

## “Grounded” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Reformation Day – October 31, 2021

- I. **John 8:31-32** – <sup>31</sup> So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
- II. **The Reformation is truly grounded in the Word of God.**
  - a. As Lutherans, we tend to take pride in the work of the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther, as he literally changed the course of history.
    - i. In no way should we put Luther on the level of perfect – because he had many flaws that we cannot defend.
    - ii. However, it was the spiritual trials and tribulation within Luther, along with a pastoral heart, that made him question his understanding of God and the Christian Church.
  - b. I know I’ve told this story before, but I’m not a lifelong Lutheran like some of you... I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church – kind of like Luther.
    - i. But after becoming Lutheran, when I was asked to be an elder at my church (long before I considered being a pastor), I figured that meant knowing a lot about Martin Luther.
    - ii. I went to the church library and got a VHS tape on Martin Luther and watched the story so I could be a competent elder... because you know, Lutheran equals teaching about Martin Luther... not.
    - iii. The truth is, Martin Luther simply lit the fuse to some much needed reform, but even he would say that God’s Word was the power that ultimately changed the world.
  - c. The whole story of Luther from his birth in 1483 to his death in 1546 is really interesting and worthy of finding a good biography.
    - i. He was born to a copper miner, and his dad made sure he was educated in the hopes that he would become a lawyer.
    - ii. It seems that Luther was plagued by fears of God’s wrath and being punished... and one day as he was heading back to university, a lightning bolt struck so close that he vowed to become a monk.
    - iii. His schooling up to that point allowed him to excel in theology, but the struggle to be right with God never went away.
      1. I’ve joked around before saying that Luther was the monkiest monk who ever monkied...
      2. Every possible way he could be right with God – doing works of penance, going to confession for hours to go over every sinful thought, word and deed... none of it gave him any relief.
      3. He could not shake the fear that God would judge him and throw him into hell because he was not righteous like God demanded.
  - d. The Word of God changed all that.

- i. Luther began to study the Book of Romans and came to realize that God places His righteousness on us, rather than us trying to be righteous and showing God how good we are.
- ii. No matter how any of us try – Martin Luther tried as hard as anyone can – we will never measure up to what God demands... perfection.
  - 1. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 5, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” (vs 48)
- iii. The impossible ideal of working out our own salvation became possible only through the work and grace of Jesus Christ.
- iv. All of this new understanding was revealed to Martin Luther through the Word of God.
  - 1. Luther regularly studied the Scriptures with intense scrutiny – looking for every tiny word that might open his eyes to truth.
  - 2. In fact, for Luther, the sole test of truth had to be found in the Word of God, and nowhere else.

III. **Jesus also knows about the truth, because He *is* the Truth!**

- a. In our Gospel reading, He’s speaking to a group of Jews at the temple in Jerusalem.
  - i. He tells them to abide, or remain, in His word... and if they do, the truth revealed to them will set them free.
  - ii. Of course, they struggle to understand Him.
    - 1. They lived under the Law... God’s Law, along with the many additional requirements the scribes and Pharisees piled on.
      - a. There were so many things that had to be deciphered that sometimes you needed a lawyer to tell you what to do... but many of these “laws” were man made traditions rather than based on the Word.
    - 2. Not only were these Jews slaves to tradition, but they were slaves to their own sinful condition.
      - a. Paul says it clearly in Romans 3:23 – “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
      - b. None of these Jews were free – from the burden of doing good works, to the sin that was passed down from Adam and Eve in the Garden.
- b. We are all under the curse of sin – the actions and thoughts and words that come out of us...
  - i. The trouble is that we’re a lot like the Jews that day, and we can’t see the nature of our trouble... the bondage of sin.
    - 1. You see, the bondage of sin is strange because we rarely see it happening to us... we feel free – we act free – we get to do basically anything we want!

2. Yet, it doesn't take long to see how freedom isn't about doing whatever we want –
  - a. In fact, our best choices usually get us into a pile of trouble and heartache
- ii. On occasion, we get beat down enough to see the sin in our lives clearly – and the only way out is to give up.
  1. We simply look to God and admit that our thoughts, words, and actions were wrong, and we cannot free ourselves...
  2. We don't try to get right with Him by doing a lot of extra good things – serving others or volunteering...
  3. We don't try to get right with Him by spending extra time in prayer and going to church four times a week...
  4. No, we get on our knees (if possible) and bow our heads and say, "God, please be merciful to me, a sinner." (Luke 18:13)
- c. In this simple way, by looking to God in faith, we are freed from the sin that clings so closely (Hebrews 12:1).
- d. We are free because the Truth... Jesus Christ... has set us free.

IV. **Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ already did the work.**

- a. In God's great mercy, He figured out a plan to free us from our sin... and it was to put all of it on Jesus, His Son.
- b. All our broken thoughts... all the terrible words that pour from our mouths... all the actions that hurt God and others... were placed on Jesus and nailed to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)
- c. He took all of it for our sake – and in return He doesn't demand anything, except that we believe and trust in Him. (John 6:28-29)
- d. It's hard to wrap our minds around the grace of God – free, with no strings attached – all because God loves us that much
  - i. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

V. **Those words of promise are both truth and freedom.**

- a. Martin Luther came to believe that Jesus, in a great exchange, took all of Luther's sin on the cross and in return gave him forgiveness, life and salvation.
- b. That is the truth that was being obscured by the church at the time – and it was through deep study of God's Word that led Luther down a different path.
- c. You see, Luther went to the only place that has the truth... the Word.
  - i. Luther was grounded in the Word of God.
  - ii. Even at the end of his life, Luther gave all the credit to God's Word.
    1. "All I have done is put forth, preach and write the Word of God, and apart from this I have done nothing ... It is the Word that

has done great things ... I have done nothing; the Word has done and achieved everything.”

- d. As followers of Jesus, remember the great power of the Word.
- e. Yes, the Word of God does it all – it provides the Truth, it frees us from bondage, and as we are grounded in it... our mortal and eternal lives are totally secure. Amen.