

The Reformation of 1517

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 October 2017

Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

[0 : 00] The world at large, at least much of it, is celebrating a significant milestone in human history within the next couple of days.

It is known by the name the Protestant Reformation, but that is not altogether accurate. In reality, it was a failed effort to reform the Roman Catholic Church that eventually led to what became the establishment by a group of people called Protestants, separating themselves from the Roman Catholic Church that they had attempted to reform, but without success.

Martin Luther, German monk in the Roman Catholic Church, became the leader and the catalyst for the movement.

His historic posting of the 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenberg, Germany, set off a firestorm throughout Europe.

His theses were 95 grievances and practices in Romanism that he thought to be much in need of revising or eliminating.

[1 : 25] Many of those 95 points had been adopted by the church leaders and were considered as infallible, as if Christ himself had instituted them.

Where, then, did that make them subject to change or correction of any kind? If the church doctrines and demands were instituted under what was supposedly God's own authority, then who was Martin Luther or anyone else that could dare to suggest they were in need of reformation? This was the crux of the struggle over the issue of authority. As discussed in an earlier segment, the Roman Catholics had three equal sources for the doctrines and practice they had installed. One was the Bible, which they considered infallible, as do we, incapable of error. The second was the official pronouncements of the Pope and the councils that met and gave their verdicts on issues of faith and practice.

And the third infallible source, at least as they regarded it as infallible for their authority, lay in the oral traditions handed down over years by the church fathers.

[2 : 53] Any and all practices that were imposed upon the faithful that could not be justified by one of those authorities could surely be justified by another.

And this was and remains to this day the issue, authority. Authority is not the issue for the Roman Catholic Church alone.

It is also the issue for all churches and as well for all individuals, even whether or not they profess to be Christians.

The issue facing each of them is authority. What will you or who will you as an individual recognize as the proper authority, the final authority for your life?

What you believe and your reasons for believing it stems from what or who you accept as your authority. This became the predictable watershed issue for Martin Luther.

[4 : 03] His personal agonizing over his own sin and his inability to obtain any peace from a sense of forgiveness drove him deeply into the scriptures.

We are told that on one occasion when Luther had opportunity to visit Rome and the Vatican, that he subjected himself to crawling up the marble steps on his knees, which by the time he reached the top were severely bloodied, confessing his sin all the way up.

This was a self-inflicted kind of penance that he imposed on himself with the intent of satisfying this righteous God and providing some peace to his own heart and mind.

We are told that Luther had such a sensitive conscience that it would not permit him to get away with anything. And he had at least one or two favorite priests to whom he, as a monk, would go and confess his sins.

They were, of course, his father confessors, as they were called. And Luther would bring such petty things, such minute details over which he believed he had sinned, to these confessors, that he wearied them with his confessions.

[5 : 36] And it got so that they hated to see Luther coming because they knew they were going to be subjected to an ordeal while he confessed everything that he could possibly think of that might in any way displease God.

And still, he found no rest for his soul, no security, no peace, no assurance, and no stability. And he was driven to the scriptures to find an answer that he couldn't find elsewhere.

Perhaps little did he suspect that that was the only place where he would find the answers. And if you would turn, please, to that passage of scripture that so enlightened Martin Luther, you will find it in Romans chapter 1.

But actually, it is first found in the minor prophet Habakkuk. And it is here a repeat or a quote from the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 1.

And we shall begin with verse 16. Romans 1 and verse 16. And this was what so captured the mind and heart of Luther, so much so that it would not let him go.

[6 : 47] And as a result, this message became the springboard for what would eventually be the Protestant Reformation.

Verse 16 of Romans chapter 1 reads, For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

For therein, that is, therein this gospel, this good news, is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith.

What exactly does that mean? Well, I can assure you it is far more than just a saying. It contains the grandest of theological truths that have ever been given to humanity.

The just shall live by faith. What does just mean? What does live mean? And what does faith mean? We are not going to take time to adequately expound the meanings of these verses other than to just give you the essence of it, that it must have come to the heart and mind of Luther, because herein, he found the peace that he was so desperately searching for.

