

# The Greatest Awakening

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Grab your Bibles and go to Romans 1. Would you do that? The book of Romans 1. I want to talk to you this morning on the theme of "The Greatest Awakening." Not the Great Awakening, but the Greatest Awakening. Romans 1, beginning in verse 15. We'll read down through verse 17. Paul as he begins this letter to the Christians in Rome, and take note of that, this is Rome. This isn't Corinth. It's not Philippi. It's Rome. So to the Roman church Paul writes, verse 15 of Romans 1,

15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the Righteous man shall live by faith."

You see a lot of wonderful truths jump out at us in this text of Scripture but let me just outline some things and then give you two things I want you to hold onto throughout the message this morning. He talks about, first of all, the God-ordained means of salvation, preaching the Gospel. He says, "I'm coming to you in Rome not to execute priestcraft, not to administer sacraments. I want to come to you in Rome and preach the Gospel." To the church at Rome," he says, "It is the preaching of the Gospel that is needed to convert the soul and to build the church." That is God's ordained means of salvation. The God-ordained message of salvation, the Gospel. Now, I personally believe that you can take the phrase "preaching of the word and preach the Gospel" and they are practically synonymous. So the preaching of this Gospel truth and all the glorious dimensions, precept upon precept, that unfolds as we exegete Scripture going verse by verse, chapter by chapter, that's the unfolding of Gospel truth. That's the message of salvation. The God-ordained means, preaching the word. The God-ordained message is the Gospel. The God-ordained manner of salvation, faith. Notice how he says it there, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." Then verse 17, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." So the means: preaching. The message: the Gospel, the word of God. The manner by which we are saved: when faith occurs in our hearts based on that Gospel message. Then the God-ordained mandate, the result of it all for us is, verse 17, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" In other words, God mandates – now listen to me – the standing of righteousness to

everyone who believes in the Gospel Paul is talking about preaching. You do not practically become perfectly righteous, not in time and space history, but you have the standing mandated as a righteous one before God. As a matter of fact, your righteousness is not even something that's just imputed to you, your righteousness is a person, Jesus Christ, who stands at the right hand of God right now.

Now, there are two things I want you to hold onto as Paul writes to, what church? The church at Rome, the Roman church: he says the foundation is preaching the word, preaching the Gospel, and that results in the righteousness of faith. Your righteousness, your righteous standing before God does not occur because you keep some ritual, go through some motions, jump through certain hoops, perform some rituals or do certain moral or ethical good works. No, you preach the word and then faith occurs in the hearts of men and women, boys and girls, and when that faith in that message occurs, you are declared righteous by the very standard of the holy righteousness of God himself.

Now in talking about the Greatest Awakening, I want to preach to you about the great Reformation that began at least in the most formal sense on October 31, 1517. Next Tuesday is October 31<sup>st</sup> and that is a day that we should remember the birthing of the greatest awakening, spiritual awakening, of all time.

Now, church history and history itself is an important thing. History is important because it's a record of what God has done in the world. You do understand everything that happens God ordains it and everything that has ever happened in the world is to the glory of God, but now church history, more specifically speaking, is God's activity in and through his church and that speaks of God's greater glory. God's greatest work which reveals the greatest distinctions of his character and attributes is his work in his church. In fact, the Bible itself is something of a great history book. Now it's far more than just a history book but it is a great history book. It's a record of what God has done in and through his people. In the Old Testament, for example from Genesis to Esther, parts of the book of Job, the Psalms, parts of the prophetic books, all contain a historical record. Then you go to the New Testament from Matthew through Acts you have predominantly a narrative of history. So when I think about us speaking on the Great Awakening, the Protestant Reformation in particular this morning, I want to say to you that history is important and that's why you have so much history recorded in the Bible. By the way, church history is about our former brothers and sisters in Christ, all of those who have gone before us. We are going to get to know them in heaven, we might as well learn a little bit about them now.

Two thoughts now on why church history is important. 1 or A: church history gives us hope. Church history tells us that God is always doing something, even in the darkest of times. It gives us hope. In Luke 3, for example, verses 1 through 3, here's the way it reads, "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a

baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Now when Luke begins to write about what day it was and he talks about these particular political and religious leaders who were in office at the time, he's not just trying to help us understand chronologically and in time history where this was, what he wants you to know is to the people who would have read this originally, they knew this was a dark dark time politically, spiritually, religiously and culturally. It couldn't get much darker but God was working behind the scenes. As a matter fact in Luke 3:4, "as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"" So here we have the darkest of times but behind the scenes God was preparing the forerunner of Christ himself, John the Baptist. Listen to me: when it looks its worst, God is up to some of his best. No one knew John the Baptist was on the scene because he hadn't come out yet, and then on the heels of John the Baptist, the Son of God himself is coming to minister on planet earth.

