

## **“The Great Buyback” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Reformation Day October 30, 2022**

- I. **Romans 3:23-25** - <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith.
- II. **Each year on Reformation Day**, we get a brief history lesson.
  - a. The entire Christian Church changed because God worked through a monk and professor, the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther.
    - i. But Luther was also a pastor, and he cared about the people in his congregation and community... he cared about their relationship with God.
    - ii. So when members of his parish showed him that they purchased something called an indulgence, the shepherd in him couldn't stand by and watch as people were led astray.
      1. The Roman Catholic Church teaches about a place called purgatory, where our sins are cleansed before going on to heaven.
      2. An indulgence allowed a person to bypass purgatory, or to get a relative or friend out of purgatory so they could go to heaven.
      3. Scripture does not support purgatory, nor does it support the Pope giving or selling indulgences to get souls out of purgatory.
      4. The worst part was these indulgences were being sold to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome...
    - iii. Not only were indulgences a problem, but also the Bible was not available to anyone other than the educated and those who could read and understand Latin.
      1. As Martin Luther spent time with various people in the surrounding areas, he found that even the most basic Christian principles were missing in the average person... which is the reason he wrote the Small Catechism – or the summary of teachings in the Bible... easily taught to children by parents.
      2. If no one understood the basics of Christianity and what's in the Bible, then how could they possibly pass it on to their children?
  - b. C.F.W Walther, whom many consider the founder of our own Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in the mid-1800's said in a sermon: “Before [Luther's day], nearly a thousand years of spiritual darkness had settled over all of Christianity... The light of the pure Gospel was lost nearly everywhere... The Book of Books... the Holy Scriptures, lay in the dust, right in the midst of Christianity... All of Christianity was under the yoke of slavery... Christianity languished in fearful despair and anxiety. Thousands

had, in their previous predicament of sin, cried out in vain, ‘What must we do to be saved?’ But there was no answer.”<sup>1</sup>

- c. In other words, God’s love and forgiveness were hidden and obscured by the Roman Church, and things needed to change... needed reform.
- d. The main issue for Luther was that people lacked assurance of their salvation through the work of Jesus – they were being taught that their own works.... their extra penance paid for sins, their collecting extra favor from God... or even trusting in a piece of paper called an indulgence was the only way to see eternal life.
  - i. So as Luther came to a new understanding of how God forgives and loves by grace through faith alone, he posted an educational document for debate (the 95 Theses) and unwittingly started the Reformation... but don’t forget, the idea was to change the Roman Catholic Church... not to start new denominations.
- e. With all the centuries of reflection on the Bible and a new freedom to read and understand its content, we still see a big group of people in the Christian faith and on its fringes who believe they need to “do their part” to get to heaven... But Paul writes otherwise.

### III. **St. Paul opened Luther’s eyes.**

- a. We all know the story of Saul of Tarsus who persecuted Christians and oversaw the death of the first Christian martyr, Stephen.
- b. But on the road to Damascus Saul was struck with blindness and Jesus Himself came to him... transforming him from a zealous Pharisee out to destroy Christianity to an Apostle, or physical witness of Christ... and as his eyes were opened and he was baptized, Saul became Paul – a man on fire for Christ spending the rest of his life witnessing to God’s grace as a gift.
- c. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome, and it has become a part of the reason we are free in the Gospel
- d. You see, Paul wants all Christians to clearly see the truth that we hear proclaimed week after week in the Lutheran Church – that it is by grace through faith alone that we are saved – as a free gift. (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- e. At the beginning of our reading, he says that no one is made right or not guilty before God just by doing good works (Romans 3:19-20)
- f. And certainly each of us are sinful, as I repeat Paul’s words many times that we “have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)
  - i. The trouble is that God doesn’t just make sin disappear – in His perfect holiness, He is just... and no sin goes unpunished.
  - ii. Therefore, God saved up His wrath... rather than punishing the people for their sins (Romans 3:25), He instead placed them on His very own Son.

- iii. What each human being deserved for their sin and rebellion was placed on the Christ... who took upon Himself what we could not pay for.
- IV. **The very heart of the Reformation** is our salvation found in Christ alone.
- a. Martin Luther had his eyes opened to the fact that our best effort will never get us into God's good graces... only God's grace through Jesus will bring us forgiveness, life and salvation.
  - b. Through Jesus and His work on the cross and the empty grave, we are at one with God again.
    - i. Without Jesus, we are far from God and lost... without hope.
    - ii. With Jesus, we are at one with God, which is the meaning of the word atone.
    - iii. Jesus paid for our sins, atoned for them, so we can be at one with God again.
    - iv. It is the redemption... the greatest buyback of all time – as Jesus bought us, the Father's children, from an eternity without Him.
    - v. And all this is a gift... as we have faith that Jesus really did these things for us, we are free from the responsibility of saving ourselves.
    - vi. Jesus already bought us – as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:23 – “You were bought with a price...” – so the payment for sin is done – we are now living a life of response to God's unbelievable love.
- V. **In the freedom of the Good News of our salvation, we live for Him.**
- a. Most of you know that I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, and I relate to Martin Luther on many levels...
    - i. I felt a huge burden and guilt that I could never be saved... I could never do enough... or do it right in order to see eternal life.
    - ii. I remember very little about the wonderful saving grace of God through Christ's work – In fact, I didn't even know that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, who died to buy me back from hell.
  - b. Yet the day came when personal struggles overwhelmed me, and I met a Lutheran Pastor named Tim Cartwright... who opened my eyes to the Gospel.
    - i. I had never known that God's grace was a free gift... not to be earned by my good life and good works...
    - ii. Sunday after Sunday I heard the grace of God preached from that pulpit, and my eyes were opened... it was nothing short of a miracle.
    - iii. I could not help but respond to God's grace by living for Him – Not only has He bought me back from eternal separation from Him, He bought me back from a life of alcohol, broken relationships, and misery – and for that, I owe Him everything... and yes, I live for Him.

- c. I live as a free man today – with the Gospel truth in my life and heart – all because of Christ and His Word – which was dusted off, translated, and shared for all through the inspired work of Martin Luther.
- d. Be glad and rejoice! Jesus Christ bought you back from your sins – and by the great mercy of God we are free!! Amen.

<sup>1</sup> “Reformation Sermon on Revelation 14.6–12 (1845),” *Treasury of C. F. W. Walther*, tr. Joel R. Baseley, vol. 4 [Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 2008], pp. 110-111).