at Wittenberg. He was a professor at the university who helped shepherd the church there but he helped men learn how to shepherd and he had a shepherd's heart. So we are going to look at his example today. But let's read, first of all, 2 Timothy 3:14 through chapter 4:2. That's where we started last time. It's kind of a point of departure. We are not really going to exposit this passage, we're going to talk about some biblical principles related to it. This is more definitely of a topical message and we'll return to James's exposition probably after the first of the year.

Now 2 Timothy 3:14, Paul writing to Timothy, Paul the apostle, knowing that his death is imminent, writes to his young disciple, Timothy, the young pastor that he has trained up, and he says this to him, verse 14,

14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we ask that as we come to your word and we come to the subject of the importance of your word and the ministry of your word, we pray that you would bless us, that your Spirit that inspired the word, breathed out these words, would now illuminate our minds and our hearts to understand these things, to apply them, and most of all, Lord, to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray in his name. Amen.

Okay, what we want to look at is six characteristics of a faithful shepherd, a shepherd who is going to feed the sheep, these six characteristics of a shepherd who feeds the sheep well. Luther modeled these in his life. As I said, he preached 4,000 sermons, on average 120 a year. Even though he wasn't the lead pastor, he was preaching that many sermons to the people of the church every year, constantly laboring in the word. Well, six characteristics that we see in his writings that were essential for someone to feed the sheep well. Well, to feed the sheep well, you have to handle the word well and so handling the word. Six characteristics of a faithful handler of the word.

The first characteristic is prayerful dependence. Prayerful dependence. Luther understood that truth is revealed. It must be revealed by God. The Holy Spirit must illumine the word of God, enlighten our eyes. Psalm 119:18 the Psalmist prays, "Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law." Psalm 119:27, "Make me understand the way of Your precepts." Verse 34, the Psalmist prays, "Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law." You see, the Psalmist in this celebration of the beauty of God's word which Psalm 119 is, continually is crying out to God to grant understanding. So we must approach the word of God with prayerful dependence. There must not be a confidence in one's own ability and skill, though those things are important. Skill and effort, we are going to see, are important but it starts with prayerful dependence. God must speak otherwise we will not hear.

Luther writes this, "The Scriptures cannot be penetrated by study and talent is most certain, therefore your first duty is to begin to pray and to pray to this effect: that if it please God to accomplish something for his glory, not for yours or any other persons, that he may graciously grant you a true understanding of his words. As Jesus said, 'They shall all be taught of God,' John 6:45. You must, therefore," Luther continues, "completely despair of your own industry and ability and rely solely upon the inspiration of the Spirit." So complete dependence upon the Lord, something that is very easy to forget, especially as we become more skilled in how to study, how to break open the bread of life, but a truly Christian, biblical approach to Scripture cannot allow one's self to forget that.

Prayerful dependence, that's the first characteristic of a faithful shepherd. The second characteristic in Luther's unpacking of the word and of a faithful shepherd is literal interpretation. Now for those of us, it seems pretty straightforward and obvious that this would be something. Why would we have to talk about it? Well, in Luther's day, literal interpretation was not the norm. The norm in the Middle Ages was, among other things, there were a variety of ways of interpreting Scripture but the literal sense had a diminished place in hermeneutics, that is, the science of biblical interpretation. And

Luther was convinced as he looked at the word, that God had spoken plainly, that he intended to be understood. As we talked about last week, one of the characteristics of the Bible is the perspicuity, the clarity of Scripture. Remember?

So he spoke plainly to be understood and so we should look for the literal sense of the Scripture. God has spoken in human language according to the way that we use language, according to the rules of language, sentence structure, literary forms, and we should interpret the Bible as we would interpret literature. Now, truly it's the word of the living God but we come to it in the same way that we come to any other human literature. Derek Thomas in talking about this in the book "The Legacy of Luther," mentions that a literal interpretation means that we interpret parables as parables, poetry as poetry, law as law, epistles as epistles. You let the form, you respect the form in which he has given it and you interpret accordingly. You interpret a proverb as a proverb, not as a promise. A proverb is a basic rule of how things work in life. It's not a declaration by God that it is always going to be this way. You see, a proverb is a proverb.