Now, fast forward about 1,300-1,500 years and you have the Protestant Reformation but you have something terrible that happened. The Roman Catholic Church tried to crush it out and they put to death men like Cranmer and Latimer and Ridley and Hooper and Bradford and Bunyan, and the ones that they didn't martyr, they put in prison and so it looked like God was doing something and then it was crushed out. But then not too long after these men were crushed by the Catholic Church, there was a short time later when another group of men rose up. Actually Bloody Mary was the queen who put these Reformers to death or had them locked in prison, but she came off the scene and then another group of Reformers rose up and they had a preaching influence and an influence for the Gospel and the truth that was greater than the first group. So our hearts would have sunk if we lived in that day and saw these great preachers rise up and then the government shut them all down, but then a little while later that was just fuel to raise up even a greater influence of preachers. It was a dark time but God was up to something.

In 1662, a group of strong Bible believing, Reformed minded pastors called Puritans, sometimes called Separatists, were ousted from their churches in England and imprisoned. I think it was thousands of them, actually. You think, "Man, what a dark dark time." So they couldn't preach any longer but what they could do was study and what they could do was write and their writings have impacted for good all the way down to this day. As a matter of fact, the Puritan scholars and expositors are the best, I'm convinced, of all times since the time of the apostles. In their persecution, they wrote and studied and left us a great foundation to build our Gospel upon and our truth upon. So it was a dark time, they are all in prison but God was doing something. As a matter fact, one Harvard history professor states that it was the preaching of Puritan ministers which led to the discovery of America. A dark time but God was doing something. Then at the end of World War II, basically the whole of Eastern Europe was annexed into the communist Soviet Union. Christians, at least Bible believing Christians, came under harsh state persecution. It was a time of darkness but God was at work. This purified the church and in some of these countries, revival broke out.

I remember so distinctly going to Romania the first time after the fall of the reign of the communist dictator, Ceausescu, and I have never in my life been in a more powerful,

godly, sanctified and consecrated church as the churches I visited and preached in in Romania. And I am not exaggerating to you, I would get in a pulpit and literally people would be sitting or standing within 18 inches of the pulpit because they were getting in that building to hear the word of God. It didn't matter how long they had to stand, it didn't matter how long the wait, every aisle packed with people. There would not be a square inch of space where there wasn't a body. They would put 6,000-8000 people in this building, that's not an exaggeration. Why? Because a purification and a love for God and the truth came out of the communist oppression. The communist oppression was darkness but God was up to something and he has always been that way.

We go all the way down to the latest communist regime, the Mao Tse-Tung communist regime in China and how the communist Chinese put great persecution on the true Bible believing church and the church went underground and the missiologists tell us that the church went from a few million to today probably totaling over 60 million believers in communist China today. So church history gives us hope. It encourages us during some of the darkest times and I know we talk about what's happening in Western civilization and we look at our own country and it's not good, it is bad and it looks dark, but God is doing something. We haven't seen it all yet but God is doing something.

So church history gives us hope but, secondly, church history teaches us to avoid the errors of the past. Oh my goodness, as I have led you for now 37, 38, 37 years it is now and we have reformed and reformed things, you do understand that not only did I look thoroughly at the Scriptures, I looked thoroughly at church history because we would have been most arrogant and foolish to think we were the first ones to come up with what the doctrines and what the practice of the church should be. After 2,000 years of church history, certainly somebody else got it right too. Do you know what I found? Great generations of early Baptists and others stood on the things you and I stand on today and we have gone to being the outcasts and the out-scourings of the Southern Baptist Convention to now today some of the most prominent leaders give us great credit and affirmation for standing on what Baptists should have stood on all along. But the point I'm making is: if we would look at church history, we could avoid some errors. If we do not learn from the past and the mistakes of the past, we are doomed to repeat them. Solomon warned us in Ecclesiastes 1:9, "That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun."

You see, and sometimes young guys, especially some young Reformers think, "We have come upon an approach, a way to do things that is brand-new." No, it's not. No, it's not. No, it's not. I mean, what we find is that the same errors keep coming up and going around over and over again. We change some of the terminology and we dress it up in different clothing but it's the same error and the same stuff. The same compromise keeps coming through the church every century so and Satan just dresses it up differently so it doesn't look like the old error of the past but if you look at church history, it's very very clear what's going on.