[8 : 22] He found the reality of forgiveness, of coming into a right relationship with God, which actually allows a person to be at peace within themselves, rather than having a roiled conscience that continually is upsetting.

When the apostle uses the term in verse 17, the just, he is talking about the individual who is justified.

The individual who has a right relationship or comes into a right relationship with God. We call this justification. And it means that the basis or the means by which one may become acceptable to God has been laid down and provided for apart from the individual who was seeking it.

And as the context reveals here regarding the person of Jesus Christ, it is in Christ and in the gospel of Christ that this righteousness is revealed.

That this justness is revealed. And the phrase that is used, the just shall live by faith, it obviously is not talking about physical life such as we now all experience and as Martin Luther himself experienced.

[9 : 51] Everybody who is alive and breathing already has that kind of life. And it is evident that he is talking about the life that is an eternal life, the life that is spiritual life, the life that is connected with God because justification has been realized.

And God is able to pronounce that person just or righteous. Now, mark well, it does not mean that that person has somehow mysteriously become righteous and just because he remains a flawed individual fully capable of sin and disobeying God.

But what it means is that he comes into a position whereby he is declared to be righteous and just even though in reality and in his humanity he is not.

but this is the verdict of the law court of heaven. This is God's assessment whereby God pronounces the individual righteous and just just as if he really were.

It is an official status. That's what we must understand. And it is a status that brings us that causes us to be in a right standing and relationship with the God who is also righteous.

[11 : 22] This is an amazing thing. This is called justification whereby the one who has partaken of that has life or connection with God or eternal life and the text goes on to say that it is on the basis of faith.

Or we could say it is on the basis of belief. That's precisely what the word faith means. It means to believe, to trust, to rely upon, to commit to.

So, in essence, what Luther discovered is it is the person who is just before God solely on the basis of his belief or trust in this gospel and who Jesus Christ is that made this tremendous commitment on that cross on our behalf.

It is the one who is declared just or righteous on the basis of belief that has eternal life and a relationship with the God of heaven.

That was a breakthrough for Luther. It was just as if that light from heaven just enshrouded his whole person. It was his aha moment.

[12 : 50] And it completely changed the man which completely changed the world in so many ways. This is what coming to grips with truth is capable of accomplishing.

and it is absolutely stunning. To reinforce this as he continued reading and by the way just as an aside may I inject something here while you turn to Romans 4 for a very brief exposition there. We're going to fast forward from Martin Luther for just a moment. A quick 200 years. Approximately two centuries after Luther nailed those 95 theses to the door in Wittenberg a man by the name of John Wesley had become a recent graduate from Oxford University in London and he felt called to go to the colonies to America and there he was going to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to the American Indians with the intent of winning these heathen as they regarded them to a personal relationship with God and he set sail and he landed in one of the original colonies the colony of Georgia he became a good friend Governor

Oglethorpe who was the crown's representative for the colony of Georgia at the time and he set about evangelizing the American Indians John Wesley preached the best that he knew how and he was a miserable failure never resulted in the conversion of anybody that he knew of dejected discouraged he got on the boat later for a return trip to London considered himself a failure wondered what he was going to do with the rest of his life and one of his friends confronted him and invited him to hear a special message that was going to be delivered that evening at Aldersgate Street Chapel in London having nothing else to do he went attended sat in the audience and the one who was presenting the message that evening started his message by reading Martin Luther's preface to the book of Romans wasn't even the text of scripture it was Luther's preface to the book of Romans and Wesley said as he sat there his heart was strangely warmed word and that is an expression that has been very dear to Methodists for the last 200 plus years because it was in that meeting that John Wesley became converted to Jesus Christ and later he said by his own testimony little did I suspect that I who had been called and had gone to America to convert the Indians had not been converted myself and of course when he was completely changed everything Wesley became famous as a traveling preacher clergyman said his parish was the world preached thousands and thousands of sermons over thousands of miles most of them on horseback over several years one of his famous sayings was earn all you can save all you can give away all you can and it was said that when

