

Martin Luther

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[0 : 00] Well, as I've indicated to you over the past couple of weeks, this month is Reformation Month.

And because it's Reformation Month, I'd like us to just take the opportunity to consider some of the men of the Reformation that the Lord used. And, well, there's no doubt that the Lord used influential men to initiate the Protestant Reformation during the 16th century.

And I think it's good for us to consider these men. We're so prone to forgetting our past, and we're so prone to forgetting the men who influenced our past.

And so it's a good opportunity for us to remind ourselves of what they did and how the Lord used them. But I want to be clear, we don't venerate these men. And we don't worship them.

We thank the Lord for them. And we thank the Lord for using them for his glory and the extension of Christ's kingdom in this world. And so this evening, I'd like us to consider the life and ministry of the German reformer, Martin Luther.

[1 : 13] And the way in which I'd like us to consider Martin Luther and, well, all of the reformers when we come to them one by one, the way I want to look at it is the same way in which we interview a minister at a congregational fellowship.

Because every time we interview a minister at a congregational fellowship, we use the headings childhood, conversion, call, and congregation. But because we're considering the reformers and they were men who made a huge contribution to the church of Jesus Christ, I'd like us to use the fifth heading of contribution.

So we're considering Martin Luther this evening under the following headings, childhood, conversion, call, congregation, and contribution. So we'll just walk through his life together.

So first of all, his childhood. On the 10th of November, 1483, in the Saxony village of Eiselbin, a son was born to Hans and Margaret Luther.

The next day, he was dutifully taken to the local church, the Catholic church, to be baptized and given the name of that day's saint, Martin. Martin Luther, he was the second of eight children to be born to Hans and Margaret.

[2 : 31] They were four sons and four daughters, making up the family. And as a family, they were part of this copper mining community. They were all peasants. But Luther's father, he wanted a better life for his family.

And soon after Luther's birth, his father, Hans, he moved his family from Eiselbin to a place called Mansfield in Germany. And it was the centre of Germany's mining industry.

And during that time, Hans became the joint owner of six mining shafts and two smelting furnaces. And so with the copper mining industry on the rise, it also raised Luther's family quality of life to, you could say, new heights of prosperity.

But as the years went by, it's said that it became increasingly obvious that young Martin was born with a greater portion of intelligence than his brothers or sisters.

And with their prosperous situation as a family, Luther's father, Hans, he was eager to capitalise on his son's intelligence. And so in 1501, at the age of 18, Hans enrolled Luther into the University of Erfurt.

[3 : 45] And in obedience to his father's wishes, young Martin began studying law. You know, we know little of Luther's early life and his university life, apart from the fact that he was a good student and he graduated in early 1505, coming second in the class of 17.

But as an influential father, Luther's father, Hans, he always planned that his son would study for a further two years in Erfurt in order to qualify as a lawyer.

But you know, there was always this tension between Luther and his father. Hans wanted his son to be this successful lawyer, but he also knew that Luther was often serious about religion.

Because in his youth, Luther's hero was this monk called Prince Wilhelm. And Prince Wilhelm, he was so devoted to his religion that he's said to have beat himself and then starved himself to death.

And you know, that kind of behaviour, well, it was not the sort of role model that Hans wanted for his promising son, Martin. But then the worst thing possible happened for Hans, as the father of Martin Luther.

[5 : 01] The worst thing possible was that Martin Luther was converted. It's not what Hans had planned for. But of course, the Lord had other plans. And you know, we're reminded of that all the time in our own lives, aren't we?

Whether it's the plans that we make for our own lives or the plans we make for our own children. And yet time and time again, the Lord reminds us that his ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts.

But you know, we ought to always take comfort in the fact that the Lord's plans are not to harm us. But they're always for our good. And you know, don't you just love those words in Jeremiah 29, verse 11?

You always see them on plaques and on posters. I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future.

And so the Lord had plans for Luther. And those plans became more evident at his conversion. And so this brings us to Luther's conversion. His childhood and then his conversion.

[6 : 05] And so in 1501, at the age of 21, after only a month of training to be this qualified lawyer, Luther decided to forsake university life.

He renounced the world and he became a monk. Of course, this was in the face of the angry opposition of his father, who challenged Luther's religious move. He challenged him by asking, have you never heard of God's commandment to honour your father and your mother?