We must avoid the notion that this present generation alone is true and the church in this generation alone is standing on the truth and that actually past church history is somehow so filled with compromise and error we have nothing to learn from it. That's simply not true. One example of this would be modern day charismatics. Now we have good friends, all of us, who are charismatics and I love them and appreciate them but some in that movement talk about the latter-day rains and what they mean is God is doing a brand-new thing so there is no reason to look back in history because everything is new, God is doing new stuff. That is an error. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote one time, "I know of nothing more instructive next to the Bible than church history." The psalmist reminded us in Psalm 48:12-14, "Walk about Zion and go around her; Count her towers; Consider her ramparts; Go through her palaces, That you may tell it to the next generation. For such is God, Our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death." What he's saying is, "Look at what God has done and learn this and teach the next generation the ways of God so they don't lose it; so they are not influenced by a counterfeit; so they are not seduced by a new wave of culturally contemporary, relevant errors that former generations came out of. So learn how we got here and what truths we are standing upon so we can make sure we're not to fall into some of the errors of the past."

Well in that spirit, that's all introduction. Let me go to our main outline. First of all, I'm calling this the hidden foundation. The hidden foundation. Now, you're going to have to use your brain this morning. If you came about half-asleep full of college football, you need to get over it. It has been really easy for me to get over my team, you get over yours for a little while. You're going to have to think, use your brain. That's part of your discipleship. The Protestant Reformation that formally came into being 500 years ago, as we'll celebrate on Tuesday, October 31st, is the greatest of all awakenings. It's the greatest event in church history since Pentecost, I'm convinced. In this movement the true church emerged from 1,000 years of Roman Catholic dominion and darkness to reclaim true doctrine and true church practice.

Now there are some great things that came out of this Protestant Reformation of 500 years ago and sometimes they're listed under what they call solas, which means "alone." It's a Latin word. It's outlined this way: sola gratia or grace alone. That came out of the Protestant Reformation. Do you realize – are you listening, church – do you realize up until about 1500 for at least 1,000+ years nobody ever thought about salvation by grace alone? Salvation was always through the church and through works in the church and through the sacraments of the church and through the priestcraft of the church. This was a radical new idea. You say, "We all know that." Yeah, but for 1,000 years, nobody thought of it, and I can't say nobody but for the most part. Then sola fide or faith alone. Sola Christus, Christ alone. Soli deo gloria, for the glory of God alone. So salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. Those great solas are great foundational pillars that came out of this Reformation of 500 years ago that you and I still stand on today.

Now it's not that they were invented 500 years ago, just that the Bible was opened and they were rediscovered 500 years ago. You do understand that Roman Catholics did not allow people to read the Bible or study the Bible. You were not considered elitist or

qualified. Studying the Bible and praying was supposed to be left to the professionals in church hierarchy. They would basically say, "You just do what we tell you and you'll get to heaven. Let us read the Bible and study and tell you what it says." And that went on for centuries and centuries and centuries.

Now I know what some of you church history scholars are thinking that I left out one of the solas. I gave you four, there are really five, but I'm doing that on purpose. We'll get to it in a few minutes.

So there was this foundation laid in God's sovereignty but – and this is my first main point – there was a hidden foundation laid before the foundation of 500 years ago. Actually about 850 years ago, there was an awakening in Catholic Europe and we don't hear much about it. As a matter of fact, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century a Frenchman named Peter Waldo, understand we don't know exactly that Peter was his first name but we are pretty sure about Waldo, this man began preaching the Bible and translating the Bible into the language of the people. Once again, that was a radical thing. You just didn't do that. But he was a wealthy man and he had the means to do it.

Waldo had some people who began to follow him and who began to say, "Let's study the Bible and see what the Bible says about our faith and what the Bible says about what we're supposed to do as Christians." The Waldensians, they were called, longed for a simple biblical understanding of the Bible in contrast to the highly complicated bureaucracy of Roman Catholicism. Now the Waldensians did not seek to leave the Catholic Church, they just sought permission, "Let us study the Bible and preach the Bible so we can understand the way of God."

Now they weren't very large. They became pretty large but they weren't very large so the Catholic Church for a time just ignored them, but pretty soon we find out that the Bible is a dangerous thing. Item after item, doctrine after doctrine, practice after practice of the Catholic Church wound up being clearly in contradiction to what the Waldensians were finding in their Bibles so they began teaching things that greatly upset the established church. You do understand the Catholic Church basically ruled all of central and western Europe. I mean, there were kings who bowed and kissed the pope's ring. There is a reason why it's called the Holy Roman Empire, because they had dominion over all of it. All power and all authority.

