

Revelation 16: 3; “Martin Luther – An Angel Pouring the 2nd Bowl”, Sermon #118 in the series – “The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 30th, 2016, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

Here in Revelation 16: 3 we find the 2nd angel pouring out his bowl of wrath on the sea. The setting, I have said to you, is the 2nd 100 year period of time of this pouring out of God’s wrath upon Antichristian Rome. I have dated it from about 1420-1520 A.D. In the pouring out of the 7 vials, or bowls of wrath, I have taken the position that they began at the birth of the Reformer John Wycliffe in 1320, and that each of these vials represents an approximate one hundred year period of time. One vial is poured out after another even as the 7 days in a week succeed each other until God’s wrath against false Babylon is complete. The effect of the pouring out of the first vial does not stop when each period of 100 years is complete. Rather there is overlap and there is a cumulative on-going effect which these vials have, which will culminate in the complete destruction of this false system, and which will pave the way for the Millennium; the triumph of Christ’s kingdom spiritually upon the earth. These bowls of wrath are poured out during the last 700 years of the 1260 years prophecy, and they stretch from the dawn of the Reformation down to our own day where I believe that we are coming to the place where we shall eventually see the destruction of the Antichristian powers.

The wrath being poured out here is God’s great displeasure with, and anger against the false doctrines and false worship of Roman Catholicism headed up by the Pope, and supported by the 10 kingdoms of the beast. Those are the 10 kingdoms of Europe which politically, and even militarily, supported the Pope’s systematic suppression and persecution of true Christians during that time period. How does God exercise His wrath towards this false system? He does it in and through the instrumentality of the preaching of the word, accompanied by the Spirit’s power; the sword which proceeds from Christ’s mouth which shall bring down the whole fabric of Roman Catholic authority, doctrine, and practice over this 700 years period of time. It has now been 499 years, almost to the day, since Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg chapel. Should we not consider the “angel” who formally began the Reformation?

The word “angel” in this text, I believe, is referring to a whole set of men who were once priests or monks in the Roman Catholic church who had come to see the truth that people are not saved by their attending church and partaking of the sacraments. They are saved by grace through faith, and that not of themselves; that it is the gift of God. They came to understand the doctrine of Justification by faith alone. That is, this life changing truth that people are not declared righteous by God based upon their good works, but by faith in Jesus Christ. They are justified by His perfect righteousness which He worked out while He was here upon the earth, and His sufferings on our behalf. It is Christ who saves us. And He saved us by enduring the punishment due to our sins. Thus, these men had divine spiritual light shined into their hearts, so that they saw that it was Biblically wrong to submit to the false authority of the Pope, and the false doctrines which a whole long line of Popes had added to the Scriptures. And through their witness, many millions of people including kings and princes and many, many others, have been brought into the freedom of the sons of God.

Now, today being Reformation Sunday, I think that it is very appropriate that I would speak to you concerning the man who was responsible more than any other for actually formally beginning the Reformation away from Popery during this time period that we are studying. His name was Martin Luther. Although there are many men that we could speak about in relation to the beginning of the Reformation; Luther is the most prominent of them all, and so if we can learn about his life and what he did, we can see better how it was a very significant part of the pouring out of the 2nd bowl of wrath upon the Antichristian system of the beast of the sea.

1st – Let’s think about Martin Luther as a sincere seeker.

Martin Luther is well known for his nailing his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg chapel on October 31st, 1517, challenging the doctrinal positions of the Roman Catholic church, but how did he get to

that point where he began the Reformation? The Roman Catholic church was the only true church of that day, or so it claimed. For over a thousand years the Roman Catholic church had been imposing the teachings of men and their traditions upon the Word of God, and various Popes came to exercise an authority which was never given to them by Christ. They came to be seen as infallible in their decisions about truth. As a result, many of the plain teachings of the Scripture were warped and twisted by this means, so that many true believers who challenged the truth of the Papal laws on church doctrine came to be criticized and persecuted and even put to death under orders from the Roman Catholic church hierarchy.

