

Jan. 15, 2016

# Martin Luther

Various Scriptures

**B.I: “For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:17).**

LTS: Psa. 18:1-19

Read Romans 1:14-17

This year (2017) marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of something historians call the Protestant Reformation. Five hundred years ago (and for many years thereafter) a number of faithful Christian men took a stand against the Tyranny and false teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. If you had lived any time between 300AD and 1550 AD and called yourself Christian, you were a Roman Catholic. In fact, all of the men who played key roles in the Reformation had previously been faithful Roman Catholics. They never intended to create a faction or split away from the Catholic Church. Rather, they wanted to reform her. They were determined to bring the church back to two primary essentials: 1) the purity of the true gospel, and 2) the authority of the Scripture.

Who could have anticipated that this call for Reformation would rock the entire western world and change the spiritual, political, social, and economic landscape forever? One can hardly overstate the significance of this movement.

Renown historian, Philip Schaff exclaims that,

next to the beginning of Christianity, the Protestant Reformation was the greatest event in history. It was an unprecedented movement, a far-reaching, history-altering season when the invisible hand of God impacted not only individuals and churches, but entire nations and cultures.<sup>1</sup> And at the fountainhead of this movement stood one man. His name – Martin Luther.

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Lawson, *The Heroic Boldness of Martin Luther*, (Orlando, Reformation Trust, 2013), XV-XVI

There is so much that we can talk about when we delve into the life and ministry of Luther, but this morning I want to focus primarily on the two essential issues already mentioned. Namely, the purity of the Gospel and the authority of Scripture.

Martin Luther was born to Hans & Margareta Luther on Nov. 10, 1483. His father was a copper miner who had done fairly well for himself economically and had some resources at his disposal. His great desire was for his son to have a better life than his own. Having observed the boy's keen intellect, Hans decided to send young Martin to the university to study law. This Martin was happy to do. If his course did not change he would become a prosperous and respectable lawyer and bring great honor to his father. But, O' how things did change!

One sultry day in July of 1505 young Martin was walking home from law school when a thunderstorm billowed over him and lightning struck, knocking him to the ground. In terror he cried out, "Help me St. Ann! I'll become a Monk!"

Much to the dismay of his father Martin actually followed through on his promise. Just fifteen days after making the vow to St. Ann and at the age of 21, he quit his studies in law at the University of Erfurt, knocked at the door of the Augustinian Hermits and asked the prior to accept him into the order – which he did.

Later on he would say that this choice was a flagrant sin because he made it against his father's wishes and out of a deep sense of fear. Then he added, "But oh, how much good the merciful Lord has allowed to come of it."<sup>2</sup>

Luther began his studies as a Monk and progressed impressively until it came time for him to lead his first Mass after his ordination. He and his father, Hans, had almost made peace with one another by then. In fact, his father was beginning to take a little pride in the fact that Martin had attained the stature of priest. But when it came time for him to call upon God to transform the bread and wine into flesh and blood, he faltered. He was stricken by a paralyzing thought of God's infinite holiness against his own unworthiness.

Luther sensed something of what Isaiah felt (Isa. 6), and it was devastating. The holiness of God apart from the grace of God is a devastating prospect. Luther knew the teaching of Jesus who said "Unless your righteousness is greater than the Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven... "Therefore, you must be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:28). But how could mere man abide the presence of

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, (Wheaton, Crossway, 200), 84

God unless he himself was holy?<sup>3</sup>

So Luther set himself to pursue holiness. Whatever good works a man might do to save himself, these Luther was resolved to perform.<sup>4</sup>

One biographer writes,

He began fasting, sometimes three days on end without a crumb. The seasons of fasting were more consoling to him than those of feasting. Lent was more comforting than Easter. He laid upon himself vigils and prayers in excess of those stipulated by the rules. He cast off blankets permitted him and which well-nigh froze him to death.