So the Waldensians, this little group, began to study their Bible and began to see these things that contradicted what was taught and practiced by the Catholic Church. For example, the Waldensians held only to the authority of Scripture over the authority of the pope or over church dogma. The Waldensians began to teach salvation in and through Christ alone.

They began to deny the doctrine of purgatory, that after you die you go to a place, you suffer for a while, and if your relatives give enough money, they can pay you out of purgatory and get you into heaven. They denied that.

They denied the system of relics. The Catholic Church had all these relics, thousands and thousands of them and if you paid money and got close to one of them, they had magic power. They might heal you or they might help you get to heaven. It might be a little piece of bone they would say was some pope's bone or some fragment of blood. As a matter of fact, John Paul, he was attacked when he was the pope and they've got some of his blood and other things and they pass this stuff around and people go... It's just silly superstition. Well, the Waldensians 850 years ago said that's nonsense.

They said pilgrimages were worthless. It doesn't help you at all. They said the holy water the priest sprinkles on you is of no effect. They said prayer in a barn was just as effectual if it comes from the heart as prayer in a church. Remember, the Catholic Church says you have no business praying, you don't know how it's done. You have to come to your priest, talk to him, confess your sins, he prays for you. The Waldensians rejected that.

They rejected transubstantiation. The Catholic Church taught that you come down to the altar and the altar was in the center of their church, and the priest gives you a wafer and it literally becomes the body of Christ. The priest gives you juice, it literally becomes the blood of Jesus. So every time you take Mass and you partake of that supper, it's not just a memorial supper as we teach, it literally becomes the dying of Jesus for you again and helps you, once again, get toward heaven. What power and control this held over the people but the Waldensians rejected that notion.

They even spoke, and this might be the thing that got them in biggest trouble, they spoke and taught that the Roman Catholic Church was the harlot church revealed in the book of Revelation.

Well, of course, this brought the wrath of the Catholic Church upon them and they were persecuted severely but they did spread into six different countries. Now what I'm telling you is this happened 350 years before Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. It was something of a hidden foundation that the later Reformers stood upon.

J. C. Wylie in his book "The History of the Waldensians" writes this about the persecution they endured. Wylie writes that little children were torn from the arms of their mothers, clasped by their tiny feet and their heads dashed against the rocks. Or they were held between two soldiers and their quivering limbs torn apart. Their mangled bodies were thrown on the highways or fields to be devoured by beasts. The sick and the aged were burned alive in their dwellings. Some had their hands and arms and legs lopped off and fire applied to the severed parts to staunch the bleeding and prolong their suffering. Some were flayed alive. Some were roasted alive. Some disemboweled or tied to trees in their own orchards and their hearts were cut out. Some were horribly mutilated and of others, the brains were boiled and eaten by these cannibals. Some were fastened down into furrows in their own fields and plowed into the soil as men plow manure into it. Others were burned alive. Fathers were marched to death with the heads of their sons suspended around their necks. Parents were compelled to look on while their children were first raped and then massacred before themselves being permitted to die.

The Catholic Church was intent on stomping out all opposition to its power and control in the world, yet the Great Awakening or revival of biblical Christianity that occurred 350 years after the Waldensians to some extent had to stand on the foundation of groups like these Waldensians, and I'm convinced there are many other groups like the Waldensians. I believe in each and every era since the time of the apostles there has been at least a faithful remnant, a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. So before we get to the greatest of awakenings, what we formally call the Protestant Reformation, let's pay homage to our forefathers like the Waldensians who broke out of the control of the church, found a translator, got the Bible and said, "What saith the Scriptures?" As a matter of fact, the Waldensians were just about crushed out of existence by the Catholic Church.

II. The greatest of all spiritual awakenings, the Protestant Reformation, and I mean great in the sense of the widespread and lasting influence. The greatest of all spiritual awakenings, the Protestant Reformation.

Now while there were a number of stirrings in the Roman Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century concerning the darkness and evil in the system, nothing though was used of God like the writing and preaching of a German monk by the name of Martin Luther. When Martin Luther was a boy, he was a devout Catholic but one day he was caught in a violent storm. He was terrified and thought he might die. In his despair, being the good Catholic that he was, he cried out in prayer. He didn't pray to God. He didn't pray to Jesus but as a good Catholic, he prayed to St. Ann, and in crying out to prayer, he asked St. Ann, "If you'll spare my life, I'll become a monk and I'll serve God in the church." And that's exactly what he did.

