

2nd Chronicles 34: 1-9 & 14-21; “Luther’s Finding the Bible”, A sermon delivered on Reformation Sunday, by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 31st, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.

We are living in days where many things from the past, that have molded and shaped our culture, our political freedom, and our religious freedom, are being taken for granted or forgotten. We are living in times when most of the people in the free world have forgotten the importance of the Reformation and what God did for the church, the church which His Son is still building, the church which He died for, so that she might be free from sin, and free to worship the only true and living God.

I for one, do not wish to forget what God did back there at the Reformation, because the truths of the Bible that were rediscovered by men such as Martin Luther have formed the basis for much of the progress that has taken place spiritually and politically in Europe and the United States, and around the world ever since. If these truths are ever lost or hidden away, as they once were, from about the year 500 to the year 1517, great spiritual darkness will come, and the forward progress of Christ’s kingdom in the world could be hindered significantly.

But the more that these truths are held dear and promoted, the greater will be the blessings of salvation that will come upon men and societies. The more that God’s glory will be seen, and His Name worshipped and adored! Thy kingdom come Lord Jesus! There are several reasons that I think that we should not forget the Reformation of Josiah’s day and why we should also not forget the Reformation which took place in the 1500s.

1st of all – The Reformation shows us that God can do much good with one man.

If “one sinner destroys much good,” God can make it so that one man can do much good. In chapter 34 we are told that Josiah was 8 years old when he became king, and he reigned 31 years in Jerusalem. We are told that in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, He was sixteen years of age, he began to seek the God of his father David. He began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images. He desired to get rid of the idolatrous worship in Judah. He broke down the altars of Baal in his presence and he cut down the incense altars.

When he was 24 years of age he purged the land and the temple, and he sent men to repair the house of the Lord His God. God raised up king Josiah to do this great work. He had to undo the evil and wicked works which his father and grandfather done in bringing false worship into the very places where true worship should have been conducted. God had a man of God prophesy of these days of Josiah’s reformation some 300 years before Josiah became king. In 1st Kings 13: 1, 2 it says – “And behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar! Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men’s bones shall be burned on you.’”

And all this came to pass in God’s good time. Let us always remember that God has great and mighty plans to establish Christ’s Kingdom and His Church in all the nations of the world. Sometimes we do not understand how much He can use one man to establish the truth to a whole nation. King Josiah had the authority over the nation of Judah to bring about these reforms that we read about. Martin Luther did not have either the spiritual or political authority to do what he did, humanly speaking. But by God’s decree and His authority, the Reformation of the 1500s began, initiated in Germany, by one man. God raised up this particular man to do His work. Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg chapel on October 31st, 1517, challenging the doctrinal positions of the Roman Catholic church.

The Roman Catholic church did not like her false doctrinal positions challenged. For over a thousand years that church had been imposing the teachings of men and their traditions upon the Word of God. And various Pope's came to exercise an authority which was never given to them by Christ. The Papal Office was never instituted by the authority of Christ or the apostles, but it came to be seen as the highest authority on earth, not only spiritually, but politically as well. And so, as a result, many of the plain teachings of the Scripture were warped and twisted by many popes over many generations, so that many true believers who challenged the truth of what they were doing, came to be criticized and persecuted. Sometimes people were even put to death by the Roman Catholic church hierarchy.

There had been an number of people before 1517 who challenged the Papal authority, and the doctrines that were added to the Scripture. They questioned the teaching of salvation through sacraments, their worship of dead saints by means of statues, they questioned the ability of Popes and priests to forgive sins and grant indulgences, and many other false doctrines. Indulgences, you should understand, were related to the false doctrine of purgatory which was made up by the popes. They began under pope Boniface the VIII, hundreds of years before Martin Luther's time.

They were instituted for sins and crimes that were committed by a person or their relatives, either dead or living, so that somehow they could be brought out of purgatory, the place where the Pope and the Priests said that they were being held, between heaven and hell, until the paying for their sins was complete. When the monetary payment was made, they would supposedly be brought into heaven. When the coin in the coffer would ring, Tetzal would say, the soul from purgatory would spring. One of the reasons that this false doctrine became established, was that the Bible was being withheld from the masses of the people. Persons who had been trained to be priests received the traditions of the Roman Catholic church as being on the same level as the Scripture.

