

## “Thoughtful Transition”

Matthew 10: 11-20

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**Text: (NIV) <sup>11</sup> "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. <sup>12</sup> As you enter the home, give it your greeting. <sup>13</sup> If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup> If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. <sup>15</sup> I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. <sup>16</sup> I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. <sup>18</sup> On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, <sup>20</sup> for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.**

Jesus said: **“When they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it.”** That was an ominous statement. It was and has been and still is a reality that some Christians have experienced persecution... even martyrdom. But the Lord Jesus Christ was also saying that individuals would be used by the Holy Spirit to change the world for the Gospel. Jesus said **“When they arrest *you*...!”** That idea fascinates me... the impact of individuals. First, let us pray.

Think about it. In late September, a driver of a large semi-truck took out the overpass by Kensington Road going east on I-96. His truck was four inches too high and the resulting crash was an incredible mess. One guy did one thing. This event did not just cause a little inconvenience to the driver and his truck. It has been estimated that the repairs will take at least six months. Many thousands of drivers have been and will be inconvenienced not being able to enter the highway at that point. For four days thousands of drivers were backed up and delayed and more will follow when the road department really gets to work on the missing overpass. Perhaps a million people will have been inconvenienced because of the actions of one person.

It's always that way for good or bad. One Salaam Hussein tortures thousands and one Adolph Hitler kills millions. One person can work for evil. Or good. One inventor of penicillin saves millions and one soldier rescues dozens. And one man Martin Luther worked thru a spiritual intersection and was used by God to change the Christian world and effect millions of believers. But it was not easy, and he had to go before governors and kings. Today, a second

message on the transition brought about by the great Protestant Reformation. One person can change the world.

Last week, we spoke of that fateful day October 31, 1517 when Luther posted his 95 arguments on the castle door. They were criticisms against the Church of Rome and the Pope and his many Bishops and other clergy. What kind of things did Luther say in those documents that brought him before the officials of the church for the inquisition as we saw portrayed in the film? He said things like this:

Only God can give salvation... not a Priest  
 Only God can forgive-the Pope can only reassure people of forgiveness  
 Because of church penalties the church is producing a crop of human weeds  
 An indulgence will not save anyone  
 An indulgence will not save a dead soul  
 The Pope should desire devout prayer more than money  
 Relics are not truly relics of Christ; they are evil  
 The Pope should rebuild St. Peter's with his own money

Eventually Luther's books were burned, and he was excommunicated. In our film clip, we saw Luther standing in front of the Emperor and his prosecutor Johann von Eck and Luther refused to recant... to modify his position. Finally, Luther said:

**“Unless I am refuted and convicted by the testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound to the word of God: I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience. Here I stand! I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen.”**

The authorities were beyond stunned. His life was at risk. He was taken away by some who were supposed to protect him, but they had other plans. They were going to harm him. Yet, friends kidnapped him and took him to safety, hiding him in a distant castle. Eventually, the authorities backed off Luther. The churches in Germany and elsewhere began to prosper as they preached the Gospel. At the same time, we must finish the Luther story with integrity. It is true that this imperfect man was used by God mightily. But he had some very unsettling behaviors.

Eventually, he married a former nun named Katerina and they had six children. He continued to serve the Lord and be a Pastor and advisor to many. It is also true, that by the time Luther was an old man he was known to be an irritable and irascible crank to many. He had problems with sleep and digestion and terrible acrimony with those who opposed him. It is also true

that his words were sometimes anti-Semitic. In his essay called **“On Jews and Their Lies”** he was very cruel. He seems to have hated the Jews for not turning to Christ. If a Jewish friend ever asks you about Luther’s words against the Jews do not deny it friends. He grew more and more mean and intolerant. Yet, God used Luther to set off the sparks that brought on the Reformation of the church. He died at the age of 63 of apparent heart failure. A deeply flawed man used mightily by God.

Jesus said his servants would be persecuted. Indeed, we might ask ... what would we die for? Luther was quite willing to die for his trust in the Word of God. Luther knew very well that John Hus and others had been burned at the stake. Martyrdom has always been present as the church has faced opposition. It was present when the early church developed its creeds. After all, why did they need the Apostles’ Creed that we recite today? Why was it written somewhere around 400 BC? Because Christians had to agree on the essentials of the faith since so many were being persecuted for Christ. If we were early fourth century Christians, we would probably be asking “Exactly what do we believe and are we willing to die for what we believe?” In a real sense, what would you die for? The belief that Jesus was Resurrected? That Jesus will return? The Virgin Birth? So, the creeds were developed.