Now Luther was brilliant and he was well educated and Martin Luther was also very dedicated to being as righteous a man as he possibly could be. Martin Luther writes how he studied and learned working his way up in the ranks and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and how he was particularly smitten with the doctrine of mandatory righteousness, that is, that since God is righteous, God must mandate all of his creatures be righteous which leads to punitive righteousness, every creature that is not righteous must be punished for their unrighteousness.

So Luther is stirred about the righteousness of God and how God demands this of all of his creatures so Luther committed himself with all of his being to achieve this righteousness, to attain it. Here's what he said and I quote, "I hoped I might find peace and tranquility with fastings and prayer, vigils and pilgrimages, and I miserably afflicted my body, but the more I sweated it out, the less peace and tranquility I knew." Luther even had some of his superiors in the church come to him and say, "You've got to back off on all this fasting and beating of your body trying to be righteous before God."

Luther was intelligent. He was a scholar. He rose to distinction in the Church and that gave him the liberty and the freedom to diligently study the Scriptures and like the Waldensians of 350 years earlier, in his study of the Scriptures he began to see biblical error in the Roman Catholic system, especially he began to be taken by the Catholic Church's teaching on the righteousness of God and how an individual person could attain



that righteousness. And by this time, though, he was so defeated and so broken over how he would fail. It would be arguable that you can find no one in history that worked harder to get righteous than Martin Luther but he got so defeated and so discouraged that he so failed that he secretly began to hate the doctrine of the righteousness of God because it made him stand condemned.

Then he began to study the book of Romans and he came to that particular truth in Romans we read of earlier, Romans 1:17, "The righteous shall live by faith." And when Luther contemplated that phrase, everything changed for him. Listen to this quote from Luther's writings about his conversion. He says, "At last God being merciful as I meditated day and night on the relation of the words, the righteousness of God as revealed in faith as it is written, 'and the just shall live by faith,' I began to understand the justice of God as that which the just lives by the grace of God, namely faith, and this sentence, 'the righteousness of God is revealed,' referred to a passive righteousness which by the merciful God he justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'the just shall live by faith.'" Now listen, "This straight way made me feel as though I had been reborn." You've got to understand there had not been the concept of being born again probably for 1,000 years but in describing what happened to his heart as he studied Romans 1, he said, "I felt reborn." He said, "I felt as though I had entered through the open gates into paradise itself and from that moment I saw the whole face of Scripture in a new light, and now where I once hated the phrase, 'the righteousness of God,' I began to love and extol it as the sweetest of phrases so that this passage in Paul became the very gate of paradise to me."

So Luther in his studies as a leader in the Catholic Church comes to this glorious revelation that it's not through the sacraments and it's not through prayers and it's not through vigils and it's not through paying indulgences and it's not through moral works or ethical works of righteousness, it's not in locking myself in a cage somewhere to get away from the temptations of the world. I've done all of that and I'm still unrighteous, but God by faith in his Son Jesus has now declared me righteous. Now when Luther saw that and experienced that, everything changed in his heart and everything changed in his life and soon everything would change in Europe.

So now Martin Luther in his new love for God and love for the Scriptures and now with the Holy Spirit's illumination as he studied the Bible, he began to see the thorough bankruptcy of the Catholic system and he began to make written documents of how Catholic doctrine and the Catholic system was contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture and all this came to a head 500 years ago on October 31, 1517 when he took a manuscript, a manuscript he had written in which he outlined 95 distinct unbiblical errors of the Roman Catholic Church, and he took that manuscript with these 95 theses and he nailed it on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg and the Reformation was on. Now here's what's interesting, talk about how God's doing it: it couldn't have been a darker day. Folks, in this day and it's happened in many centuries but it was true in this day in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, that many popes were homosexuals and had boyfriends. The priests turned their parishes into brothels. Just corruption, iniquity and immorality everywhere. By the way, have you heard the law cannot make righteous? Paul said the

law stirs up sinful passions and makes you more wicked and the Roman Catholic Church has illustrated that through the centuries because everything they're about is law.

But when Martin Luther wrote that manuscript with the 95 theses of the unbiblical practices and doctrines of the Catholic Church, he also providentially mailed it to a friend who also just happened to have access to the printing press and the printing press had only been invented a few years earlier. That just happened by coincidence. God was in that. And then this friend published these 95 theses and they went all across Europe and a fire of awakening and revival was begun that could not be contained, much less extinguished.

