

The Reformation in Biblical Perspective
“Martin Luther: The Making of a Reformer and Reformation”
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October 29, 2017 • Evening Sermon

Martin Luther: The Making of a Reformer, Part I
(Narrative with Dr. Reeder playing the part of Martin Luther)

I have to confess I was utterly surprised to receive this invitation to a Presbyterian church. I could understand some of my colleagues like Knox and Calvin even, but for me to come here? I think it's because of the association of the 95 Theses at this time and a significant milestone is here so you want to hear from me. I'd like to begin this way. There were major areas where the Reformation began to explode to change everything – Strasburg, London, Edenborough, even my own small village that became an unbelievable center of activity, Wittenberg. The one that you maybe most familiar with is Geneva. It is there that they acknowledge it with an interesting statement in Latin, ‘Post tenebras lux’ which translated means ‘out of darkness light.’

At the end of the 15th century, beginning of 16th century there was much darkness and the darkness had enveloped governments of the land. There was nothing more contradictory than the name of the dominate empire, the Holy Roman Empire. It was not holy or Roman nor was it an empire yet it controlled many. There were wars taking place and the oppression of peasants. Most of all was the darkness within the church. It has been descending for almost a thousand years. The church is embracing what is known as sacerdotalism which is the power of the church to administer salvation through its sacraments and its clerics by its indulgences with its relics. The various powers assumed by the church had clouded the Gospel since perhaps the days of Augustine. With the church not having its salt or its light the decent of the culture was even more rapid than you could possibly imagine. That is what was happening when I was born.

Now I'd like to share with you my testimony. Reformation comes through reformers and reformers come by the grace of God with all of their imperfections and mine are numerous. My place of birth was Eisleben, Germany. It is in a mining area. My father's name was Hans Luder. In my lifetime we changed our name four times and that wasn't because we were ashamed of it, it just kept changing for various reasons. I was born with the name Martin Luter and the ‘t’ soon became a ‘d’ to use your alphabet so it became Martin Luder. My father then decided that this peasantry was not going to be for him so he went out on a limb, took some big loans and bought a mine. Thankfully for the family it succeeded and because of that he no longer was in the peasant class but what you all call the middle class. My father was quite the entrepreneur for it didn't stop with one mine, it became more mines and then foundries. All of a sudden our name was no longer ‘Luder’ it was ‘Luhter’ and then I'm not sure when the ‘h’ and ‘t’ were mixed up but then it became Luther. Thus I am known to you now as Martin Luther. I kind of prefer Luhter but it is Luther now.

Not all of my siblings, as was the reality of the day, survived their infancy. My parents, knowing that would happen, wasted no time in going to the church for its sacerdotal declaration of salvation through baptism in the christenings. So within the first few days of my birth I was a stone's throw away from the house I was born in to be baptized in the church. I began to grow up in Eisleben and in our time our social security was our children, not like you have today. So

parents then wanted to make sure their children were educated, taught and could support their parents in their old age. That is what my father expected of me.

To educate me, my father sent me to a small town but what soon became known as an educational center. I actually was a street singer for a tavern and that's how I was able to secure my board and food there as my father took care of my educational costs. The town was called Eisenach and that is where I finished my secondary education. At the end of the century, in 1497 my parents sent me on to my graduate work and my father told me to go be a lawyer, make money, take care of my business and take care of him. I did not have a choice in what my passion would be. So at 17 I went to the University of Erfurt and within three years I had finished my undergraduate degree, bachelor's degree and my master's degree. So I was not ready to become a lawyer.

After that I went back home and there I had an accident. Today I would call it an act of God's providence. A sword pierced my leg and hit an artery where I almost bled to death but somehow survived it. I was always aware of my mortality, of death. It was in my family, my siblings and it was around me in the town. Our towns were always ravaged by fevers. It seems like if that accident had been a few more inches I would be dead. I was not gaining much assurance from what I was being told about salvation at the time, either through the waters of baptism or through the declarations of a church or even from the confessional booth whereby the priest was declaring my absolution from sins and then giving me instructions as to my penance. There was no assurance in my heart.

