

2nd Chronicles 34: 29-33; “Two Great Reformers Compared”, A Reformation Sunday
Sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 31st, 2021,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.

We saw this morning how a man like Josiah, who was king over Judah and Jerusalem brought reformation to the worship and practice of the people of God in that day, in the Old Testament. And we also saw how it was, that one man, Martin Luther, was converted and brought out of Roman Catholic darkness and traditions, to be God’s Reformer. The Reformation began with his finding the Bible and through it, his finding Christ, by faith. But once he had found Christ and the Bible, he began to see many more things clearly, in terms of how men should live and how they should worship God.

There are several things about the passage that I just read to you about Josiah, that remind me of Martin Luther. I want to show you the similarities, and also show you a few of things that Luther did in his day, that are pertinent to our day as well. Certain phrases should stick in our minds when we think of both men. What king Josiah did in his day, Martin Luther also did in his. And in doing so, the Reformation was begun. I believe that if we will learn from these lessons, that we will see progress in Reformation in the Church of Jesus Christ, today, where it is needed.

1st of all – Martin Luther, like Josiah, went up to the house of the Lord.

It says in verse 30 that king Josiah went up, “with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem – the priests and the Levites, and all the people, great and small.” “And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord.” This reminds me very much of Luther at the Diet of Worms. But before I relate this I must briefly tell you about the events that led up to that great convocation of learned men, and rulers of kingdoms.

In 1516, Luther was a very busy man. He wrote to a friend – I could use two secretaries. I do almost nothing during the day but write letters. I am a conventual preacher, a reader at meals, a parochial preacher, a director of studies, an overseer of eleven monasteries, a superintendent of the fish pond at Litzkau, a referee of the squabble at Torgau, a lecturer on Paul, a collector of material for a commentary on the Psalms, and then, as I said, I am overwhelmed with letters. I rarely have full time for the canonical hours (that is, the time set apart for prayer and devotions) , and for saying mass, not to mention my own temptations with the world, the flesh, and the Devil. You see how lazy I am. Now, you might laugh Luther’s great business. But it was out of just such labors as these, that his activities as a Reformer arose.

Martin Luther got into great trouble with the Roman Catholic church and its hierarchy, because he was concerned for the church of his day; the spiritual house of God, the temple of the living God. He was a man concerned about the salvation of people under his charge as a priest. As he read the Scriptures, he came to see that the practice of selling indulgences was deceiving people into thinking that they could buy their relatives out of purgatory. He began to see clearly that people were losing their souls. He knew that people were perishing by believing that buying indulgences would bring their dead relatives out of purgatory, or add merit toward eternal life. He knew that indulgences would not pay for any man’s sins.

He knew how Tetzl, the Dominican monk and vendor of indulgences used to address his audience. He would say – “Listen now, God and St. Peter call you.” “Consider the salvation of your souls and those of your loved ones departed.” “You priest, you noble, you merchant, you virgin, you matron, you youth, you old man, enter now into your church, which is the Church of St. Peter.” “Visit the most holy cross erected before you and ever imploring you.” “Have you considered that you are lashed in a furious tempest amid the temptations and danger of the world, and that you do not know whether you can reach the haven, not of your mortal body, but of your immortal soul?”

“Consider, that all who are contrite, and have confessed, and made contribution will receive complete remission of all their sins.” “Listen to the voices of your dear dead relatives and friends, beseeching you and saying, ‘Pity us, pity us.’” “We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us

for a pittance.” “Do you not wish to?” “Open your ears.” “Hear the father saying to his son, the mother to her daughter, ‘We bore you, nourished you, brought you up, left you our fortunes, and you are so cruel and hard, that now you are not willing for so little to set us free?’ “Will you let us lie here in these flames?” “Will you delay our promised glory?” “Remember that you are able to release them, for – As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”

Now, when Luther heard that Tetzal was saying such things, he began to preach against this indulgence trafficking. In one sermon he says this, “No one can prove by Scripture, that the righteousness of God requires a penalty or satisfaction from the sinner.” “The only duty it imposes is a true repentance, a sincere conversion, a resolution to bear the cross of Christ, and to perform good works.” “It is a great error to pretend of oneself to make satisfaction for our sins to God’s righteousness; God pardons them gratuitously(freely) by his inestimable grace.”

He said to them – “But you say, shall we then never purchase any?”..... “I have already told you, and I repeat it, my advice is that no one should buy them.” “Leave them for drowsy Christians: but you should walk apart and for yourselves!” “We must turn the faithful aside from indulgences, and exhort them to the works which they neglect.” And finally, glancing at his adversaries, Luther concluded in these words: “And should any cry out that I am a heretic (for the truth that I preach is very prejudicial to their strong box), I care but little for their clamors.” “They are gloomy and sick brains, men who have never tasted the Bible, never read the Christian doctrine.” “May God grant both them and us a sound understanding!”