Years later he would write,

I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.<sup>5</sup>

The reason he worked so hard was to compensate for his sins, but he never could believe that the ledger was balanced. He knew it was not. He would spend excessive time in confession attempting to own every sin. And he was frightened when after six hours of confessing he could still go out and think of something else which had eluded his most conscientious scrutiny.”<sup>6</sup> His confessor, Johann Staupitz once confronted Luther in the confessional saying, Luther, go home and don’t come back until you have committed a REAL sin! But Martin was inconsolably overcome by the disparity between God’s demands and his own inability to meet those demands.

At one point he wrote,

In the monastery I [was not tempted] about women, money or possessions; instead my heart trembled and fidgeted about whether God would bestow His grace on me... For I had strayed from faith and could not but imagine that I had angered God, whom I in turn had to appease by doing good

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<sup>3</sup> Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, (Peabody, Mass., Hendrickson Publishing), 25

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>6</sup> Bainton, 36

works.<sup>7</sup>

Staupitz, reminded Luther that God is love, that His people are commanded to love Him. To which Luther replied, “I was more than once driven to the very abyss of despair so that I wished I had never been created. Love God? I hated Him!”<sup>8</sup>

Beloved, isn’t this where we would want someone to point this suffering monk to Matt. 11:28-29? Don’t we not want to hear Jesus declare, “Come to Me you who are weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke on you and learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your soul.” But Luther was no position to hear or even read these words. As a young monk and scholar he was not even permitted to study the Scriptures. As one biographer put it, in the RCC “The Bible was not the staple of theological education.”<sup>9</sup> This was stunning to me years ago when I first read it. Are you kidding? They didn’t use the Bible in theological education? What did they study? Well, they studied Virgil, Plato, Aristotle. They studied catholic dogma and Papal decrees, but they didn’t study God’s word. NO wonder Luther couldn’t find relief! But all of that was to change.

In an act of divine providence Luther was ordered to leave the monastery to begin studying for his doctorate. Moreover, he was to take the chair of biblical studies. And he was not merely going to study the Bible but to teach it as well. So off to the University of Wittenberg he went. And it is here that everything changes.

Luther leaves the monastery and begins his work in Wittenberg, and though the transition no doubt brought a sense of freshness and excitement for his work, Luther brought his burdens with him. Nevertheless, he was now studying the text of Scripture. More importantly, he fixated on studying Paul’s letter to the Romans. He knew that Paul’s main theme was the righteousness of God, but he hated that righteousness because no matter what he did he could not attain to it. How can a sinful man be counted righteous in the eyes of a holy God? He would beat upon Paul until he had his answer.

“At last” Luther writes, “by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely (Rom. 1:17) ‘In it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘the just shall live by faith.’ There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous [person] lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by

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<sup>7</sup> Piper, 84

<sup>8</sup> Bainton, 41

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 42

the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [the] merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.”

- Define the term “passive righteousness”
- Define “justify.” (Justificare v. Dikiasune)
- Mention Erasmus & GK NT. To “make” righteous or to “declare” righteous. The GK translation clarified.
- *Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched.*

When Paul’s explanation of the gospel became clear to him, Luther wrote, “Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Here a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me.”<sup>10</sup> He saw Christ everywhere! He saw gospel everywhere! Suddenly the cross made sense. Suddenly God’s impossible demands made sense. Suddenly the law of Moses made sense! The law was given to expose sin and drive us to despair of EVER being able to meet God’s holy demands. Our only hope is to fly to Christ and receive what we need from Him by faith

Sola Fede – Faith alone became the rallying cry of the Reformation. Under twelve hundred years of spiritual rubble piled on by the traditions of Rome, Luther rediscovered the Gospel of the apostles in a book. (2 Kings 22:8 Josiah finds the Book).

