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“THEY TOOK NAILS”

Five Devotions from the life of Martin Luther
For personal use or group discussions

MARTIN
LUTHER

A hammer and three nails are arranged on a wooden surface. The hammer is positioned vertically, with its head at the top and handle at the bottom. The three nails are laid out horizontally below the hammer's head, with their heads pointing towards the center. The background is a dark, textured wood.

REDISCOVERING THE GOSPEL TRUTH

“For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!

- MARTIN LUTHER

INTRODUCTION “THEY TOOK NAILS”

**‘The Law discovers the disease,
The Gospel gives the remedy’** – Martin Luther

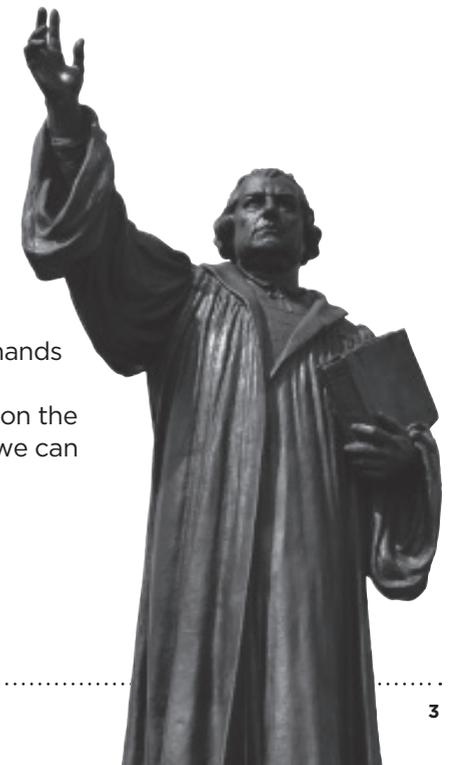
Above all else Martin Luther was a preacher. He risked life and reputation so that people would hear the gospel. This short study guide uses important events throughout the life of Martin Luther to help explain the gospel message.

Ordinary people were enabled to **read** the Bible when Luther translated it from the original Greek and Hebrew into German, and his friend William Tyndale translated it into English. Ordinary people were enabled to **understand** the Bible through Luther’s recovery of the Bible’s central theme of the Law and the Gospel, which Tyndale brought to England and Patrick Hamilton brought to Scotland.

The Law (the Ten Commandments, developed further in the Sermon on the Mount) confronts us with the reality that everyone has sinned - outwardly by our words and deeds, and inwardly by thoughts and motives. It demands absolute perfection to be right with God.

The Gospel comforts us with the good news that only Jesus has fulfilled the demands of the Law, and by faith, His perfection is ‘imputed’ to all who trust in Him. He died on the cross and rose again on the third day so we can have our sins forgiven.

How do we receive this?
By faith alone, in Christ alone.





STUDY 1 I AM LOST

Martin Luther lived in the sixteenth century, 500 years ago.

He was intelligent and his father tried to help him put his ability to use. He progressed through education to become a student of law. However circumstances changed and he decided to become a monk, eventually a priest, then a college professor, and finally the leader of attempted reform in the Roman church. He ended up as one of the best known of all the Reformers. His life took him in many unexpected directions – sometimes suddenly; sometimes change was slow and seamless.

In spite of his outward success, Martin Luther experienced great inner strife. How could he, a sinner, know his sins forgiven? He finally found peace with God and forgiveness of sin, but only after many twists and turns! In this first study we will think about some of the changes in Martin Luther's life, and how he eventually found the answer to his greatest dilemma.

JULY 1505

Absolutely terrified, Martin Luther came to an abrupt halt, rooted to the spot in fear. A lightning bolt had earthed right beside him. Shaking with terror, believing his life was over, the young law student cried out to the patron saint of miners, "Saint Anne, help me and I will become a monk."

This incident was the prelude to one of the most amazing spiritual pilgrimages the world has witnessed. A few weeks after the thunderstorm, Martin Luther presented himself at the doors of an Augustinian Monastery seeking admittance – intent on fulfilling his vow. He also knew he was a man with a real problem – sin, but he did not know what to do about it.

