

# Scripture alone

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[0:00] For the next few Sundays, we're going to look at the matter of the Reformation, which was 500 years ago, and we're going to try and think how this applies to us today.

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, age something, which I didn't fill in, who was a monk and a theology teacher, he put 95 discussion points on Facebook, no, not Facebook, on the door of the chapel in Wittenberg.

And there is a photograph of him doing it. It's not actually a photograph, it's a painting. Now, that action can be identified as the trigger point for a huge cultural, political, economic, spiritual revolution for Europe.

And in fact, not just for Europe, but for the Americas, for Africa, and onward into the world.

And we still reap the benefits today of the thing that Martin Luther and other people started going in 1517.

[1:26] And we're going to try and unpack a bit of that and look at some of that this morning. That's the plan. And what he was doing was to challenge the Christian church, which in those days would be pretty much the Catholic church.

He challenged them. They've been doing this for 1,500 years. How on earth could he challenge them? How on earth could he take this longstanding widespread church and to accuse it, as he did, of corruption?

How could he disagree with the Pope and all the cardinals and the establishment of that church?

How could he say that he had discovered or rediscovered a better way? How could he? How dare he do that?

That's what they were all asking. How dare you? What gives you the authority to challenge all this stuff?

[2:41] And the answer is that he stood on the Bible. That's what we're going to look at. He wasn't the only person doing this. And I wouldn't like to think that he was doing this all on his own.

There's a map of Europe. Luther was in Germany, so I put an arrow pointing to Germany. There were other famous people like Calvin and Zwingli in Geneva.

There were the Huguenots in France. So all those little red dots, I think, are the Huguenots. And there was actually a Huguenot church in Brighton until just a few years ago.

And my very dear friend, Frank Orner Ornstein, was the pastor. And the Huguenot church was founded in Brighton in something or other, 15-something, 1600 and something.

So they didn't have very many of the original members. But the church was still there. John Knox was doing the same sort of thing in Scotland.

[3:46] In England here, we have all the political and spiritual and religious upheavals with Henry VIII, leading in the end to the arrangement that Elizabeth I came to, the prayer book, the Anglican prayer book, Thomas Cranmer, and other names like that.

And that's a picture to show where England is. I put Poland there, just out of deference to your good self. And, in fact, if you go down Black Lion Street, you can see the house where, I think his name was Mr. Carver, lived, who was martyred in Lewis in 1557, I believe.

So even in our town, even in our county, the conflicts and upheavals that were started off in 1517 echoed through and cost people their lives.

How dare he do it? There's Martin Luther. That's another picture of him. And what was at stake was, what's the way of salvation?

How do people get saved? That was the burning question. That was the heart of the matter. How can I escape God's wrath?

[5:15] How can I escape going to hell? And that was what Martin Luther was saying. We need to know what the answer to that is. And, of course, to answer that question, you have to know where do you go to to get the answers.

So this, the issue of the way of salvation, and then the issue of where you go to find the answers. What is the authority which you trust to tell you the way of salvation?

And in those days, there would be, and indeed today, there would be competing answers. So one answer would be tradition. So how have we always done it? What have we always believed?

What are the traditions? And then another answer would be, well, what do the top people in the church say? What do the popes and the cardinals say?

What do the priests say? Because they're the ones with the authority. They're the gatekeepers of salvation. And what do they say? What do they say?

[6:18] What do they do? And interestingly, we've got relatives in the Greek Orthodox Church. And we had a little conversation with them a few years ago about salvation.

And they said, and I said to them, isn't it great we've both got Jesus? And their answer was a little bit ambiguous about that. And they said, well, actually, we've got priests.

Is that the basis of authority? Is that the key? Or is it people's individual experiences, maybe moving towards mystical experiences, what people think they have heard or experienced?

Is that the authority? And Martin Luther would have said, none of those things is the authority. The authority is what God has said in Scripture.