And Luther's father, he wasn't happy with his intellectual son and whom he had ploughed lots and lots of money to get him through his education. But you know, something infinitely more important than obeying the will of his earthly father had taken hold of young Martin.

Because within that month of starting his studies to be a lawyer, a close school friend from Luther's youth died very, very suddenly. And inevitably, this brought home to Luther the reality of death.

And Luther felt that, well, in his own soul, he wasn't prepared to die. But the turning point in Martin Luther's life was when he was returning from Erfurt to his parents in Mansfield.

[7 : 21] And, well, presumably Luther had been attending the funeral of his school friend. But on his journey back towards university, back to his studies, Luther was then caught in a thunderstorm in the middle of June.

And Luther's own testimony is that a lightning bolt hit so close to him that it threw him to the ground. And in that moment, Luther, he was filled with fear.

Because without the chance of making this final confession to the priest, or without any last rites being given to him, and the prospect of what awaited him after his death, it was too much for Luther to even contemplate, that Luther cried out there and then, St. Anne, help me.

I'll become a monk. And what a thing to cry out. St. Anne, help me. I'll become a monk. But Luther's vow, it may have been involuntary, but to Luther a vow was a vow.

And, of course, Luther's father claimed that the lightning bolt from heaven was nothing but the work of the devil. Nevertheless, Luther gave up his studies in the University of Erfurt to join the monastery in Erfurt.

[8 : 34] He shaved his head, and then he left that little thin circle of hair around his head, and then he exchanged his clothing of the world for the holy garb of a monk.

And being given this new look, you could say it was a symbolic act, because it said that a man could restore his innocence by becoming a monk. And this is just what Luther wanted.

And, you know, Luther, he lapped it all up. Because to enter the monastery was to enter a world of rules. There were rules of how and when to bow. There were rules of how to walk, how to talk, where to look, when to look, even rules of how to eat.

And every few hours in the day as a monk, the monks would leave their tiny cells, which were only nine foot by six foot. They would leave their tiny cells, and they would go and pray in the chapel with the first of six daily worship services, starting at 2 a.m.

That was their routine. Six times a day they were to pray and follow all these rules. But even with all these rules and disciplines, the more Luther did, the more troubled he became.

[9 : 47] Luther's fear of God's judgment, it terrified him. And Luther always worried that he was insincere with his prayers, and he felt that he wasn't doing enough to please God.

And if he lacked because of, well, illness, if illness took over him, he thought that he'd have to try and catch up with God using his weekends. Luther's conviction of sin, it was wearing him down because he had no peace with God and he had no assurance of his salvation.

But you know, Luther's conviction of sin, it was not only wearing him down, it was also wearing down everybody else too. It's said that Luther used to take six hours at a time to confess his sin to the priest.

But even then, Luther wondered if this confession was genuine. Because if it wasn't true contrition, he thought, then there could be no true forgiveness. And Luther took this so seriously, questioning himself all the time.

Am I truly repentant of my sins? Or am I just saying this because I'm terrified of God's punishment? And you know, what's remarkable is that Luther became a monk and he studied theology not because he wanted to teach it.

[11 : 02] It wasn't for the sake of others, but for the sake of his own soul. Because Luther, he desperately wanted to find peace with God and have this assurance for his salvation.

But after two years of living the strict monastic life of a monk, Luther was ordained as a priest in 1507. And when he was due to say his first mass as a priest, when he was to do the sacrament of mass, Luther is said to have stood at the altar with terror overwhelming him.

Terrified of what he was doing because for years Luther had only prayed to the saints and he had only prayed to Mary. But now as an ordained priest, he would have to speak directly to the judge of all the earth.

And of course, Luther questioned his fitness as a sinner to do such an act. He was always questioning himself, how can a sinner like me address a holy judge?

And you know, with all his unrest and his lack of peace and his lack of assurance and his emptiness and his complete unworthiness, even as a priest, Luther continued to desperately search for this solution to the problem of his salvation.

[12 : 19] But it wasn't until 1510 that Luther's eyes began to be open to the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1510, Luther was given this, you could say, an opportunity of a lifetime.

He was sent on a monastery business trip to the city of Rome, the heart of Roman Catholicism. And for a monk who increasingly knew that he was spiritually bankrupt, you could say that being sent to Rome was like winning the lottery.

Because in Rome, a pilgrim was not only closer to all the apostles and they were closer to all the saints, but Rome, it was crammed full of relics, all these relics, and it was like this spiritual gold mine for the soul.