Luther discovered that the Gospel of Justification by faith was all over the NT. For example,

- Gal. 2:15 “knowing that a man is not justified [declared righteous by God] by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.
- Eph. 2:8-9 “For by grace you have been saved...
- Phil. 3:7-9 “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law [works], but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith... Luther called this “external righteousness” or “alien righteousness.” It is not a righteousness that we achieve but a righteousness we receive by Faith in Jesus Christ.
- Colossians 2:12–14 ...When you were dead in your transgressions and the

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<sup>10</sup> Piper, 91

uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, <sup>14</sup> having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (by what means? v. 12 “through faith in the powerful working of God”).

Luther’s great question was, how do we obtain the righteousness we desperately need to be made right with Holy God? Paul’s answer is Christ for righteousness to all who believe. Where do we get the forgiveness we need from God? No by working our way into God’s good graces but by humbly admitting our inability to save ourselves by our working and by faith casting ourselves completely upon Christ! We are declared righteous Sola Fede – by faith alone.

Now this is important. The two major aims of the Reformation were to restore the purity of the gospel and restore the authority of Scripture. By the time Luther was born the gospel had been all but lost. In its place were inserted the tradition of men and a scheme of self-righteousness that seemed plausible but was completely incapable of reconciling men to God. How could that have happened? Answer, the church lost the gospel when it turned its back on Scripture. Without the Scripture, there is NO gospel.

The medieval era is referred to as the “Dark Ages” for good reason! The Scriptures had been lost so the gospel had been lost. The Light of Truth had gone out. In those days the word of the Pope was supreme, NOT the word of God. It was the Pope who was thought to have the keys to the kingdom. The Pope alone had the power to declare a man righteous or condemned. But now, the pure gospel had rediscovered and light was beginning to dawn!

The reformers who came after Luther had a slogan capture this: Post Tenebras Lux – After Darkness... Light. The reclamation of the gospel would bring the dawning of a new era of church history. One that exists to this very day.

So the first goal of the Reformation was being fulfilled. The pure gospel had been revealed. Secondly. Luther’s great concern was establishing the authority of Scripture. And this came to the fore in the Indulgence Scandal.

When the Pope Leo X decided to build a massive church in Rome in honor of St. Peter (St. Peter’s Basilica), the principle question was, From where will he take the money? Answer? From the people! From the poor! From the uneducated! From those who are kept in darkness. And so the Pope, whom the people believed had the keys to heaven, purgatory, and hell, offered all Christians an official plenary indulgence. What was an indulgence? It was declaration printed on paper with the official seals of the Pope that declared that all your sins (or those of one you love) are forgiven. And for a small price

any Roman Catholic could have one.

How would they market this scheme? They sent the best salesman they could find – an infamous priest named Tezel. He would travel from town to town and literally “sell” these indulgences. Listen to his irresistible appeal:

Have you considered that you are lashed in a furious tempest amid the temptations and dangers of the world. And that you do not know whether you can reach the haven, not of your mortal body but of your immortal soul? Consider that all who are contrite and have confessed and made contribution will receive complete remission of all their sins. Listen to the voice of your dead relatives and friends beseeching you and saying, ‘Pity us, pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for a pittance.’ Do you NOT wish to? Open your ears. Hear the father saying to his son, the mother to her daughter, ‘We bore you, nourished you, brought you up, left you our fortunes, and you are so cruel to us and hard that now you are not willing for so little to set us free. Will you let us lie here in flames? Will you delay our promised glory?’

Then Tezel would end by saying, “Remember that you are able to release them, for as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”

Now you have to remember that Luther, at this point, is a no-body. He’s an unknown monk serving as a professor of Bible in a small university in Wittenberg. But, this young man has something the world needed; namely, the authoritative word of God and the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. He understood that when the Jailer at Philippi asked Paul, “What must I do to be saved,” Paul answered NOT “Purchase an indulgence and you will escape purgatory,” but rather “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!”

