

¹⁰ Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. ¹² Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. ¹³ But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the Word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.

Text: Acts 17:10-13 A 10-25-26 Jer. 23:16-29 John 8:31-36 Ps. 119:XIII-XIV Resp. Ps.: 1
Hymns: 264 (tune: #463), 266, 262, 283

REMAIN FAITHFUL TO GOD'S WORD

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Today we celebrate the Reformation, when God brought people back to people His Word as truth; not what some thought about God's Word or taught about God's Word, but God's Word itself and what it says. When it comes to spiritual and eternal things, God wants us to rely on His Word, and His Word alone.

Martin Luther struggled greatly to find the truth from God. In Luther's day there was only one church for Christians to go to. Luther and everyone else had been taught to unquestioningly believe what the church taught. But Luther found no real peace in the church's teachings. It wasn't until he was able to study the Bible for himself that God led him to understand and believe the truth, that we're saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

The apostle Paul went to the town of Berea, where he preached. We're told that the Bereans, "*received the Word with all readiness*" (from the original also "*with all willingness, with all eagerness*"). That's a great example for us. We don't come to church or read our Bibles only because we should. We need to eagerly hear and study God's Word also because we want to, we need to. Jesus says, "*I am the bread of life*" (Jn. 6:48). We need to be hearing and studying God's Word like our life depends on it, our spiritual and eternal life, because it does.

We're told that the Bereans "*sought the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*" They didn't just believe something because the apostle Paul said it. They compared what Paul said with what the Bible says to see if what Paul was saying is what God says.

God tells pastors, "*Preach the Word*" (2 Tim. 4:2). "*Let him who has My Word speak My Word faithfully*" (Jer. 23:28). Don't believe something just because I say it, or just because our church body teaches it, or just because some person claiming to be a Bible teacher says it. Compare what is being taught to what God says in the Bible. If what's being taught is what the Bible says, it's true. If what's being taught contradicts what the Bible says, it's not true. It's the responsibility of all of us to make sure that what's being taught from our pulpits and by our

church body is what the Bible says, no more, and no less. (By the way, we don't say we're right and everyone else is wrong. We say that God's Word is right, and anything that contradicts God's Word is wrong.)

Before and after our text, the apostle Paul was fleeing persecution. Many of Paul's fellow Jews hated him teaching that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world. Paul had been preaching about Jesus in Thessalonica. But many of the Jews there chased him out. He fled to Berea, where he kept preaching about salvation in Jesus. The unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica heard about it, and came and chased Paul out of Berea. Paul then went to Athens, Greece, where he kept on preaching about Jesus.

When God led Martin Luther to understand and believe *"the just shall live by faith"* (Ro. 1:17), Luther wanted to share this saving truth with everyone. At first, he thought that the leaders of the church would be happy to be reminded of this. But Luther found out that the opposite was the case. Instead of rejoicing with Luther, the church leaders condemned him and his teachings. Luther faced severe persecution, including the threat of death for his so-called "heresy."

Paul kept preaching about salvation by faith in Jesus, and Luther kept preaching this, too. Paul in his day, and Luther in his day, wanted everyone to hear about Jesus and believe in Him and be saved. God changed Paul from a person who hated Jesus Christ, to a person who believed in Jesus and loved Him. At first Martin Luther said that he hated God because he felt that God was an angry Judge who only condemned him and wanted to punish him for his sins. God led Paul, and Luther, to see that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, and rose again. God led Paul, and Luther, to see that by faith in Jesus our sins are all forgiven and we're saved. Paul, and Luther, couldn't and wouldn't keep the saving Gospel to themselves. Paul said, *"Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel"* (1 Cor. 9:16). Martin Luther absolutely agreed with that. In spite of the threat of losing their lives for it, Paul, and Luther, refused to be quiet about Jesus. They wanted everyone to have what they had in Jesus. As Paul said, *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes."* (Ro. 1:16)

May the Lord give us that same kind of zeal to spread the Gospel of salvation in Jesus. By the grace of God we know and believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross and rose again. We know and believe in Jesus as our Savior from sin. Our sins are all forgiven, and all of our guilt is taken away. Jesus is taking us and everyone else who believes in Him to heaven. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (Jn. 3:16). Are we going to keep this to ourselves?!

After hearing Paul preach about Jesus, we're told about the people in Berea, *"many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men."* God brought many of the people who heard about Jesus to believe in Him and be saved! Romans 10:17 says, *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."* Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."*

That's why we invite people to church. That's why we tell them about Jesus. We want them to believe in Jesus and be saved, too! What a wonderful message we have to tell! *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved...."* (Ac. 16:31)

As God helped the apostle Paul, as God helped Martin Luther, so may He help us to be faithful to all of His Word, and help us to be spreading the saving truths of His Word.

As we celebrate God's Reformation, I would like to share with you some thoughts from Martin Luther:

"We should not take offense at the Word of God even though it may sound strange, unlikely, and impossible; but we should firmly insist that if God has said it, it must also come to pass. For no one should ask whether it is possible but should only determine whether God has said it. He is mighty and faithful enough also to do it. Therefore we should believe it."

"We ... have [the] greatest treasure...: the precious Word of God. Let us, then, put forth an effort properly to guard it. Let us not permit our adversaries to lead us away from the right path into the thorny desert, there to accept their self-constructed worship. Let them first prove their cause by the Word; then we shall follow them. But when they enthusiastically cite the authority of the fathers, ... and the councils too, we reply: All this means nothing whatever to us. We want the Word. [The fathers] and the councils are not the Word. Therefore we shall not walk their paths."

"It is the duty both of preachers and of hearers first of all and above all things to see to it that they have clear and sure evidence that their doctrine is really the true Word of God, revealed from heaven to the holy, original fathers, the prophets and apostles, and confirmed and commanded to be taught by Christ Himself. For we should by no means ever let doctrine be manhandled according to the pleasure and fancy of the individual who adapts it to human reason and understanding. Nor should we let men toy with Scripture, juggle the Word of God, and make it submit to being explained, twisted, stretched, and revised to suit people or to achieve peace and union; for then there could be no secure or stable foundation on which consciences might rely."

"When persecution arises because of the Word of God, we can say: I thought so. Christ is in the ship; therefore the sea and the wind rage, and the waves assail us and want to send us to the bottom. But let them rage; it is an established fact that wind and sea are obedient to Him. This persecution will go no farther and last no longer than He desires. And although [others] pounce upon us, they will nonetheless have to be subject to Him. He is Lord over all; therefore this persecution will not harm us."

"Let us learn the art of letting the world boast of great wealth, honor, power, etc. After all, these are light, unstable, perishable commodities, which God throws away. ... As dear children and heirs of God, we should not boast of our wisdom, strength, or wealth; we should boast of the fact

that we have the precious pearl, the dear Word, through which we know God, our dear Father, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent. This is our treasure and heritage; it is certain and eternal and better than the goods of all the world.”

Finally, Luther here speaks as if Jesus were speaking to us:

What I have done and taught, teach thou,
My ways forsake thou never;
So shall My kingdom flourish now
And God be praised forever.
Take heed lest men with base alloy
The heavenly treasure should destroy;
This counsel I bequeath thee. Amen. (TLH #387:10)