And Luther, he loved being in Rome, going from one holy site to the next holy site, clocking up merit all the time he was there. And yet within that spiritual haven, Luther still had doubts about his religion.

And his doubts, they were strengthened when he witnessed people paying for masses to be said for them and for all their deceased family members. And the mass was said at such a pace that no one could actually understand what was being said.

[13 : 39] And in order to keep up with the demand of people wanting masses for themselves and for those who were dead, in order to speed things along a little quicker, two priests began to say the mass simultaneously at the same altar.

They were saying the mass together and Luther's doubts, well, they just increased all the time wondering how can this actually be true. But you know, Luther's doubts weren't helped either when he decided to climb this stair called the Scala Sancta.

Now, the Scala Sancta was this staircase that Jesus was supposed to have climbed in order to stand before Pilate. And this staircase, it had subsequently been brought from Jerusalem to Rome in order to make more money for the church.

And it was claimed that if someone climbed the Scala Sancta, these steps, if they climbed it and kissed every step and kneeled and said the Lord's Prayer on every step, then they were assured that when they reached the top that a soul of their choice would be freed from purgatory.

And of course, when you would expect Luther, he ran at the chance every step, kissing every step, saying the Lord's Prayer on every step. But you know, it was on reaching the top that Luther asked himself, who knows whether or not this is actually true?

[15 : 06] And so for Luther, his pilgrimage to the holy city of Rome, it was actually disenchanting because all he found there was this cynical attitude to religion and an obsession with money.

In fact, it's said that later in his life, Luther was fond of repeating the Italian proverb, if there is a hell, Rome is built over it. But you know, on returning from Rome, Luther transferred from the monastery in Erfurt to the monastery in Wittenberg.

And it was there in Wittenberg that Luther's supervisor, this man called Johannes von Stoutpitz, he recognised that Luther was this outstanding scholar and he was an outstanding preacher.

And Stoutpitz, he encouraged Luther to study for a doctorate in theology. But encouraging Luther to study the Bible and giving him the freedom to study God's word, it was going to be a move that Rome would soon regret.

Because when Luther was called to be the professor of Wittenberg in the university, you could say that the ball would start rolling towards the Reformation.

[16 : 20] And so that's what I'd like us to consider thirdly. We've considered his childhood, his conversion, but then thirdly his call. Luther's call. Luther received his doctorate in theology in the year 1512.

And then shortly after that, Luther took over from his supervisor to be the professor of biblical studies in Wittenberg University. His supervisor, who was this man, Johannes von Stoutpitz, he stepped down because he felt that if Luther taught others, he would find the answers to all his problems.

Stoutpitz believed that Luther's full-time study of theology would help Luther sort out all his spiritual anxieties. Anxieties of how to have peace with God and the anxieties of how to find assurance for his salvation.

And you know, isn't it remarkable that Luther taught theology and yet he didn't have peace with God himself? And he didn't have assurance of his salvation. But despite his lack of peace and his lack of assurance, Luther was searching diligently.

And it was evident that Luther was searching for all these answers because he was continuously lecturing on the Psalms and the letters of, Paul's letters of Romans and Galatians as we were reading and the letter to the Hebrews.

[17 : 45] But it was also from all his lecturing that Luther became convinced of God's sovereignty in our salvation. Of course, there were many in Luther's day who didn't believe that God was sovereign in our salvation because they believed that and they taught that sinners had a part to play in saving themselves.

Whether it's by the sinner's confession to the priest or their charitable deeds or taking part in all the sacraments. All of these things were meant to be viewed as a stepping stone to God's forgiveness.

But you know, as Luther studied the scriptures, he came to discover that salvation is not an act of man but an act of God's grace. And in God's act of grace, Luther discovered that God blesses the sinner with unmerited mercy.

And you know, this theological and spiritual breakthrough for Luther, it came in about 1513, a year after starting as this professor. And the breakthrough came when Luther understood what the Apostle Paul meant by God's righteousness.

Because as we were saying on Sunday evening, for years Luther had been taught that God's righteousness, which Paul is speaking of, it's the righteousness which God punishes sinners.

[19 : 11] But when Luther was reading the letter to Romans, Luther discovered that Paul's use of the word righteousness was actually in reference to God's gracious gifting of his righteousness to sinners.

And with that, Luther came to see that salvation is not about what we do but about what God has done on our behalf. And for the first time in his life, Luther realised that the Bible taught that salvation is a free gift of God to the sinner, to the wicked sinner.

