

Heroes of the Faith #03: Martin Luther

Heroes of the Faith

By Dr. W. Robert Godfrey

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Tuesday, January 18, 2005

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

200 E. Main St.

Taylors, SC 29687

Website: www.gpts.edu

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/gpts

When we come to Martin Luther we come to a man who was for much of his life—I don't think it is too much of an exaggeration to say—consumed by a concern about the holiness of God.

Last night we talked a little bit about the medieval Church in terms of the Church deformed and talking about some of the problems that developed in the medieval Church. But one of the strengths of the medieval Church was that it had a very profound sense of the holiness and righteousness of God. Now it didn't develop that always in a proper and healthy way, but it did have a profound sense that God was righteous, that God was holy, that he dwelt in a perfection that was difficult if not impossible for us to approach and that sense of the holiness of God inspired, for example, some of the architecture of the Middle Ages, some of those great cathedrals with a sense of the transcendence of God, how God was one who was high and lifted up, one who had to be approached in awe and in reverence.

God was not a buddy who could be easily sidled up to. But God was one whose very holiness [?] of holding us sinners far away from him. And not only these vaulting gothic architecture testified to God's transcendence, but the rest of the architecture of the Church spoke of God's holiness.

Regrettably it too often was kind of an Old Testament notion of holiness, but nonetheless there at the front of the church was the most holy place separated often by a kind of fence with steps leading up beyond that fence to an altar. And even the priest in his vestments of—dare I say—covenantal holiness as he approached the steps leading up to the altar had to kneel and bow to prepare himself. At the altar he had to strike his chest and say, “*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*. I am guilty. I am guilty. I am most guilty.”

He had a sense of the holiness of the place at which he was to minister.

And the congregation realized the holiness of what went on there. And, again, I am... I am not suggesting that everything was right in the conception here at all, but there was this abiding testimony to the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man and the great distance that needed to be bridged.

And maybe that is one lesson that the modern church needs still to learn from the medieval Church or, better to learn it from the Scripture, that God is the one who is holy, holy, holy. And the matter then of us being able to approach a righteous God, the matter of us being righteous in the presence of such a holy God is the most basic spiritual issue imaginable.

How can sinners approach a holy God? How can we be found right in the presence of God?

That is a question that Martin Luther wrestled with and in some senses I would suggest perhaps understood and plumbed the depths of in a way that hardly any other Christian has ever done.

My colleagues on the faculty sometimes accuse me of being a crypto-Lutheran. I don't think that is really true, but nonetheless, it is true that Martin Luther had a depth of understanding of the holiness of God and of the need of sinners and of the glories of the gospel that is almost unmatched in the history of Christian thinkers.

And we need to recapture something of that, I think, because there is so much confusion, so much shallowness, so much hollowness and so much error that floats around.

I saw an ad in last Saturday's *Los Angeles Times* for a church, a protestant church, I think an evangelical church, the church will remain nameless, but I was drawn to the ad because the ad looked sort of catechetical. There was a question and an answer.

And I thought, wow, you know, a... but they should have found a better catechism. Let me read this to you. If you don't understand it, don't feel bad. It is kind of confusing. But it points, I think, to the problems that modern evangelical protestants have in articulating our understanding of what it means for us to draw close to a righteous God.

The question is: How does one become righteous? Good question. Good question.

Now the answer. True righteousness is that kind of righteousness which God's righteousness requires God to require of man.

Did you help write that, John?

This means that only God can produce that kind of righteousness. Man cannot produce a righteousness which God's righteousness requires God to require.

So the only way man can be righteous is to get some righteousness from God. And the only way man can understand righteousness is for God to package it in a man. God did that in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is that sense without which sense all other sense is nonsense.

Now I think this church was sincere in publishing that ad. And I think they intended to be helpful, but I don't think anybody would get saved reading that ad. I don't think anybody would be helped to understand what it means to become righteous by reading that ad. And more importantly to me is as a Church historian when I confront the problems of the modern Church is there is nothing really protestant about that statement. Any good medieval Roman Catholic could have said, "Amen, brother, preach it."

Now I think this evangelical church would have been dismayed to realize that, but it brings us to this point, you see, of saying, "We need to invest some time and energy really to understand what the righteousness of God is and how according to the Scripture we can become reconciled to such a righteous God." And I would suggest to you that the experiences, the testimony, the life of Martin Luther is one of the best ways in the history of the Church of understanding that.