There had been an number of people before 1517 who challenged the Papal authority, and the doctrines that were added to the Scripture. They questioned the teaching of salvation through sacraments, their worship of dead saints by means of statues, they questioned the ability of Popes and priests to forgive sins and grant indulgences, and many other false doctrines. But they were condemned by Papal authority as heretics and burned at the stake or driven to seek exile in other places. John Hus, John Wickliffe, Jerome of Prague and others were among those who protested papal authority and the church's doctrine. And Ulrich Zwingli also emerged as a great leader and reformer in same time period. The Bible was being withheld from the masses of the people. Persons who had been trained to be priests received the traditions of the Roman Catholic church as being on the same level as the Scripture, and the common people were seen as too uneducated to understand the Bible. The priests and the bishops conducted religious services, but the masses were said in Latin, and not understood much at all. People thought that they might get to heaven by participation in these services and ceremonies. The understanding of the truth of how men were to be saved from their sins, how they were to be justified in the sight of a holy God, was becoming more and more obscure.

But Luther did not know of these problems in 1501 when he enrolled in the college of Erfurth. Martin Luther was a man concerned about his own soul. Oh, that men would be concerned about the salvation of their souls and their eternal destiny. Martin Luther became an Augustinian monk in order to save his soul. He decided upon this course of action because of an encounter that he had with death. Roland Bainton says in his biography of Luther, "He was then twenty one and a student at the University of Erfurt. As he returned to school after a visit with his parents, suddenly lightning struck him to the earth." His traveling companion, Alexius, was killed by the lightning bolt. In that single flash Luther saw the seriousness of life and God's warning to him. Bainton says, "There was God the all-terrible, Christ the inexorable (not to be moved by prayers and entreaties), and all the leering fiends springing from their lurking places in pond and wood that they might seize his shock of curly hair and bolt him into hell. It was no wonder that he cried out to his father's patron saint, the patroness of miners, "St. Anne help me! I will become a monk."

Luther was a man, however, who sincerely tried to find peace with God through a course of religious duties. He saw God before His conversion as righteous and angry with sinners like himself. And he thought that he could only get to heaven by doing of many good works, and to become holy it could only be attained by severe self-discipline. At the saying of his first mass, when he came to the words, "We offer unto Thee, the living, the true, the eternal God", he related afterward: "At these words I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, 'With what tongue shall I address such Majesty, seeing that all men ought to tremble in the presence of even an earthly prince? Who am I that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine Majesty?'" When it came to the severe discipline of his body Bainton says, "He fasted, sometimes three days on end without a crumb. The seasons of fasting were more consoling to him than those of feasting. Lent was more comforting than Easter. He laid upon himself vigils and prayers in excess of those stipulated by the rule. He cast off the blankets permitted him and well-nigh froze himself to death."

"At times he was proud of his sanctity and he would say, "I have done nothing wrong today." Then misgivings would arise. Have you fasted enough? Are you poor enough? He would then strip himself of all save that which decency required. He believed in later life that his austerities had done

permanent damage to his digestion.” “I was a good monk,” he said, “and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayer, reading, and other work.” (End of Quote) Luther became exhausted and consumed with trying to satisfy God and finding eternal life in this way. But God was going to show Him the better way, the way of faith. God was going to use Martin Luther to turn the world of his day on its head and lead the church out of her New Testament Babylonian Captivity.

2nd – Let’s think about Martin Luther as the man who re-discovered the value of the Bible.

It is truly amazing that something so important as God’s Word could be lost to whole generations of people, but this is what happened from about the 800 A.D. on to the time of Luther. Listen to Merle D’Aubigne in his history of the Reformation: The year is 1503 and Luther was now 20 years old. “The young student passed, in the university library, all the time he could snatch from his academical pursuits. Books were as yet rare, and it was a great privilege for him to profit by the treasures brought together in this vast collection. One day – he had then been two years at Erfurth, and was twenty years old.- he opens many books in the library one after another, to learn their writer’s names. One volume that he comes to, attracts his attention. He has never until this hour seen its like. He reads the title – It is a Bible! a rare book, unknown in those times. His interest is greatly excited: he is filled with astonishment at finding other matters than those fragments of the gospels and epistles that the Church has selected to be read to the people during public worship every Sunday throughout the year.”