And that that wicked sinner is made righteous before God not by their merits or their charitable deeds but by receiving and resting upon the finished work of Jesus Christ.

And with this, Luther taught that a sinner is made righteous before God by personal trust in Jesus Christ. and through faith, God imputes Christ's righteousness into the believer's account.

And that this act of personal trust is what changes the believer's legal status before God in which they're justified, as we were reading, they're justified by faith.

[20 : 25] And as we said, this is what we were looking at on Sunday evening when we were considering sola fide, faith alone. We're justified by faith alone. And you know, by studying the words of Romans, especially Romans 1.17, Luther discovered that doctrine, justification by faith alone.

Because it's there that Paul emphasizes that the righteous shall live by faith. But you know, it's interesting that Luther first lectured on Paul's letter to the Romans and also to the letter to the Galatians.

Because when Luther wrote his lectures on Galatians, he said, if the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole of Christian doctrine is lost. If we lose the doctrine of justification, we lose simply everything.

For Luther, as he said himself, justification is the article of a standing or a falling church. justification is the article of a standing or a falling church.

And you know, as time went on, in Luther's mind, the Roman Catholic Church was a falling church because it was no longer standing upon the truth.

[21 : 45] And this fact became more and more apparent when it came to the year 1515. because Pope Leo X, he authorized the sale of indulgences in Germany.

And the purpose of selling indulgences was, well, to bring in cash in order to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Now, in order to explain indulgences, in the teaching of medieval Roman Catholicism, when a sinner went to confess to a priest, the priest would demand that acts of penance be performed.

And any sins for which penance had not been performed in this life, they would have to be dealt with in purgatory. Purgatory was this interim state between death and the final judgment.

But the good news was that there were saints, as they said, saints who had been so good and so upright before God that they had actually earned enough merit to bypass purgatory altogether and get straight into heaven.

In fact, these saints were told that they were so good that they had more merit than necessary to get into heaven. And so this spare merit was said to be kept in the church's treasury in which only the Pope had the keys.

[23 : 08] And the Pope could gift merit or an indulgence as it was called, he could gift it to any soul he deemed worthy to receive it. And an indulgence could either, it could either fast-track a soul straight into, well, straight through purgatory into heaven or you could leapfrog others into heaven.

But you know, how did a sinner merit an indulgence? They paid for it. The gift of money was deemed penitential enough to merit an indulgence.

And as a result, the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church became increasingly clear in people's minds. Do what you like and with a little bit of cash it will secure for you eternal bliss.

And so when Pope Leo authorised the sale of indulgences in 1515, there was, as you would expect, this great following because everyone wanted to secure their eternal well-being.

Everyone wanted to go to heaven. And if it only required a little bit of money, then everyone was happy to cough up. But you know, what's frightening is that there was this selling agent who had been sent from Rome into Germany.

[24 : 23] And he had been, this man had been sent into Germany in order to convince the people of Germany to buy indulgences. And this selling agent, he was a man called Johann Tetzel.

And Tetzel, he's often been described as, you see him all the time, this tele-evangelist. And he would be a travelling tele-evangelist who tried to emotionally blackmail people into buying indulgences.

Tetzel would travel from town to town preaching about family members who had died and were burning in hell. And he would create this emotional drama asking his audience, can't you hear the voices of your dead parents wailing?

And can't you hear your dead relatives and friends saying, have mercy on me because we're in severe punishment and pain? You could redeem them with a small fee, he would say to them.

And when people came forward to buy an indulgence, Tetzel, he didn't even ask them to confess their sins. The money would do. And you know, Tetzel, he had all these little rhymes that would emphasise, where he would emphasise to his audience the importance of buying an indulgence.

[25 : 37] One rhyme was, place your penny on the drum, the pearly gates open and in strolls mum. Another rhyme was, when the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs.

But you know, Tetzel, he went even as far as to claim that when a sinner bought an indulgence, it would automatically wash away the foulest of sin.

And he went as far as to say, even if the sinner had raped the Virgin Mary. Tetzel's publicity campaign, it was crude, it was tasteless, it was vulgar, and even contradictory to the teaching of Rome.

But sadly, many people bought into it. There was one, but there was one man who didn't buy into Tetzel's publicity stunt, and that was Luther.

And the reason everything came to a head in the year 1517 was because of Luther's spiritual concern for the well-being of his own congregation.

