

## **“Released” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Reformation Day October 27, 2024**

- I. **John 8:31-32** – <sup>31</sup>So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him, “If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, <sup>32</sup>and you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free.”
- II. **I recently went back home to Colorado for a week.**
  - a. I visited family all over the state but ended the trip by going to my home in Steamboat Springs.
  - b. Taking a walk around my old neighborhood, a man was outside my house I sold before we went to the seminary... and he was the new owner, and oddly a member of my home congregation, Concordia Lutheran!
    - i. He asked me to tour around the inside of his home to see some of the updates, and I was surprised to see their furniture in the same places we had it set up... but it was also strange to think that my journey to the ministry began in that place.
  - c. I’ve told this story before, but when we had a pastoral vacancy at Concordia, the Elders asked me to serve with them... and I was shocked!
    - i. Not because I was a bad guy, but I had no idea what a Lutheran was, or anything about Martin Luther... and now I was supposed to be an Elder?
    - ii. So, I went to the church library and found a VCR tape of the 1950’s black and white film, *Martin Luther*, which was nominated for a couple of Academy Awards by the way.
    - iii. There I sat – in the house I sold to go to the seminary – watching a movie about Martin Luther and thinking I could be an “official” Elder in the Lutheran Church if I just knew his story.
  - d. Truth be told – I had a lot to learn... not about Martin Luther but about God and His Word.
- III. **What is Reformation Day, and why do we celebrate it?**
  - a. Yes, many will say it is about Martin Luther and how he started the Reformation, but the heart of the Reformation is the truth found in God’s Word.
  - b. Somewhere along the line, the Roman Catholic Church had a chokehold on all things related to the Bible and how to understand or interpret it... especially for the common person.
  - c. So, along comes a young man named Martin Luther, who joined the monastery against his father’s wishes in order to become an Augustinian monk.
    - i. Much of the problem for Luther was the Medieval understanding of forgiveness... because a person went to the priest, felt sorrow for their sins, confessed them, and the priest forgave them...

- ii. But it didn't stop there as it does for us, because the person *then* had to satisfy a number of other steps of penance to pay a sort of worldly penalty for sins.
  - 1. If a person didn't do enough penance for these sins in their lifetime, then the Roman Catholic Church falsely taught that you go to Purgatory, or a place to burn off any remaining sins... which would finally allow you to go to heaven.
- iii. Luther rose to the level of "super monk" (I made that up), and tried to confess every sin, pay penance in every way, and do all the requirements the Roman Catholic Church placed upon the believer... and he felt less... and less... and less assured of his salvation.
- d. Finally, as Luther studied and taught from Romans, he saw the answer: God was not actively punishing sinners in His righteousness...but instead, God was giving sinners righteousness by faith.
  - i. All of Luther's attempts to be righteous were futile – because no one can be righteous.
- e. From this point forward, Luther could not stay silent about the truth... because it released him from a life of struggle and pain... that included no assurance of his salvation!
- f. The Reformation began as Luther promoted the truth... because the truth had released him.

IV. **Jesus tells us the truth will set you free in our Gospel lesson today.**

- a. Jesus is standing firm against the Pharisees as He teaches in the temple court... and they keep asking Him who He claims to be, and they wonder why they should believe Him... or, what makes His words true?
- b. Jesus keeps going back to His Father who sent Him, and that they do not know the Father... or Jesus.
  - i. Think about that for a minute. Jesus is saying to Pharisees that they don't know God.
  - ii. These Pharisees, who spent most of their time studying God's Word, trying to do everything they could to please Him!
  - iii. But they were so caught up in the rules and being right, that they became slaves to sin and pride.
  - iv. So Jesus tells them that what He says is true, that the Word of God He speaks to them is truth... and this truth will release them from the bondage of sin.
- c. In the very same way, we hear the true Word of God... The living and active Word of God that transforms us into new people.
- d. The Reformation brought the focus back to the Word of God rather than on a false understanding of what God demands.
- e. The Reformation still matters today because it points to the main things – Jesus Christ and His Word.
  - i. We don't need to seek out truth outside of God's Word...

- ii. We don't need to watch videos on why the Word isn't true.
    - iii. We don't need to read books by people who don't believe God's Word or the truth.
  - f. Inevitably, I run into people who are like the Pharisees in our reading today and claim that the Word of God is not true...
    - i. I always want to tell people that have all these questions about the Bible to just read it and know it cover to cover first, and then tell me what you think – but no, they doubt God's Word without even really knowing what it says...
    - ii. Sinful people will figure out every way they can to call God's Word written by men and not reliable nor truly inspired by the Holy Spirit.
    - iii. Sinful people say that God's Word is full of errors and contradictions
    - iv. Why? Because the truth can be changed to suit their desires...the truth is no longer God's but their own
  - g. We have the true Word of God and Jesus Christ... and that is why we celebrate the Reformation!
  - h. Jesus tells us, if you remain in My Word you are My followers, and then you will know the truth that will set you free...
    - i. This is a promise for all of us, and it means that Christ's Word can set us free from slavery to other voices so that we can listen to Him.
    - ii. Listen to Jesus, and be free because you believe in Him.
- V. **The Reformation is about the true Word of God** – the Good News of God's salvation through Christ alone!
  - a. How many different times and ways can I tell you that Jesus died... went to the cross... for all of our sin and pride? But it's still just as powerful as the very first time you heard it... Jesus died to forgive you...
  - b. When we don't listen to Him or study His Word, He gently calls us back home and tells us to be free
  - c. When we look at the Bible as a bunch of stories that *might contain* some of God's truth... Jesus lovingly calls us to the truth which is found in the Bible – the promise of salvation through Him
  - d. We humans get things wrong so easily, but Jesus calls us back every day to repent, to align our thoughts with Him.
  - e. Jesus, our Savior, used the Reformation to point us to His saving grace – and that's why we celebrate it.
- VI. **In a world of unlimited information at our fingertips, turn to the Word.**
  - a. So many people learn about the Word from other sources, or watch shows about it, but don't actually read it and inwardly digest it.
  - b. Read the Word – get into the Bible and spend time in the Truth.
    - i. No other place will change you more.... will transform you as a follower of Christ... or will set you free from the powerful forces against you.
    - ii. The truth is found there – the truth... that sets you free... Amen