And part of the profundity of Luther's understanding of the gospel comes from the fact that he was a thoroughly medieval man and a thoroughly loyal son of the Church.

Roman Catholics sometimes like to paint Luther as sort of a rebel. And there is no greater mistake than seeing Luther as a rebel. Luther was conservative through and through and through. He was a social conservative and in many ways he was a theological conservative. He grew up above all else wanting to be a loyal son of the Church. And as he grew up as a young person he was religiously sensitive. He listened to the Church. He took seriously what the Church said to him.

Now his father at times was somewhat concerned about that almost excessive religious sensitivity that he saw in his son.

Papa Luther was a practical fellow. He was a hard working man. He had built up his small smelting and mining business to the point where he made a very good family living and he wanted his son Martin to advance the family fortune. And how do you advance the family fortunes? Well, in the 16th century it was the same as in the 20th century. You send your son to law school. He wanted his son to be a lawyer.

And Luther, as a dutiful son went off to law school, went to university first, entered law school, going to pursue his legal studies, but he kept coming home to his father and saying, "You know, dad, I am really troubled religiously. I know God is righteous and I know I am a sinner and I want to be right with God and I don't feel that I am right with God and I want to find a way to get right with God and I want to do what the Church tells me to do to get right with God. And the Church tells me that if I really want to be serious about being a Christian, what I ought to do is join the monastery."

The monastery is the place for serious minded Christians.

Oh, the Church says it is all right if you want to go out and work in the world if you have to do that. Then maybe your children will become nuns or monks. But the Church said, "Let it be known clearly that anyone who is really serious about his or her faith will

become a monastic, will withdraw from this world, from the temptations of this world, from the problems and concerns of this world and in the cloistered environment of the monastery will give one 100 percent of the time to getting right with God, to pursuing holiness of living, to pursue self denial, to pursue a use of the sacraments and so in every way possible to get right with God.”

The monastic life is the apostolic life, said the Church. The apostles didn’t marry. Well, maybe except for Peter, but, you know, don’t look too closely.

The apostles didn’t marry. They didn’t have regular jobs most of the time. If you really want to be serious, withdraw from this world and its distractions and its pleasures and its sins and give yourself over 100 percent of the time to seeking God and then maybe you will be saved in the judgment.

Salvation wasn’t easy. And Luther, you see, young Martin Luther was a loyal son of the Church. He wanted to do things right. He wanted to be serious about his religion.

Father Luther was a religious man. He was a serious man. He said to his son, “I want you to be serious about your religion, but I don’t want you to be a fanatic. I want you to remember the Fifth Commandment. Honor your father and your mother. Your father says go to law school.”

And so Luther went to law school, but on one of the trips back to his law school after a stormy interview with his father he got caught in a real storm, a thunderstorm. Lightning nearly hit him. He was thrown to the ground and in panic he uttered what is known technically among theologians as a foxhole prayer.

Now you know what a foxhole prayer is. A foxhole prayer is that thing that happens when you get into some difficulty. Something bad is happening to you and you promise God if he will only get you out of the present difficulty, you will do something disagreeable in the future.

We won’t dignify this with the notion of a covenant, but it is almost a sort of covenant. If you do something for me now, God, I will do something for you later. We will have a little bargain here. Foxhole prayer. Get me out of this mess now and I will do something that I really don’t want to do in the future to make up for it. Sort of a trade off, you see.

[?] issue here is a foxhole prayer although he didn’t entirely play by the rules. Luther in his panic said he cried out, “Saint Anne, I will become a monk.”

So he took a vow. He promised, “Lord, if you will save me, Saint Anne, particularly, if she will save me, I will become a monk. I will do that disagreeable thing.”

But, of course, it wasn’t really disagreeable. It was really what he wanted to do all along. But now he was able to write to his father and say, “Father, in the midst of a storm when I

thought I was perishing I took a vow and now I am bound by it. I have to do it. The Church says once you make a vow you have to live by it. You can't get out of it."

And Luther had taken the vow in the name of Saint Anne who just happened to be his father's patron saint. So poor papa Luther found himself bound on two counts and Luther went off to the monastery.

Well, in Luther's day monasteries came in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Some of them were really kind of holiday spas for the children of the rich where life could be lived out in great luxury and comfort and pleasantness and they really weren't all that religious at all.