Luther was deeply troubled by the abuse of indulgences. He wanted to bring it to the attention of other scholars who perhaps might generate helpful discussion about the problems. So he drew up a document laying out 95 revolutionary opinions (96 theses) regarding certain practices and teachings that he believed needed to be reformed in the church. Then he posted them on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. It was October 31, 1517.

Luther made three main points: First, he objected to the building of St. Peter's. Second, he denied that the pope had power over purgatory. Third, he was greatly concerned for the spiritual welfare of sinners. Rather than reading the Theses, let me quote from some passages where Luther explains.

To the Pope's argument that St Peter's needed to be built in order to shelter the bones of St. Peter under a universal shrine of Christendom, Luther retorted:

The revenues of all Christendom are being sucked into this insatiable basilica... Why doesn't the pope build St. Peter's out of his own money? He is richer than Croesus! He would do better to sell St. Peter's and give the money to the poor folk who are being fleeced by the hawkers of indulgences!<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the Pope's power over Purgatory, he wrote:

If the pope does have power to release anyone from purgatory, why in the name of love does he not abolish purgatory by letting everyone out? If for the sake of miserable money he released uncounted souls, why should he NOT for the sake of most holy love empty the place?<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the people who naively purchase indulgences, his concern for them is expressed in the following:

Indulgences are positively harmful to the recipient because they impede salvation by diverting charity and inducing a false sense of security. Christians should be taught that he who gives to the poor is better than he who receives a [phony] pardon. He who spends his money for indulgences instead of relieving [another person's need] received NOT the indulgence of the pope but the indignation of God... Did Christ say, 'Let him that has a cloak sell it and buy an indulgence?'<sup>13</sup>

As you can imagine the pope was not at all happy. Luther was interfering with his corrupt and harmful money-making scheme. But Luther was NOT trying to split the church. In fact, when he posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg church, it was written in Latin – the scholar's language which the common people could not read. He wanted to inspire debate, NOT division. But the Pope (whom Luther referred to as Antichrist) was not about to be schooled by a lowly monk.

A lot of political intrigue took place over the next year or so, but in the end Luther was summoned to appear in the city of Worms and face the emperor Charles. R.C. Sproul tells what happened:

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<sup>11</sup> Bainton, 63

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 64

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 65



When the imperial Diet opened, Luther stood in the center of the great hall. By his side was a table that contained his controversial books. An official asked Luther if the books were his. He replied in a voice that was barely a whisper: “The books are all mine, and I have written more.” Then came the decisive question of Luther’s readiness to recant. The assembly waited for his response. [But] there was no raised fist, no defiant challenge. Again Luther answered almost inaudibly, “I beg you, give me time to think it over.” The emperor gave him 24 hours to think about it.

That night, Luther spent alone in his room, in prayer to the Father. It was for Luther his own, private Gethsemane.

Late the next afternoon Luther returned to the great hall. This time his voice did not quake or quiver. He tried to answer the question by giving a speech. His inquisitor finally interrupted him and demanded an answer. He said, “I ask you, Martin - answer candidly and without horns - do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?”

To this Luther replied:

Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of popes and counsels, for 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 conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”<sup>14</sup>

Here at Worms we see Luther’s unshakable commitment to the authority of Scripture in death-defying clarity. Luther could have walked away from this meeting a free man! All he had to say was one Latin word – *Ravaco*. But Luther knew what was at stake. The church’s relationship to God is dependent on its relationship to His word. Hasn’t that always been the case? The people of God enjoy fellowship with God only as they live under the word of God.

- Luther would famously say, “A layman who has Scripture is more than

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<sup>14</sup> R.C. Sproul.... See also *Bainton*, 175-181

Pope or council without it.”<sup>15</sup>

The emperor allowed Luther to leave without harm, but he was pronounced officially condemned as a convicted heretic and within a matter of weeks he could be executed as such. In fact, on his way home to Wittenberg it looked as though he would be arrested and killed. As he traveled through the forest and a group of soldiers appeared, chased off Luther's companions and kidnapped him. But this time it wasn't his enemies, but his friend, Frederick the Wise who had him rescued and taken to the Wartburg Castle. And here he would stay for two years in hiding.