[26 : 42] And so let's consider his congregation and the impact of Tetzel and what he was doing there. We've considered the childhood, his childhood conversion call and congregation.

And so as well as being a pastor of biblical studies in the University of Wittenberg, Luther was a professor, I should have said. He was also appointed a pastor in the parish church.

And the parish church was called the Castle Church. where Luther preached every Lord's Day. But you know, Luther, he wasn't this ivory tower intellectual that never mixed with his congregation.

Luther faithfully and dutifully pastored the people of Wittenberg. And as the parish priest, Luther was deeply horrified that there were people in his own congregation who were buying these indulgences from Tetzel.

But what horrified Luther wasn't just what Tetzel was saying. Rather, it was the fact that Tetzel was teaching that salvation could be purchased for cash without the need of repentance.

[27 : 53] And understandably, this got under the skin of Luther. Along with the fact that Wittenberg had become this shrine for relics. You could say Wittenberg was this hotspot for Christian pilgrimage.

Because the castle church where Luther preached, it had become home to more than 19,000 relics. Relics that included straw from the crib of baby Jesus, strands of Jesus' beard, a nail from the cross of Jesus, a piece of bread from the Last Supper, a twig from the burning bush that Moses stood before, there was hair from the Virgin Mary and there were some of her clothes.

And it said that veneration of each of these 19,000 relics was said to be worth an indulgence of a hundred days. Meaning that the pious pilgrim to Wittenberg could amass more than 1.9 million days off from purgatory.

But if a sinner was to come and view all these relics on All Saints Day, which was the 1st of November, it was supposed to reduce a sinner's stay in purgatory by, get this, 1,900,000 and 2, 1,900,000 and 202 years and 270 days.

And you know, this was what tipped Luther over the edge. Because with all these pilgrims pouring into Wittenberg, pouring in for All Saints Day, hoping to free themselves from some time in purgatory, you know, Luther felt compelled to speak out against such heresy.

[29 : 44] And so on All Saints Eve, being the 31st of October, 1517, Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg.

Now when Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door, it wasn't this dramatic scene, this dramatic gesture to the church in Rome. But you know, it was actually the normal way of posting a public announcement.

You would nail it to the church door. But Luther's public announcement was that he was wanting a debate over Tetzel's abuse of indulgences. And to his astonishment, Luther found that he had loosed this storm of controversy.

Because without Luther's consent, the 95 theses, they were taken down, they were copied and then distributed to thousands of people throughout the nation of Germany. And as you would expect, Luther found himself under attack from all the church's bishops and universities and the monks.

In fact, Tetzel himself, he demanded that Luther be burned as a heretic. But you know, it wasn't all one-way traffic because Luther had also won this widespread support for those who were fed up of the corruption from the Roman Catholic Church.

[31 : 02] But Luther was now a target of the church and the church wanted rid of him. And in 1519, two years after nailing his theses to the church door, Luther was summoned to debate with this man called John Eck.

And John Eck's purpose was to secure Luther's condemnation as a heretic. And you know, this actually, it became clear to Luther that that's what Eck was all about.

When he questioned Luther on the authority, the authority in the church, he asked, which has the final say, Scripture or the Pope?

And Luther knew straight away it was a trap because Roman Catholicism taught that Scripture draws all its power and Scripture draws all its authority from the Pope.

but Luther claimed that he could understand Scripture without the Pope and that Scripture was even against the Pope. Luther, of course, he was then regarded as a heretic.

[32 : 06] But as the months went by, Luther became more and more convinced that if Rome held the Pope to be this authority above Scripture, then the church could never be reformed by God's word.

And from there, Luther considered the Roman Catholic Church to no longer be a church of God, but they were now under the reign of the Antichrist and they were a synagogue of Satan.

And, you know, this brings us to our final point of consideration, Luther's contribution. Childhood conversion call congregation and contribution. Luther's initial contribution to the Reformation was that he spent the year 1520 writing against the teaching of Roman Catholicism.

And instead of writing in Latin, which was the language of academia, Luther wrote in the people's language of German.

And he wrote it so that the ordinary man on the street could understand what he was saying. And with his extraordinary speed and his easy writing style, it was easy to understand and to read, and his explosive message that he had, combined with the fact that in God's providence, the printing press had just been invented.

[33 : 24] All these things made Luther, within weeks, the most read German author. And the first main work which Luther wrote was called To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation.

