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## Sermon

### ***True Apostles***

#### **1 Thessalonians 2:1-8**

29<sup>th</sup> October 2017

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We heard last week how the Apostle Paul was called over to Macedonia and so came to preach in Europe, moving on down into Greece. The Letter to the Thessalonians is a letter sent back to new converts soon after he has had to leave them because of persecution.

Paul writes to assure them of his love and to reinforce his teaching to them. From today's passage we learn about Paul's heart for his converts and it is a sweet and gentle attitude.

He and Silas had left in a hurry driven out of town by angry opponents. Yet he says their visit was not a failure. And indeed to make disciples who would stand under persecution and form a church in so short a time is impressive.

They paid a price of suffering to be able to preach to them. They had been beaten, imprisoned and insulted in the previous town, Philippi. Nonetheless they had followed Jesus' instruction to his disciples to move on and preach in the next town. It wouldn't be easy to do what they did - preaching the gospel where there is strong opposition. It takes courage and conviction of the value of the message - it would after all be so much easier to go home and live a quiet life.

But Paul knew he had a message from God: "We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel." This was (and is) a message from God to humanity. It is a message with eternal consequences for the hearers. Again in verse 13,

... when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

The message Paul carried, preached and wrote is the word of God and it works change in those who believe.

Paul asserts that Silas and he came to them with integrity. They did not have falsehood in their heart: no impure motives or trickery. The message was without error because it was the message inspired by God. They were not like politicians trying to gain favour. They did not flatter to win favour. His motive was not greed well covered by a hypocritical mask. Rather he spoke as one who knew he was accountable to God for what he said.

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<sup>1</sup> Portion on Reformation and Luther's doctrines summarised from: <https://creation.com/martin-luther-shook-world> and <https://creation.com/luthers-legacy>

Why does he mention those possibilities? Because we learn from his other letters that others who followed on the preaching circuit do use rhetorical tricks and certainly demanded money for their speaking and ministry. For those false teachers, preaching was a money-making venture. But not so for Paul. He reminds them that he and Silas did not depend on them for food but paid their own way.

What is his heart attitude towards them?

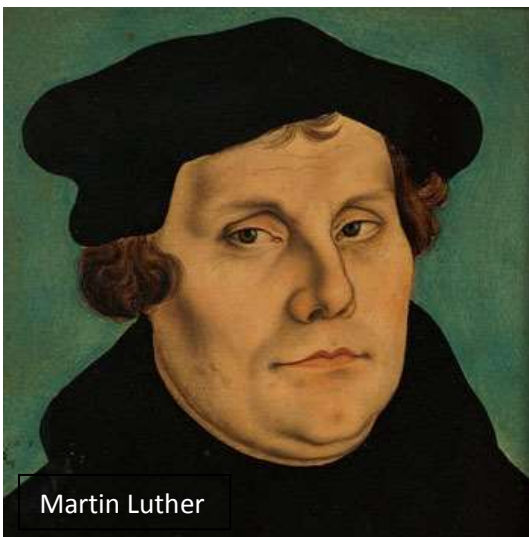
It's all about relationship: They are brothers. He cared for them gently as a mother cares for a child. The term is actually a nursing mother – a gentle and intimate relationship. These are new believers and need care and attention. They needed feeding with milk rather than steak. In verse 11, he says,

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

So Paul likens himself to a gentle mother and a comforting and encouraging father- these are images of caring relationship.

Now I want to move from this account of a good apostle to an important anniversary which has some common features.

On Tuesday it will be the 500th anniversary of the ignition of the Reformation. On 31 October 1517, Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 Theses to the door of the All Saints Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. He was protesting against non-biblical practices in the Roman Catholic Church, and the eventual result was the formation of Protestant Churches. This act of Luther is therefore regarded as the start of the Reformation.



Martin Luther

The Church of that day taught that good works were necessary to earn salvation and developed the unbiblical idea of purgatory – a place of punishment after death before being accepted into God's presence. Such salvation required people to participate in the sacraments, do penance, pray to deceased saints and/or worship their relics, go on pilgrimages to holy places, buy indulgences and say masses for the dead to shorten their time in purgatory and withdraw from the world to a monastery to escape the sins of the world. All this caused Martin to despair of ever being able to do enough to satisfy God, and to fear God's future judgment.