While in hiding he took to translating the Bible into the German, the language of the people. But his work was not limited to translating Scripture, he also explained it in book after book. He wrote catechisms to help fathers teach their families the essentials of Scripture. He wrote songs so God's people could sing the truth. Eventually he would begin writing a periodical called *Table Talk* to help families engage in discussion on spiritual matters at home. All of this was new!

Plank by plank he began tearing down and rebuilding the church upon the P Authoritative Scripture. If it could not be found in Scripture it was to be rejected. If it was found in the text it was to be embraced no matter what.

More than anything the Reformation came about because of the faithful teaching and preaching of the word of God. Luther called it the External Word. One of the most revolutionary ideas of the Reformation was that the word of God comes to us in a book. Piper explains,

Luther called it the external word to emphasize that it is objective, fixed, outside ourselves, and therefore unchanging. “Luther would say, “Let the man who would hear God speak, read Holy Scripture.”<sup>16</sup> He rejected the idea that the word of God comes by popes, prophets, or church councils. He said, “The word of God is the greatest, most necessary, and most important thing in Christendom.”<sup>17</sup>

The external word became the final court of arbitration on all things pertaining to life and godliness. Later reformers would refer to this doctrine as *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture Alone.

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Walker, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2000), 125

<sup>16</sup> Piper, 78

<sup>17</sup> Piper, 79

Because of Luther's focus on the pure gospel and the authoritative word, all kinds of things began to change.

- Universities started teaching the Bible with a focus on the original languages.
- Pastors began teaching the bible and doing it in the language of the people
- Church sanctuaries were redesigned to make the word of God the dominant feature.
- The Mass was reformed to the Lord's Supper
- The number of sacraments were reduced from seven to two (Baptism and the Lord's supper.)
- Icons (images) in the church were thrown out
- Fellowship among believers was encouraged
- The church began singing congregationally, and some of the songs were written by Luther himself.
- Luther's understanding of the priesthood of all believers destroyed the distinction between sacred and secular work. The milkmaid's work is just as important as the pastors if she does it to glorify God.
- Monasteries closed because Luther said, "The monk's vow is unfounded in Scripture..."<sup>18</sup>
- Priest's began to marry nuns because of how the External Word (the Bible) honor's marriage as a picture of Christ and His church. What could be a more spiritual ministry than marriage and family?
- And one of the most amazing and scandalous changes that took place was when Luther himself got married to Kathrine von Borra, a nun who escaped her convent by stowing away in a herring barrow. Their marriage was scandalous not only because he was a priest and she was a nun, but because she was 26 and he was 42. But they didn't care!
- Luther said there was three reasons why he was getting married: To please his father, to spite the pope and the Devil, and to seal his witness before martyrdom
- One of his wedding invitations read, "You must come to my wedding. I have made the angels laugh and the devils weep." To another he wrote, "I am going to get married. God likes to work miracles and to make a fool of the world."<sup>19</sup>
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At one point someone asked Luther how he was able to bring about so much change. He responded by saying, "*I did no more than pray and preach. The word did it all... While I sat still and drank beer with Philip and Amsdorf, God dealt the papacy a mighty blow.*"<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Bainton, 197

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 294

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 212

Why do we take the time to remember these things? Its because we are so prone to forget our history. We forget what God has done to get to where we are. We forget the battles that have been fought for the Gospel and for the word of God. Why do we preach as we do? Why do we sing as we do? Why do we observe the Lord's Table and baptism? Why do we say that if you want to hear the voice of God look to Scripture?

The repeated sin of O.T. Israel was that they kept forgetting the word of the Lord. It happened in Israel. It happened to the early church. And I would argue that it will happen again if we are not vigilant to preserve the purity of the gospel and the authority of the external word.