And the pope got a copy of those 95 theses and, of course, he was not happy. He was enraged so called for church discipline. He established that there would be a Council convened in Worms, Germany. They called it the Diet of Worms. Diet just means a council or a meeting. And 206 dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church from all across Europe were convened, we're talking the emperor, dukes, margrave, archbishops, bishops, abbots, ambassadors, deputies. All of these coming, 206 of them and called Martin Luther in charging him to recant of his teaching as illustrated in the 95 theses. They had Martin Luther stand in front of a table and they had his works laid out on the table. They asked him two questions. Question 1, "Martin Luther, is this your writing?" He said, "I don't know. I don't know what you've got here. I need to read it." So they let him have overnight and he read and studied all of them. So he came back the next day and said, "The answer to your first question is yes. These are my writings." The second question was, "Will you recant?" Then Martin Luther replied and I quote, "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for pope and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves), I cannot withdraw for I am subject to the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the word of God. It is unsafe to do anything against one's conscience. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, so help me God."

Now one of the great miracles of all miracles is why Martin Luther was not nailed to a stake and burned alive like so many of his contemporaries but somehow he was not. I think it's simply because his popularity was such it would hurt the church more to martyr him, to execute him, than to leave him alive. But the Holy Spirit was already working beneath the surface in that dark dark time of the 16<sup>th</sup> century so when these writings came out and Martin Luther's stance came out, these people almost like popcorn, these men began to pop up all over Europe who were scholars in the Catholic Church who began to agree with Martin Luther very rapidly. All across Europe this was happening. Men were breaking out of the darkness and turning to the clear and simple truth of the Scriptures for faith in practice.

But here's the point I want to make: Martin Luther, can you imagine, stood against 1,000 years of Church doctrine and history and against a total authority in the Roman Catholic Church and spoke up. You and I can't conceive of that. We have no parallel in our time that matches what he did because, you see, in God's providence, though many were involved, it always takes a spokesman. Somebody has to say it. Somebody must be the

instrument and that instrument and that spokesman in the Protestant Reformation, was Martin Luther.

Now, again, he was not alone and Martin Luther's greatness from this perspective is not to take away from the greatness of other Reformers like Zwingli in Switzerland and John Calvin in France and in Switzerland, Hugh Latimer in England who said and I quote, "By the word of the living God, by the word of God preached and opened, that's how our new birth comes about." John Wycliffe, the great Bible translator in England whose passion was to see that every person, the plowboy included, had the Bible and could read it for himself. Jan Hus, the Reformer in the central European country called Bohemia, which is today the modern Czech Republic. The church actually did martyr Jan Hus and they tied him to a stake and before they lit the flame, Jan Hus said and I quote, "Is it thus that you silence this goose? But 100 years hence, there will arise a swan whose singing you will not be able to silence." Jan Hus was wrong. For 500 years that swan's been singing and has not been silenced.

III. Not only the hidden foundation of the Waldensians and others even before the great Protestant Reformation, and not only the glories and the wonders of the Great Awakening, the greatest of all awakenings which was the Protestant Reformation of 500 years ago, I want to tell you about another group, the step-children of the Reformation, the Anabaptists.

There was another group and they didn't fit with the Roman Catholics and they didn't fit completely with the Protestant Reformers, they were called the Anabaptists. I think in some ways they're more the descendants of that earlier group, the Waldensians. They began to study the Bible for themselves. They were contemporaries with Calvin and Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli and others and they began to study their Bibles and have some questions even about the Protestant Reformers and they thought, "Wait a minute, we can't hang onto sprinkling babies. That's not in the Bible." So their leaders had a meeting one night and baptized each other as adults, as believers, and that's one of the first recorded in church history episodes of believer's baptism since the early days of Christianity, the very earliest days of Christianity.

So their critics began to call them Anabaptists. What they mean is you reject the infant baptism of the state churches. They were rejecting the infant baptism of the Catholic state churches and they were also rejecting the infant baptism of the new Protestant state churches that sprung out of the Reformation. So they were hated by both sides. They looked to the Bible as their only rule of faith and practice. Today Mennonites and Hutterites and Brethren groups all claim a direct lineage to the Anabaptists. Now by the way, they rejected the title Anabaptist because that means re-baptized and they'd say, "We're not rebaptizing anybody. Until you've believed and been baptized, you haven't been baptized yet so your sprinkling doesn't count biblically. So we're not rebaptizing, we're just baptizing believers like the Bible teaches."