That was not the kind of establishment that Luther was looking for. Luther wanted a monastery that was serious business. And he joined the monastery of Augustinian hermits. Even sort of sounds serious, just the name. Luther wanted a place where he could really work out his salvation, where he could achieve peace with God by adopting the apostolic lifestyle of monasticism, known in the Middle Ages as ascetic baptism, a new beginning, entering the monastery, a chance to start over with God and be right with God.

There was another proverb in the Middle Ages that went, "Doubt makes the monk."

And that was certainly true in Luther's case. Not doubt about God. Not doubt about sin. But doubt about salvation. Am I saved? How can I be saved?

And Luther joined the monastery then and gave himself body and soul to the pursuit of righteousness, to the pursuit of holiness through the subduing of the flesh. And he followed the monastic disciplines. One of the disciplines was to deny yourself sleep to weaken the body, to deny yourself food to weaken the body, to spend long times in body to try to subdue the flesh, you see, that was conceived of as linked to the body. Sin was conceived many... by many in the Middle Ages as tied to the body. And so Luther took a rope and he tied knots in the rope and he beat his back until it bled to try to subdue the sin that he found within himself. And he found it didn't work.

And so as a loyal son of the Church he pursued other avenues of getting right with God. He knew the Church said that the sacraments provided grace to make one righteous. And he thought if he only made frequent enough use of the sacraments he could begin to fill himself up with grace from God so that one day he could be filled up enough with grace to stand in the presence of a righteous God.

And, of course, the sacrament that in many ways was central in the Middle Ages was the sacrament of penance. The sacrament of penance purged you of sin and prepared you to receive grace. And so in the monastery Luther had a father confessor, one to whom he could go and confess his sins and be assured of forgiveness for those sins. And Luther used to go to that father confessor. He used to go over and over and over again to the father confessor until the father confessor finally said, "Brother Martin, go away and

don't come back until you have something serious to confess. You are taking up too much of my time.”

But Luther, you see, had listened the Church and he had examined himself and he found that the deeper he looked into his own heart the more sin he found and the more sin he had needed to confess.

He listened to the Church about how the sin could drag the soul down to hell. And he was afraid.

He said as he used to read the Scripture on his own or as he would hear the Scripture read in the services to which he went as a monk, the phrase that came to stand out more and more in his mind was the phrase, “The righteousness of God.”

And he said that phrase came to terrorize him because every time he heard that phrase, “The righteousness of God,” he thought of God's demand, of God's requirement of righteousness and he knew that he could never meet the demand of a righteous God.

And he said, “I came to the point where I had to say if God is alive, I am dead.” He said, “I came to the point in the monastery where I hated God. I hated God because he was the being who demanded of me something that try as I might I could not accomplish. And so I felt lost and damned and hopeless.”

And this is where Luther came as a loyal son of the medieval Church. He had done everything that the Church told him to do. He had done the very best he could do and he found himself damned and cut off from God because he didn't measure up to the righteousness of God. And it was that experience, then, that made it possible for him to come to a deeper and a profounder understanding of God and the gospel and the righteousness of Christ. And that understanding opened up to him because of some studies that he did.

Some of the leaders in the monastery there saw that Martin Luther was a remarkably talented young man and they were concerned about this excessive concentration on himself and they thought that maybe one of the ways of getting his mind off his sins was to put him to study. They needed good teachers and good professors in some of the new universities that were being founded to teach theology and they thought Luther would be one such person and they set him to work.

The period in which Luther began to study was the period in which there was a great revival of learning known as the Renaissance and opportunity was now there for theologians to learn Greek and Hebrew and Luther set himself to work learning Greek and Hebrew. Set himself to work studying the Scriptures, memorizing the Scripture.

He said that he memorized the whole New Testament and vast sections of the Old Testament. Such a mind he possessed.

You know, it is amazing that at the recent American edition of Luther's works it is really a selection of his works, it is not all his works. And that American edition works to about 55 volumes. I sometimes look at those volumes and think I am not sure in my lifetime I could just copy them over much less think them out. But he was a man of extraordinary brilliance and ability. The Church recognized it and set him to work and he began to study the Scriptures.

In 1512 he was made a professor of theology and of the Bible at a university and in entering that office he had to make a promise. It was a very distinctive promise. Almost every promise and vow that churchmen made in the Middle Ages included the promise to be obedient to the pope in all things. There was only one major exception and that was the vow taken by professors of the Bible. Professors of the Bible promised to teach faithfully what the Scripture taught. And Luther said for the rest of his life that promise imposed upon him by the pope is what encouraged and directed him for his life's ministry to teach the Bible and to be faithful in that.