So this young monk sought peace with God by driving his body and soul to the limits. Bruce Shelley tells us, "Luther pushed his body to health cracking rigour of austerity. He sometimes fasted for three days and slept without a blanket in freezing winter. He was driven by a profound sense of his own sinfulness and of God's unutterable majesty."¹

CONFESSING HIS SINS

Luther tried to find peace with God through the confessional. He spent hours desperately trying to remember anything he had done that was even remotely sinful and seeking absolution from it. But through this kind of confession he found no peace with God.

As yet Luther did not understand that "...there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5)

BECOMING A PRIEST

Luther's diligence and earnestness led to his ordination into the priesthood in April 1507. His religious advancement brought more conviction of sin. In May 1507 when celebrating his first mass he was overwhelmed with his unworthiness and keenly felt his sinfulness. He had arrived at the pinnacle of religion but he had not found peace with God. Over and over again instead of reconciliation to God, Luther felt himself to be further separated from God than before!

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

At this point Martin Luther was 'offered' the role of professor of theology at the new university in Wittenberg. This came with the all the authority of a command so Luther obeyed. With all his normal diligence he threw himself into this new role. As a professor his efforts led him in a different direction – to the Bible. To teach the Bible he needed to study the Bible. Here he was confronted with the great reality that, "**the just shall live by faith.**"² This realisation led Martin to experience peace with God and forgiveness of sin because of the sacrifice made by our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

ONLY FOUND WHEN YOU KNOW YOU ARE LOST!

Martin Luther undoubtedly knew he was spiritually lost. Every turn he made, every change that occurred, every advancement he received seemed to highlight his sin and lost state, and served to make him feel further away than ever from finding peace with God.

In the thunder storm Luther was confronted with death – his own death. Our life is like a vapour that appears for a very short time, quickly disappearing. Luther was forcefully presented with the realities of life, death and eternity. A brush with death or a near miss can really change your view of life. When confronted in such a way we realise our fragility and any feeling of invincibility is gone! You really are not here forever!

Luther (wrongly) believed he needed to do something so he turned to the church for help. He found out much about the Triune God but this was obscured with tradition, ritual and 'works righteousness.' Martin Luther made the easiest and greatest mistake in religion – we can do it ourselves – we can save ourselves from our sins. He tried religion, ritual and painful observance. All these, far from leading him to Jesus, kept him from Jesus and the focus on himself and what he could do.

What have you tried to do to find peace with God? Is it all about you or is it all about Jesus? Is it all about what you can do or is all about what Jesus has already done?

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”

Jeremiah 29:13

“For the Son of man [Jesus Christ] is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Luke 19:10

Amazingly as a priest the Bible had not been part of Luther's life. But at Wittenberg for Luther to teach scriptures he had to diligently search the Scriptures. It was in this searching that he found Jesus Christ. Now the glorious light of the gospel shone into his life. Luther said he 'beat upon Paul.' He came again and again to the Bible wanting to know what it said, wanting to know what it meant, and wanting to know its implications for him.

Have you ever done this with the Bible? Have you ever spent time consistently coming to the Bible over and over again seeking for peace with God, seeking for Jesus?

When we look back over the life of Martin Luther we can see the amazing path he was led along. Just like a lost sheep he had not been seeking the shepherd, Jesus, but the shepherd had all along been seeking this lost sheep. The events in life, the paths he was directed to take, the message of the gospel that he was confronted with - these were all evidence of the shepherd seeking for His lost sheep! Has the shepherd been seeking for you? Have all the events of your life been drawing you to Jesus? How will you respond?

STUDY 1 – I AM LOST

LUTHER 'TABLETALK': POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1) The young Martin Luther had a close call with death. This incident changed his view of life. Have you ever been confronted with your own mortality – in a close call, or in the death of a loved one? How did this affect your thinking?

2) Pushing himself to the limit by performing good works and penance, Martin Luther tried to find peace with God. How have you tried or are you trying, to find peace with God? Is it through your own actions or through faith in Jesus?

3) A change of career and circumstances brought Martin Luther into contact with the Bible. He now searched and studied the Scriptures. Do you take the Bible seriously? In what ways could you learn more about the Bible?



STUDY 2

THEY TOOK NAILS

An 'indulgence' is the paying of money in the hope that sins will be forgiven. Indulgence selling was big business as it preyed on people's hopes and fears. However Martin Luther was a pastor, caring for and loving real people. The people he knew, people he lived amongst, people he was with during the highs and lows of life were buying indulgences and Luther was not happy. His reaction was to write the '95 Theses' for which he is famous.