He entered a Monastery where he engaged in long hours of prayer, fasting, whipping himself, and prolonged daily confessions of sin, but none of this brought him the peace with God he was seeking. He later remarked: "If anyone could have

gained heaven as a monk, then I would indeed have been among them. ... I lost hold of Christ the Saviour and comforter and made of him a stock-master and hangman over my poor soul."

He transferred to Wittenberg University to study for his Doctor of Theology, and was later appointed to the chair of biblical theology. Here Luther lectured on the Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. As he studied and taught these books, slowly the terms *righteousness* and *faith* took on new meaning for him.

Luther knew that Christ on the Cross felt abandoned by God. As he pondered this, Luther realized that it was because Christ was bearing his—Luther's own—sin on the Cross. And he came to see that God *gives* forgiveness to those who repent of their sins, because Christ, the Perfect Substitute, paid the *full* penalty for sin by dying on the Cross and rising again.

Likewise, he came to see that God *gives* righteousness to believers by crediting the perfect righteousness of His own Son, Jesus Christ, to them.<sup>2</sup> Faith involves trusting solely in the promises of God and the finished work of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Luther expressed it thus: “He [Christ] died for me, He made His righteousness mine, and made my sin His own; and if he made my sin His own, then I do not have it, and I am free.” Describing this culmination of his spiritual journey, as the burden of his sin lifted, Luther wrote: “All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates.” For the first time in his life, he experienced the assurance of salvation and peace with God that only Jesus can give.<sup>4</sup>

### Tetzel—vendor of indulgences

In 1516, a Dominican friar, Johann Tetzel, came to Germany to sell indulgences on behalf of the Archbishop of Magdeburg and also of Mainz, in Germany.

Half the proceeds went to pay off the 10,000 ducats the Archbishop had borrowed from bankers to induce Rome to consent to his tenure of more than one archbishopric. The other half went to Pope Leo X in Rome to help pay for the reconstruction of St Peter’s Basilica there.

Tetzel presented a persuasive spiel: “As soon as the money in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”

Luther objected that Tetzel’s customers would think they could sin with impunity and had no need of repentance. Instead they would be exposed to eternal damnation. Luther gives an account of a nobleman at Leipzig who asked Tetzel if it were possible to receive a letter of indulgence for a future sin. Tetzel agreed provided payment was immediate, so the nobleman paid up and received the letter from Tetzel. When Tetzel left Leipzig, the nobleman attacked him along the way and retrieved his payment with the comment that this was the future sin he had had in mind.



Luther sent Archbishop Albrecht his protest entitled: “Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences”. He intended to call academics to a debate on the subject but people made copies with the newly invented printing press and spread it across Europe.

### Luther on trial

In April 1521, Luther was summoned for trial at Worms, in Germany. Asked to recant, he responded:

“Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open clear and distinct grounds and reasoning—and my conscience is captive to the Word of God—then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. God help me. Amen.”

One of the witnesses reported that Luther added: “Here I stand: I can do no other.”

After various difficulties and persecutions, he translated the Bible into German and went on to lead the newly formed Lutheran Church in Germany, writing liturgy, hymns and doctrine.

Although the Reformation is considered the direct result of Martin Luther’s teaching, in fact he was perhaps the spark to the powder-keg. The development of the Reformation was very fast. Within fifteen years much of Germany, Scandinavia and England had broken with Rome and formed Protestant churches.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9

<sup>3</sup> Romans 4:16; Hebrews 11:6

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 2:14-15; 9:14

The comparisons we might draw with the passage from First Thessalonians include: Here was a teacher who was basing his teaching on the Bible – God’s message. Those against him were very much acting in greed and hypocrisy just as Paul implicitly warned against.

Luther was effectively an apostle to German and Europe to preach again the simple gospel of salvation by grace through faith – the message Paul had first brought to Europe. Like Paul, Luther suffered great opposition and his life was threatened.

Luther taught what he found in scripture and refused to go against his conscience.

Luther’s convictions can be summarized in three major issues that form the basis of the Reformation, and hence of today’s Protestantism.

### **1. Faith alone (*sola fides*)**

Salvation is the gift of God, acquired through faith alone and received through God’s grace alone because of Christ alone.

