Three Men of Courage and Conviction

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"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. "

Hebrews 2:1

Martin Luther

Throughout history God has been pleased to use men and women to preserve and communicate His Word. One such man was Martin Luther. Luther was training to be a lawyer when he found himself one day in the midst of a lightening storm. Terrified he was going to die Luther cried out,

"St. Anne, help me! I will become a monk. "

The storm passed and Luther survived the moment. But he remembered his vow and forsook law to enter the Augustinian monastery. In the years ahead Luther would witness many abuses within the Catholic church which disturbed his soul to the point that he took pen in hand and challenged others to a debate on such issues as the true meaning of repentance, the place of penance, indulgences, purgatory and papal authority.
Little did he know that when he nailed his document containing 95 Thesis for discussion on the church door of Wittenburg, October 31, 1517 he was about to strike a spark that would set the world on fire. But there was no turning back.

Luther would cry out forever against religious charlatans such as Friar John Tetzel who was selling indulgences on behalf of the pope. Changing his message from town to town according to the wealth of the citizens Tetzel promised people they could do a very good deed by contributing the building of what would become St. Peter's basilica in Rome. Moreover, they could help to get people out of purgatory for "When ever a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs!"

Luther was outraged. If the pope had so much authority over purgatory, said Luther, why doesn't he just open the door and let everyone out? Moreover, man was not to do penance as the Latin vulgate had translated the word's of Christ, but rather, as Erasmus' Greek New Testament had shown, Jesus called for a change of heart and mind.

Luther did not appreciate the concept of cheap grace in part because he had once struggled long and hard to understand the nature of God's redeeming mercy. Luther had performed many acts of penance until the Holy Spirit revealed to him the true nature of conversion.
As a young monk who had taken seriously his vows and the matter of salvation Luther had struggled with how to please God and find favor in His sight. Luther thought that he had to earn or deserve the merit's of Christ. But how? He would work very hard to please the Father. With that goal in mind Luther began the quest to secure his soul's salvation by good deeds and mortification of the flesh.

Luther would flagellate himself until his skin was raw.

He would sleep on the floor in his cell with out a blanket until he was chilled to the bone.

He would confess every known sin.

The earliest woodcuts of Luther show his face emaciated, his cheeks hollow, his eyes sunken. He was a scrupulous monk. "If ever a monk could have gotten to heaven by his monkery, it was I" Luther was later to recall. And yet for all of this and more, Luther found no peace with God. Luther was always asking himself,

"Am I cold enough?"

"Am I hungry enough?"

"Have I confessed enough?"

"How much is enough to please God?"
He did not know and would have to learn more. "I did not learn my theology all at once, " he said, "I had to follow where my temptations led me. It is not by reading or writing or speculating that one becomes a theologian. It is rather living, dying and being damned that makes one a theologian. "

In time Luther would become a theologian as he poured over the Scriptures while engaging in personal and pastoral studies. One day he came to Psalm 22: 1 and read the words,

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Luther knew that these were the words which Jesus cried from the Cross. Luther wondered how the Father could forsake His Son and how the Son could feel what he himself had felt, abandoned and forsaken by God. Luther then came to Romans 1 where S1. Paul quotes the words of the ancient prophet Habakkuk in verse 17: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

Suddenly, the Holy Spirit illuminated the heart of Luther concerning "the righteousness of God. " The "righteousness of God" was not the basis upon which God condemned the world and punishes the unrighteous, as Luther has always understood that verse. The "righteousness of God" was the basis on which God justified those who lived by faith, because of Christ, apart from good works and self earned merit! "I felt as if the gates of paradise had opened and I had entered
in. " wrote Luther "It was as if I had gone from the darkest midnight into the midday sun. I felt as if I had been born again."

The Reformation was born out of Luther's insight into the graciousness of God. He believed that everyone should be able to take the Word of God into their own hands and read it with their own eyes. The man at his plough, the woman at her well, as well as the scholars in the university should have access to the Bible.

With that in mind Luther offered to the German people a translation of the Bible in their own language. Luther had great respect for the writings of the Church council's but he believed the Bible was God's word and should be the final authority of life and practice. "The Bible is God's word clad in human words" he taught. "Just as Christ, the eternal word is incarnate in the garments of His humanity. Christ lies in the crib of the Scriptures, wrapped in swaddling clothes."