And at one point, Luther said something to the effect of, I've read my Bible. This is what it says. Here I stand. I can do no other. Martin Luther stood on Scripture alone.

[7:27] So you might say, well, was he right? And in a moment, I'm going to ask the question, would Jesus say he was right? Because that's a good way to answer that question.

But I could ask you a similar question just now. Where do we stand in a confusing world? What do we trust to give some rock-solid basis to our lives?

Would you be like Martin Luther and say, what the Bible says, here I stand, I can do no other? Or what? And I could ask the same question this morning.

What about the way of salvation? That most important of all questions. How can I be saved? How can I escape the wrath of God? How can I escape from hell?

What would you say is the way? Well, let's look at those questions just now. So my plan is to have four sections. Now, first of all, let's just clarify what is the argument about the Bible.

[8:39] Secondly, we'll look at what did Jesus believe about the Bible. Thirdly, what should we believe about the Bible? And then fourthly, how does this affect us as a church and individual? So we'll try and go through those four stages.

Just clarify the argument. Look at what Jesus believed. Put that into the terms of what we should believe. And then how does this affect us? That's the plan for this morning. Okay, you with me so far?

Is the screen all right to see? Is it a bit... It's okay. Good, right, okay. But what was the argument about the Bible? Martin Luther was debating whether the church in his day was right to do such and such, such and such, such and such, to declare salvation from God, this is what God says, and salvation to God, with God, in relation to him.

And one of the particular issues was something called indulgences. And I won't spend a long time on indulgences, but I will say that it was a scheme whereby a representative of the church would go around from town to town and say, here is a way that you can help your loved ones get time off purgatory, and if you pay some money into the church, then somehow the church will ensure that your loved ones get time off purgatory.

It won't be so bad for them in the life after death. And I think it was said, when a...

[10:21] No, what does it say? When a coin into the coffer rings, is it? A soul from purgatory springs. So that's quite a hard sell, isn't it?

And, I mean... But what's the authority for that? Is that right? Is that a right thing? I mean, it's obviously a good fundraiser, but Martin Luther was incensed by this and says, this is just getting money out of people who don't know better, and in the Bible it says nothing about that at all. Or take the issue of trying harder to be accepted with God. Now, I forget the details of this somewhere I read this years ago and I haven't found the reference, but I think Martin Luther, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm not...

I'm in the right territory, at one point was so earnest to try harder to be saved that he thought, if I do a pilgrimage to such and such a holy place and I do the last mile on my knees or the last mile crawling on my face, that will be enough to satisfy God and I will know that I'm saved.

And of course, this is trying harder. And the problem with trying harder is no matter how hard you try, you can never be sure you've tried hard enough. And just think of what that does to your conscience to think, well, maybe I should crawl the last two miles of this pilgrimage.

[11:56] Maybe I should crawl them over bare rock. Maybe I should crawl until my knees bleed and in the bitter cold. Is that enough? Trying harder.

Does it say in the Bible that we're saved by trying harder? What does the Bible say about that? Now, you see, his opponents would have said, well, the Pope says, in Charles and Cesarite, it's signed with his seal at the bottom.

Or they might have said, the church councils have agreed to this. You know, they're the people who know. And Luther said, unless you can show me this in the Bible, I will not back down.

And that was the strength and the conviction that Luther had. Unless you can show me this in the Bible that I'm wrong, I will not back down.

So let's see whether Jesus would agree with him on that. So please take your Bible and we will do a very quick tour through, well, I almost chose this at random, let's take Matthew's Gospel.

[13:16] What sort of thing does Jesus say about the Bible? Now, in the time of Jesus, the Bible would have been the Old Testament.

He, the things that Jesus said are the things that are essentially in the New Testament. So when we find Jesus saying things about his own words, he's in effect referring to the New Testament.

So, we're in Matthew's Gospel. Let's look at chapter 4. This is the temptation in the desert.