When Luther nailed up this document he not could have imagined the effect it would have. In the drama of these events it is easy to see what was being resisted. But far more important was the message of the Gospel that was being proclaimed: salvation in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. Salvation made possible because Jesus died on the cross and rose again!

MARTIN LUTHER: TOOK NAILS

It was 31st October 1517. Martin Luther's face was filled with determination as he searched for a hammer and nails. Once located, he purposefully strode to the Castle church in Wittenberg where the city notice board was positioned. He pulled out a lengthy document he'd been working on tirelessly and resolutely nailed it to the door of the church. It contained 95 Theses (or issues). In essence these declared that no one can buy God's salvation – a revolutionary departure from the received dogma of the Roman church!

This task completed, Martin went about his usual business – his modest hope was that his Theses would spark a theological debate amongst theologians.

Someone (I'd love to know who!) read the Theses, decided it was worthy of a wider audience, so took the document down and translated it from Latin into German. Copies were printed and circulated. Very quickly Luther's 95 Theses garnered a lot of interest from friend and foe alike!

Luther's biblical point was that everyone, and principally he, was a sinner. Being a sinner meant separation from God. This separation was potentially catastrophic because to die in that state spelled eternal division from God and eternity in hell.

Given the seriousness of this Luther recognised that this separation needed to be bridged and that people could do nothing to fix it – religious observance, good works or money were of no benefit. Luther came to realise through study of the Bible that, "the just shall live by faith." He was illuminated by the realisation that a sinner could have hope. He recognised that hope was based on faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ to forgive their sin, to cover them in His righteousness so that their sin would be blotted out in God's sight.

A ROMAN SOLDIER: TOOK NAILS

Around 2000 years ago, a series of highly irregular trials were convened in the middle of the night. By mid-morning the fate of the defendant, Jesus, was settled - he would face death by crucifixion.

Such was their hatred of Jesus, stirred up by religious leaders of the time, that even this was not enough cruelty to mete out on Jesus Christ. The Gospels record that prior to crucifixion Jesus was whipped, beaten, his beard was pulled from his face; he was spat on, mocked, and a crown of long thorns driven into his head. He was then walked to the place of execution, bearing his cross on his back. Luke records, **"...when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him..."** Luke 23:33

Jesus submitted Himself to a Roman soldier hammering a nail through each of His hands and His feet. The cross was lifted up and Jesus' weight was taken by the nails. His torturously slow and excruciatingly painful execution had begun. However, he was not alone - two other men were dying with him, but for very different reasons.

Amazingly one of the criminals who was on the edge of eternity blasphemously mocked Jesus: **"...one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us."** Luke 23:39. In life and in death this man would reject Jesus!

The response of the other thief is perhaps more astounding, **"...the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss."** Luke 23:40-41. This thief displayed a surprising depth of theological understanding:

- He acknowledged and admitted his own sinfulness.
- He expressed a fear of God – creator and judge.
- He testified that Jesus was different to them and was dying for a different reason.

Very simply this dying thief said to Jesus, “...**Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.**” Luke 23:42. No money was paid, no works were offered. He did what everyone must do if they are to have their sins forgiven - he trusted in Jesus by faith alone. Jesus' response to this poor man's plea was, “**Verily [truly] I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.**” Luke 23:43

When Martin Luther took his nails he wanted to point men, women and children to God's Son who had been nailed to a cross; the One who took the sins of His people upon Himself and died as a substitute in their place; the one who forgives, accepts and saves those who come to Him by faith alone.

Today you have a choice: You can mock Jesus all the way to death and a certain eternity in hell or you can swallow your self-righteous pride, acknowledge your sin before your sinless Creator, and ask Him for forgiveness, covering of sin and acceptance into God's family for an eternity in His glorious presence in heaven.

STUDY 2 - THEY TOOK NAILS

LUTHER 'TABLETALK': POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1) Martin Luther had many disputes, in order to defend people he cared about. He did this not to be right but to defend what was right. How much damage can be caused when we want to “*be right*” rather than defend what “*is right*”? Give an example of a situation in your life where this happened?

- 2) The '95 Theses' went 'viral' much to Martin Luther's surprise. He wasn't trying to create the next big thing or be famous. Rather he was being faithful in and to his circumstances. What kind of attitude or ambition do you serve God with?

