

Correcting Misconceptions
Mark 12:35-37

Under the Gregorian calendar, October 31, 1517 was a Wednesday. But, in 1517, October 31st was a Saturday, because in 1517 they were still using the old Julian calendar. Either way, if someone born on October 31, 1517, who would be 504 years old today, had saved 50¢ every day, starting on their fifth birthday, they would now have \$91,128.00 (not accounting for inflation.)

October 31, 1517, however, deserves far better mention than for mere trivia. On October 31, 1517 a German monk named Martin Luther, who was a professor of moral theology at the University of Wittenberg, invited the local clergy to an academic debate. The Roman Catholic Church was the official church of the Holy Roman Empire in power at the time. Maximilian the First was the Holy Roman Emperor and Leo X was pope. There were practices conducted by the Roman Catholic Church that Luther believed should be critiqued and examined. He wrote out a list of 95 propositions he felt deserved to be debated and he nailed that list to the door of Castle Church. The title of that invitation was “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences.”

At the time that Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church, Pope Leo had authorized the sale of indulgences as a means of raising funds for the construction of St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. An indulgence was a means by purchase of which a person could buy a ceased love one out of purgatory and into heaven. It was a means of salvation for dead sinners, according to the church at the time. It was to the practice, the purpose, and the basis of indulgences that Luther objected.

While there is a great deal that can be said, and has been said, about Luther’s 95 theses and the blatant heresy they challenge, I want to focus this morning on just three major themes Luther addresses in his disputation:

1. Salvation is through faith alone.
2. The Bible alone is the only authority for faith and practice.
3. Every believer, in and through Christ, has equal access to God needing no other mediator than Jesus Christ alone.

While each of these ideas deserves abundant time for exploration, understanding, and adoption I want to tie the events which we memorialize on Reformation Sunday with the word fo God, and specifically with the teaching of Jesus. We have seen that after Jesus returned to Jerusalem from Galilee for the final time; after He came precisely at Passover to fulfill the will of God and offer Himself to God on the cross as the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world; after He willingly, decisively, intentionally, faithfully returns to the city where they will condemn Him to death, He is unwittingly examined the local authorities who are looking for a reason to put Him to death.

They come to find fault with Jesus. They come to trap Him in His words. They come to displace their rejection of Him by tricking Him into some error that would justify condemnation. Yet, in the providence of God, who always keeps His word, they are fulfilling the requirement to scrutinize the Passover lamb and be certain it is perfect and without blemish. They are doing with

God's sacrificial Lamb what God commands of their lambs.

They have examined Jesus with four questions. We have considered each of these questions over the last few weeks.

1. By what authority are you doing these things?
2. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?
3. Whose wife will she be?
4. Which commandment is the most important of all?

Once Jesus passes these tests we find Him again in the temple, and this time He is teaching and asking questions. The examined becomes the examiner. And if Jesus through their examination proved worthy, they through His examination will prove the opposite. These four teachings of Jesus will reveal the sin and guilt of humanity and the real need we have for a Passover Lamb to be sacrificed in our place on our behalf.

While in or near the temple Jesus instructs His disciples and the gathered crowd. He corrects four common misconceptions:

1. In verses 35-37 he challenges and corrects the misconception that human traditions have greater authority among the people of God than the revealed word of God.
2. In verse 38-40 he challenges and corrects the misconception that greater responsibility among the people of God warrants greater pretense.
3. In verses 41-44 he challenges and corrects the misconception that greater wealth is the evidence of greater grace.
4. And as He is leaving the temple with His disciples in Mark 13:1-2, he challenges and corrects the misconception that greater human effort results in greater longevity in the kingdom of God.

The intent of these four teaching sessions in the temple, as it is in all Jesus' teaching, is that those who hear His teaching will love His word and put it into practice. Remember the parable of the wise and foolish man in Matthew 7? Jesus says of them,

Matthew 7:24 (ESV) *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*

Matthew 7:26 (ESV) *And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.*

Jesus' expectation is that wise people will realize the value of His words and put them into practice. So, let's take a few minutes this morning and tie together something Luther challenged the church of His day to consider and a challenge Jesus issued to the religious authorities of His day, fifteen centuries earlier.