But not only the Mennonites, the Hutterites and the Brethren groups that claim a direct lineage to the Anabaptists, I believe all modern Baptists owe and honor and have a

lineage to the early Anabaptists Their earliest leader was Conrad Grebel. Conrad Grebel lived a sinful life of debauchery and rebellion as a young man, found himself empty and he connected himself to Huldrych Zwingli in Switzerland, one of the contemporary Reformers of Calvin and Martin Luther. And he studied under Zwingli and in that studying, he was converted. He came to faith in Christ. He quickly embraced the Reformation and the doctrines of the Reformation but he was troubled that they didn't go far enough. Many of these Reformers held onto some various different Catholic practices that were not biblically substantiated. They would tell you, Huldrych Zwingli for example, we need to move slowly. Well, Conrad Grebel wouldn't have any of that. He said, "We've got to get clear about this church/state issue. It's not biblical that the state and the church are one," and he said, "We've got to be clear on the ordinances of the church. We can't keep teaching that people get the body and the blood of Christ and actually get saving power through going through the priestcraft of the Mass." And I think particularly they were disturbed about infant baptism.

So Conrad Grebel began to debate with Huldrych Zwingli, he wrote a letter to Martin Luther and began to ask them, in effect, "You've broken off of the old doctrines of the Catholic Church, you're doing some wonderful things and some wonderful teachings from the Bible again have been established in the land, but I've got a question to ask you Protestant Reformers." Conrad Grebel said, "Are you coming all the way? Are you going to knock off all the Catholic unbiblical practices or just most of them?" And they, in effect, responded, "You're radical. You're going too far. You're going to mess up everything." So they proclaimed Conrad Grebel a heretic, both the Catholics and the Protestants did, and he and his followers were mercilessly persecuted. Because they baptized believers and baptized adults, many of them were executed by drowning. They said, "You like going under the water, we're going to put you under the water."

So the Protestant Reformation of 500 years ago mainly led by Martin Luther, Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, many others, is certainly a part of our great heritage here at Grace Life Church and of all evangelicals and Baptists of our day but we also owe a debt to Conrad Grebel and the Anabaptists. Not as scholarly, didn't do a lot of writing, but said being pure and true all the way is important and that's where we stand. You know, isn't it interesting that in one sense the Protestant Reformation was a complete failure? Because all of these early Reformers never planned to separate from the state, they never planned to separate from the Catholic Church, they just wanted to reform it but it didn't work. They eventually were just thrown out of the Catholic Church. So though reforming the Catholic Church was a failure, it actually in God's providence was a great success that established the Protestant Reformation and Protestant churches.

IV. The incredible good that has come out of the Protestant Reformation. Now I can only skim through a few things and we can talk about this for many hours but here are the things that I want to mention.

1. The simplicity of New Testament church structure and function. No longer was this elaborate complicated system enacted. These guys began to start churches, they read the word of God, they preached the word of God, they prayed together, they sang biblical

songs, they baptized and they took the Lord's Supper. That's what they did. I mean, even by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Catholic system of religion was more complicated than the IRS code. I mean, they just built on statement after statement, edict after edict, council after council that would add on and build on all the things their hierarchy had taught through the years. So things were changed. No more popes. No more bishops. No more cardinals. No more priests. No more friars. No more nuns. No more monks and many many others. Let's get back, they said, what does the Bible say we need? Pastors, elders and deacons. Two ordinances. Preach the word. Pray. Study the word. Go home.

Not only the simplicity of New Testament church structure and function but another great good that came out of the Protestant Reformation was the importance of prayer. Prayer meetings began to spring up everywhere as people were overjoyed that they themselves could come boldly to the throne of grace. Again, the Catholic Church taught you can't pray. You should not pray. That's only for the professionals. And they rejected the concept of going to a human priest and saw Jesus as their only high priest. So the growth of prayer among the average Christian.

The decline of the church state would be another important good that came out of that as I think primarily we owe the Baptists credit for that because the Protestants held onto the church state for many centuries. Like Roger Williams who came over with the Puritans and helped establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony, one of the first colonies in America. But they were Puritans and they believed in a state church system and Roger Williams said, "I don't think that's best. We shouldn't tell people if you're going to live here, you've got to become a part of our church." He said, "If you do that, you're just going to have the unconverted in the church. They'll just go through the motions."

So they ran him off. So he went out into the wilderness, lived with the Indians in a place called now Rhode Island and there settled a little community in Rhode Island, and because he was convinced God led him there, he called it Providence, Rhode Island. And there in Providence, Rhode Island, Roger Williams established the first Baptist church in America, the First Baptist Church of Providence, Rhode Island. By the way, a distinctively Calvinist church.

But here's what Roger Williams said, "To settle here, you do not have to be a part of this church but you must debate me in the public square about the doctrines of Scripture." So he believed in biblical and godly influence on the government in America but just not the requirement that you had to be a member of a church to be a citizen in a community. That came out of the Protestant Reformation and that's the brilliance and the wisdom of America. Christian influence is key to being American. It's foundational but there is no requirement to join a certain church to be an American.