- 3) Jesus did lots of good things, He also taught very high standards of morality. But most importantly He came to die on the cross to take the punishment that we deserved for our sins. In what ways is it easier to think about the moral way of living Jesus taught or that He died in the place of sinners – He died because of my sin?

- 4) Many people can accept Jesus teaching on morality, but many find it difficult to consider that they are sinners and that Jesus died for them – where are you, and why?



STUDY 3

THE JUDGEMENT SEAT

Seldom in history was a 'yes' or 'no' answer more important.

A man's life hung in the balance. The reformation hung in the balance. One wrong move and everything Luther had so far done could grind to a halt. When asked to give a yes or no answer to whether he would recant or not, the verbose Martin Luther, not giving his accusers their pleasure, instead gave a short yet extremely famous speech. We can sum up his speech in one word, 'no!' Luther had been writing, preaching, teaching, lecturing and talking for years.

Now, spread out on the table before him were his writings and he was being judged on them. One day we will all stand before a greater judge. In this study we want to think about Luther's judgement day, while remembering that a far greater judgement day lies ahead for all of us.

The summons had finally arrived. Martin Luther was expected to attend the imperial meeting of the Holy Roman Empire, being held in the city of Worms. By this stage he had been excommunicated by the Roman church. The meeting was very serious his life depending on the outcome. Luther the onetime insignificant Augustinian monk had drawn the attention of Pope and Emperor all because of what he had preached, lectured and written. The books would be opened and he would have to give an answer

His 'invitation' had been issued, subsequently withdrawn and then re-issued on 26th March 1521. It was accompanied with a promise of safe passage:

*"Our noble, dear, and esteemed Martin Luther, both we and the diet have decided to ask you to come under safe conduct to answer in regard to your books and teaching. You shall have twenty one days in which to arrive."*³

Before leaving he told his worried friend and fellow reformer, Phillip Melancthon,

*"My dear brother, if I do not come back, if my enemies put me to death, you will go on teaching and standing fast for the truth; if you live, my death will matter not."*⁴

When he was reminded that John Hus had also been given safe passage but ended up dead, burned at the stake, Luther replied,

*"[I] would go to Worms if there was as many devils there as tiles on the roofs; if Hus had been burned, the truth had not been burnt with him."*⁵

At Worms Luther was not engaged in debate but expected to answer two questions. Firstly, were the books on the table before him his writing, and secondly, would he recant. For Luther to recant meant publicly stating that he rejected and denied what he had believed, and was contained in them! Surprisingly he asked for time to think and would answer the next day. Which he famously did speaking first in German, and then in Latin:

*"Since then your sincere Majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed. Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the Pope or in councils alone, since it is well known they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by Scripture I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I can do no otherwise, here I stand, May God help me. Amen."*⁶

Miraculously Luther was allowed to leave the meeting and head home. More adventures lay ahead but he was safe and alive having stood at this Imperial judgement seat.

OUR JUDGEMENT DAY!

We will all one day stand before a greater judgement seat than any imperial council. This may seem like a ridiculous idea, or something so far away in the future we don't need to worry about now. However **"...we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."** Romans 14:10. We will all eventually stand there whether we believe it or not, whether we fear it or not, or even if we couldn't care less about it.

The judgement we will face on that day will be just, fair and impartial. **"...he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."** (Acts 17:31).

We will stand before a righteous judge who will judge with absolute fairness, **"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"** (Genesis 18:25)

For Luther the judgement was subjective, there wasn't even agreement on final authority. Who knew all the facts? How should they be interpreted? But on the day we are judged the books will be opened and a true, accurate and fair judgement will be made. God's judgement when it is pronounced is final. The just and the unjust will be separated from each other eternally.

But what makes someone guilty or innocent? Is it their good works or actions? Is it their adherence to organised religion? Is it their observance of ceremonies and rituals? Is it their bravely standing in the face of great opposition?

The only way you can be declared innocent is to be innocent – perfectly and completely innocent. This is something we have already failed - we have fallen far short of it. So if we have already failed have we no hope? This is the reason Jesus came on His rescue mission. He came to save people from the perilous position they were in, lost and totally unable to rescue themselves. So our only hope must be in another and not ourselves. Jesus was the substitute we needed. He was perfectly sinless, He took our punishment, and give us their perfect righteousness! Only those who have received Christ's Righteousness will be able to stand on that judgement day!