In a similar sense, during and after the Reformation, a sort of corporate creed emerged in the form of a list of essential beliefs. They came to be called the FIVE SOLAS from the Latin word meaning “only” or “alone.” Every Christian should know the **FIVE SOLAS** of our faith and, so we will review them today. Let’s go thru them one by one.

### **FIRST: “Sola Scriptura” meaning “Scripture Alone.”**

The Reformers correctly insisted that the Word of God must be our final authority in all things to do with our Christian faith. While it is true that God raises up Elders and Pastors, they insisted that all people in authority must lead in a way consistent with the Bible. If a Pope or Pastor or anyone else leads or directs in any way contrary to Scripture, then that leader must be disregarded.

This was astounding to Rome because the church expected its members to do what they were told. But the challenge is trickier than that. Follow me here. What if the clear teaching of Scripture is not quite as clear as it seems? For example, a Catholic Priest was a friend of mine and a fine man. He is now with the Lord. I recall a lengthy debate sitting at lunch with him over the meaning of John Chapter Six. In his view, these words clearly taught the critical Doctrine (critical to Catholics) of Transubstantiation. The belief that upon the prayer of the Priest the bread and juice of Communion become the body and blood of Christ quite literally. They believe they are transubstantiated. He based it on this:

**John 6:53-55 (NIV) J<sup>53</sup> Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”**

My response and the Protestant response was that Jesus was speaking figuratively because he was right there with them. He was making the point that even though Moses brought them manna in the desert, he himself, Jesus, was the real food upon which their souls must feed. I am totally convinced that Jesus was not speaking literally but one can argue from that text for Transubstantiation. Thus, even saying we believe in the Bible alone doesn't quite settle everything.

But if the church teaches that salvation can be purchased by a gift to the church then it has directly contradicted the Word of God and such a teaching must be dismissed. **“Scripture Alone”** was and is the first important “sola.”

### **SECOND: “Sola Christus” meaning “Christ Alone.”**

The medieval church certainly spoke of Christ and his work on the Cross. But they added other things to that work so that personal works or merit enhanced the salvation of the sinner. They were saying that we need Christ certainly, but we must add in our own righteousness. It was as if Heaven was in Grand Rapids, a hundred miles from here. In their theology, Christ would carry us three quarters of the way and we would need to walk the last twenty-five miles. It was not Christ alone but Christ plus our efforts to get saved.

Some medieval theologians were afraid of spiritual indolence. That is, if I believe that Christ alone paid for my sins and that I must do nothing, I will become lazy and even unrighteous with my life. But that view underestimates my sin. The Gospel in no way suggests I can be even helpful in earning my salvation. When the Lord Jesus was asked about this he made it clear. Consider:

**John 6:28-29 (NIV) <sup>28</sup> Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."**

Jesus Christ is not one among many ways to God. He is the only way and we cannot add to his work on the Cross. So, we have Sola Scriptura and Sola Christus.

### **THIRD: “Sola Gratia” meaning “Grace Alone.”**

This may seem to be saying the same thing as “Sola Christus” but it is different in an underlying sense. This doctrine goes behind or under the first two. They said it was “Scripture Alone” and “Christ Alone.” But here is the question: what is it that draws those who are saved to God to even seek salvation? The reformers wanted this made clear: it is God who saves sinners by His grace and according to His good pleasure. That even if a sinner can remember seeking after God, as I can remember seeking after God, it is God who does the seeking. Sinners are dead in their sins and do not naturally seek after God until He prompts them to do so.

This may sound like a meaningless fine point, but it is not. Look at it this way: when Lazarus was dead in the tomb, was he is there thinking “I hope someone comes and raises me up!” No, he was dead. Unless Jesus had gone to his tomb and raised him up, he would never have come out.