Alongside of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone a second principle of the Reformation takes its place, the ultimate authority of the Bible alone.

Unfortunately the Catholic Church did not agree with these foundational principles. On 18 April 1521 Luther was brought before the Emperor Charles V to renounce his teachings. This was his reply.
"Since your majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason-I do not accept the authority of popes and councils for the have contradicted each other--my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right not safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen. "

From this time on there was no hope that the division in the church would be healed. Soon the cry for Reformation was being heard all over Europe. In Switzerland a parallel movement was underway led by Ulrich Zwingli (b. 1484).

**Ulrich Zwingli**

Like Luther, Zwingli had been influenced by the writings of Erasmus, a Roman Catholic priest who wanted to purify the church from within. He had committed to memory large portions of the *Greek New Testament*. On 1 January 1519, he was appointed to the cathedral at Zurich, having previously opposed the sale of indulgences and other abuses within the Catholic Church. Attempts were made to prohibit his preaching, but the reformation grew at Zurich.

Zwingli had a fear of idolatry. As a result he tried to prune from the people candles and pictures and icons. He wanted to make worship plain and simple. In 1527 even the great organ was dismantled and taken out of the church building.
Another concern for Zwingli involved the Lord’s Supper. The Catholic Church taught the doctrine of transubstantiation. Luther taught the doctrine of Consubstantiation. Zwingli rejected both concepts believing the Lord’s Supper was a memorial for Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

In 1529, Zwingli met Luther and Melanchthon in the city of Marburg for the first and only time to try to resolve differences that had arisen concerning the Lord's Supper. Though Luther spoken against the doctrine of transubstantiation he still believed that in a real way Christ was bodily present. Zwingli believed that Christ was present in spirit. The Lord's supper was a memorial feast to the great work of redemption. "Salvation was by Christ alone through faith alone and not through Christ and bread" he said. Christ is in heaven at God's right hand not on the various altars when the Supper is enjoyed.

When the debate grew heated Luther took a piece of chalk and wrote on the table the Latin word "est". "Jesus said, 'This is my body, ', thundered Luther. On that note the men went their separate ways. Two years later because of the controversy between the Protestant and Catholic cantons in Switzerland a battle was fought at Kappel. On 11 October 1531 In the course of the battle Zwingli lost his life.

John Calvin (1509- 1564)
The Reformation found another champion in the person of John Calvin, a brilliant Frenchman who had been trained as a lawyer. Little is known of Calvin's conversion to the Protestant faith. It must have taken place some time in the 1530's because in 1536, in the city of Basle he published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a succinct and provocative work on systematic theology that thrust him into the forefront of Protestantism as a thinker and spokesman.

The monumental work of 1559 is divided into four parts following the order of the Apostle's Creed.

Book One deals with the Knowledge of God:

- His general revelation in Creation,
- His special revelation in the Bible and
- His providential care

Book Two deals with the Person and Work of Jesus Christ Jesus' atoning death

Book Three explores

- the work of the Holy Spirit in Salvation,
- a life of Prayer,
- the mystery of predestination
- and the hope of the resurrection.

Book Four concerns itself with the Church invisible for it is the company of God's
redeemed of all time the visible, organization, officers, sacraments and responsibility in the world.

While the Ana-Baptist rejected the world for its darkness and evil and sought to withdraw from, while Luther accepted the world as a necessary place of good and evil in which the Christian must live and co-exist, Calvin set out to redeem the world through the special revelation of Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, here are men of courage and conviction who gave us a recovered gospel of grace

translated the Bible for the common people

developed the great doctrines of the Scriptures such as

justification by faith alone

setting forth the priesthood of all believers

and the Lordship of Christ over all life.

Here are three men who though being dead live on today. Truly we are "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, ' [therefore] let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. "
Amen.

- While God selects His instruments individuals can make themselves available to Him.

- Men of God are but men at best and not without glaring faults.

- The church needs heroes of the faith to help guide present behavior, because it pleases God the Father to remember them and in order to provide a foundation for faith. Psalms 44:1 *We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.* Jude 3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.