

Reformation Day – Grace Alone, Rom 3:24

1. Today we celebrate the Reformation
 - a. On Oct 31, 1517 Martin Luther nailed 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany and started what became known as Reformation.
 - i. We celebrate the rediscovery of the Gospel in the church – the Gospel that Paul clearly explains in Romans this morning.
 - ii. Luther did not intend to divide the church, but his conscience was bound to the Word of God.
 - iii. He couldn't stand silently by while he knew that the forgiveness that Christ won on the cross was not being proclaimed and the people had no sure comfort that their sins were forgiven.
 - b. Because what Luther rediscovered...what God tells us through Paul in today's epistle (and throughout the NT) is that forgiveness and salvation are freely given to us by His **grace alone** as a gift through faith!
 - i. This is something we think we hear all of the time...something we think is so basic and fundamental (like 1+1) but somehow, we have to be reminded of it time and again because it is not the way our minds naturally work.
 - ii. We live in a quid pro quo world, you don't get anything for free – you want a good job, good education, first spot on a team you have to earn it...you work for it no one gives it to you
 - iii. And we naturally carry that understanding over to salvation, that if you're going to get to heaven you've got to earn it
 - iv. But the Gospel, the Good News of sins forgiven and eternal life, is not earned by a good life, pious prayers, hard work...it's yours by grace alone...a gift made possible only by the work of God's Son Jesus.
 - v. And it is absolutely remarkable that the "church" of the Middle Ages had replaced that gift with a series of works that had to be done to procure forgiveness.
2. Let's take a moment to talk a little about Luther himself and what compelled him to risk everything for the Gospel.
 - a. Initially he was at University studying to be lawyer, his father had done reasonably well as a miner and had dreams for his son
 - i. He was intelligent, a good student but when he was trapped in a lightning storm he feared for his life, he prayed to St Anna promising to become a monk if he lived.
 - ii. He kept his promise and while at Monastery he excelled at theology, eventually earning a Doctor of Theology.
 - iii. But he was constantly plagued by comparing the Righteousness and Holiness of God with his own unworthiness and sinfulness.
 - iv. As he said, "**in spite of the ardor of my heart I was hindered by the unique word in the first chapter (of Romans): 'the righteousness of**

God is revealed in it.' I hated the word 'righteousness of God,' because in accordance with the usage and custom of the doctors [it] was righteousness according to which God is righteous and punishes sinners and the unjust."

- b. However, as he taught and preached the Scriptures he began to see that forgiveness not something we earn by worthiness but gift from God – given by grace.
 - i. Then in 1517 he was angered by selling of Indulgences by the RCC in Germany; which were widely sold as promises forgiving the sins of those who bought them.
 - ii. There was no ASSURANCE in Indulgences, they didn't rely on blood of Christ but money spent by men – he worried that people would think they could BUY Salvation!
 - iii. Luther wanted sure answer to questions, "Can I know my sins are forgiven...Can I know that God loves me and accepts me into heaven?" The resounding Scriptural answer is, "Yes! **By Grace!**"
3. This is what God's Word in Romans says to us this AM
 - a. Today, 500 years after the Reformation, many people still think of the Bible as a list of dos and don'ts, "If follow the do's and not don'ts I go to heaven."
 - i. We call do's and don'ts LAW – of course all know most popular list – 10 Commandments, but even the Golden Rule "Do unto others as you would have done to you," and "love your neighbor as yourself," are LAW
 - ii. God's Word also says, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." THERE'S THE PROBLEM
 - iii. Do you ALWAYS love your neighbor as yourself? Do you ALWAYS do unto others as you would have done to you?
 - iv. NO! OF COURSE NOT! Therefore, by own admission then, you break LAW. You stand condemned! Why would perfect judge let you go?
 - b. But we naturally misunderstand the Law when we think of it as means by which we live a good life to earn God's favor
 - i. God says as much in opening of our reading, "**No one will be declared righteous by observing LAW; rather through Law comes knowledge of sin.**" (Rom 3:20)
 - ii. The Law is not there to make us righteous because we can't follow it perfectly.
 - iii. The Law is a mirror reflecting our true nature to us.
 - iv. It reveals that I can't be perfect, which means I am condemned before a Righteous and Holy God.
 - c. And that's where Luther found himself in the medieval RCC, condemned,
 - i. Realizing that no matter how much he confessed

- ii. No matter how many pilgrimages he went on, no matter how many indulgences were bought they all relied on his effort, his striving
 - iii. And it could never be perfect
- 4. But just at that moment when he realized that there's nothing more he could do the truth of "God's righteousness" was revealed to him and it was the spark that lit the flame of the Reformation.
 - a. He wrote, "Day and night I tried to meditate upon the significance of these words: 'The righteousness of God is revealed in it, as it is written: The righteous shall live by faith.'"
 - i. **"I began to understand that the righteousness of God is a gift of God by which a righteous man lives, namely faith...indicating that the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: 'The righteous shall live by faith.' Now I felt as though I had been reborn altogether and had entered Paradise. In the same moment the face of the whole of Scripture became apparent to me."**
 - ii. He had re-discovered what Paul says to us today in Romans, **"A righteousness from God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a GIFT through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."** (Rom 3:21-24)
 - iii. It had been staring him in the face all along, we aren't justified and forgiven by what we do but by what Christ has done for us and gives us freely
 - iv. God's grace is the key to unlocking all of the treasures of God's Word, the comfort of sins forgiven, and the free gift of salvation given to all who believe!
 - b. Scripture's all about grace – God's grace in offering forgiveness and salvation to hostile and sinful people – us.
 - i. That's the treasure that Luther found in Paul's word to the Romans – a treasure that he was willing to risk his life for.
 - ii. As Paul says we deserve to be condemned, yet God out of His grace punished Jesus, His own Son, in our place so that we would have the FREE GIFT...FREE GIFT of Salvation when we deserved to be condemned.
 - c. That's the truth of the Gospel that ignited the Reformation of the Church that we celebrate today;
 - i. The message that countless people throughout the ages, and even today, have been willing to die for.
 - ii. You are SAVED BY GRACE ALONE! Put your faith and trust in the One who has done all this for you that you may know joy and peace that passes all understanding!

