

Martin Luther and the Reformation



AIM: WHY DO WE CALL OURSELVES “LUTHERANS”?

A. Martin Luther’s World... ...a time of rapid social, economic, political, and religious change.

- 1.) Bubonic Plague had killed ~1/3 of Europe’s Population
- 2.) Age of Exploration: Americas Discovered
- 3.) The Turkish (Muslim) Threat to Europe
- 4.)

- 5.) The revival of Biblical languages studies (Greek/Hebrew)

B. The Christian Church before Luther

- ◆ 30-310 AD Growth and Persecution
- ◆ 311 AD Emperor Constantine’s “Edict of Toleration” ends persecution
- ◆ 400 AD Bishop (Pope) of Rome claimed rule over all churches
- ◆ False Doctrines:
 - ◆ Earning salvation by good works
 - ◆ Purgatory:
 - ◆ Prayers to saints and Virgin Mary for help, mercy, and forgiveness instead of God
 - ◆ Services in Latin which few could understand
 - ◆ Tradition more important than what the Bible said
- ◆ The Need for a Reformation: A “re-formation” = going back to the beginning. In the church this meant going back to the roots of Christianity, what Jesus and the Apostles had taught and believed.

C. Martin Luther: Early Life:

- Born in Eisleben, Germany, November 10, 1483
- Son of a small (but hard working) copper miner
- Strict upbringing
- Taught that God was an angry judge who would punish sinners
- Luther had a guilty conscience and doubts about his faith

D. Martin Luther: the Monk

- On return to law school he was trapped under a tree in a severe lightning storm.
- Fearing for his life he cried out, “Save me, St. Anne, and I will become a monk.”
- Kept his promise and entered the monastery at age 21
- Lived a difficult life hoping to earn God’s favor and atone for his sins
- Luther would sleep on the stone floor, starve himself, and often beat himself unconscious
- Yet his conscience had no peace or rest
- “If any monk ever got to heaven by being a monk, I, too would have made it.”

E. Martin Luther: the Priest and Professor

- Ordained as a priest
- Later became professor at University of Wittenberg
- His study of God’s Word gradually led Luther to know the love and forgiveness of God that are freely offered in Christ

- **Galatians 3:11** - Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.”
- Once Luther realized God’s grace he wanted to share it with his students and his congregation
- To sum up Scripture’s teaching concisely Luther taught **we are saved...**
By grace alone:

Through faith alone:

Found in Scripture alone:

F. Martin Luther: the Reformer

- ◆ Much of what Luther was teaching was embraced by the common people
- ◆ But in order to build St. Peter’s Church in Rome the Pope issued **indulgences**
- ◆ In response Luther wrote his “**Ninety-Five Theses**” questioning the sale of indulgences and other church practices
- ◆ On _____, he posted these on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, seeking a private debate (written in Latin) on these issues
- ◆ His theses were quickly translated into German and printed and spread throughout Germany
- ◆ Luther argued that the indulgences were evil because:
 - ◆ They were promoting people to sin (buy an indulgence and sin for “free”)
 - ◆ No one can buy God’s forgiveness
 - ◆ The Pope should FREELY announce the forgiveness of sins without payment
- ◆ **Luther did not WANT to start a new church, rather he wanted to REFORM the Catholic church**

G. The Diet of Worms (1521)

- ◆ As the true doctrine spread several princes in Germany came to agree with Luther. This caused division in the empire because the Emperor was a Catholic, and he needed the princes’ help to fight the Turks.
- ◆ In order to end these divisions the Emperor announced a debate at Worms, but no debate took place. Luther was only asked two questions: “Are these your writings?” “Are you ready to take back what you have written?”
- ◆ Luther knew that if he answered “No,” he would be put under the imperial ban (he would be a wanted criminal whom anyone could arrest or kill on sight).
- ◆ After a day of deliberation he responded, “Unless you can prove to me from the Bible that I have made wrong statements, I cannot and will not take back anything. My conscience is bound by the Word of God. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”

H. The Reformation Takes Root

- ◆ Luther’s life was saved when the Elector of Saxony “kidnapped” him and hid him in Wartburg castle where he stayed for about a year and **translated the New Testament into everyday German**
- ◆ The Reformation spread and changes took place:
 - Sermons and the Sacraments were spoken in language people could understand
 - Luther wrote his Small and Large Catechism for the instruction of youth and adults
 - The Old Testament was translated into German

I. Luther's Later Years

- ◆ Continued writing – one of most prolific writers in history
- ◆ Wrote 37 hymns ("A Mighty Fortress")
- ◆ Suffered from poor health and kidney stones
- ◆ Struggled with depression, death of daughter
- ◆ Died in Eisleben on February 18, 1546, buried in Castle Church in Wittenberg

J. Luther's Legacy - Why do we call ourselves "Lutherans"?

- ◆ NOT because Luther as a "holy" man, he was a sinner like the rest of us
 - Often spoke too strongly/insultingly of his opponents
 - In later years made insulting comments about the Jews
- ◆ **We call ourselves Lutherans because we stand with Luther on the truth of God's Word that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, found in Scripture alone.**

Assignment for next time:

- ◆ Memory work: Galatians 3:11
- ◆ Complete at-home, open-notes quiz
- ◆ Answer study question: What do you want to know or learn about the Bible?