

Sent: 11/1/2017 7:25:49 PM Eastern Standard Time
Subject: Last Nite's MOB study on the Reformation!

Last nite we, as MOBsters, reflected on--and celebrated--the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, a reminder (some would say) of one of the most significant events in Western history! We even sang the great hymn Martin Luther himself wrote: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"--which is based on Psalm 46! Dr. Nigel Azer was our special guest speaker, and we also spent some time talking about it in our small groups.

But what is it exactly about the Reformation that's so important--and that moves us so?

Looking back, I'm overwhelmed with the "times and timing" of it all! Coming as it did with the advent of the printing press, which allowed the very Word of God and the preaching of the gospel to be spread to the world, and in the language of the common man! And coming, as it did, at the time of the rise of Suleiman the Magnificent (so called) and the Ottoman Turks, as they seized Vienna in their surge to conquer all of western Europe, in the name of Islam--circumstances requiring the unity of Lutherans and Catholics, and all the people of the Holy Roman Empire, under King Charles V, to confront and "rescue" them from this great enemy! All of which spared the life of Luther at a critical moment and gave him the time to complete his writings, and fulfill his mission--impacting Germany and "rescuing" the gospel--and Christianity!

In all this and more we can look back and see the "providence" and "sovereignty" of our Almighty God! Working out His plan for the ages, in the "fullness of time," through the Reformation--and, in particular, the way He preserved His inspired Word and oversaw its recovery and translation, and propagation of the "good news" of the Gospel--which, the Bible says, is the "power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek!" (Romans 1:16) And raised up reformers!

So, who were the "reformers"? And what drove them? I hope you all had chance, as I had, to get a copy of the pamphlet made available at church this past Sunday which showed pictures and a brief write-up of eight of them. Beginning with John Wycliffe (1320-1384), a priest in England who began reading the Bible in Latin and saw how unbiblical Catholic doctrine had become! He believed the most effective way to oppose error was with the Scripture, so he began the first-ever English translation of the Bible, the truths of which spread across Europe, eventually resulting in what we call the Protestant Reformation! Then John Huss, who converted to Christ after reading what Wycliffe wrote, began preaching the Gospel too, and got burned at the stake for doing it!

But the Reformation officially began one hundred years later, on October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther famously nailed the 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg, as a "protest" against the Pope and the selling of indulgences! Then there was William Tyndale who, after sitting under Luther's preaching and studying his newly completed German Bible, translated it into English and smuggled copies into England, leading to his arrest and hanging, as a martyr! Lady Jane Grey is listed! She was a distant relative to Henry VIII--and a cousin of the notorious "Bloody Mary"! Buy she became a believer, after reading the Bible, and even served as queen of England

(for but nine days, as a teenager) --but made the "mistake" of challenging her cousin's beliefs and soon was beheaded, leaving her mark in history! Then there was Menno Simmons, from the Netherlands, who was converted to Christ, renounced his ordination as a priest--and, because of his commitment to Scripture, practiced "believer's baptism, regenerate church membership, and church-discipline," and is referred to as the "first evangelic"! His followers were called "Anabaptists" and many were martyred, while others fled to America, becoming "Mennonites" (ancestors of mine, actually!), known for their pacifism and piety!

Well, we can't forget John Calvin and John Knox! Calvin is considered the most influential pastor in church history and, among other things, wrote *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, perhaps the most significant book ever published! He also marked a change in the purpose of corporate worship--Christians would no longer gather for sacraments but instead for the preaching of the Word! He trained many men to return to their own countries as "gospel preachers"--some of whom became martyrs! And, lastly, John Knox, who is known as the "father of the Scottish Reformation," which became modern Presbyterianism! He sat under the preaching of Calvin and had a great passion to spark revival in Scotland! His motto was: "Give me Scotland, or I die!"

All the information above is taken from the pamphlet cited--which, interestingly, ends with the word "tetelestai"! Greek for the last words Jesus spoke on the cross, translated as, "It is finished!" (referred to by Jesse in his October 22nd sermon, taken from John 19:30). But I doubt Jesse would agree that the Reformation itself is "finished"! But more on that to come!

So, what was it about the reformers that they held so much in common? It was their zeal and passion for reading and studying the Scripture! And for translating it into a language that could be read and understood by the common man! And their realization that the Bible was (and is), in fact, the very Word of God and thus the basis for all Christian doctrine and practice! It was, after all, the Bible that Luther discovered as the "liberating message" of the grace of God and the "glorious truth" that "righteousness comes from God"--that God justifies guilty, condemned sinners (as he saw himself!) by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone! To the glory of God alone! And thus, the five "solas" of the Reformation!

This is a good time to go to our memory verse for last nite: "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast!" (Ephesians 2:8-9)

And so, it was the conviction of the reformers that the Bible alone is the basis for doctrine and practice! Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"! And II Timothy 3:16-17 (in the King James translation) says: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine (teaching the faith!), for reproof (identifying errors in our thinking!), correction (re-setting the direction of our ways!), and for instruction in righteousness (training us in godly living); that the man of God may be perfect (mature!) thoroughly furnished unto all good works!" The Phillips version puts it this way: "The Scriptures are the comprehensive equipment for the man of God, and fit him full for all branches of his life!"

And so, is the Reformation over? Is it time to "re-unite" with all those who call themselves Christians--and maybe those of other beliefs as well? For the sake of unity! Many would say "yes"! After all it was Jesus Himself who prayed to His Father, just prior to heading to the cross, that all His followers would be "one... so the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You love Me." (John 17:23) But, in the same prayer, He asked that Father would "sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth!" (17:17) And He also warned, in Matthew 24:11 and elsewhere, that after He left, "many false prophets would arise and mislead many"! Peter warned that "false teachers among you would secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them..." (II Peter 2:1). And the apostle Paul said that we're to "be on guard...for he knew that after his departure ravaging wolves would come in among you, not sparing the flock..." (Acts 26:28)

And, in his great book, called "Rescuing the Gospel--The Story and Significance of the Reformation, Erwin Lutzer writes that just as Martin Luther had to rescue the gospel in his day, so must we! In fact, he suggests the task is even more difficult and challenging today--not only from those who would add to the gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, etc. but from a host of other "movements," including the so-called TV evangelists teaching a "health and wealth" theology, liberal theologians who deny the supernatural character of the Christians faith, as well as "cults" who come to our doorsteps! Nigel last nite alluded to these other influences, including the growing call to satisfy everybody's needs by getting together through "ecumenism"!

Lutzer's bottom line is that the Reformation is indeed not over! The Gospel "must be defended--and sometimes must be rescued! Mark Parson, co-pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel and editor of Table-Talk magazine, writes that Lutzer's book "powerfully demonstrates why the story of the Reformation is, in fact, our story...and that it sounds the much-needed clarion call to a generation that is quickly turning away from the one and only gospel"! Luther and Lutzer would probably agree!

Jude (in Jude 3-4) says "he felt it necessary to write to you to contend for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints!"

Well, there's much more about the Reformation that could, and should, be said! And we'll be re-visiting many of these issues as we continue our study in the book of Romans!

So, on to next week and our study of Romans 3:1-20!

May God bless your week!

Lowell