Now, literal interpretation was essential and because of this, Luther as he learned to study the Scriptures and as he became a doctor in theology and in teaching in the monastery before he was converted, came to understand that the Bible needs to be understood literally, and as you understand it literally, then you come to what God is intending to say and what God is intending to say throughout his word is essentially some things become very clear, essentially God is revealing his glory, his holiness, on every page of Scripture. The Bible is about him. He is the main character. And as we see God in his glory, God in his righteousness, God in his holiness, we also see man in his sin. Again and again and again, we are led to despair of ourselves when we interpret correctly and then we see God's remedy for sin, the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole Bible is about Christ and rightly interpreted, we will see how it connects to that overarching story of God's plan of salvation, but literal interpretation.

The third thing, prayerful dependence, six characteristics of a faithful shepherd, prayerful dependence, literal interpretation, and thirdly, direct study. Direct study. One of the great problems in the Middle Ages, one of the things that had made them, there are so many things that came into making the Catholic Church as corrupt as it became in the Middle Ages, but one of the problems was that the theologians in the Catholic Church tended to read the Bible through the lens of philosophy. They tended to put on Aristotle like a grid of Aristotelian thinking, and through that read the Bible. This is what Thomas Aquinas essentially did. And so what you're doing is you're making Aristotle more fundamental than the Bible. You're reading the Bible through Aristotle. He's the filter which really without, you know, any surprise, messed up the understanding of the Bible. The Bible is to be studied directly. Luther said it's better to see the Scripture through your own eyes than through the eyes of another and this was one of the things that liberated him as he went directly to the text of Scripture.

Now we need to be aware of this because we, as evangelicals, can tend to read the Bible today ironically too quickly through the eyes of the commentator. We can read the Bible through the eyes of Luther, even, which would be very un-Lutheresque. I can remember

having a discussion in seminary, I went to Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi and when I did, I was not Reformed. I went there because there were no solid Baptist seminaries that believed the Bible is the word of God at that time. Now today, praise the Lord, they have been reformed. Southern Baptists seminaries are all much better than they were 30 years ago. So I go to RTS and I knew that they were Reformed and I wasn't, but I thought they believe the Bible is the word of God, it's going to be good. So I had a lot of fruitful discussions with my classmates and the Lord used that and I became Reformed after they basically won after 3 ½ years of that. But anyway, I remember having one discussion one day with some guys and we were discussing some theological point and I thought I had made some pretty good points from the text to the argument and he came back the next day, I thought, "He'll think about that and he'll come around and see my viewpoint." He came back the next day and he said, "Ty, I was reading Calvin's commentary on it and Calvin says your interpretation is hogwash." So that settled it for him. Calvin had said on this point that whoever would think that particular thing is not right. Well, normally I have a very high view of Calvin too and so I'd like to hear what he has to say, but that doesn't settle it. At that point Calvin is wrong, actually, in my view, okay? And that's what I told him but that didn't carry much weight with my friend because he was actually elevating Calvin a little more than he should. It's helpful to know what he says but let's look at the words on the paper in the text. Look at the Scriptures directly. That's what Luther said.

The direct study of the word of God is essential. This is what led him to the breakthrough. This commitment was pivotal. It was Luther's direct examination of Romans that led to the Reformation breakthrough. Had he been reading it through the lens of others, he would not have seen what he saw. Romans 1:16 and 17, that's the passage that led to the lightning bolt, as it were, salvation experience when Luther was born again. He describes his conversion as being suddenly the gates of heaven opening and him walking in when he understood Romans 1:16 and 17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed," from heaven, "from faith to faith; for it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" He was wrestling with what does the righteousness of God mean and how is it revealed in the Gospel? And as he studied the words of the passage and he kept laboring over it, he suddenly understood that what Paul is saying as you work through the grammar and the words and the meaning of the words, is Paul is saying that the Gospel, the proclamation of the good news, the proclamation of Jesus, is the vehicle through which righteousness comes. When a person believes the Gospel, righteousness is given to him or credited to him. That was the breakthrough and it happened because he studied the words of the text. He wasn't looking at it indirectly through other people's viewpoints. He wasn't just reading what Augustine had to say. I'm not saying that those things aren't valuable, they are valuable and you should consult the commentators to make sure you're not off at some point, and it is relevant what Calvin says or what the commentators say, but it's not primary. The word of God and the word of God alone are the final authority.