When you get trained as a lawyer you start asking questions. I started looking through my Vulgate Bible and saw that God was holy, He punished sin, I'm a sinner and my sins are ever before me. So how can I possibly be saved if God is really holy and just? How could I ever be justified before Him? It was in the midst of that, that I had gone home to spend some time with my family. On my way back there was a thunderstorm about five miles out of Erfurt coming back from Eisleben and a thunderbolt hit right next to me and knocked me to the ground. It made me almost senseless but when I arose as the storm continued I cried out 'Saint Anna, save me and I will become a monk.' The reason I called to Saint Anna was because she was the patron saint of the miners which had to do with the church I was baptized in. Saint Anna was who I called up and she seemed closer to me than God who seemed very far away. She was the mother of the Virgin Mary. God's anger had to be directed at me and perhaps that storm was that anger.

What would I do? Here was my reasoning to become a monk. If the priest could administer salvation through the declarations of the church then why not become a priest, for certainly a priest would be saved to be able to do that. So I committed myself to becoming a monk. I survived the storm and when I got to Erfurt I knew right where I was going. My parents would tell you that when I do something I don't do it halfway so the best monastery I knew of was there in Erfurt. It was an Augustinian monastery that was very strict in all its requirements and responsibilities. As I knocked on the door of that monastery to enter the cloister a voice said 'Who is there and what is your purpose?' My answer was one I had been instructed to give which was 'I am seeking the grace of God and the mercy of the Augustinian monastery.'

They let me in and I stayed in a room for a while until they eventually let me in where I began, in a seven by twelve foot room my years of study. That began in 1505. I had just graduated the year before from the University of Erfurt. I started my study under a man who would have quite an influence on my life and as I look back on the providence of God I am so thankful for Johann von Staupitz. He was an expert in Augustinian theology and he was really

the last church father who understood the Gospel of saving grace. Staupitz was put out with me more times than one for I was fully aware of my sins so when they told me I had to confess my sins I would just say this 'If you could be saved through monkery then this is the one monk that would have been saved.' I would beat myself over my sin and soak my undergarments in brine in order to continually punish myself as it would bite into my skin to remind myself that I was a sinner. Beyond that I would get very little hours of sleep and I was constantly in the confessional booth.

I was very sensitive to all my sins but just how many sins can you do in a monastery? My mentor Staupitz said to me at one of my confessionals 'Son, don't come back here unless you have something to really forgive because this is too trivial' but they were not trivial to me at all. I kept bringing them to him and he finally decided that I needed some time in the Word of God so he gave me an instruction. That is when I began to teach on his behalf to assist him with the Psalms and the Psalms became very dear to me in my life as I spent time studying that book of the Bible. My conviction went deeper and deeper and deeper. It showed up a number of times.

About five years later, something happened in the chapel which is still there today. They even have my white rose in the window but it wasn't there then. I did what I was called to do. I laid myself out in the shape of a cross on an altar. It won't be many years after this that I will be accused of being a Hussite, a follower of that Czechoslovakian Bohemian Jan Huss. Interestingly the name Huss is translated 'goose' but he held to the things that I would later hold to and later I would be associated with him. In fact, you'll probably see some pictures of me with a swan in the background. It is all over my native Germany in this day and age. The reason that picture exists is because when they burned Jan Huss he said 'You may burn this goose but after me will come a swan whom you will not be able to silence.' Everyone was convinced that I was the fulfillment of his prophecy. That may be where we get 'cook the goose' but I was the swan who couldn't be silenced. That is exactly what happened in the providence of God. Why is that interesting? It is because where I laid, the bones of the bishop who burned Huss and heard that statement were buried right underneath me. You could almost hear him say 'over my dead body' couldn't you? So therefore I am the swan and he was the goose.

I went ahead with it through my ministry and God was dealing with my soul. In 1510 von Staupitz sent me on a mission/pilgrimage to Rome. My father was not happy with me when I gave up law to go into the monastery for he saw his retirement going out but after a while he kind of made peace with it. I remember thinking going to Rome that I wish my parents were dead so that while in Rome through the indulgences, the relics and everything I could ensure there release from purgatory but because they were alive I couldn't dedicate my pilgrimage to them so I dedicated my pilgrimage to my grandparents because they were dead. I don't think I had been ever so disappointed in my life as I heard the backroom discussion of the clerics as they would administer communion after communion with jokes and off color remarks with five communions every hour just pushing everyone through. It made no sense.