And in it, Luther sounded his first trumpet blast of the Reformation against Roman Catholicism. Because Luther explained that the church was unable to reform because one, the Pope was the supreme authority on earth, two, only the Pope may interpret the scriptures, and three, no one but the Pope can summon a council to reform the church.

And what Luther was saying was that the Roman Catholic Church had put walls up around themselves, and the church was then impregnable and then, and therefore unreformable.

And with that, Luther attacked the church claiming that the authority of the Pope, it's unfounded. But then one month later, didn't waste any time, a second work from Luther's hand appeared in the press.

And this was called The Babylonian Captivity of the Church. And in this work, Luther attacked Rome's claim that God's grace only flow to the sinner through the sacraments, sacraments that were controlled by the priests.

[34 : 44] Presenting the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Luther said that God's righteousness is gifted to the sinner and received by simple trust. And again, Luther, he attacked the Pope, claiming that if the Bible and not the Pope is to be believed, then there are actually only two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, not seven, as the Pope claims.

In the third work that Luther wrote that year, and perhaps the most important of Luther's writings, was called The Freedom of the Christian.

And The Freedom of the Christian was this allegorical explanation of the Gospel and a work which Luther actually dedicated to the Pope. And at the heart of the allegorical story, it's a story about a king who marries a prostitute, implying Jesus and a wicked sinner.

And when they marry, Luther says, the prostitute becomes, by status, a queen. And Luther explains that the prostitute was made a queen not by her merit or her charitable deeds or the sacraments, but by the marriage vow of the king.

And from the allegory, Luther was stressing that when a sinner accepts Christ's promise of forgiveness in the Gospel, they're still a sinner, but their status is that they have been made righteous through Jesus Christ.

[36 : 13] Of course, Rome wasn't going to take all this lying down. And so on the 15th of June, 1520, Pope Leo issued a papal bull, which was this decree from the Pope, from the voice of the Pope himself, and the decree had ordered Martin Luther to recant of all that he had written and submit to the authority of the Pope within 60 days or be excommunicated and burned as a heretic.

But the papal bull had only confirmed Luther's theory. The church didn't want a debate from scripture. The church only wanted to silence any threat to her supremacy.

But you know, when the 60 days were up, Luther appeared outside the city gates of Wittenberg, and he threw his copy of the papal bull into the fire, along with many works of Catholic theology and the books of canon law.

And Luther is reported to have said, because you have confounded the truth of God, today God confounds you into the fire with you, he said.

And by his actions, Luther was symbolically destroying this ecclesiastical system of the Roman church. But surprisingly, even with those actions, nothing happened to Luther.

[37 : 32] He was excommunicated, he was under this ban, but he wasn't burned. But with all this unrest going on in the church, and the authority of Rome being undermined, the Roman emperor couldn't tolerate it anymore.

And so in January 1521, the Roman emperor, Charles V, he called this diet to meet at a place called Vernes, in order to condemn Luther and have him burned as a heretic.

And in April that year, Luther appeared before the diet. And on the table before him was all the works that he had written, and he was just asked two questions.

Are these your works? And he replied, yes. The second question Luther was asked that day was, do you still defend them, or are you ready to recant them?

Luther asked for more time to make a decision, and he was granted one day. So then the following afternoon, Luther appeared before the diet again, and he made a speech in German, a speech that contained some of the most famous words in the history of the Christian church.

[38 : 48] Luther said, unless I am refuted and convicted by the testimonies of scripture or by clear reason, since I believe neither the popes or the councils by themselves, for it is clear that they have often erred and contradicted themselves.

I am conquered by the holy scriptures, I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not withdraw anything, since it is neither safe nor right to do anything against one's conscience.

Here I stand. God help me. Amen. And with that, Luther walked out, being jeered by his enemies, but greeted outside by a crowd of admirers.

But because of the shock of Luther's response, no one expected him to. No one expected him to say what he said that day. And because of what he said, they were thrown into confusion.

Luther could just walk out. After the hearing, the emperor declared that Luther was a schismatic and a heretic. But Luther, he didn't hang around in worms to be condemned.

[39 : 59] He had already boarded this wagon heading back to Wittenberg. And yet, en route to Wittenberg, the wagon was surrounded by this group of horsemen, and Luther was kidnapped.

And with that kidnapping, everyone assumed that Luther had been seized by the emperor to be executed quietly. But the opposite was actually true. Because the kidnappers were in fact employees of the local politician of Wittenberg, a man called Frederick the Wise.