It is said that after saying these words that Luther stepped down from the pulpit, leaving his hearers in great emotion, at his using such daring language. This sermon was printed and it made a profound impression on all who read it. Luther was a man of the church; he never intended to leave the Roman Catholic church if he could convince others of their errors, and lead them back to the truth. But he knew that he had to take a stand to deal with this. And so, knowing this, let us not take a look at the 2nd thing that is pertinent to our day from his life.

2nd – Even as Josiah stood in his place, Martin Luther stood in his.

Verse 31 of our text says – “Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord, and to keep his commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book.” In doing these things, in Josiah’s taking his stand for truth, Martin Luther followed in his footsteps. Merle D’Aubigne says in his history that one day in 1516, Luther was seated in the confessional at Wittenberg. Many of the towns-people came one after another and confessed themselves guilty of great excesses. Adultery, licentiousness, usury, ill-gotten gains, and other sins such as this. He reprimanded them, he corrected them, and he instructed them.

But he was greatly astonished when these persons replied that they would not abandon their sins..... This shocked him greatly. And so he declared to them that since they would not promise to change their lives, he could not absolve them. The unhappy creatures then appealed to their letters of indulgence. They showed them to him, and they maintained their virtue. But Luther replied that he had nothing to do with these papers. And he added: Except you repent, you will all likewise perish. Well, they cried out and they protested; but Luther was immovable. He told them that they must cease to do evil, and learn to do well, or else there would be no absolution for them. He said to them – Have a care how you listen to the clamors of these indulgence-merchants: you have better things to do than to buy these licenses which they sell at so vile a price.

Well, the the inhabitants of Wittenberg were greatly alarmed. They hastily returned to Tetzal and they told him that an Augustinian monk had treated his letters with contempt. Tetzal became very angry. He stormed from the pulpit using insults and curses. And to strike the people with greater terror, he lit a fire in several places in the market place, and he declared that he had received an order from the pope to burn all the heretics who had presumed to oppose his most holy indulgences. But Luther stood firm because he loved the pure word of God. He took his stand because he didn’t want to see people be deceived on such an important matter as the salvation of a person’s soul. Salvation is

only found by receiving Christ and His redemptive work, without money and without price to the sinner, but at great cost to Him. Even so, in our day, we need to stand firm against the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church concerning sacramental salvation, rather than compromising the gospel which says that salvation is by grace through faith and that not of yourself.

3rd – Let’s think together about how both Josiah and Martin Luther made the people of their day take a stand.

Verse 32 says – “And he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin take a stand.” “So the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.” “Thus Josiah removed all the abominations from all the country that belonged to the children of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel diligently serve the Lord their God.” “All his days they did not depart from following the Lord God of their fathers.” What is significant for our study this afternoon is that Josiah made the people take a stand. Let’s see how Martin Luther did the same.

Quoting from D’Aubigne - “The festival of All-Saints was a very important day for Wittenberg, and above all, for the church which the elector had built there, and which he had filled with relics. On that day the priests used to bring out these relics, ornamented with gold, silver, and precious stones, and exhibit them before the people who were astonished and dazzled at such magnificence. Whoever visited the church obtained a rich indulgence. Accordingly on this anniversary, pilgrims came to Wittenberg in crowds. On the 31st of October at noon on the day preceding the festival, Luther, who had already made up his mind, walked boldly towards the church, to which a superstitious crowd of pilgrims was going, and he nailed upon the door his ninety-five theses, his propositions against the doctrine of indulgences.

Let me give you a sample of these statements. #1 – When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says repent, he means that the whole life of believer upon earth should be a constant and perpetual repentance. #21 – The commissaries of indulgences are in error when they say, that by the papal indulgence a man is delivered from every punishment. #37 – Every true Christian, whether dead or alive, participates in all the blessings of Christ or of the Church, by God’s gift, and without a letter of indulgence. #53 – They are enemies of the pope and of Jesus Christ, who by reason of the preaching of indulgences, forbid the preaching of the Word of God. #62 – The true and precious treasure of the Church is the Holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.

This is just a sample of what Luther nailed to the door of Wittenberg chapel that day. In hearing these things, we should conclude that Reformation is always negative and positive. It is negative in that it brings down the strongholds of falsehood and error, and it is positive in that it seeks to repair, and build, and promote true worship, and service, being given to the One True and Living God. Luther would have much work to do after this, in confronting numerous illustrious and educated men and princes. But none of that work was as great as his appearance at the Diet of Worms.