[16 : 58] John Wesley died he left nothing behind but a well worn saddle a bent spoon a pewter serving tray and the Methodist Church all from reading Martin Luther's preface to the book of Romans nothing in the world works like truth works it is our most precious possession and we are to pursue it at all costs in Romans chapter four if you will look at that for just a moment the apostle Paul is offering to his audience what is a repeat of something that was really very old but it was considered new because you see one of the charges that was leveled against the apostle Paul when he began preaching the gospel of the grace of God was this was some new fangled idea that this guy's got and there is no real validity to it it is just something that he has made up and that was a prophets well he is here going to prove his case by quoting a recognized authority that every

Jew could subscribe to and that of course was Abraham so when he opens chapter four of Romans he is saying shall we say then that Abraham our father as pertaining to the flesh has found he is talking about this subject of justification by faith is it possible for an individual to come into a right relationship with God simply on the basis of what he believes and the answer is not only is it possible it is essential it is the only way you can come into a right relationship with God is by having your thinking reordered and that is precisely what happens when the new birth takes place so against the charge that he has been preaching some new doctrine that is completely unacceptable Paul says alright let's go back about as far as we need to let's go back to the patriarch of patriarchs

Abraham our father who begat Isaac who begat Jacob and set this whole thing in motion let's use him as our example for for if Abraham verse two were justified by works he has where up to glory and doesn't he of course he does he is simply saying if Abraham came into his right relationship with God on the basis of what he did he's got something to brag about because that was his accomplishment he did that he deserves the credit for it that's the hypothetical that he is presenting here but such was not the case at all if Abraham were justified by works he has where up to glory but not before God he can glory before man but he cannot glory before God for what saith the scripture Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness and the question is to what does it refer it refers to his belief what

God is saying to Abraham is Abraham you are a flawed individual you are a sinful being you are not acceptable unto me because of my holiness but I'll tell you what I'm going to do and this by the way is pure grace speaking if you will put your trust and your confidence in me I will consider your belief in the place of the righteousness that you do not have I will accept that as a substitute for your righteousness such a deal such a deal God has been making this deal for millions of people for thousands of years in fact this is the only deal God makes he does not negotiate these are the terms it is called justification by faith well now wait a minute some would come back and say well Abraham Abraham had works Abraham offered up Isaac his son yes he did but he did that as a result of his justification not in order to obtain it and the difference is remarkable the difference is all the difference in the world he was justified on the basis of faith long before he offered up Isaac his son the offering of Isaac was simply his faith working out that's all it was he did not do that in order to gain a right relationship to God he did it because he already had one and how was it obtained it was obtained solely on the basis of his belief that's the argument that he has presented now to him verse four to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace but of debt in other words if you are working for something and whatever it is you perform these works then the result of your works is what you have earned it is what you have coming it is what you deserve but we find here just the opposite to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace but of debt so when you when you work to produce favoritism you have earned it you deserve it and the favoritism is the payoff but that's the complete opposite of what he's talking about here and he goes on to say in verse five but by way of contrast this is a conjunction of contrast but on the other hand to him that worketh not but believes on him that but believes on him that justifies or declares righteous the ungodly his faith is counted for righteousness

[23 : 56] God says I'll accept that I'll accept that as my coin of the realm in place of the righteousness you do not have and when he says faith that justifies the ungodly what about the godly well there weren't any there weren't any God has to justify the ungodly because there aren't any godly and if there were any godly they wouldn't need to be justified but all have sinned and come short of the glory of God we are all ungodly that doesn't mean that we are wicked vile individuals it just means that we are like Paul described the Corinthians the Ephesians in chapter 2 that they were without Christ without God in this present world to be ungodly means to be apart from God means to be without God means you don't have God on your side that's what it means to be ungodly and that's why we need to be declared righteous so we can be at one with him it's a beautiful concept and when