“Until this day he had imagined that they composed the whole Word of God. And now he sees so many pages, so many chapters, so many books of which he had had no idea! His heart beats faster as he holds the divinely inspired volume in his hand. With eagerness and with indescribable emotion he turns over these leaves from God.” He reads the first few chapters from 1 Samuel about Hannah. “He returns home that day with a full heart.” “Oh that God would give me such a book for myself, thought he.” The Bible that had filled him with such transports, was in Latin. He soon returned to the library to pore over his treasure. He read it again and again, and then in his astonishment and joy, he returned to read it once more. The first glimmerings of a new truth were then beginning to dawn upon his mind. Thus had God led him to the discovery of his Word, that book of which he was one day to give his fellow-countrymen, that admirable translation in which Germany has for three centuries perused the oracles of God. Perhaps for the first time this precious volume has now been taken down from the place it occupied in the library of Erfurth. This book, deposited upon the unknown shelves of a gloomy hall, is about to become the book of life to a whole nation. In that Bible the Reformation lay hid.” (End of quote)

And this is why dear people, I have brought up this subject this afternoon, on this Reformation Sunday. It is so that you might see how terribly precious is the Word of God. It is so that you will never take the Holy Scriptures for granted. It is so that you and I will not grow easily tired of meditating upon its contents. It is so that we might have “good success” in living a holy life, a joyful life of faith, seeking for greater grace to come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ, and for that grace to spread to more and more people. And it is so that we will hold dear the truths which this book contains, because they are God speaking to us, telling us of His love through Jesus Christ, telling us that we cannot fulfill His holy law, so God gave another way, apart from the law. And that way is found by faith in Jesus Christ.

3rd – Let’s think of Martin Luther as a man who searched for the truth and when He found Christ, He knew that he must begin the Reformation.

The Bible tells us of Christ who is the only Savior of the World, our only way to have our sins forgiven, the only way to be right with God, the only way to be holy, the only way to heaven. Let’s hear how Luther discovered this. Bainton says, on p. 60 of his book, *Here I Stand*: “Luther set himself to learn and expound the Scriptures. On August 1, 1513, he commenced his lectures on the book of

Psalms. In the fall of 1515 he was lecturing on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The epistle to the Galatians was treated throughout 1516-17. These studies proved to be for Luther the Damascus road. When Luther lectured through the Psalms, he saw it as a book foreshadowing the life and the death of the Redeemer. The reference to Christ was unmistakable when he came to the twenty-second psalm, where it says, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What could be the meaning of this? Christ evidently felt himself to be forsaken, abandoned by God, deserted. Christ too had felt the utter desolation which Luther said he could not endure for more than a tenth of an hour and live, had been experienced by Christ himself as he died. Rejected of men, he was rejected also of God. How much worse this must have been than the scourging, the thorns, and the nails! Christ's descent into hell was nothing other than this sense of alienation from God."

"Why should Christ have known such desperations? Luther knew perfectly well why he himself had had them: he was weak in the presence of the Mighty; he was impure in the presence of the Holy; he had blasphemed the Divine Majesty. But Christ was not weak; Christ was not impure; Christ was not impious. Why then should he have been so overwhelmed with desolation? The only answer must be that Christ took to himself the iniquity of us all. He who was without sin for our sakes became sin and so identified Himself with us as to participate in our alienation. He who was truly man so sensed His solidarity with humanity as to feel himself along with mankind estranged from the All Holy. What a new picture this is of Christ! Where, then is the judge sitting upon the rainbow to condemn sinners? He is still the judge. He must judge, as truth judges error and light darkness; but in judging he suffers with those who he must condemn and feels himself with them subject to condemnation. The judge upon the rainbow has become the one abandoned upon the cross. A new view also of God is here. The All Terrible is the All Merciful too. Wrath and love fuse upon the cross." God had shown Luther what He was really like, and what Christ had really done for him."

Then, as Luther wrestled with the letters of Paul he came to understand the importance of faith. He says, "I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Chapter 1: 16, 17) and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, 'The justice of God,' because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against Him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by his faith'. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise."

"The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the justice of God had filled me with hate, now it became to me a gate to heaven.... If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love." This is how the Reformation began, with one man, wrestling with the scriptures so that he could have his soul saved. And in His finding Christ, Luther found also the One who would stand by him in the work of the Reformation that He would lead him into. His labors in the word of God and his preaching the word, his disputing with the Popish authorities over it would be the real beginning of the fall of Antichrist. I will continue to explain this to you in my next sermon on the 2nd bowl of wrath. Let us thank God for raising up Martin Luther as one of the men who became angels and poured out this bowl of wrath so that we might have the truth and the truth set us free.