And in chapter 4, verse 4, so Satan comes to Jesus and says, if you are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread. So he's got a voice speaking to him.

And Jesus answers that voice with the Bible. Jesus answered, it is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

[14:21] Which is interesting in at least two ways. Because he sees that scripture is powerful enough to contradict and defeat the devil, which is an interesting thing.

And a useful thing. And it's also that the statement that he takes is that people don't live just by bread, but they need every word that comes from the mouth of God.

He's referring to scripture. He's quoting scripture and referring to scripture. And in verse 10, why have I put verse 10?

I think I've put verse 10 because all those answers in that section are quotations from the Bible. It's practical help, isn't it? When we have voices speaking to us, telling us things that are temptations, if we've got Bible to use, we can use that as a defense.

And that's just interesting to see that Jesus said that's very useful for us. Jesus believed that life is not possible without God's words from his mouth. Let's move on and look at another bit.

[15:38] Chapter 5, verses 17 and onwards. This is part of the Sermon on the Mount. And Jesus refers to the Bible, meaning the law and the prophets.

Verse 17, do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

So his view of the Old Testament, he's not getting rid of it, he's fulfilling it. And then he says, I tell you the truth, unless heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter nor the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.

So it looks like Jesus is actually saying that every single letter and stroke and sign in the scriptures is there and will not disappear until it is fulfilled.

So he has a very high view of scripture, doesn't he? He doesn't just say that it's more or less God's word, he's saying every little component of it is the word of God.

[16:52] chapter 7 verse 24 to 26 chapter 7 verses 24 to 26 so this is about Jesus' words and Jesus made huge claims for his own words and here's one of them chapter 7 verse 24 therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rains came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house yet it did not fall because it had its foundations on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rains came, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell with a great crash. Okay, here's somebody whose life is strong and lasts, I think we would say lasts forever and here's somebody whose life is vulnerable and falls and what's, what makes one strong on the other weak?

The strong one, well they both hear the words of the Lord but the one on the rock hears and listens and does what Jesus says and that's a huge statement about the words of Jesus isn't it?

That his words listened to and obeyed make the difference between heaven and hell. No one else would dare say that would they? You wouldn't dare say that would you?

[18:41] But Jesus seems to say that without batting an eyelid. My words are the things that make the difference between heaven and hell. And we see things about the word of Jesus Christ if we go on to chapter 8 verse 26 which is as you remember this incident of Jesus being in the boat with the storm.

Jesus is asleep. The disciples think they're going to drown. He speaks to the disciples in verse 26 and says you of little faith why are you so afraid?

And then he speaks to the wind and the waves and he rebukes the wind and the waves and completely calm. Did you get that?

There's this huge storm and Jesus stands up in the boat and says to the wind and the waves and a complete calm.

these his disciples his friends these men were amazed and asked this question what kind of man is this that the wind and waves obey him?

[20:03] That's a huge statement about the power of Jesus words and therefore who is the person speaking these powerful words? We would say the full reality of it is it's divine power that the word of Jesus is the same word spoken by the same person that in the beginning said let there be light and there was light.

It's a power to make to make the created world or in this case a power to control the created world. Now you can't do this.

You might like to go home and just put that to the test. There's a wonderful bit in Adrian Plass's book where he tries to get a paper clip to move on a table by telling it it won't move because it needs the divine power of the word of God to say to a storm be quiet and it does.

Chapter 15 verse 3 is the incident where the Pharisees and teachers of the law come and criticise Jesus and they say we notice that your disciples don't wash their hands before they eat.

This is in contravention of the tradition of the elders. Notice the tradition there and the elders and Jesus says now why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?

[21:50] And he sees a conflict that they are saying you need to do this and we do that and something else because of the tradition of the elders and Jesus says you are using your tradition to contradict the word the word of God.

Your tradition contradicts the word of God and how dare you contradict the word of God by your tradition and you can read in that passage more details of how he says that happened.