For me and my first communion everything went well until it came time for the prayer I was to utter which according to what I believed at the time, was that the elements would turn into the body and blood of Christ. I could not get the prayer out of my mouth. My father had come to this communion and brought some of his friends with him and he was highly chagrined and embarrassed as he let me know after it was over. I explained to him 'Father, I'm a sinner. How can I possibly hold the body and blood of Jesus in my hands? I just can't get the words out.'

Then I heard all about the sexual immorality of both homosexual and promiscuous kinds and I saw all of it taking place. I saw what had happened in the corruption of the doctrine and the church but I went ahead through the *scala santa*, the staircase that was supposedly in Jerusalem that was brought there by the Crusaders. It was said if you could come up to the top and declare the 'our fathers' then you could have people brought out of purgatory. At this time I understood that everyone went to purgatory when they died and you could not do enough penance to escape it but once you went there then your relatives or friends could get you out with relics, indulgences and particular acts. One of these acts would be the fees to climb up this particular staircase, the very staircase that Christ would have mounted in the judgment of Pontius Pilate. I went up those steps on my knees and for every step I paid the fee. When I got to the top I thought 'Who knows if this makes any difference.'

When I came back my heart was full of cynicism. Von Staupitz had been asked by a prince of Germany named Frederick the Wise to come to Wittenberg and start an Augustinian cloister as an offshoot of Erfurt and the University of Wittenberg. He went and now he was going to call me there. There I was with the embarrassment of my first Lord's Supper, the cynicism I had felt in Rome and there was no assurance in my life but only a deep conviction of sin. As I arrived at the University of Wittenberg it was there at the white city on the white hill of the Elbe River that I began to teach. Von Staupitz assigned me to teach the books of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews.

Then one day I climbed up the tower in the castle church. There were two churches there, the city church and the castle church. I was the rector for the city church but I this day I went to the castle church which was the basic church of the University and faculty. I climbed the castle church tower for meditation and all I could do was feel the sweat pouring off of my body because of my convictions. I realized I was under the judgment of God and I had no hope but my eyes fell upon Romans 1:16-17 which says [16] *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 Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* It is there I realized I can be saved.

I could be saved by grace alone, the love of God extended with no merits on my part to me, through faith alone, in Christ alone, with my sins removed and the righteousness of God covers me. So I am forgiven and accepted to the glory of God – *Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, Sola Deo Gloria* from the Word of God, *Sola Scriptura*, which alone is my authoritative rule of faith and practice. I then wrote down 'I have been born again' and that would lead this reformer into a Reformation. But first I started writing hymns and other things.

I wrote 38 hymns and it seems like this church always sings at least one of them. Then others followed after me and wrote hymns. O the joy and not only did my life change but the church would change out of the Reformation. Now people didn't watch worship but they worshipped. People can now have the Bible in their own language. People could now declare the glory of God and bear witness of Christ. O what great things there are to sing about!

Martin Luther: The Making of a Reformation, Part II (Narrative with Dr. Reeder playing the part of Martin Luther)

I understand your esteemed Birmingham Theological Seminary has offered a course on the Reformation. As we move toward the Lord's Supper together I'd like to give you a small

distillation of that. I heard the seminary has offered this course with a wonderful price making it highly accessible for all with some extraordinary teachers as well.

I have just shared with you how God worked in my life and then how He used me in a very interesting moment because while all this was happening in my life there is this thing called the Guttenberg press that is being invented. As I am writing all that I am writing is being produced and sent out and rightly so for the reclaiming of the Gospel with all these five *solas*. There is about to come a moment in my life where that fifth sola (Sola Scriptura) undergirds everything. How do we know we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone? How do I know I was made for the glory of God and to enjoy Him forever? How do I know I was saved to the praise of His glorious grace? How do I know that He sustains me every moment of my life for His glory?

There is only one way I know. I don't get that from contemplating God's revelation creation. I only get that through God's Word. So everything rises and falls on the believer's relationship with the Word of God to know the God of the Word and to make the God of the Word known. Sola Scriptura is that the Word of God is our only infallible, inerrant, sufficient, authoritative rule of faith (what we believe) and practice. This soon became the question with the fate of Jan Huss being burned to death, with all the authority of the church and the government raiding against me, given all the weakness that I know about myself? I will come back to this.