Martin Luther came to this truth he could not contain himself he had to begin spreading this now listen can you not see from reading a passage just like we shared with you can you not see the great difficulty that Rome will have in dealing with a passage like this can you not understand then why they do not encourage people to read the Bible saying that it will only confuse you I'm sure there have been many many priests as some of you have related to me who have been mighty mighty uncomfortable in a conversation with someone who was questioning the authority of the Catholic Church by using passages like this and there have been not a few who have themselves come to truth and light and like

Luther ended up leaving the Catholic Church simply because they could no longer sustain that in their belief so in Galatians chapter 3 if you will look at that very quickly please Galatians chapter 3 another favorite passage that grace people have been captivated by for years and I'm looking at verses 11 and 12 of Galatians chapter 3 but that no man is justified that is no man is declared righteous by the law in the sight of God it is evident for the just shall live by faith and the law is not a faith but the man that doeth them shall live in them Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us all of these things come together to completely provide an upheaval

in the mind and heart of

Martin Luther as he struggled to find his way with this new found belief what's he going to do with it is he just going to dummy up and keep it to himself but when you come to something so monumental like this that is impacting your own life so much how can you possibly keep this to yourself and he began sharing it and of course it got him into a great deal of difficulty works loom very large in catholic theology in the main works works centered around receiving the sacraments that infused the one receiving them with grace works and the sacraments were vital and the priest was the only person who could offer the sacraments to the people this made the priest indispensable it is on the basis of faith

Luther learned that the one who is justified shall have life not on the basis of the sacraments the sacraments gives man something he can do and a necessary priesthood through whom he must do it sacerdotalism or the priestcraft or salvation by sacraments is nothing more than the human religious works being required for salvation the whole epistle to the Galatians was written to clearly delineate between works and faith and faith and works James chapter 2 was a passage that gave Martin Luther some real difficulty he called it a downright straw epistle and he wasn't willing to cut it out of his Bible as though it did not exist but he made it very clear that he would just assume that it were not part of the canon because in

[29 : 28] James chapter 2 James is talking about faith and works and it looks like at least on the surface to a lot of people that both of these are necessary but if you read the context very carefully James makes it clear and we will not take time to turn to chapter 2 but James makes very clear that if a man says he has faith and has not works can that faith save him in other words can the kind of faith that is not followed up by action can that possibly be saving faith and the answer is no because when someone comes to grips with their own sin and puts their faith and trust in Jesus Christ accepts him as their savior they will never ever be the same you cannot have an encounter with Jesus Christ and ever be the same it will change your life beginning on the inside out and that will be reflected in your attitude and actions and here is where the works come in we are not saved by faith and works we are saved by faith that works and if your faith does not work you don't have the real thing now we are not to say what the works consist of because this is a highly individual thing what may be a work for one person is not a work for another person none the less when real faith is there inside it will manifest itself outwardly this is what

Jesus meant when he said a good tree brings forth good fruit and a corrupt tree brings forth corrupt fruit so whatever the tree is that's what it's going to produce and if you have faith in Jesus Christ it will I'm not saying it should I'm not saying it should I'm saying it will it will make a difference in your attitude and your actions it will show up in your faith it will show up in your agenda it will show up in your priorities it will show up in your interests and if nothing has changed then nothing has changed that's the essence of James chapter 2 all James is saying is there is a phony faith and there is a real faith a phony faith can't save anybody a real faith will result in real works our faith is validated by our works where there are no works we have every reason to question whether there is faith faith that is real does something it is not inert it is called to action we do what we have become one does not have to work at producing works when regeneration has occurred it is the life change by regeneration that produces the works that are described as the fruit of the spirit well who's producing them then it isn't you it's the spirit of

God within you as opposed to the flesh the flesh produces only those things that are unacceptable to God the spirit produces that which God finds pleasing the Roman Catholic Church has developed into a formidable and powerful religious establishment of long standing significance it has managed to survive many different threats over the years due to its traditional and emotional appeal of its followers many many feel its mere survival attests to its genuineness but survival is no proof for its validity otherwise we could say the same thing regarding Buddhism and Hinduism they've been around and have survived for a long time also these also possess millions of followers and their survival remains intact after thousands of years