Now, direct study. When you understand the plain sense of Scripture, the literal interpretation, and you go directly to the word of God, that's what led to the

breakthrough. So a faithful shepherd is characterized by prayerful dependence, literal interpretation, direct study, and fourthly, hard work. It's a paradox. We read earlier a quote where Luther said, "The holy Scriptures cannot be penetrated by study and talent, that that's true is most certain, therefore, pray," but he didn't say pray and don't work hard. He said, "pray and then work hard, trusting in God's grace to enable you to work hard," which is so like the Bible itself. Like Paul says in Colossians 1:28 and 29, "We proclaim Him," listen to what Paul says, "We proclaim Him," that is Christ, "admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." Listen what Paul says next, "For this purpose also I labor," I am laboring to present Christ, to proclaim him. I'm laboring to proclaim him, "striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." You see, prayerful dependence. We labor but we are trusting that God is giving us the ability to labor. We are prayerfully laboring. So you don't just pray and not study. That would be a lot easier but it would not be fruitful.

Hard work. In fact this is so clear, back to our passage, 2 Timothy 4, the command to preach the word, reprove, rebuke, exhort, be ready, five imperatives, commands. Paul is telling Timothy and he gives that solemn charge ahead of time, "You must preach the word. You must labor at these things." And he has told him even in the previous chapter, if you turn back over to chapter 2, verse 15, he emphasizes hard work in interpreting the Bible, "Be diligent to present yourself," this is 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." He says the person who handles the word of God needs to be a workman, that is, a laborer. It's interesting the pastoral epistles are so rich. 1 Timothy 5:17, just turn over another page to 1 Timothy, and there where Paul is dealing with the fact that elders can be compensated by the church, he says, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."

It's not something you just, you know, I remember having, I've had ministry pastor friends who didn't know what they were going to preach until they got up in the pulpit and they basically opened their Bible and they would just start preaching. No study. No preparation. And they thought that was being Spirit led. I had a man come into my office after I was pastoring for a while and chide me, an older gentleman, on the fact that I studied too much; that you should just trust the Lord and go in the pulpit and preach like that. You know, it's a view that's not that uncommon, not in our circles, but it certainly, there are people around who it's very much like the Quaker mentality, just wait and see if God just gives you something. But he has given us something. He has spoken so clearly in his word and we are to study to show ourselves approved, a workman who need not be ashamed.

But he says a work, the elder who rules well, who leads the church well, who is working hard at preaching and teaching. This word "work hard" means "to work and labor to the point of exhaustion; to weary one's self with labor." That's the word that Paul uses there, the one who wearies himself to the point of exhaustion in the preaching and teaching of the word. In fact, the imagery is interesting. Verse 18 after he says the one who works

hard at preaching and teaching should then receive some return. He's talking about caring for the needs of the elders and the leaders in the church by the church caring for them and he explains by bringing up an example from the Old Testament, a very practical example, "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.'" That is that when an ox thrashes grain, you're not to muzzle him, you are to allow him to eat the benefits of his threshing. Threshing an ox is basically walking on the grain to try to bring about the separation of the grain from the husk so that you then have grain that you can use. So he's basically saying, I remember seeing this at some point along the way in ministry early on in my pastorate, sometimes we can have overly inflated views of our work, whatever our work is, and it hit me one day, the Lord was just telling me, "You're nothing but an ox." You don't have to have much talent, you've just got to tread and just keep walking and treading and walking and treading. It's a thankless task but that's what God has called you to. This is the way that God feeds his sheep. Hard work.

You know, Spurgeon in commenting on this particular subject, the work of the minister, the work of the Bible teacher, he says that the treasure, the spiritual treasures of Scripture are like the treasures of nature. God has not strewn rubies and diamonds on the surface of the ground so that you just walk around and pick rubies and diamonds up off the ground. How do you find rubies and diamonds? You dig for them. So it is with the truth of the word of God. We must dig for it. The most perplexing passages can become precious treasures when you wrestle with the text.

One of the quotes I like of Luther, he says that he was studying Ecclesiastes which he believed was written by Solomon. He said, "I have wrestled with this text in Ecclesiastes all week and I am perplexed, but Solomon must yield." He wasn't going to quit wrestling with the text. He was going to keep beating on it until he understood what God was saying. That's the heart that God blesses. "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with your whole heart." You see, the Lord has put in his word the way he has spoken to us though it is plain and clear in many ways and the main truths are plain and clear, the precious deep truths of the word of God need to be sought earnestly and studied hard after and we are all called to pursue the Lord that way, particularly those that shepherd the flock.