As I began to teach from the books of Romans, Galatians, Psalms, Hebrews and these *solas* that I have just shared with you, my students began to imbibe them. I also thought 'how can I get through to the church?' So I wrote 95 propositions that I wanted to propose and discuss in the life of the church but in the meantime some interesting things were happening. There were some vacancies in the church for bishops.

Prince Albert from Brandenburg was able to get two bishops because he was able to get the money for them. You weren't supposed to be able to buy one but he did and bought two. This is actually called Simony in our church that comes from Simon the Magician in the Bible who tried to buy the work of the Holy Spirit from the Apostle Peter. At this time Simony was all over the church. Then it happened with the Arch Bishop. We had a corrupt Pope named Julius II who died and then an even more corrupt Pope took over named Pope Leo X. It was no wonder that many of my colleagues identified him as the antichrist in their confessions. He had building projects, such as Saint Peter's Basilica and all kinds of things facing him so he needs money and wants more money and power. He had these doctrines of purgatory, penance, and indulgences that were available to him and Simony so he negotiated for these two bishops and the arch bishop with Prince Albert and Prince Albert was able to come up with the money.

At first the Pope set the price at 12,000 ducats of gold and Prince Albert said 'how about 7,000?' The Pope wanted 12,000 for the 12 Apostles and Prince Albert sent back and said 'how about 7,000 for the seven deadly sins that I'll confront?' They finally settled on 10,000 as if to represent the Ten Commandments. Prince Albert didn't have the money so he went into debt for it so the Pope threw in this; wherever it's not outlawed in the German state you can go to those places and sell indulgences and you can even have my best seller, Johann Tetzel. Tetzel had a whole drama team, sermon and spiel to get people to buy indulgences from him including that little jingle of 'every time a coin in the coffer rings a soul from purgatory springs.' He made people feel badly if they didn't buy indulgences to get their friends and relatives out of purgatory. This is where the 'purging' took place over many years in the fires there. How could you possibly know if you could get people's years knocked off but if you could why would you

not do this? That was all part of his scheme. The Pope and Prince Albert would let Tetzel keep fifty percent to pay off his debt but the other fifty percent would have to be sent to them because of what they were doing in Rome.

I wasn't too worried about this because I was in a region that had outlawed the sale of indulgences under a man named Frederick the Wise. I wish I could tell you he outlawed this due to great theological conviction but he did this because he had his own relic collection which was the second largest in all the world. His desire was to get more relics. He had a hair and some bottled milk that came from the Virgin Mary. He had part of a splinter from the jaw bone of the donkey that Samson used. He had one of the links of the chain from the Apostle Paul. He had almost 20,000 relics and the assigned value of releasing from purgatory was 1.9 million years and he didn't want any competition. So he was more than happy for me to take on Mr. Tetzel and he offered me protection on more than one occasion.

It is amazing what God does with people for Frederick the Wise even got converted. His son became one of the most wonderful rulers you have ever seen in your life. In the meantime he protected me while I decided to take on Johann Tetzel. He was just across the river and I wanted to make sure my people didn't go over there so I decided to take him on. So I set aside my 95 proposals and wrote my 95 theses dealing with the issues of indulgences. I thought what better time than to do it on All Saint's evening. I know people do great movies on me for this but where I nailed these was on the bulletin board of the faculty, college and city, where people posted jobs and places for rent. I wrote it in Latin to make sure everyone understood I was aiming for an academic debate with the theologians hoping for a Reformation, not a revolution. I didn't want to create a new form but I wanted a re-form in the church and that's all. I was convinced if I could get the debate then it would happen.

Do you know what happened next? Some of my students were waiting for this moment and as soon as I put them up they pulled them down and took it to the Gutenberg press where in about two weeks all of Germany was filled with these 95 theses. Now this couldn't be stopped. Then it was sent to Pope Leo X who then wrote a papal bull that went toward my excommunication and my demise in the fires of judgment. He said publically 'There is a drunken monk a loose in Germany' but he wrote it a little more poetic than that; "Arise O Lord, there is a wild boar in the vineyard of the Lord. Cast him out!" I was both the wild boar and the drunken monk all at the same time.