Presided over by the Emperor Charles, there had never been so many princes meeting together in one place. Electors, dukes, archbishops, landgraves, margraves, counts, bishops, barons, and lords of the empire. The major purpose of their gathering was to decide on Luther was a true teacher and whether the Reformation was needed at all. On the 16th of April, 1521, Luther entered the city of Worms. Two thousand people accompanied him through the streets of the city. The citizens eagerly pressed forward to see him: every moment the crowd was increasing. It was much greater than at the public entry of the emperor. He was perceived by some as a prodigy of wisdom, and to others, he was a monster of iniquity.

On the next day he was summoned before the most august assembly in the world. The chancellor of the Archbishop of Treves, John ab Eck, said first in Latin and then in German – “Martin Luther! His sacred and invincible imperial majesty has cited you before his throne, in accordance with the advice and counsel of the States of the Holy Roman Empire, to require you to answer two questions: First, do you acknowledge these books to have been written by you? (He pointed at about 20 volumes which had been placed on a table in the middle of the hall, directly in front of Luther.) And, Secondly he said – Are you prepared to retract these books, and their contents, or do you persist in the opinions

you have advanced in them? “At this time, Luther only answered the first question.” He said – “Yes, I acknowledge as mine the books that have just been named: I cannot deny them.”

“As to the second,” he said – Seeing that it is a question which concerns faith and the salvation of souls, and in which the Word of God, the greatest and most precious treasure, either in heaven or earth is interested, I should act imprudently were I to reply without reflection. I might affirm less than the circumstance demands, or more than truth requires, and so I entreat you imperial majesty, with all humility, to allow me time, that I may answer with offending against the Word of God.” This time, they granted him.

The next day, the 18th of April, it seemed to him that God had hidden His face from him. His faith grew weak; his enemies multiplied before him; his imagination was overwhelmed at the sight.....His soul was as a ship tossed by a violent tempest, which reels and sinks to the bottom of the abyss, then mounts up again to heaven. It was to him as a little garden of Gethsemane. He prayed – “O Almighty and Everlasting God! How terrible is this world! behold, it openeth its mouth to swallow me up, and I have so little trust in Thee! How weak is the flesh and how powerful is Satan! If it is in the strength of this world only that I must put my trust, all is over!.....My last hour is come, my condemnation has been pronounced!.....O God! O God! O God! Do thou help me against all the wisdom of the world!”

“Do this; Thou shouldst do thisThou alone.....for this is not my work, but Thine. I have nothing to do here, nothing to contend for, with these great ones of the world! I should desire to see my days flow on peaceful and happy. But the cause is Thine.....and it is a righteous and eternal cause. O Lord! help me! Faithful and unchangeable God! In no man do I place my trust. It would be vain! All that is of man is uncertain; all that cometh of man fails.....O God! My God, hearest Thou me not?....My God, art Thou dead?....No! Thou canst not die! Thou hidest thyself only! Thou hast chosen me for this work. I know it well! Act then, O God....stand at my side, for the sake of Thy well beloved Jesus Christ who is my defense my shield, and my strong tower.”

After a moment of silent struggle he continued – “Lord! where stayest Thou? Come! come! I am ready.....I am ready to lay down my life for Thy truth.....patient as a lamb. For, it is the cause of justice – It is Thine.....I will never separate myself from Thee, neither now nor through eternity!.....And though the world should be filled with Devils, though my body, which is still the work of Thy hands, should be slain, be stretched upon the pavement, be cut in pieces....reduced to ashes....my soul is Thine! Yes! I have assurance of Thy Word. My soul belongs to Thee! It shall abide forever with Thee.....Amen!.....O God! Help me!.....Amen!”

I think that this prayer explains Luther and the Reformation. When he was brought before the diet at 4:00 that afternoon, the Chancellor of Treves said indignantly, “Will you, or will you not, retract?” Upon this, Luther replied without hesitation: “Since you ask from me a clear, simple and precise answer, I will give you one, and it is this: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils, because it is clear as the day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or by the clearest reasoning – unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted, and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the Word of God, I cannot and I will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience.”

“And then looking around on this assembly before which he stood, and which held his life in its hands, he said: “Here I am I can do no other; may God help me!” “Amen!” This saying is what has caused countless thousands of people to rally around him, to join him in the reformation of the church. In each of our cases, our conscience can only be taken captive by the Word of God. Men cannot dictate our faith. We have received it from God Himself in his word. But we can say, that by God’s grace we will follow in the steps of the great reformer, Martin Luther. And in taking our stand for the truth of God’s Word, we will make others to take a stand with us. I think that is what happens when we are filled with Christ’s spirit, and when we become fervent for truth. Let us remember what has been given to us in the Reformation; these blessed truths which lead to our taking our stand for Christ. Let us never let them go.