Roman Catholicism as a hierarchical religious institution traffics almost entirely upon its tradition and its emotional connection its followers have to it and the very same thing can also be said of Protestantism and its tradition and emotional connection there are many Catholics who will attest to their validity of salvation as being I'm a member of a Catholic church I've been baptized and I've taken communion and many Protestants will fault them for that but then there are the same Protestants who turn around and say well I'm a member of such and such a church have been

served on this committee and that committee my great grandfather was a circuit riding preacher and on and on what's the difference between that and Roman Catholicism none in essence none Protestants

Protestantism with its makeup of numerous denominations has no more validity than does the Roman Catholic church Islam Buddhism Hinduism or any of the other cults what then pray tell me does have legitimate validity and actual standing before the God of heaven good question what does who does do you realize I'm sure many of you do that 500 years ago when Luther posted his 95 theses on that church door do you realize that there were no Methodists they didn't even exist there were no Presbyterians there were no Episcopalians there were no Lutherans there were no Nazarene there were no

[35 : 48] Pentecostal there were no church of God none of these had any existence at all they had never come into being something to think about what then does have legitimate validity and actual standing before the God of Heaven each local assembly a local church of which Grace Bible Church is simply one among thousands each local assembly numbering probably in the hundreds of thousands worldwide these are where the legitimacy resides they may be very small officially even illegal house churches as in China and Russia and other places like Iran and

Saudi Arabia Christianity is not permitted in these places there are simply small groups of believers who have no building in which to meet no actual membership no constitution no bylaws not even a name that actually identifies them yet they are in the eyes of God a legitimate church and these are the only entities that are legitimate churches the others are just religious organizations some of them highly organized very well funded very powerful very influential and all of the accoutrements that go with it local assemblies like the one right here accept biblical authority even though in some cases they may have few bibles among them they have a genuine love for Christ and for each other and they relish their opportunities to be together for corporate worship and teaching of the word of God in venues where Christianity is permitted they may meet in actual buildings that are small or they may be very large numbering in the thousands if a church is to be a church that is valid in the eyes of God it all depends on why they are meeting and what goes on when they do meet that determines whether or not they are a church in the eyes of the only one who matters as far as denominations go an

Episcopal church may be a solid group of true believers who know and love the Lord his word and each other or they may be thoroughly apostate same is true of Presbyterians and Methodists and Baptists and yes including those that call themselves a Bible church like Grace Bible Church they too may be rank apostates all of this is to say that the name by which it goes or the organization to which it belongs does not a true church make apostate means having left the faith no longer embracing the truths you once did modernism is another name for apostate look at their historic bylaws their statement of purpose embraced when they organized years ago and look at what they embrace today there is no similarity between them we are right now dealing with the situation here in the

United States and in Europe that reflects a radical change from the positions that were taken by those organizations when they originally were founded they have become apostate that means they have abandoned the faith those doctrines that they put in their statement of faith that were so meaningful and so valuable to them years ago have since been either revised or just completely ignored and it's a shame if you were to read even the original purpose for having come into existence that was assigned to Harvard University by John Harvard the founder of it Harvard University is such a hallowed kind of institution such an American institution it was founded only 20 years after the pilgrims landed on