Very interesting parallel for Martin Luther wouldn't it? Jesus didn't allow tradition to over trump the word of God but the word of God over trumps human tradition and if you go on to chapter 19 verses

3 to 6 you'll see another quote this is on the controversy about marriage and divorce and in order to settle it Jesus quotes scripture chapter 19 in verse 4 Jesus quoting scriptures quoting from Genesis haven't you read he replied that at the beginning the creator made them male and female that's a quotation from Genesis and said for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh they are no longer two but one what God has joined together let man not separate the interesting thing is he's quoting

Genesis and the bit of Genesis that he's quoting is just the text he isn't quoting where it says and God said quote something unquote that's the bit that God said what he says is Genesis is what God says so the creator verse four said for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife which is fascinating isn't it Jesus doesn't stop to say oh this is an exception or he just assumes we all know that what the Bible says is what God says it doesn't have to be in quotes and the Lord said something that's the bit that God says the whole thing is what God says what the Bible says God says let's look at Matthew 26 verses 52 to 56 and this is one of these key crucial points in the life of

Jesus where he's arrested and there's this huge pressure on him what will he do because he knows that if he is arrested he will be badly treated and that could and indeed would end in his death in a horrific way so Jesus is faced with choices all the way through what to do about this and in verse 52 Matthew 26 verse 52 he prevents his disciples from putting up a fight to stop this happening put your sword back in its place Jesus said for all who draw the sword will die by the sword do you think I cannot call on my father and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels but how then would the scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way which is a fascinating thing isn't it

[25:48] Jesus says you could be resisting this in fact says Jesus well I could be resisting this but I'm not going to do it and you shouldn't do it because scripture must be fulfilled isn't that fascinating that Jesus submitted his own life his own decisions to scripture you think if anybody would say I don't care what it says in the Bible I'll do my own thing it would be Jesus but absolutely not he the son of God says I will choose I will follow the way that is written in the Bible which I think is impressive now I haven't stopped to comment on the many places that the writer of this biography that's Matthew says that the things that are happening as he writes his story of Jesus are in fulfillment of ancient prophecy so the one that

Roger quoted from Luke as Jesus sees himself as the redeemer from Isaiah just an example of that and Matthew does this too this happened that it might be fulfilled what was written that it might be fulfilled that what was said in Isaiah might be fulfilled that the whole thing of Jesus life is inextricably enmeshed in the flow of scripture and that's where Jesus stands and lives and is to be understood look at please 27 verse 9 which is a little detail about the money that was used to buy Judas's betrayal and it says in 27 verse 7 they decided to use this money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners that is why it has been called the field of blood to this day then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled they took the 30 coins the price set on him by the people of Israel and they used them to buy the potter's field as the Lord commanded me now I won't go into the detail of what was being prophesied and how it happened and everything!

but life is said to be fulfillment of multiple scriptures of streams of prophecy and it's all fulfilled in the Lord Jesus in other words that we can't understand who Jesus is unless we place him in his right context why did he do that why did he say that why did he use that expression why is that does this follow this answer to those things because they all fit into the flow of the whole Bible so I've done that very quickly Jesus take on scripture here are a few thoughts on that number one Jesus knew his Bible extremely well Jesus knew his

Bible extremely well be good if we knew our Bibles extremely well Alec Matia the late Alec Matia I remember him having a little illustration He said it was back in the days when nobody had calculators he said if you take your Bible and count the number of pages and then you go into WH Smith's where they've got a calculator and you put that in and you divide it by 365 that would be the number of pages you would have to read to read through your Bible in a whole year not such a bad idea some people have more time some people have less time he said you won't understand it all but just be reading it through and he said if a man wants to thicken up a piece of wood with paint

you put one layer of paint on let it dry you put another layer of paint on and let it dry you put another layer of paint on and let it dry and gradually the wood gets thicker and he said if you read the [30:32] Bible the first time you read it through you think well that didn't do much I didn't understand a lot of that but go through it again and you go through it again we need to be people who know our Bibles well because Jesus certainly did notice that his approval covers the Old Testament now Islam says that there are textual faults with the Christian Bible but Jesus certainly didn't complain about the text of the Old Testament he's saying that's all what God says and I would further say that there is no demonstration whatsoever of flaws and faults in the text of the

