“Grace Changes Everything” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Reformation Day October 26, 2025

I. **Romans 3:23-24** – “[23]For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24]and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

II. **The story of Martin Luther and the Reformation always amazes me**.

a. When I attended school at Concordia University in Seward, Nebraska, I took a class that required reading a biography on Luther and the many things that had to fall into place for the massive changes that occurred.

b. It was truly divine providence in motion… kind of like a line of dominoes… as everything needed to be in order for the process to keep going.

i. One of the first dominoes was the Gutenberg Press, or a way to print things on a much larger scale than ever before.

ii. The next domino was the rise of education… as more people were able to read in their own language and wanted to learn Scripture.

iii. The next domino was the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church… especially as it sold indulgences… or certificates that supposedly allowed a person to bypass Purgatory.

1. Purgatory is taught by the Roman Catholics as a place believers go to be purified and made holy before they can go to heaven – so an indulgence would supposedly bypass that.

iv. The next domino was that the Roman Emperor Charles V was so busy with political issues that he didn’t crush Luther immediately.

v. Another domino was Luther’s protector in Wittenburg, Germany, Frederick the Wise… who was powerful enough to keep Luther safe from the Pope and the Roman Emperor even when Luther was branded a heretic to be burned at the stake.

vi. Yet, one domino starts the rest in motion… and it was a German monk named Martin Luther whose heart was opened by a new understanding of grace that began what we now know as the Reformation.

1. God’s divine providence was set in motion to dramatically change the world, its governments, and of course… the Christian Church.

c. It’s difficult, because the story cannot be summarized in five minutes, but could take hours to explain all the amazing events that saved Luther from death and allowed his new understanding of grace to take hold.

i. Yet, the verse that always tripped him up was Romans 1:17, “For in [the Good News, the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed [by faith from start to finish], as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith.”

ii. You see, Luther understood grace to be “infused”, or put into us through baptism, which then allowed us to live up to God’s righteousness… it was almost like grace was the fuel we could use to be Christians that live up to God’s standards…. but he never felt like he could possibly get to that level… and it left him without any assurance of heaven.
iii. Luther realized that grace isn’t something God puts inside us so we can earn heaven – but it’s a gift Jesus gives us… counted to us as His righteousness.
1. In other words, we are called right in God’s eyes even in our sin and brokenness…

d. As Luther became utterly convicted of this new understanding of grace, he got bolder about speaking out against the Roman Catholic teachings.
i. It really is an amazing story that’s worth checking out… as Luther was able to avoid the death penalty, write a German version of the New Testament, and live a long life opening hearts and minds to the wonders of grace.
ii. In so many ways, grace changes everything.

III. **How about for us**?

a. In the 500 years since Luther, have we become apathetic or sort of indifferent to grace as a gift that comes through Jesus?
b. Do we treat grace as ordinary… kind of like something that just comes with the package of being Christian?
i. Maybe we don’t buy indulgences anymore, but we often still believe that our good behavior, our giving, or our faithfulness somehow keeps us in God’s favor.
ii. We may even believe, deep down, that we have to prove to God we’re worth saving… that we have to show Him we’re trying hard enough.
1. It boggles my mind how many times I preach and teach that we are saved by grace alone, and yet some people still believe that they need to be a good person to get into heaven.
2. Some of you might have heard or seen President Trump’s comments about heaven… and they are just offhand or maybe musings… but he basically said that he hopes any good he does will get him into heaven…
a. He is saying out loud what many Christians believe… that they must do good, go to church, read their Bibles, help others, and be a nice person to be saved and have eternal life.

iii. That’s the same burden Luther carried… the fear that God’s love must be earned, that maybe we’re never quite good enough.

1. And when we live like that, grace becomes small… it loses its meaning as the center of our faith… and the blessing of the Gospel!

IV. **The great truth of the Gospel** and why the Reformation succeeded is grace.
   a. The good news that set Luther free is the same good news that sets us free… We are justified by His grace as a gift.
      i. Grace is not fuel for the journey… it's the destination that's already given in advance!
      ii. Grace means that Christ's perfect righteousness covers us entirely.
      iii. Grace means that God already loves you with the fullness of His mercy, not because of what you've done, but because of what Christ has done for you.
         1. And if I haven't told you lately, Jesus took our sins and the ways we minimize His grace upon the cross.
         2. He knew that we could never live up to the holiness, the righteousness, the perfection of God, so He did that for us.
         3. He lived the perfect life under the Law and died the perfect death as a sacrifice so that grace could flow freely to each of us who were given faith.
         4. For by grace through faith we have been saved, as Jesus tore up the indulgences… shattered our good works… and poured out the grace that gives us eternal life.
      iv. That's what Luther discovered… and that's what still changes everything.

V. **God's grace is the change agent that we all need**.
   a. As He unleashes His grace upon us, our fear gives way to freedom… our duty turns into joy… and our very lives become an act of thanksgiving to the God who has already called us righteous in His Son.
   b. When we truly grasp that grace is a gift and not a wage, it changes how we live every single day…. we no longer serve God out of fear, but out of freedom.
      i. There's a story about a young man who spent his life trying to make his father proud… and every achievement was an attempt to earn love.
         1. One day, his father sat him down and said, "Son, you don't have to earn my love… you already have it."
         2. The young man later said that moment changed everything… he started doing the same things, but with joy instead of fear.
      ii. That's what grace does… It doesn't make us lazy; it makes us alive.
      iii. We still worship, serve, give, and love, but not to earn heaven… we do these things because heaven has already been given to us.
      iv. Grace frees us to live boldly, to love freely, to forgive deeply, and to face each day with peace instead of pressure.

v. That's what the Reformation rediscovered… and what we still proclaim – that grace changes not only our eternity, but our present.

c. The Reformation began with one domino… one heart awakened by grace… and the effects rippled across the world.
d. Maybe God still intends His grace to keep toppling the dominos in our lives… our pride, our fear, our self-reliance… until only faith remains, resting entirely in Jesus. Amen