And he was put to work then discovering new things in the Bible that the hadn't know before, discovering, for example, that a local Latin Bible said, "Do penance," had Christ saying in Mathew four, "Do penance for the kingdom of God is at hand." When he read the Greek he found it wasn't do penance, do the sacrament of penance. It was, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

And it began to lead him more and more into the Scripture, more and more to question certain teachings that he found there. And he began to lecture on the Psalms and on Romans and on Galatians.

If you wanted a sort of preparatory course to become a reformer, you could hardly think of books of the Bible that would be more central in preparation.

And as he began to work through these things he said one night he was sitting in his study in the university pondering that hated phrase, "The righteousness of God," and trying to think through all that he had learned in his study of Psalms and Galatians and Romans and other parts of the Bible. And his mind kept being drawn back to Romans chapter one verses 16 and 17 where he read, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God."

He hated that phrase. In the gospel the good news, the righteousness of God is revealed. How can those two things stand side by side? How can it be good news that God is righteous and demands the righteousness of me that I can never accomplish? That is bad news, Luther said. And so he pondered this text.

In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed through faith, for faith As it is written, the just shall live by faith.

And he said that night as he pondered that text suddenly a whole new understanding of that text opened itself up to him. Suddenly he said it was as if the gates of paradise had been opened for him. Suddenly it was as if the world had been turned upside down for him. It was because finally he saw how the righteousness of God could be good news.

It was good news, he said, because the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is not the righteousness that God demands of the sinner, but the righteousness that God provides for the faithful in Jesus Christ.

And suddenly he saw that the perfection and holiness of God could only be satisfied by the perfect holiness and righteousness of God's Son and that that righteousness is ours by faith, that that righteousness is reckoned to us that that righteousness remains perfect and entire in Christ outside of ourselves. And as we rest and trust Christ by faith we are counted righteous by God.

Now Luther knew that in our sanctification we also become progressively more righteous. And he thought that was a terribly important teaching. But he also saw that by our sanctification we would never make enough progress to satisfy God's just demands. And he saw therefore that we needed a perfect righteousness, reckoned to us which was the foundation of our justification.

And for Luther, then, justification was the heart and soul and foundation of the Christian life, because it provided that foundation of confidence in God by which we could battle against our sins, by which we could serve God in this world from a basis of knowing that we are already right with God because Jesus Christ has accomplished it all for us and that is reckoned to us, given to us, promised to us in the gospel and we receive it by faith.

Faith not as if faith itself were of good works that we have to do, but faith as that which looks outside of itself and away from itself to rest in Jesus Christ and his finished accomplishments. And that was the total turn around for Martin Luther. For him that was his evangelical break through when he came finally to understand how the gospel was good news to sinners. Christ has fulfilled all righteousness. Christ has borne my sins on the cross. And therefore in him by faith I have an assured relationship with God. I can live for God. I can live for my neighbor in love without having [?] over it, without having to try over and over again by my loving to please God.

It is as if Luther was saying before, whenever I tried to do an act of love, I had to not only keep one eye on the neighbor whom I was trying to love, but I had to keep one eye on God to see if he was watching so I would get credit. I needed all the credit I could get.

Seminary students know about credit.

I needed all the credit I could get to get through. And he said, "Now suddenly I realized that by faith in Jesus Christ my account is paid in full and I can live now a life of love not to earn from God my righteousness, but to manifest before the world the wonderful gift of righteousness, perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ."

And that fundamental insight of Martin Luther was never, I think, since the time of Saint Paul so clearly understood and articulated in the Church. And to have occasion to read some of Martin Luther's writings, the power of that insight comes through again and again and again as Luther is the one who in a most remarkable way was able to articulate that heart of the gospel.

That is why there is more written about Martin Luther than any other figure in human history except Jesus Christ himself.

Now, in part, of course, that is a testimony to German scholarship, but you know the Germans are forever writing books. But still it shows something of the power and the attractiveness of Martin Luther. Attractive in part because he was a very outgoing person. He was a person that attracted a loyal following because he was alive, likeable, powerful.

We have several volumes of what are known as Luther's *Table Talks*. He would invite the students over to dinner sometimes to the consternation of his wife who wasn't sure how many were coming. The church, the prince in Wittenberg had provided amply for Luther and gave Luther as a home the old Augustinian monastery. So Katie Luther had about a 40 bedrooms to take care of there. And there were guests come over, students would come over, students would come over and apparently these students never ate. They just took notes on the things that Martin would say as he had dinner. And we have books full of these sayings that Martin Luther would testify to something of the power of his mind, the vividness of his imagination.