**Ephesians 2:8–9** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Christ’s death on the Cross, followed by His resurrection, was not only necessary but was also both complete and sufficient to pay the total penalty for our sins and discharge our sin-debt to God in full.

**Hebrews 7:25** [Jesus] is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

This is the Gospel that Paul preached:

**1 Corinthians 15:1,3-4** Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. (ESV)

And there is no other gospel that saves:

**Acts 4:12** Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

The Apostle Paul says that God nailed the record of our sins to the Cross.

**Colossians 2:13-14** He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

So then, on the authority of the Word of God, our sinful past no longer exists in the records of heaven. This means that we as believers can have absolute certainty of our salvation and that we are no longer damned sinners! Our eternal destiny does not depend on how well we have performed works in this life, nor on our having suffered enough punishment for our sins after we die. But rather because we have been declared righteous by the Eternal Judge Himself.

### **2. Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*)**

*Sola Scriptura* is the doctrine that the Bible as the Word of God is the sole infallible, authoritative, and *sufficient* authority in all matters of doctrine, faith, and conduct. It is based on the Apostle Paul’s statement that “All Scripture is God-breathed”, in 2 Timothy 3:16–17. Thus Scripture originates from God Himself, who cannot err, and therefore the authority of Scripture is God’s error-free authority.

*Sola Scriptura* is important for these absolute reasons:

- i. It limits what God requires us to believe to what He Himself has actually said in His Word, the Bible. God has provided in the Bible, in clear, understandable, and reliable words, His full and final revelation regarding what we must believe to be saved, and all that is necessary for the Church’s mission in the world. It is infallible, binding, and authoritative today, and thus is complete as to doctrine.

- ii. *Sola Scriptura* negates all doctrines originated by human beings and directs our attention to what God says rather than to what man formulates. God's Word needs no supplementing from human wisdom. In the Bible, God repeatedly commands us not to add to what He has said.
- iii. *Sola Scriptura* disclaims all tradition that is not actually approved of in the Bible. It follows that any tradition not found in the Bible (either explicitly or by logical deduction) does not originate from God and is therefore not binding on Christians either to believe it, to fear it, or to act upon it.
- iv. As to development of doctrine, the guiding factor is the Bible itself. "The text of Scripture provides the grounds, and most importantly, the limits of this development over time. ... no one has ever plumbed the depths of the revelation of God contained in the Bible. ... Therefore, real development of Christian doctrine is simply the ever-increasing understanding of the Word of God."

### **3. The priesthood of all believers**

The Bible tells us that no further sacrifices for sin are needed now, and hence no repetitions or re-enactments of the crucifixion, because Christ's 'once-for-all-time' sacrifice was and is totally sufficient before Almighty God.<sup>5</sup>

In the Old Testament, priests were needed to offer daily sacrifices, which foreshadowed the perfect sacrifice of Christ. In the New Testament, the Apostle Peter and the writer of Hebrews tell us that now that Christ has paid the full penalty for sin, no further sacrifices are needed. Here are two of the many verses that tell us this:

- "[Christ] has no need like those high priests to offer sacrifices daily ... since He did this once for all when He offered up Himself" (Hebrews 7:27).
- "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10).

Thus the Bible tells us that no further sacrifices for sin are needed now, and hence no repetitions or re-enactments of the crucifixion, because Christ's 'once-for-all-time' sacrifice was and is *totally sufficient* before Almighty God.

#### ***How then are all believers priests?***

Believers are priests not in the sense of offering sacrifices but because we have direct access to God through Christ alone without the necessity for any earthly intermediary priest.

**Hebrews 4:14, 16** Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ... Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

One practical aspect of this is that all Christians are called to be God's witnesses, representatives, and ambassadors in whatever capacity or profession we find ourselves.

### **Conclusion**

Salvation is by faith *alone*, by grace *alone*, in Christ *alone*, on the authority of Scripture *alone*, and for the glory of God *alone*. These principles give, to those who will accept them:

1. The complete forgiveness of sins here and now.
2. The absolute assurance of salvation, and hence peace with God and freedom from the fear of death or what happens after death.
3. Union with Christ, which is God's comprehensive and ultimate purpose for our lives, both now and for all eternity.

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 6:9-10

It was the message that Paul said was entrusted to him by God. It was the message that Luther rediscovered in the Bible. It is the message that brings us the assurance of salvation.

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