In that day, the common people were seen as too uneducated to understand the Bible. The priests and the bishops conducted religious services, but the masses were said in Latin, and so the people did receive Biblical teaching or learn much sound doctrine at all. People thought that they might get to heaven by participation in regularly attending the services of the church and participating in the sacraments. The understanding of the truth of how men were to be saved from their sins; how they were to be justified, how they could be declared righteous in the sight of the holy God, was becoming more and more obscure.

Young Martin Luther did not know how deep these problems were, when in 1501 he enrolled in the college of Erfurth. Martin Luther was simply a man who was concerned about his own soul. Oh, that men would be concerned about the salvation of their souls, and their eternal destiny! Martin Luther didn't understand the simple gospel, but he wanted to know how he could find favor with God; how he could know God and know that he was on his way to heaven. And so he became an Augustinian monk in order to save his soul. He decided upon this course of action, because of an encounter that he had with death.

Roland Bainton says in his biography of Luther, "He was then twenty one and a student at the University of Erfurt. As he returned to school after a visit with his parents, suddenly lightning struck him to the earth." His traveling companion, Alexius, was killed by the lightning bolt. In that single flash Luther saw the seriousness of life and God's warning to him. Bainton says, "There was God the all-terrible, Christ the inexorable (not to be moved by prayers and entreaties), and all the leering fiends springing from their lurking places in pond and wood that they might seize his shock of curly hair and bolt him into hell.

It was no wonder that he cried out to his father's patron saint, the patroness of miners, "St. Anne help me!" "I will become a monk." Luther was a man who sincerely tried to find peace with God through a course of religious duties. He saw God before His conversion as righteous

and angry with sinners like himself. And he thought that he could only get to heaven by doing of many good works, and holiness could only be attained by severe self-discipline. At the saying of his first mass, when he came to the words, "We offer unto Thee, the living, the true, the eternal God," he related afterward: "At these words I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, 'With what tongue shall I address such Majesty, seeing that all men ought to tremble in the presence of even an earthly prince? Who am I that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine Majesty?'"

When it came to the severe discipline of his body Bainton says, "He fasted, sometimes three days on end without a crumb". The seasons of fasting were more consoling to him than those of feasting. Lent, to him, was more comforting than Easter. He did vigils and said prayers in excess of those he was required to engage in. He cast off the blankets that he was permitted to have, and he almost froze to death at times. Sometimes he was proud of how holy he was, and he would say, "I have done nothing wrong today." "Then misgivings would arise. Have you fasted enough? Are you poor enough? And he would then strip himself of all, save that which decency required."

"He believed in later life that his austerities had done permanent damage to his digestion." "I was a good monk," he said, "And I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I." "All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out." "If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayer, reading, and other work." So, Martin Luther, through his severe austerities, became exhausted and consumed with trying to satisfy God and finding eternal life in this way. But God was going to show Him the better way, the way of faith. God was going to use Martin Luther to turn the world of his day on its head and lead the church out of her New Testament Babylonian Captivity. But first, he had to come to understand the righteousness of faith in Christ.

2nd – The Reformation shows us the importance of the Bible to being saved, and living the Christian life.

Martin Luther was a man, who like Josiah, "found" the Bible and discovered it to be the word of God which speaks to men in every generation. In our text in verse 8 it says – In the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah sent men to repair the house of the Lord." During the process of repair, Hilkiyah the priest found the book of the Law in the house of the Lord. And he gave it to Shaphan, and Shaphan carried it to the king, and read it to him. When the king heard the words of the book, he tore his clothes and said, "Go inquire of the Lord for me, and for those who are left in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found for great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book."

It is truly an amazing thing that something so important as God's Word can be lost to whole generations of people, but this is what happened in Josiah's day and it also happened in the time of Luther. I want to read to you from Merle D'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation*. "The young student passed in the university library all the time he could snatch from his academical pursuits. Books were as yet rare, and it was a great privilege for him to profit by the treasures brought together in this vast collection. One day- he had then been two years at Erfurth, and was twenty years old. He opened many books in the library, one after another, to learn their writer's names. One volume that he comes to, attracts his attention. He has never until this hour seen it's like.

He reads the title – It is a Bible! A rare book, unknown in those times. His interest is greatly excited: he is filled with astonishment at finding other matters than those fragments of the gospels and epistles that the Church had selected to be read to the people during public worship every Sunday throughout the year. Until this day he had imagined that they composed the whole Word of God. And now he sees so many pages, so many chapters, so many books of which

he had had no idea! His heart beats faster as he holds the divinely inspired volume in his hand. With eagerness and with indescribable emotion he turns over these leaves from God.” He read the first few chapters from 1st Samuel about Hannah. “He returned home that day with a full heart.” “Oh that God would give me such a book for myself, thought he.”