Another important good that came out of the Protestant Reformation, the freedom of speech and the freedom of conscience. All men can learn the things of God, all men can learn from the Bible, and all men have the right to speak what they feel God is showing them from the word of God. This came out of the Protestant Reformation. Before that there was just dogmatic control of the people, what you thought, what you spoke. You

could be excommunicated. You could be put to death. That all was changed after the Protestant Reformation.

Literacy and education. People in the day before the Protestant Reformation were kept ignorant. They didn't want them to read. You just do what the church tells you. But now people were beginning to learn to read and primarily learning to read the Scriptures and education was advanced for the common man, not just for the wealthy and for the hierarchy of the church.

Then another great good that came out of the Protestant Reformation is the Protestant work ethic. You see, before the Protestant Reformation, the church basically said the only real work that's pleasing to God is done by those in the hierarchy of the church. The rest of you common people and all of your blue collar labor, God doesn't think much of that. Well the Protestant Reformation changed all that. They went to the Bible and saw that if a man is a plowboy, that's an honorable work to do and God is pleased in that work and this drove a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship that led to the great ethic that I think is the backbone or one of the backbones of the greatness of America.

But of all the many things we could say were good things that came out of the Protestant Reformation that began formally on October 31, 1517 when Martin Luther nailed those theses to the door, nothing is as important as the five solas of the Reformation. Remember them? Sola gratia, grace alone. Sola fide, faith alone. Sola Christus, Christ alone. Soli Deo gloria, for the glory of God alone. I left out the first one and it's the foundation stone of all the others. I left it out because I want to emphasize it the most and that is sola scriptura, the Bible alone is our authority, because if you don't get that, you don't get grace alone. If you don't get that, you don't get faith alone. If you don't get that, you don't get Christ alone. And if you don't get that, you don't get the glory of God alone.

I want you to look at this picture on the screen and in this picture on the screen, do you see anything unique about that picture? That's a Catholic church. Maybe you can see it better if we zoom in a little bit. There it is. Over on as you're sitting, over on the left side is the pulpit. Why is the pulpit over on one side? The reason why the pulpit is over on one side is because in a Catholic church the altar is the center because that's where you come and find God and get the saving grace of God. It's kind of like a magic spot. You come down to the front, the priest administers the priestcraft to you, and that's what you look to to help you toward heaven, and if there's any preaching to be done, and I'm sure it's not Bible preaching, then they come over to the side, the secondary thing is the pulpit. But all of a sudden after the Protestant Reformation (let me take this with me, I need it,) church architecture changed and in Protestant churches there are not little pulpits on the left or right and not little pulpits on the left, there's one pulpit in the center and why is that? Because exactly what Paul told the original Roman church, Romans 1:15, "I want to come and preach to you the Gospel. I'm not going to come and administer the sacraments. I'm not going to come and sprinkle holy water on you. I'm not going to come with indulgences signed by the pope whereby if you give the church money, you can pay your way into heaven. I'm doing none of that. One thing and one only thing is the foundational

thing that men need to know God and God will use to build his church and that's the preaching of the word of God."

So it's not accidental, it's not incidental, it's fundamental that when we built this auditorium, this is the centerpiece. Not Jeff Noblit. Not Matt Fowler. Not Steve McAllister. But the preaching of the word of God and when the word is preached faithfully in the power of the Spirit, then faith arises in the heart. And that's what Martin Luther saw studying his Bible as an obscure Roman Catholic monk, that when I place faith and the finished work of Jesus through the teachings of the Scripture, then it's the righteousness of faith.

We are, indeed, encompassed about with such a great cloud of witnesses. We stand on 2,000 years of history. Just a side note, I think Grace Life Church and some other like churches, I think certainly we are in the line of the great Reformers and we owe a debt to the Anabaptists, both streams feed unto us, but I think we're a little bit like the Waldensians, I believe God intends for us, not us alone, many others, to make a statement of here's what it looks like to be a true church, here's what it looks like to stand on the Scriptures for faith and practice. Others may get the glory and the recognition and the applause and that's fine but I believe God's got a role for us because – now listen now – all church history is a continuing cycle of resurrections of the church, of awakenings back to the truth, and every church – are you listening to me – every church in every generation is either helping to the present decline or is helping to the present awakening back to the truth of God's church.

You thought I made some of this stuff up we've been talking about for years, didn't you? No, no, no. There is nothing new under the sun, just old old truth we need to stand on, live for and if necessary, die for.