Plymouth Rock that's how old Harvard University is and you read their statement of faith that was initiated by John Harvard when it was founded primarily for the purpose of training and educating preachers for the churches in the new colonies you read their statement of faith and you look at their practices and what they deny today it is heart sickening they have long since become apostate and they are not alone so is Yale so is Princeton so are so many leading institutions throughout our country and so are so many churches and denominations German higher criticism that came into being in the late 1800s that propounded the JEDP theory and the calling into question the Pentateuch and the authorship of Moses and all the rest of it that along with Charles Darwin and the impact of evolution has caused so many institutions that were once stellar bastions of the faith to apostatize and to depart from the faith and today they are a joke compared to what they once were

they are an embarrassment they are a shame and

[42 : 23] I'm sure they do not enjoy the favor of our Lord this is what we're dealing with today right here in the United States we are approximately well we used to be about 50 years behind Europe now we're about five Europe has already abandoned so much of the faith I mean it is it has gotten so bad in Europe that even the Catholics with their embedded tradition and emotional attachment to the faithful are having difficulty maintaining a congregation and when we were in London a number of years ago one of the places that we often ate was in church cafeterias and these were beautiful cathedrals just eye popping architecture absolutely gorgeous some of these it took hundreds of years to build and they would seat maybe 1500 or 2000 people and on a

Sunday they couldn't scrape together 50 people and in order to keep the cathedral alive and be able to pay the bills they served meals to the tourists to try and raise enough income to pay their expenses because the faithful so-called were no longer faithful they were no longer there and really why could they be those churches have nothing to offer there's no reason to be there I don't blame the people for vacating the churches what's the point it is becoming that way in much of America as well church attendance in general is down we still have our so-called mega churches or super churches and most of them are struggling and they have to provide all kinds of entertaining things on a weekly basis in order to hold their crowds because largely because churches churches have abandoned the things that make a church a church that would draw people to it and attract people to it and don't you think

I haven't been deeply concerned about that right here at Grace Bible Church are we still continuing to offer the things that are really necessary are we still continuing to provide the kind of things that makes it worthwhile to come here these are sobering questions that I think every pastor has to ask and I've asked myself this a number of times and frankly I don't enjoy all that much being in the minority but at the same time I must confess I do derive a certain amount of security from being in the minority because seems like God has always worked in a minority started with Noah and his family would you call them a minority I guess they would be wouldn't they but at the same time we can take a little comfort in it but we certainly don't want to take any pride in it because we've got nothing to be proud of we are deeply grateful for the contribution that Martin

Luther has made for the impact that it has had upon so many lives over the years and yes it is true Martin Luther was just a human being like we are but he had to have had an enormous intellect he had to have had an enormous constitution he had to have been able and willing to stand against the intimidation and the threats that were coming his way and they were many and they were significant but he withstood those challenges and he provided a reformation I can't say it was a reformation of the Roman Catholic Church because truth be told it never has been reformed a lot of its basic practices are still in place after all how can something that is supposedly instituted by the authority of God himself ever need correction or reforming and their view of course is it doesn't here at Grace Bible Church I want to put you on notice we are in constant need of repentance we are in constant need of reformation we are in constant need for searching the scriptures to try and find out are we believing something we shouldn't so we can get rid of it or is there something that we are missing that we should be adopting so we can embrace it we have not arrived we haven't even come close to arriving but we do believe that we are on the way and so are thousands of other assemblies like Grace Bible Church that are functioning under all different kinds of names all around the world and all throughout the country where they are gathered together out of love for the Lord and love for the word of God and love for each other there the Lord is and there he is pleased wow well Martin Luther Martin

[47 : 50] Luther is one of my many heroes and I shall always treasure his accomplishments and credit is deserved where credit is due I'm going to ask George Craig if he would come forth now and close our service by reading that farewell statement that Luther read as he stood before the council that will be our conclusion I thought I'd provide just a little background here in 1520 Pope Leo the 10th issued a bull of excommunication against Luther he directed the emperor of the holy roman empire of the german nation to execute it and since the imperial diet was then in the session at Worms Luther was summoned to appear before it for examination the papal representatives at the diet were acting under instructions from the pope not to allow the occasion to degenerate into a debate but to put the accused firmly on the defensive when the examination when the presence of emperor in the presence of emperor charles v and the assembled princes and nobles of the empire

Luther was asked whether or not he would renounce his writings because they were in opposition to the church neither safe for us nor open to us on this
I take my stand I can do no other God help me Amen how can help him live matter to the saja wise
experience an er he ins him is that can do a page tells how did have