He was forever saying outrageous things. He would give himself to hyperbolic expressions. We are all far too reformed and pious to even quote some of the things that Luther would say, but he would say terrible things about lawyers, about Anabaptists, about Jews and about Roman Catholics. And he has been very seriously criticized for that and sometimes legitimately.

But do you know why he did that? He said, "Do you know what all of those people have in common: lawyers, Catholics, Jews, Anabaptists? They all talk all the time about the law and they don't understand how it condemns them. We need a gospel that will free us and deliver us."

He said many other remarkable things. He wanted to stress that every Christian has a calling in the service of God. The medieval Church said only monks and nuns and priests had a calling, only they are really serving God.

Luther said, "No, every Christian who knows Jesus Christ by faith in whatever that Christian is doing with his or her life is serving God." He said, "Every calling is honorable before God with the possible exceptions of burglary and prostitution."

You see, he would always express himself in exaggerated way to try to hammer home the central point that he wanted to make and that central point always came back to Jesus and his righteousness.

In that turmoil, then, he became a reformer. He didn't go out to try to make himself a public figure. He didn't try to thrust himself upon the scene of the world stage, but the revolution that had come about in his understanding of the Scripture and his power as a teacher and a preacher almost forced him out into the open, to become a champion for God.

It happened in all sorts of ways. It began with this matter of indulgences when he nailed the 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg in 1517 on October 31st. There was a man who was selling indulgences for the pope.

Now the indulgence was a kind of complicated theological thing that technically eliminated part of one's obligation in the sacrament of penance. But most people didn't understand the technical intricacies of an indulgence and what they thought they were buying was the forgiveness of sins. And what the preachers and sellers of the indulgences encouraged people to think was that they were buying the forgiveness of their sins. And Luther as a pastor and as a teacher couldn't tolerate that. And he stood up and railed against the practice of those who would encourage people to think that they could buy forgiveness of sin.

That brought him into prominence. He was invite to debate. He began to see more and more consistently his own position, began to see as the only authority that one could trust for understanding the gospel was the Word of God. And got himself, therefore, into more and more trouble until finally he was put on trial for his life before the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.

Summoned to the city of Worms there to give account before the emperor and the princes and the archbishop of his teachings. And into that room in Worms in April of 1521 Luther came still clothed in the black habit of an Augustinian friar in literally to the presence of the powers of this world, fearful, wondering, but ready to make a testimony for the faith.

And as he appeared there the chancellor of the emperor stepped forward pointing to a table covered with books and pamphlets and said, "Martin Luther, are those your books?"

Luther looked up and said, "Yes, they are."

The chancellor said, "Will you now recant of the errors in those books?"

Luther said, "I thought this was going to be a trial. I thought I could make a defense. I thought I could present my case."

But the emperor had been warned that this Luther fellow was very persuasive and you

really better not let him talk. There is no telling what harm he could do. And so the chancellor said, “No. There is to be no defense. Will you recant of your errors?”

Luther tried another maneuver. He said, “Can you give me a list of my errors so I know what I ought to recant?” thinking then he could get into a little debate whether something was an error or not an error.

But the chancellor was ready for that one and he said, “No, you are a theologian. You know what your errors are. Will you recant?”

And then Luther made his great defense of the gospel... well, not quite. He said, “Can I have 24 hours to think it over?”

Luther said suddenly he found himself with this tremendous weight upon him as not only emperor and princes, but cardinals and archbishops and theologians of the Church were saying to him, “[?] Are you alone right?”

That is not the right Latin form, but we can correct that later on the tape. Are you alone right? Luther, are you so sure that you are right that you will lead people away from the Church of Jesus Christ so that not only you, but thousands of your followers will be plunged into everlasting darkness because of your pride and arrogance in rebelling against the church’s teaching for 1500 years? Are you alone right?

Now most American evangelicals are quite prepared to say to the world, “Yes, I alone am right,” and to go right on with that. But Luther appreciated the full weight and seriousness of that question. Is it conceivable that the Church has been wrong for 1500 years and I am the only one that has seen it?