Luther stood fearlessly at the judgement seat of the Holy Roman Empire because he knew there was a greater judgement day for him. Luther's faith was in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. What is your hope for that inevitable day?

STUDY 3 - THE JUDGEMENT SEAT

LUTHER 'TABLETALK': POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1) Martin Luther displayed extreme bravery by attending the Diet of Worms. He had to stand over his Bible teaching and writings. Do we view these events as actions of a 'Protestant superhero,' or, the actions of a sinner saved by grace writing and preaching with a conscience held captive by the word of God?

2) Do you have the strength of conviction that Martin Luther had?

3) What makes someone guilty or innocent when being judged is very important. For Martin Luther at Worms it is hard to know what constituted innocence or guilt. Since we will all stand before God someday what makes someone innocent or guilty?

4) When you stand before God on the day of judgement what will you be placing your hope in?



STUDY 4

TILL DEATH US DO PART

We now come to a very pleasant but profound change in Martin Luther's life – marriage! Today the unmarried minister or pastor is the exception but for centuries the church had required clergy to be unmarried. Luther's marriage was another example of how his life had changed, to be guided by Scripture and not tradition. How Martin and Catherine met reveals the wonders of God's providence. Theirs was a happy and loving home in spite of their personal tragedy of losing children and the unique challenges they faced: a death sentence, people from all over Europe flocking to their home, her husband being blamed for causing a revolution or credited for starting a revival!

In this study we want to think about marriage and the wonderful illustration it gives for our union with Christ.

It was a day both thought would never come, but it had finally arrived. There was an air of public excitement. Miss von Borra was in the final nervous moments before she became Mrs Luther. She must have wondered what lay ahead for her having taken the decision to marry such an infamous man, someone who didn't enjoy good health, someone who was as entertaining as controversial, someone who had been too busy to change his bed for a year, someone who had a death sentence hanging over his head. Nevertheless, Martin and Catherine exchanged vows and became man and wife! Ironically the former priest and nun set out in married life in the Augustinian Monastery - a wedding present from Fredrick the Wise the Elector of Saxony.

FROM HOLY ORDERS TO HOLY MATRIMONY

Both Catherine and Martin had taken Holy Orders, one as a Cistercian Nun, the other as an Augustinian Monk. Luther's journey from the confines of his Order are known the world over but Catherine's escape is not! She, along with other Nuns climbed over the wall of their convent in Nimtze, clambered into empty barrels and were transported to Wittenberg, a three day journey. All the other nuns married except Catherine who was reaching the upper limits of eligibility for marriage at the grand old age of twenty-six! Starting to panic and in exasperation, she said she would marry Dr Amsdolf of Magedeburg or Luther himself. Martin Luther not only believed in the concept of marriage, but he now warmed to the idea of marriage for himself, and to marrying this escapee nun!

A GOOD DECISION?

His choice of bride did not impress all his friends. One warned him, *"for heaven's sake not this one!"*⁷ However, theirs was a loving and happy marriage. Martin and Katie truly loved, helped and supported one another throughout their lives. Martin referred lovingly to his wife as, *"my lord Katie"*, and *"my chain"*.

A HAPPY HOME

Martin and Catherine had six children, two, Elizabeth and Magdalena, whom they sadly lost. The family struggled financially. The ministry and Luther's fame were not enough to meet their modest needs so they took in student lodgers and even did manual gardening jobs to help pay the bills. But theirs was a perfect match having a genuine love and mutual respect one for the other. Theirs was a home of joy, noise and happiness!

ALL GOOD THINGS COME TO AN END

Tragically the happiest of marriages end in the pain of bereavement. The 62 year old Luther headed off to help settle a will but became unwell and died while away from home. Catherine was heartbroken that she could not be with her husband in his last hours.

THEY NEVER EXPECTED TO MARRY

The background of both Martin and Catherine made the prospect of marriage impossible at one time. However, the circumstances of life changed everything! Theological reform now allowed ordained ministers to marry, while Catherine's escape to Wittenberg had brought her into contact with Martin.

It is also amazing how the circumstances of life bring us into contact with the Gospel. The changes in life, the people we meet, the events that happen, all these are the Providences of God that bring us to Christ, to the knowledge of His death on the cross, the blood He shed for sinners, and the wrath of God for sin poured on Jesus. Perhaps life may appear pretty random but it has actually been bringing you in contact with the gospel?