New Testament the New Testament contains the record of the words of Jesus and his apostles so Old Testament and New Testament Jesus endorses both of those I think it was Augustine who said this but this isn't I think a very helpful summary Jesus believed what the Bible says God says and if it was good enough for Jesus I think that ought to be good enough!

for us he was guided by and submitted to himself to scripture and for us to revere scripture I don't mean that we put it in the top shelf in a white bag and never touch it we revere scripture by reading it we revere scripture we believe scripture we submit to scripture and that's not just being contrary or awkward it's showing that we love Jesus so it's an act of devotion to Jesus that if he says what the Bible says is what God says that we should say that's good enough for me so that was looking at what Jesus said so third thing what should we believe about the Bible so just put it into some words here this is the statement of the fellowship of independent evangelical churches to which we belong and it's a very suitable statement

God has revealed himself in the Bible which consists of the Old and New Testaments alone every word was inspired by God through human authors so that the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the word of God without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine the Bible alone speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice I think that's a very reasonable summary you could always tweak the words around a bit but I think that's absolutely spot on so what are we believing we're believing we're called to believe that the Bible is God speaking in power and authority so the words in this book are not mistaken they are old in a sense but we shouldn't think oh that's just the past it's dead and irrelevant but because it's God who speaks his words are not mistaken but true not old and dead but living and active and not irrelevant but indispensable we cannot live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God and there's a quote which says that it's in Hebrews 4 12 which I'll find for you and read which says the word of God is living and active sharper than any double edged sword it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit joints and marrow it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart nothing in creation is hidden from God's sight everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account and the writer there has this very dynamic understanding of

[35:30] God's word rightly spoken and rightly read and rightly understood and rightly received it judges us it pierces us it goes right down deep into us it challenges us in a way that no human words can we should pray that God's word has that effect on us and we should pray as we do week by week that we will know that God's word is living and active and sharp and transforming second bullet point these sort of overlap really God is able to speak he is able to oppose us and Luther would have said we haven't met God until we first met him as our adversary God is able to oppose us and to win us and to woo us wooing is courting as when a boyfriend and a girlfriend talk to one another with a view to loving one another and getting together and

God speaks to us to win us and to woo us in love to get us together with him in the Bible there is an example of things that cannot speak that have mouths but cannot speak and the Bible says that's not God that's idols it's the idols who have mouths but cannot speak but the real God can speak I think it's very important for us to understand that because sometimes you might say can God speak to me can I get the hang of it isn't it just because God is so far away I'll never be able to hear him it's like one of these I had a mobile phone call the other day every few words is it like that when God

speaks well answer no he is a competent communicator it's the idols that have mouths but cannot speak if

God speaks he can make us hear and people therefore are able to understand well if we're listening if we're humbly and spiritually willing to listen speak oh Lord is what we sang what do we say speak oh Lord as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word we are able to hear it's a relationship thing there needs to be a willingness there needs to be a moving towards but if we're saying to the Lord I want to know I want to be clear I want to be certain the Lord will say that is perfectly possible I do speak and I will speak to you notice this text that was from the song we sang right at the beginning the law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul have you ever had that experience of reading something or hearing something from scripture and it's revived your soul the law of the

Lord is perfect reviving the soul the statutes of the Lord are trustworthy but only the priests and the theologians can understand it is that what it says but only the clever scholars can understand it it doesn't say that it says it makes wise the simple the childlike the people who say I don't have to understand everything but I do want to know you Lord like a little child I come please please speak to me please bring me into that relationship with you the word of the Lord the statutes of the Lord are trustworthy making wise the simple that's a wonderful text isn't it doesn't mean that you could expect just to understand the whole of the Bible if you just sat down by yourself there are guides there is guidance there's guides of people who read it before there's the guidance that's been accumulated over the thousands of years of the church's history we don't just come to the Bible as individuals on our own other people have read the Bible as well we read the Bible together we can learn from people who've thought these things through before so guides are helpful but we're not trusting!