And Frederick the Wise, he had devised this plan to keep Luther safely hidden in a castle, Wartburg Castle. Wartburg Castle was to be Luther's secret home for the next ten months.

Luther, he grew a beard, he grew his hair, and then he dressed like a knight and he named himself Sir George. But more than that, Wartburg Castle became the setting for some of Luther's most extraordinary achievements.

Because in less than eleven weeks, Luther managed to translate the Greek New Testament into German. And with its publication in 1522, Luther realised his dream that his own people, his own people would taste the clear, pure word of God and hold on to it.

[41 : 22] And with the Bible now in the hands of the man in the street, you could say, Luther came out of hiding and returned to Wittenberg. And instead of using force to reform, Luther sought to persuade people of the truth with the simple yet clear preaching of Scripture.

Because Luther believed that in order for Roman Catholicism to collapse, the word of God alone must convince people. Luther was convinced that the word of God must drive and dictate both thought and practice.

And as a result, Luther said that he didn't have a programme. He didn't have a programme for reformation. He didn't have a strategy for reformation. He didn't even have a ten-year plan for reformation.

Luther just wanted the word of God to be unleashed and to let the Holy Spirit do all the rest. And you know, there's so much more that could be said about Martin Luther, but time does not allow.

Because Luther, he ended up in many famous debates. He debated with Erasmus over the freedom of the will in 1524. He finally got married in 1525 to an ex-nun called Katharina von Bora and they had five children together.

[42 : 38] And you know, of course, what we're doing this evening, it's just a taster. A taster of the man, Martin Luther. If you want to read more about him, I suggest you read the classic Roland Bainton's biography of Martin Luther's life.

It's a good read. But you know, just to conclude, on the 18th of February 1546, Luther died at the age of 63.

Luther had returned home to Isilben to try and settle a family dispute. And not long after arriving home, he had to take to his bed.

And it said that on his deathbed, he was repeating the words of John 3, 16, and that he was praying the words of Psalm 31, verse 3, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

And it said that after his death, Luther was buried beneath his pulpit in Wittenberg to await the resurrection. A resurrection at which he believed we would all recognise one another.

[43 : 49] And so there's Martin Luther, an influential man used by the hands of God for the furtherance of God's kingdom. And God willing, next time we'll consider William Tyndale and how he was used in the Reformation.

May the Lord bless and history to us. We'll pray together. Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we give thanks to Thee this evening that Thou art the God of history, and that how often we are reminded that history is His story.

It is the story of God's work, where Thou art the one who is the author, and that we all are seeing that story unfolding, that we see the story of redemption unfolding throughout the Bible, where Jesus is the main character, and that He has provided redemption for His people.

But we thank Thee, Lord, that we are able to look at the history of Thy church, and consider the people and the places that Thou didst use for Thine own glory. And help us, Lord, we pray, not to get bogged down in history, but to see the God of history, the one who is working all things together for good.

And Lord, we thank Thee, and we praise Thee, that Thou are the one who is sovereign, whose providence rules and overrules in all things, and that we might take these things to ourselves, and see that Thine hand is in everything, that Thou are the God who is building His church, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

[45 : 23] O Lord, bind us together then, we pray. Help us to keep looking to Jesus, knowing Him and loving Him as the author and the finisher of our faith. Go before us then, we pray, and do us good, for Jesus' sake.

Amen. We'll conclude by singing the words of Psalm 130. Psalm 130, page 421.

This was a favourite of Luther's Psalms. And he loved it because of, he called it a Pauline Psalm, because it taught justification by faith alone.

And that's especially seen in verses 3 and 4. Lord, who shall stand, if thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquity? But yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou mayest be.

So we're singing Psalm 130, the whole Psalm, to God's praise. Lord, flow my death, to thee I guide my blood, so do aloud ■■■■ ■■■■ ■■ ■■ te for increase ■■■■ to whole God's want is all good.

[46 : 59] And let's hear what■■■ information is yet given.

If thou, O Lord, should smart iniquity, But yet with thee forgiveness is that fear thou mayest be.

I wait for God, my soul doth wait, My hope is in His word, more than they thought, For morning watch, my soul doth wait for the Lord.

I say more than they thought to watch, The morning light to see.

Let Israel open the Lord, For with Him mercies be.

[48 : 57] Adventist redemption is never found with Him, And from all His iniquities Israel shall redeem.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.