And in answer to that question he asked for 24 hours to think it over. And in that 24 hours he spent a lot of time in prayer. He spent a lot of time talking to friends and he spent a lot of time reading the Scriptures. And at the conclusion he said to himself, “I am not saying that I alone am right. I am saying that the Scripture drives me to stand where I stand. As I read the Word of God I have no other alternative but to be loyal to it. I am not teaching and preaching Martin Luther. I am teaching and preaching God’s clear Word.”

And so he returned the next day and before the emperor he made this famous statement.

“Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason for I do not accept the authority of popes and councils 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 in captivity to the Word of God is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”

And when he left that room the Spanish body guards of the emperor cried out, “To the flames, to the flames.” They wanted Luther condemned immediately as a heretic and executed.

But Luther wasn't condemned immediately. In fact, the emperor, an honorable man, had given Luther his word that he could come and leave in safety and Luther was permitted to leave in safety.

Halfway home on the road back to Wittenberg he was kidnapped, but he was kidnapped by his own prince who had said to some of his knights, "That fellow Luther is going to get himself in a lot of trouble. You go off and you kidnap him and you take him off to one of my castles and don't tell me which one. And then when the emperor comes to me and says, 'Where is that fellow Luther who is your subject?' I can say to the emperor in all honesty, 'I don't know.'"

And, indeed, the prince, Prince Frederick the Wise, perhaps he should be known to history as Prince Frederick the Crafty, quickly left the city himself and so he was gone before the emperor issued the decree declaring that Luther was an outlaw.

For the rest of his life when the emperor would send an inquiry to Frederick and say, "Why are you protecting that Luther? I declared him an outlaw," Frederick would say to the messenger from the emperor, "When? When was Luther declared an outlaw?"

And the messenger would say, "At the Diet of Worms in 1521."

And Frederick would smile and say, "No, no, no. You must be wrong. I was at the Diet of Worms, never heard a thing about Luther being declared an outlaw."

And so Luther's life was spared, spared for some 25 years of most remarkable service to Jesus Christ.

While he was sort of exiled in that castle he spent his time well, translated much of the Bible into German producing the German version of the Bible that ranks in German literature the same way that the King James Version does in English literature, the Bible that Germans for centuries read and treasured.

He provided advice to Christian princes, to Christian parents, to Christian city councilmen, most of all to Christian churches and pastors teaching for 25 years with remarkable faithfulness the Word of God.

Went through a lot of controversies. He remained a controversial fellow. But at the end of his life when he was greatly weakened in body two of his friends were feuding and he took a long trip, I think, to patch up the argument between the two friends. And on the way home from that successful trip he died. And as they came to remove the body and to prepare it for the funeral they found in his pocket a little piece of paper in which he had written what may well have been the very last words he ever penned.

It is always interesting to find out what famous people's last words were. The last words he spoke were to his fellow minister who said to him, "Brother Luther, are you ready to die in the face in which you have lived?"

And his answer to that was a simple yes.

But in his pocket was found some final reflections upon his life. We might wonder what would this great man of God who had been so mightily used and had accomplished so much for God be thinking in his last hour? And the last words were very simple.

"We are beggars. This is true."

His last thoughts were not, again, of the great things that he had done and the great things for which God had used him. His last thoughts were that in the face of a righteous God we are beggars. We have nothing to offer to God, Luther said, but our sins and to look of mercy only in the perfections of Jesus Christ.

And so when Johannes Bugenhagen preached the funeral sermon for Martin Luther he chose a most appropriate text, Revelation 14:6 which reads, "Then I saw another angel flying in midair and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on earth, to every nation, tribe, language and people."

And he said, "Surely Martin Luther was an angel, a messenger from God to proclaim the eternal gospel."

And to that I can only say amen.

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for Martin Luther, but most of all we thank you for his insight into the Scripture, for what he proclaimed was not himself nor his own ideas or theology, but he sought to proclaim your Word clearly and faithfully. And so our thanks tonight is that there is good news for sinners, that Jesus Christ has done for us what we could never do for ourselves, that Jesus Christ has borne the curse of our sin in his own body on the cross, that he has fulfilled all righteousness in the perfection of his life and that he freely and graciously imputes that righteousness to his own.

We pray, oh Lord, that as we live out our lives our lives may rest upon that foundation of imputed righteousness in Jesus Christ and that we might seek, therefore, to live every moment of our life in gratitude to him. So bless us each one with the assurance that there is good news from God and that in Christ we are reckoned righteous. Hear us for we pray in his name. Amen.