SOME WEREN'T HAPPY

As mentioned already some of Martin's friends did not think this was a good match so they tried to persuade him not to go through with it! Similarly, people will try and persuade you not to become a Christian. They will point out all the problems, use character assassination of God, Christ or His church, and do anything and everything to stop you.

However, Martin and Catherine made the right decision. Similarly millions of men, women and children from every nation, kindred and tongue have made the right decision and accepted Christ. **"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."** Romans 5:8. God loves sinners and Jesus died for sinners – you and I – in spite of the fact that sinners are not good people, but rebels and rejecters: **"for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."**

A GLORIOUS WEDDING GIFT

People can be given anything from towels to multiple knife blocks as wedding presents. The Luther's were given a home! But even the greatest wedding gifts pale into insignificance when compared to what we receive in Christ:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,”

1 Peter 1:3-4

We have the present blessing of knowing our sins forgiven, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the outward and ordinary means of Grace: the Scriptures, prayer and the sacraments. But so much more lies ahead!

A UNION THAT NEVER ENDS

Luther's unexpected marriage ended one day. Luther died of natural causes, far away from the wife he dearly loved. **“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face...”** 1 Corinthians 13:12. Presently Christians see Christ 'darkly' (that is 'dimly') but on the day they leave this earth they will see Him face to face. The union of a Christian with Christ is eternal – it shall never end. Often in the hustle and bustle of life we can lose sight of this but let every believer encourage themselves and rejoice in this fact.

The Bible begins with a marriage when the first Adam got married concluding with the second Adam's eternal union with His bride – those whom He has redeemed.

To conclude, consider the words of the hymn written by Ada R. Habershon:

*“There are loved ones in the glory,
Whose dear forms you often miss;
When you close your earthly story,
Will you join them in their bliss?
Will the circle be unbroken,
By and by, by and by?
In a better home awaiting,
In the sky, in the sky?”*

STUDY 4 - TILL DEATH DO US PART

LUTHER 'TABLETALK': POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1) Every Christian has come into contact with the Gospel. How did you come into contact with the Gospel? Or how are you being made aware of the Gospel presently?

2) People have views on everything and are happy to make them known. Some really didn't think Martin's marriage to Catherine was a good idea. You may be thinking about becoming a Christian and people are trying to persuade you not to, or you may be having a great internal battle. What do you think about their arguments and how will you respond?



STUDY 5

WHEN WE COME TO THE END OF LIFE'S JOURNEY

Martin Luther died aged 62 - an old man for his time. His life was over and his work finished. He had lived an action packed life, facing great danger, winning great victories, and making many mistakes. But for everything he achieved in life all that really mattered in death was his faith in Jesus Christ.

Luther had lived constantly in the face of death therefore consciously lived in the face of eternity. We may have little in common with Martin Luther but one day we will join him on the battle field of death and face our final enemy. Nonetheless for Luther there was victory. A victory he had not and could not win. This was a victory that could only be won by Christ; a victory we can only become part of by faith in Jesus. So in our final study we will consider the end of this life and the life hereafter.

Everyone, the great and the famous, the lowly and unknown, all eventually come to the end of life's journey. So on February 18th 1546 Martin Luther the great Reformer met his final enemy. During his lifetime many opponents had been faced down and defeated, but not this one. He encountered a foe that is always victorious. Death's chilly hand grasped Martin Luther; his sojourn upon this earth was over.

It was against the wishes of his wife Catherine and the Elector of Saxony that he left Wittenberg for Eisleben and Mansfeld to try and help settle a difficult will. He was not well as he left, describing himself as, "old, spent, worn, weary, and cold with only one eye to see with."⁸ While far away from his beloved Catherine his health finally broke. Nearing the end of his life he was asked, "Reverend Father, wilt thou stand by Christ and the doctrine thou hast proclaimed?" Luther simply replied, "Yes."⁹

The final recorded words of Martin Luther explained his life, ministry and faith: "**We are beggars, this is truth**". The first part was in German and the second in Latin, the language of the people and the language of the theologian.

These are amazing words from a man who had rocked the Roman church to its very foundation. He had demanded a return to the Bible, he had recalibrated theological discussion back to the crucified and risen Lord Jesus: Salvation being in Christ alone, through Faith alone, by God's Grace alone. Yet all that he had done was nothing in his dying estimation. He simply rested on Christ and trusted in Him for Salvation.