Grace alone means God initiated it and God brought it about. Even when we remember that we acted on a desire to know God, we must remember that God planted that desire in us. All the Glory goes to God! The Apostle Paul put it this way:

**Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV) <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.**

In January of 1992, I preached a sermon here at Cornerstone called “Predestination: Evidence of God's Mercy!” A few people were upset because they had always been taught that everyone is capable of repenting and turning to God for salvation. Everyone they said has some small spark of life upon which they can act if they will only turn to Him. Of course, He says “Turn to me” but the point is if a person can turn to God then it is nice of God to offer salvation but not truly gracious of God. Grace is when we get something we absolutely do not deserve and have no right to claim or expect. Then the Glory goes to God alone. We will come to that.

Let me illustrate “Grace Alone.” We’ve all been to funeral homes and stood at the coffin of a friend or loved one. Wouldn’t I look absurd if I stood there and spoke to that embalmed body and said “Hello! Why not get up and come home?” You’d say I’d lost my mind because the person is dead. And you’d be right. The lost sinner is not simply ill and weak but able to respond to treatment. He or she is dead and unresponsive unless God leans down and gives them new life. It is tricky and completely an act of grace on the part of God! **“Sola Gratia” meaning “Grace Alone.”**

#### **FOURTH: “Solo Fide” meaning “Faith Alone.”**

This means we are saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ. We touched on this when we spoke of Christ alone but let us be more precise. “Faith Alone” was considered the “Material Principle” by the reformers. That means it is the central teaching of true Christianity. It is the practical truth attached to the more Formal truth that Christ is Savior. It is the thing without which the whole plan of salvation is misunderstood. The point is that it is faith alone that gets us right with God... not anything we can do. It does not mean that we should go out and do bad things and God will not care. Not at all! It simply means that we contribute nothing to our salvation except faith alone and even that comes to us by grace from God! So, we see that we could never stand before God and say “Well, I did my part, right? I came with humility to ask to be saved right God?” Consider what we learned last week about Luther and his ruminations from Paul’s letter to the Romans:

**Romans 1:16-17 (NIV) <sup>16</sup> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. <sup>17</sup> For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."**

He says the righteousness is "from God!" God gives us the title of "righteous." By faith we receive that title. We can do nothing to deserve it or attain it. We cannot perfectly keep the Laws of God and we cannot in any manner deserve our salvation.

Is this a practical truth as you work thru transitions in your life? It should be! We must grasp that we did nothing to deserve being chosen by God and that we can do nothing to stay in His grace! Then we can finally relax and live for Holiness not to get saved but because we are saved. Paul put it this way:

**Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV) <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.**

But then... almost as if he was anticipating the objection that such a truth would make us immoral and spiritually lazy, Paul wrote:

**<sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

Ahh! So, God saves us not because of our works but so we could do good works! By Grace alone! **"Solo Fide"** ... Then finally:

**FIFTH: "Solo Deo Gloria" meaning "Glory to God Alone."**

This was sort of a summation point capturing the meanings of the other points. This is why we sing "To God be the Glory!" Man gets no glory! Man deserves no Glory! Man is without any claim to Glory! Therefore, is it particularly obnoxious for any man to allow himself to be called "Holy Father!" That was how Jesus the Christ addressed God the Father! The true Gospel knows nothing of the glory of man! The glory goes to God alone who, by His grace and in accordance with His good pleasure saves unworthy sinners.

Luther spent the closing years of his life being a Pastor/Theologian trying to iron out differences with other Protestants. Some were never fully resolved and that is why we have so many Protestant Denominations. In fairness to our Catholic friends, they went about making good changes in some areas of theology and God has continued to work thru the Church of Rome. In fact, in many places Catholic theologians are leading people to faith in Christ by grace and spending more and more time in the Word of God.

In my own life, I most affectionately recall coming to Christ many years ago. I was managing a commercial banking office in New York and there was a Catholic convent nearby. I used to

chat with some of the sisters when they came in to do business. One was quite gentle and pleasant to speak with. One day I said to her “Sister may I tell you something wonderful?” She said “Please. Yes!” And I said “I recently gave my life to Christ and I have become a Christian!” She looked at me with such joy and quietly said “I rejoice with you!”

So we rejoice over God who gives us the SCRIPTURES and CHRIST and GRACE and FAITH all to the **GLORY OF GOD ALONE!**

Let us pray.