So prayerful dependence, literal interpretation, direct study, hard work. These are characteristics of a faithful shepherd and necessary to interpreting the word of God correctly. Luther adds the fifth characteristic that is somewhat surprising. The fifth characteristic of a faithful shepherd, the fifth characteristic of Bible interpretation is suffering. Suffering. Luther understood that the word of God comes to us through suffering. You know, David himself said, "It was good for me that I was afflicted. Now I attend to your precepts," Psalm 119.

So Luther believed in the value of suffering. As is often the case, he says it quite somewhat humorously. He says this talking to ministerial students and pastors, "For as soon as God's word becomes known through you, the devil will afflict you and he will make a real theological doctor of you. He will help you by his temptations to seek and to love God's word, for I myself owe my papists," the Catholic opposition, "for I myself

owe my papists many thanks for so beating, pressing and frightening me through the devil's raging that they have turned me into a fairly good theologian. They drove me to a goal I should never have reached alone. I owe the depths of the riches of the wisdom of God. What Satan means for evil, God means for good." So the opposition comes, the suffering comes, and what happens? It drives us into the word of God to greater clarity, to deeper understanding of the treasures of Scripture, to fuller apprehension of the glory of Jesus Christ.

So suffering is so key. John Piper, commenting on this says, this particular aspect in an essay he has written on Luther, he said, "These were the trials that Luther said made him a theologian. These experiences were as much a part of his exegetical labors as were his Greek lexicon. This should cause us to think twice before we begrudge the trials of our ministry." Piper says, "How often I am tempted to think that the pressures and conflicts and frustrations are simply distractions from the business of study and understanding. Luther would teach us to see it another way. The stressful visit that interrupted your study may well be the very lens through which the text will open to you as never before. The trial, the thorn in the flesh, is Satan's unwitting contribution to our becoming good theologians."

It's amazing. You know, you think about this is exactly the story of church history. I was sharing last week about canonicity and talking about how when the church councils when they got it right, and they are not infallible, but there are some, we are very thankful for some of the church councils. You know, the Council of Nicaea in 325 clarified the church's position regarding the deity of Christ. I made the point last time that they didn't invent the doctrine of the deity of Christ there. It's often mistakenly ridiculously asserted that way, totally unhistorical, fanciful interpretation of the facts. The church always believed in the deity of Christ but what happened was the heretics rose up and taught something different. Arius came along and he said there was a time when the Son of God was not, therefore he's not eternal, therefore he's not equal to God. This is what Arius taught. This is what Jehovah's Witnesses teach today. Well, Arius gained quite a following and the biblical faithful theologians that the heretic drove them back into the Scriptures to show that what they had always believed, what the faithful had always believed that Jesus is the great "I Am," that everything that was created was created through him and for him, that he is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, that he is God himself, it became clearer as they dove back into Scripture. This is what happened time and time again. The heretics Satan raises up to deceive and many are deceived and great damage is done to many people, but God in his wisdom uses that to draw the faithful into the word, ever deeper into the word, and the study in the word yields greater clarity so that we see things more clearly than we ever saw them before because we have had to pursue it with a more complete energy and heart.

So suffering. And this is true in our lives. When we suffer, when you are going through pain and you're wondering why, why is God not giving you relief, your heart is being tilled up, areas of sin are being exposed, and God is creating in us a hunger for him, and so the answer in those moments is don't waste suffering. Piper wrote a book with an intriguing title after he was diagnosed with cancer, he said, "Don't Waste Your Cancer."

Whatever the affliction, God can use it to bring about more pure faith. It's exactly the image in 1 Peter 1 when we are told that the testing of your faith, the trials that come are testing your faith like a refiner's fire. God has sent the trial. He has sent the test to purify and prove the genuineness of our faith. And isn't it true that the moments where you have struggled with doubt and you kept seeking, you came to a clearer understanding of the truth of God and a deeper apprehension and a deeper love and a deeper confidence? This is God's wisdom and God's way. Luther said this is to be expected. So this would be like a good part of any sermon to young ministers, "Hey guys, you know, you feel like you're called to ministry. Get ready to suffer." It might cut down the enrollment in the seminary a little bit. I don't know.

So prayerful dependence, literal interpretation, direct study, hard work, suffering, and the sixth point for the shepherd is something that Luther really valued and I think is often undervalued and becoming less and less valuable in our day, and that is the original languages. The original languages. The sixth aspect, characteristic of a faithful shepherd is the ability to converse with the original languages.