Many thought Luther would have died as a martyr for his faith. Instead at 62 years of age, an old man for his era, he died of natural causes.

WHEN I COME TO THE END OF LIFE'S JOURNEY

We have no idea when or how we will die and come to the end of life's journey. We may be young or old, rich or poor, surrounded by our family or on our own, gained much in life or having achieved very little, but one day we will die. Ecclesiastes 8:8 explains, "**There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war...**"

Moses summed up life well in Psalm 90: "**For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.**" (vs 9-10) If we live to seventy, eighty or beyond it is short. The greatest men and women with time become nothing more than a mere footnote in history.

Isaac Watts used Psalm 90 as his inspiration to write the hymn, 'O God our help in ages past.' Watts summed up the brevity of life this way:

*"A thousand ages in Thy sight
are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night,
before the rising sun."*

He continued:

*"Time, like an ever rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream,
Dies at the opening day."*

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- Trueman, C., 2005. *Luther's Theology of the Cross*.
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ENDNOTES

- 1 (Shelley, p. 238)
- 2 Romans 1:17
- 3 (Bainton, p. 173)
- 4 (Lindsay, p. 104)
- 5 (Lindsay, p. 105)
- 6 (Marty, p. 68)
- 7 (Bainton, p. 294)
- 8 (Lindsay 205)
- 9 (Lindsay 207)

“...at Wittenberg for Luther to teach scriptures he had to diligently search the Scriptures. It was in this searching that he found Jesus Christ. Now the glorious light of the gospel shone into his life.

Luther said he ‘beat upon Paul.’ He came again and again to the Bible wanting to know what it said, wanting to know what it meant, and wanting to know its implications for him.”

SEE PAGE 6



LUTHER READING LIST

LUTHER'S OWN WRITING

- *95 Theses* (1517)
- *The Bondage of the Will* (1525)
- *Commentary on Galatians* (1535)

(Also see further reading list)

LUTHER'S THEOLOGY

- *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom*
Carl Trueman (Crossway)
- *Histories and Fallacies: problems faced in the writing of history*. Carl Trueman (Crossway)
- *The Genius of Luther's Theology*
Robert Kolb & Charles P Arand (Baker Academic)
- *Reformation Thought an Introduction*
Alister McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing)
- *On being a theologian of the cross: reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation (of 1518)*
Gerhard O Forde (Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co.)

LUTHER'S LIFE

- *Martin Luther a Life*. Martin Marty (Penguin Books)
- *Martin Luther: the man who started the Reformation*.
Thomas Lindsay (Christian Focus)
- *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. Ronald Bainton
- *The Wit of Martin Luther*. Eric W Gritsch (Fortress Press)

FURTHER READING

An excellent reading list can be found here:

- <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/reading-luther-not-wisely-but-well-part-one.php>
- <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/reading-luther-not-wisely-but-well-part-two.php>

BOOKSHOPS

The following shops do not appear as adverts but as possible sources for books on this reading list. Other bookshops are also available.

BEULAH BOOKSHOP

25 Central Promenade, Newcastle, Co Down BT33 0AA
T: 028 4372 2629 www.beulahbooks.com

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T: 028 3832 1488 www.icmbooksdirect.co.uk

WESTMINSTER BOOKS (ONLINE)

www.wtsbooks.com

“ I am more afraid
of my own heart
than of the pope
and all his cardinals

– MARTIN LUTHER

www.luther1517.org

On 31 October 1517, Martin Luther took a hammer and nailed his '95 Theses' to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. His stand for the Gospel was the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

Above all else Martin Luther was a preacher. He wanted to reach people all over Europe with the good news of the gospel.

His preaching of the law highlighted that everyone is a sinner in God's eyes. But in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus there is forgiveness of sin. In this booklet we use five big events in Luther's life to help explain the gospel.

Luther pointed his listeners to Christ and through his example we encourage you to also seek Christ.

FOUR OTHER BOOKLETS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE



The Luther 1517 project has been jointly published by the Imperial Grand Black Chapter and the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland. It is our desire that this project will reaffirm for our members how central faith is to our two Institutions, will stir up faith within our memberships, and will be a Gospel witness to wider society.