My students didn't like it and honestly I didn't like it much either. I just wanted the debate but on the contrary the papal bull went out instead. Frederick the Wise said that he was going to protect me so we did get a debate that next year. It was in a place called Heidelberg but Lord, deliver us from our disciples for my students got out ahead of me and they had published twenty plus protestations and from that point on we would now be called Protestants. The protestations became the subject of the debate. The debate drew more people than I expected and it seemed to have gone pretty well because before long they decided we needed another debate and this time it took place in Augsburg. From 1517 to 1521 it was a very busy time in my life with debates, my writings and all kinds of things were happening.

At the Augsburg debate Cardinal Cajetan was there and he was the one who began to associate me with Jan Huss. If he could paint me with that brush then it would be assured that I would be burned at the stake and no German would want to follow someone who followed a Czechoslovakian Bohemian to the fires of judgment at the stakes. He was right because much of what Huss said I was saying like the pope and the church was not infallible, the Word of God

was infallible, inerrant and our only rule of faith and practice. I find myself not wanting to be a Hussite but I found myself identifying with him.

The next one was in Leipzig in 1519 and I had the wonderful opportunity to preach at St. Thomas Church. The theologian I debated at this debate was Johann Eck. His one goal was to also associate me with Jan Huss and at the same time he had in his pocket the issues of the papal bull. The reason it is called a papal bull is because it has the pope's seal on it and Leo the X had call for my destruction with this. Yet Frederick the Wise secured my protection at Heidelberg, Augsburg and Leipzig.

Here is another thing that began to happen during all this. The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Maximilian died. Who were they going to replace him with? There were four men that everyone looked to. One of the contenders was my own Frederick the Wise. Another one was King Henry VIII and another was the King of France named Francis. The last one was a teenager who was the King of Spain whose name was Charles V, even though he wasn't a Spaniard. In the first election Frederick the Wise was elected but he turned it down and not many people know that. So they went to a second election and the one who was really being groomed for this was Charles V. He was elected at the age of 19. He has this Islamic invasion coming up through Spain and Austria and he has to deal with that. He is in debt and has a host of other problems as well. The most money he will get will be from Germany so if he takes out this popular monk which I happen to be at the time, then he has a real problem. By the way, Frederick the Wise might even go back and take the first election anyway.

So Charles V agrees to not enforcing the excommunication and the penalty of my death at the stake but it does get delivered to me. I'll never forget the day where I was standing outside of Wittenberg where my students took the papal bull, placed it in my hand and with them I put it on the fire. We burned it and I knew it wouldn't be long until I would be burned but I wasn't going to be burned without saying first what I thought the fate of that bull ought to suffer so we burned it first. Frederick the Wise was able to maintain my security and I went to a place where all of the church and all of the state came together. It was a place called Worms, Germany. At the Diet of Worms, the gathering of the church and state, I was confronted by another von Eck who was an emissary from the Pope and there was going to be no debate, only a demand that I recant.

I asked him what he wanted me to recant of. Have I in some cases overstated my argument where I was less than Christian in what I wrote? Certainly I would recant of that but I can't recant of my commentaries. There are many things I have written that the church has actually used and you wouldn't want me to recant of those. Then I began to share the Scriptures from Romans, Galatians and other Scripture and asked if I should recant of these passages of Scripture. He said 'Enough of the debate with forums and let's quit beating around the bush, will you recant?' There I saw the Emperor, the princes, all the people, the church and the state knowing he was holding the decree of my death in his hands. I asked him for a day to think on his question and it was granted. I went back and pleaded with God, 'O God, You alone are my strength, I have none. This world is filled with devils and great is my adversary, greater is he than me. O Lord, rise up and defend me. O Lord, be my strength and my refuge.'

The next day I returned and in the midst of all my weaknesses and inadequacies my God was gracious. When it came time to recant my answer was simply this; 'Unless I am convinced by Holy Scripture or clear reasoning I cannot recant for popes and counsels do err and contradict each other as has been clearly seen and I do not trust either popes or counsels. So unless I am convinced that the Scriptures I have quoted are wrong my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.' And God was praised.

Come and meet with your God at the Table for He invites you to and this demonstrates we are saved by grace, through faith, in Christ alone, with our consciences captive to the Word of God. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, in these moments come and meet with us as we meet together with You for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.