[40:26] the guide we're trusting the guide to show us what's in the scriptures God uses people to tell people the way of salvation it's a big subject on its own but the plan of salvation where Jesus died on the cross and rose again is communicated from the apostolic testimony to preaching and the whole thing is the plan of God so God is in on the death of his son he's in on the writing of scripture and he's in on the preaching of scripture so the act of preaching even as we're doing this morning is part of his plan that he is in on the Holy Spirit is at work in this activity as in the other activities I mentioned how do we know the way of salvation how do we know what the gospel actually is the only place where we can find it is in the

Bible the scriptures are the source of the good news of Jesus Christ and it says that this book is really all about Jesus it testifies about him and if we don't read the Bible if we work on something else we don't have any access to Jesus that's a stark truth isn't it if churches decide we won't bother with Bible we'll do something else instead they cut themselves off from their saviour so fourthly what does it mean to us I think I've just got one slide on this we should read and know our Bibles be a worthy thing to attempt wouldn't it we should believe and obey what it says take God at his word if we do that it will change us it will make us different to the world around us it will make us counter cultural that's what happened to

Martin Luther he became in opposition to the culture around him it will make us counter cultural too and the pointed we will be at odds with the world around us we will be the ones who commit the blasphemy as the BBC would see it by saying that God does not approve same sex marriage same sex sexual relationships we become counter cultural if we hold on to what God's word says so there's some bullet points of what this means to us we should use and appreciate the guides that God has given teachers from the past preachers and teachers of the present God uses speaks his perfect words to us through imperfect people which is a thing in itself isn't it we've been thinking about church membership belonging to a church is a negative please don't set yourself to belong to a church which is not fed and formed by

God's word it just cuts itself off from life from God from the Saviour John Wesley I believe said this if there is a book that can show me the way to heaven give me that book it's a great thing to say isn't it valuing our Bibles we should insist on and fully support the authentic ministry of the word we pray we expect our speakers to reverently study scripture doesn't mean they get everything right but the intention is to divide the word of God rightly we pray for the work of the spirit in the ministry of the

word of God as it reveals Jesus the son the work of the spirit in word ministry word and spirit being bound together we shouldn't be ashamed to speak the word of God to others doesn't mean we're always pontificating but there are opportunities Billy Graham was great remember Billy Graham he used to say when asked a question he would say the Bible says it's a wonderful way to answer a question the Bible says for things our fathers told us will not hide them from our children but recite the deeds and wonders of our saviour long ago Psalm 78 verse 4 parents don't hide scripture from your children teach them what the Bible says when they're older they'll decide whether they believe it or not but you need to teach it to them you wouldn't hide this from them would you of all the things that they need scripture is right up there at the top don't hide! [45:53] Scripture from your children reveal it to your children and to anyone else where we have the opportunity Martin Lloyd Jones had this as one of his famous preaching texts Acts 8 verse 4 the disciples went everywhere speaking the word and he did a little tweak on the translation which I think wasn't quite legitimate but who would have dared say that and he said what they did was gossiping the gospel it's very memorable isn't it they went around gossiping the gospel it's a fine thought isn't it Luther shows us this that it is the people who are grasped by the word of God who are the ones who know God and do great exploits for God I think he set us an inspiring example there he is and at one point he said this presumably in

German I opposed indulgences and all the papists but never with force I simply taught preached and wrote God's word otherwise I did nothing and while I slept or drank beer with Philip his colleague the word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it I did nothing the word did everything Amen let's sing