This Bible that had filled him with such transports was written in Latin. He soon returned to the library to pore over his treasure. “He read it again and again, and then in his astonishment and joy, he returned to read it once more.” “The first glimmerings of a new truth were then beginning to dawn upon his mind.” “Thus had God led him to the discovery of His Word, that book of which he was one day to give his fellow-countrymen, that admirable translation in which Germany has for three centuries perused the oracles of God.” “Perhaps for the first time this precious volume has now been taken down from the place it occupied in the library of Erfurth.

“This book, deposited upon the unknown shelves of a gloomy hall, is about to become the book of life to a whole nation.” “In that Bible the Reformation lay hid.” And this is why dear people, I have brought up this subject this morning, on this Reformation Sunday. It is so that you might see how terribly precious is the Word of God. I read these things to you, so that you will never take the Holy Scriptures for granted. I pray that you will not grow easily tired of meditating upon the truth of the Scripture so that you might have “good success” in living a holy life; so that you might have a joyful life of faith.

I have read this to you so that you might become a better witness for Jesus and the truth of the Bible. I have read you these things so that you will hold dear the truths which the Bible contains; how a person who is a sinner can be just before God, how they can be saved by faith in Christ apart from the works of the law, how they can know God and walk with God, be happy and joyful every day because they have the Holy Spirit with them, who the Father and the son sent to you so that you can be holy. God speaks to men through the Bible. He tells us of His love for us who are sinners, and says that this is why He sent His Son. Have you come to treasure your Bible? For the Bible is how God speaks to you.

3rd – The Reformation brought to light the truth that should never be forgotten; in Christ alone is found grace, by faith alone.

Let’s hear how Luther discovered this. Bainton says, on p. 60 of his book, Here I Stand, “Luther set himself to learn and expound the Scriptures. On August 1, 1513, he commenced his lectures on the book of Psalms. In the fall of 1515 he was lecturing on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. The epistle to the Galatians was treated throughout 1516-17. These studies proved to be for Luther the Damascus road.” When Luther lectured through the Psalms, he saw it as a book foreshadowing the life and the death of the Redeemer. The reference to Christ was unmistakable when he came to the 22nd Psalm, where it says, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

“What could be the meaning of this? Christ evidently felt himself to be forsaken, abandoned by God, deserted. Christ too had felt the utter desolation which Luther said he could not endure for more than a tenth of an hour and live had been experienced by Christ himself as he died. Rejected of men, he was rejected also of God. How much worse this must have been than the scourging, the thorns, and the nails! Christ’s descent into hell was nothing other than this sense of alienation from God.” “Why should Christ have known such desperations?” Luther knew perfectly well why he himself had had them: he was weak in the presence of the Mighty; he was impure in the presence of the Holy; he had blasphemed the Divine Majesty.”

“But Christ was not weak; Christ was not impure; Christ was not impious. Why then should he have been so overwhelmed with desolation? The only answer must be that Christ took to himself the iniquity of us all. He who was without sin for our sakes became sin and so identified himself with us as to participate in our alienation.” “He who was truly man so sensed his solidarity with humanity as to feel himself, along with mankind, estranged from the All Holy.”

What a new picture this is of Christ! Where, then is the judge sitting upon the rainbow to condemn sinners? He is still the judge. He must judge, as truth judges error and light darkness; but in judging he suffers with those who he must condemn and feels himself with them subject to condemnation. The judge upon the rainbow has become the one abandoned upon the cross. A new view also of God is here. The All Terrible is the All Merciful too. Wrath and love fuse upon the cross." And so, "God had shown Luther what He was really like, and what Christ had really done for him."

Then, as Luther wrestled with the letters of Paul he came to understand the importance of faith. He says, "I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Chapter 1: 16, 17) and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, 'The justice of God,' because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although I was an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against Him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

"Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that the just shall live by his faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the justice of God had filled me with hate, now it became to me a gate to heaven...." If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love." My brethren, this is how the Reformation began, with one man, wrestling with the scriptures so that his soul would be saved. And in His finding Christ, Luther found also the One who would stand by him in the work of the Reformation, that He would lead him into. I will speak more of these things in the Afternoon Worship Service.