Mark 12:35-37 (ESV) ³⁵ *And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, “How can*

the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? ³⁶ David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ ³⁷ David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?” And the great throng heard him gladly.

The scribes are the teachers of the Law. They are the religious professionals, the seminary instructors, the Bible interpreters of their day. Jesus begins His teaching by challenging a misconception in their teaching, specifically about the Messiah as the Son of David.

What Jesus does is very simple. Acknowledging the vast, convoluted teaching that has accumulated since the time of King David and the writing of the Psalms, Jesus simply takes His audience back to the biblical text. The verse Jesus cites in His question is Psalm 110:1, a Psalm written by David. Jesus takes them back to this verse and asks them to recognize the logic of what David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and thus penning the very word of God, wrote. If David called the subject of this verse, “my Lord,” then how can that person be his son, because even a great king would still be a son and lesser than his father.

Jesus sets the example Luther later follows:

Jesus and Luther call the people of their day to the Bible as God’s inspired, revealed word.

Jesus and Luther declare the people of their day capable of understanding the word of God on their own.

Jesus and Luther call the people of their day to put their faith in the revealed promises of God rather than the misconceptions of men.

The misconception here is that Messiah will be like great old King David. The truth is that Messiah will be more than David. Messiah will not restore David’s kingdom, making David great again, Messiah will establish a kingdom greater than David because He is greater than David.

The LORD God calls this one in the Psalm, the one that David calls “my Lord,” God calls Him to join Him in His throne, to sit at His right hand. The truth revealed here is that Messiah is greater than David because Messiah is Himself God. No one sits on the throne of God who isn’t God. Satan tried and was thrown to earth and will one day be cast into the fires of eternal hell.

God said,

Isaiah 42:8 (ESV) ⁸ I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

Isaiah 45:5-6 (ESV) ⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, ⁶ that people may know, from

the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.

The kingdom to come is not a restored kingdom of David with whom God shares the glory of His throne. It is the eternal kingdom not of the son of the man, David, but of the Son of the Almighty God!

The word of God will always lead us to the truth, to the Son of God, the power of God, the love of God, the holiness of God, the sovereignty of God, and the glory of God. Those who reject the Bible as God's authoritative word, or attempt to replace God's word with their own words, their own traditions and teachings lead only to themselves. If you truly want to know the truth about God, return to His word.

That is a primary principle of the Protestant Reformation: Sola scriptura. God's word alone. God's word reveals that salvation from sin and guilt is not a matter of human effort, but is ours according to God through faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone for the glory of God alone.

So, on this Reformation Sunday, 504 years after the Wednesday when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg and set off a series of events that would one day be called the Reformation, let us take action on the word of God.

1. Take up the word of God for yourselves. "Study to show yourselves approved."
2. Trust no one for your salvation save Christ alone.
 - a. Not saved because you believed. You believed because God through Christ saved you.
 - b. Not saved because you prayed a prayer. Saved because God on account of Christ's death on the cross forgave your sins.
 - c. Not saved through any action of your own. Trust only Christ!
3. Join a church, a real church.
 - a. Great distress is coming.
 - b. Jesus saves His people into community, into His fully integrated Body.
 - i. You cannot exist and/thrive on your own, even if you are watching online.
 - ii. You cannot use the old "I love Jesus but I hate the church" excuse,
 - (1) Because Jesus loves the church and gave Himself up for her.
 - (2) Because Jesus sanctifies and cleanses the church
 - (3) Because Jesus presents the church to Himself without spot or blemish
 - (4) Because one day Jesus will gather the church to Himself and it is inconceivable he would invite you to spend eternity with a bunch of folks you hate. That would be hell!
 - c. Come find your place in the Body of Christ where you will learn the word of God, love and be loved, and discover what it means to live for and serve Jesus.