Luther was convinced that if not for the original languages, the Reformation would not have happened. He said so quite clearly. It was his own wrestling with the text in Greek that brought about the breakthrough of the Reformation. You see, until the 16th century, the church had read the Bible consistently in Latin so Luther when he was trained as a monk, well, he had already learned Latin in school because he was trained to be a lawyer before that, so he's reading texts in Latin and the Bible of that day was Latin even though Latin was a dead language that only theologians and doctors and lawyers read and spoke in those legal settings and so forth. It was language in which the Bible was read and so Luther, they had read the Bible in Latin for centuries, but with the Renaissance, one of God's blessings that came out of that movement was the saying, "Back to the sources. Back to the sources."

So for 100 years before the Reformation began, people were trying to uncover the original writings of the philosophers, the original writings of the Greek mathematicians, and so that happened also with finding the texts of Scripture. So in 1516, Erasmus published a Greek New Testament and Luther studying that Greek New Testament, in wrestling with the words in the Greek, came to the understanding that the word "justify" and "justification" were misunderstood and misrepresented in the Latin translation. The word for "justify" in Latin is "justificare," and that word came to mean as the translation of the Bible over the centuries, the Roman legal interpretation of that word kind of became infused into the text of Scripture and that word meant "to make righteous; to infuse with righteousness; to make righteous." As Luther was studying in the Greek and looked at the real meaning of the word "dikaio," the Greek word for "declare righteous or to be righteous," he saw that it meant "to declare righteous," and so that righteousness is a declaration. It's a gift and God declares us righteous on the basis of what Christ has done.

This was the breakthrough that would not have happened apart from his study in the original languages. In fact, Luther said this, "If the languages had not made me positive as to the true meaning of the word," listen to this, "If the languages had not made me

positive as to the true meaning of the word," the word "righteousness" I was just talking about, "If the languages had not made me positive as to the true meaning of the word, I might still have remained a chained monk engaged in quietly preaching Romish errors in the obscurity of a cloister. The Pope, the Sophist and their anti-Christian Empire would have remained unshaken." So he urged the shepherds, the leaders of the church, to be able to look at the Scriptures in the original languages and this is something that sound seminaries today encourage, require for the Master of Divinity degree, the standard degree for pastors. But it is becoming less and less fashionable because there is not that emphasis on the text and we should keep that focus. I mean, the wonderful thing now is that there are all kinds of resources available online. You can learn Greek study guides online or Logos. You can go and you can have classes in Greek. You can learn it yourself.

But a shepherd, there needs to be at least one shepherd in the church that understands how to handle the languages to protect the flock because sometimes it's not often, we all need to study our Bibles in English. I'm not saying we ought to be reading in Greek and Hebrew. God means to let the Bible be translated into the language of the people. He wants the Bible translated into English for us but the fact that we will encounter from time to time deceptions that are nuanced and can only be decided by looking at the original words of Scripture in the original languages, we need to have men who are skilled in Greek and Hebrew to protect the flock. So many of the errors of the cults are just laid bare when you understand the languages. They are totally misunderstanding, misrepresenting, twisting and distorting, and that was definitely the case with the errors of Catholicism that Luther and the Reformers came to see more and more as they looked at the Scriptures in the original languages, so many things came clear. So the languages are essential for the health of the church.

Now, when the shepherd has these characteristics and can handle the word of God, then what's going to happen is the Lord is going to use his word to feed his people. He is going to show them his glory. He's going to show us our sin and he's going to show us how Jesus Christ is everything that we need; that everything that you or I could ever need is found in Christ and the Bible is all about him. The written word was given to reveal to us the living Word, and the living Word is Jesus Christ. So may God help us be people of the book not because we just want to be about a book, no, we want to find Christ and God has chosen to reveal Christ through the pages of holy Scripture. He who would hear God speak, let him read holy Scripture, Luther said. He who would see Jesus or hear Jesus, let him read holy Scripture. That's where you will hear Jesus calling and only there, the pages of the Bible.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for the gift of your word, that you are a God who is speaking and has spoken with such clarity in the pages of Scripture. You are a God who has spoken in such clarity in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, help us be people of the book. I pray for everyone in this room that you would have your way in each heart. You know those that belong to you and you know those that need to repent and come to faith.

Lord, draw everyone to Christ by the power of your word. And Lord, help us to continually feed upon the word of God. Help us to see how greatly we need it, that we truly do need it more than we need the food that we eat, more than we need the breath that we breathe, that we truly live by the word of the living God. And we pray this in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen.