

Sola Christus

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[0:00] The formers were trying to help people to see. So let's just think about a little bit of history together.

! There were rules. Rules, lots of rules. Rules for how and when to bow. Rules for how to walk. Even rules for using your cutlery to eat. And when rules were broken, sins needed to be absolved. That was life in a monastery in Germany. And one of the monks there is Martin Luther. And he would spend hours and hours and hours a day in confession of his sin. But in the process, missed things like chapel services.

Therefore adding more things for him to be confessing. And one of the ways sins were dealt with was through penance. Mass, which is doing things in order to absolve your sins.

[1:12] So your sins can be forgiven. And one day in 1517, he was due to say his first mass as a priest.

And for the first time, he was able to talk directly to the judge of all the earth. Something he had never dared do before.

Because previously, he would address his prayer through Mary or another saint. But finally, as a priest, he could address directly to God.

Address his prayer to God. But this is what Martin Luther thought. How could Martin Luther, a sinful man, address the judge of all the earth?

There was a real problem in his mind. And so he needed a solution. Now he had the opportunity to go to Rome. And being in Rome was a delight.

[2:16] He got to go because he was sent on monastery business. And it was a delight to him because in Rome, you are closer to the apostles and to the saints than anywhere else you could be.

And so he dashed from one holy site to another, clocking up all these merits. With God on the way. And he wished his parents could be there.

Because if they were, they could go and do that too. And therefore, they would free themselves from purgatory. The kind of in-between place between earth and heaven.

And so he even went as far as climbing these steps. There's two pictures of them. It's a staircase to Scala Sancta, which were 28 white marble steps.

And these steps supposedly, Jesus climbs to appear before Pilate. Now as Martin Luther climbs each step, he repeated the Lord's Prayer 28 times.

[3:28] And doing this, he believed, would free a soul from purgatory. But he doubted. He wondered, is this really true?

Another thing that was going on in the time of Martin Luther were these things called indulgences.

The phrase goes, when the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.

Living people paying money so that dead people can be freed from purgatory and go to heaven. But Luther saw this as a complete con.

Nobody was being asked to repent of sins. Sin wasn't taken seriously anyway. It was just a scandalous money-making scheme. Sin wasn't taken seriously.

But these weren't an explanation of the five solas that we're thinking of now. They weren't saying scripture alone, by Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, to God's glory alone.

[5:03] Instead it was Luther kind of questioning things like indulgences. And actually it was written in the language of Latin, which is the language of academia.

Many people couldn't understand it. But this led to a few years of debate. The next kind of two years were kind of crucial.

Led to him disagreeing and debating with Roman Catholic people. And what was going on over these few years was Luther discovering the gospel.

He saw that Rome taught that the Pope was the supreme power on earth. That only the Pope may interpret scriptures. That only the Pope may summon a council and thus reform a church.

But Luther refuted these teachings. Saying that every Christian has a right to interpret scripture. And to call a council to reform the church.

[6:12] This was after Luther had discovered in the scriptures. That God's gift of righteousness is received with simple trust.

No word of affirmation is needed from a Pope. The word of God is in the Bible. He saw that his only ground of confidence to stand before God's throne.

To pray to the judge of all the air. Is in Christ alone. Now we could spend our evening thinking about lots more history.

But that's not what we're going to do. And I don't think that's what Martin Luther would want us to do. Instead we're going to turn to the Bible.

And think about the theme of Christ alone. What the reformers were really doing. They weren't doing anything new. They were recovering what was not being taught.

[7:14] The gospel which is found in these scriptures. But before we do turn to scripture. And I've noticed people picking up their Bibles.

Which is great. Before we do. We're going to sing again. And really there's only one song that we could sing. Isn't there? In Christ alone.

My hope is found. So we're going to see two things from the Bible this evening. Things that hopefully aren't really new to us. But to remind us of this great truth.

Of Christ alone. For salvation. So the first one is this. Jesus alone can bring us to God. John Calvin. Another reformer. Said this. Men suppose. Humans. Suppose that Christ is more severe. And the saints more approachable.

[8:13] So they trust more in the mercy of the saints. Than in the mercy of Christ. And they flee from Christ. And turn to the saints.

In other words. He is saying that. That his observation. Was that people were turning to their saints. In prayer.

Rather than to Christ. Thinking they're more approachable than Christ is. But hopefully we'll see. And be reminded of in the scriptures this evening.

That actually Jesus Christ is approachable. So. Number one. Jesus alone can bring us to God. And I want us to turn to John 14.

I read verse 6 earlier. I'm the way. The truth. And the life. No one comes to the Father. Except through me. We're going to read a few more verses from that. First of all.

[9:13] John 14 verse 8. John 14 verse 8.

Philip said. Lord show us the Father. And that will be enough for us. Philip is asking to see the Father.

In other words. I think Philip is looking to see. The greatness of God. To see God. On a great big throne.

Take us up to the heights of heaven. To where the glory is. But if that's where we're to go. If that's where Philip wants to go.

Actually we. We cannot go there. Can we? A few weeks ago. I was reading. In the news. A 21 year old man. Was given nine years in jail.

[10:13] For attempting. To break into Windsor Castle. On Christmas Day 2021. Break into the castle. To actually go and kill the Queen.

But. But if we're going to. Break into. A palace. To try and. Go and see. The king. Now. We're not going to be able to stand.

For very long. We'll get caught. We cannot do it. And if we tried. On our own. To stand before the throne. Of God.

Then we wouldn't be able to stand. And Jesus. Wants to show his disciples. Here. In the answer. To Philip's question. That you can see God.

God is right in front of you. Verse nine. Jesus answered. Don't you know me. Philip. Even after I have been among you.

[11:12] Such a long time. Anyone who has seen. Has seen me. Has seen the father. How can you say.

Show us the father. Don't you believe. That I am in the father. And that the father is in me. The words I say to you. I do not speak.

On my own authority. Rather it is the father. Living in me. Who is doing his work. Believe me. When I say. That I am in the father.

And the father is in me. Or at least believe. On the evidence. Of the works themselves. I'll stop there. Jesus is saying.

Jesus. God in the flesh. Is saying. Don't you know. Who I am. I am in the father. And the father is in me. They are united together.

[12:10] As one. God is glory. Jesus is God. He is glory. But his glory. His glory is veiled. In human flesh.

So that we too. Can look upon the face of God. As we look upon the face of Christ. Who is fully God.

And fully man. God. And because Jesus. Jesus has come. As a human being. Actually we now. Have a hope. Of standing before God's throne. God. That's what the scriptures show us. Just a couple of. Examples.

From scripture. 1 Timothy 2. 5 to 6. Where Timothy has been talking about. Praying. Paul writes to.

[13:10] Sorry. Paul has been talking about. Praying to Timothy. He wrote. For there is one God. And one mediator. Between God. And mankind.

The man. Christ Jesus. Who gave himself. As a ransom. For all people. This has now been. Witnessed to. At the proper time. It is good.

That Christ has come. As a man. In order. In order. To bring us. To God. So that we can. Approach God. He is the one.

Mediator. Between God. And man. And that is very different. To what was going on. In Calvin's. And Luther's time. In the church.

Remember Luther said. As he was praying. As a priest. To God. How can he. Pray to the judge. Of all the earth. He had been praying.

[14:07] To Mary. And to the saints. Thinking. Thinking. They're. The ones. Should. He should go to. But because. Jesus has come.

As a man. Christ alone. Is now the way. To pray. To the father. Hebrews. 2. 17 to 18.

For this reason. He had to be made. Like them. Fully human. In every way. In order. That he might. Become a merciful. And faithful.

High priest. In service. To God. And that he might. Make atonement. For the sins. Of the people. Because he himself. Suffered. When he was tempted.

He is able to. Help those. Who are being tempted. Writers of the Hebrews. Similarly. Saying. Jesus. Has come. Fully human.

[15:03] In order. That he might. Bring us. To God. And he even knows. What it's like. To be tempted. He knows. What it's like. To be human. And that's.

That's such a. Wonderful thing. For us. He knows. What it's like. To be tempted. And so. So we can come. Before him. And. And be honest.

With him. About our struggles. With temptation. With our sins. Which Jesus. Has died for. And we know. That. He is approachable.

But he understands. He's a merciful. High priest. He's been. One of us. He's human. And so. Jesus. Fully God. Fully man. Says this. And we need to turn. To Matthew 11. Love us to turn.

[16:02] To Matthew 11. I love these.

Few verses. Some of my favorite. Verses. In. In scripture. Jesus says. In verse 27. Kind of similar. To what he said. In. In John 14.

He says. All things. Have been committed. To me. By my father. No one knows. The son. Except the father. And no one knows. The father.

Except the son. The father and the son. They know each other. They are gods. And. Those to whom. The son. Chooses to reveal him.

And then. Jesus says. Come to me. All you. Who are weary. And burdened. And I will give you rest. Jesus invites people.

[16:56] To come. To him. Jesus is one. With the father. All things. Have been given. To him. By his father.

And Jesus. God made. Flesh. Says to us. Come. Come to him. And so. Calvin.

He said. Men suppose. That Christ. Is more severe. And the saints. More approachable. So they trust. More in the mercy. Of the saints. Than in the mercy.

Of Christ. And they flee. From Christ. And turn to the saints. But I think. Scripture. Just the few verses. That we've looked at. This evening. Shows us.

That Christ. Is so merciful. The saints. Are sinners. Like us. They can't. Bring us to God. Jesus. Is God. And he's come down.

[17:51] In the flesh. To live. Like one of us. Christ. Is approachable. He's a merciful.

And faithful. High priest. Christ. What about now? We're living. We're not living in the time of the reformation.

Not living in a time when the majority of people are kind of Catholic. Practicing Roman Catholics. We're not hearing people shake containers of money saying put a coin in and save some from purgatory.

We're not living in that time now. That was 500 odd years ago. What relevance does this have for our world? What relevance does this have for our world? Just one thought that I've kind of got on this.

Kind of in the age of social media. Age of selfies. In the age of trying to kind of show the best.

Presenting the best of our perfect lives online.

[19:01] A world that says look within. Look to yourself. Actually none of us are perfect are we? None of us can stand before the throne of God on our own.

No we need Jesus don't we? Jesus alone. Come down in the flesh. In order to bring us to God.

We're not perfect. We cannot create a perfect world for ourselves.

But Christ has come down. To bring us to God. Christ is not more severe than the saints. The saints are not more approachable.

The saints are sinners saved by grace. Saved by the merciful compassionate Lord Jesus Christ. He knows what it's like to be human.

And so in him we come as we are. Not perfect but not righteous. But trusting in Christ alone.

Second thing.

[20:07] Jesus alone for salvation. Jesus alone for salvation. Luther spoke about being a theologian of glory.

And a theologian of what? No. A theologian of glory. And a theologian of the cross. Theology.

Theologian. The people who study God. And we all as Christians study God. Don't we? And what he's saying about the theologian of glory. Is that they boast in works.

To get glory for themselves. The works of going up those 28 marble steps that Luther did.

Kissing each one and saying the Lord's Prayer. And boasting in that. Saying that's freeing my soul from purgatory. Or the works of the law in the Bible.

[21:04] The law of God. And maybe we may hear people say. Or maybe we ourselves even say.

I have read Pilgrim's Progress. What a great Christian I am. I read my Bible for three hours in the morning.

What a great Christian I am. Thinking those things are going to save us. I go to church. Not just in the morning.

But in the evening. What a great Christian I am. If we're boasting in those. Thinking that's going to make God approve us.

Then we're being a theologian of glory. Glory. Looking glory in ourselves. In what we do. But Luther.

[22:02] Is very clear about people who are trying to. Work for their salvation. He says this in one place. The Lord brings the wrath. The wrath of God.

So trying to obey the law. Brings the wrath of God. It kills. Reviles. Accuses. Judges. And condemns. Everything that is not in Christ. We can't impress God by what we do. We can't save ourselves by what we do. No. We look to Jesus alone. For salvation. Galatians 2. I'd love us to turn to Galatians 2.

Galatians 2 for this bit. Galatians 2. And before we read from that book.

Just as a bit of background to the book. Galatians is written to people who have deserted the grace of God. The gospel.

[23:09] They've deserted it. People have come in and said you need more than just Jesus Christ. Turn back to the law.

Turn back to works. Turn back to circumcision. And that wasn't so different from Martin Luther's day. People then were trying to earn salvation from themselves.

Attend mass. Do penance for sins. In fact there were sins of mortal and venial. Which means forgivable. They were drawn up with an act of penance attached to each one of them.

And the sinner who performed the penance would then return to the priest. To receive absolution.

And be able to partake of holy communion. In other words to take of communion you had to be in a state of grace. If you had a sin that wasn't forgiven. That you hadn't done penance for.

[24:10] You had to work for it. That's not what we say when we're taking communion. We say sinners come through Christ. I've gone off on a tangent.

We need to read from Galatians 2. Galatians 2 verse 19 to 21.

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I've been crucified with Christ. And I no longer live.

But Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body. I live by faith in the Son of God. Who loved me. And gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God. For if righteousness could be attained through the law. Christ died for nothing.

[25:12] Paul is saying if I were made right with God through keeping the law. Then Christ died for absolutely nothing. Christ has been crucified.

And when we come to find life in him. We're completely saved by his work. 100%. And so Paul is saying even if I thought I added just 1% of the work of salvation.

Then Christ died for nothing. 100% Christ's work. I think this kind of. I didn't know you were going to do maths this evening.

Or did you. Now is this true or false? Jesus plus. Something. I've done this wrong.

Jesus plus something equals no salvation. Is that true or false? It's true. I was going to test that you were awake and say.

[26:20] Jesus plus something equals salvation. But I failed to take out the no on that. That's false. What about this? Jesus plus nothing equals salvation.

Is that true or false? True. Jesus plus nothing. Nothing that we do. All his work. That's salvation.

If we go away with nothing else this evening. That's what Christ alone is about. His work. Not our work. The law is good.

It's God's word. Of course it's good. The law shows us our sin. Like a mirror. We look in it and we see we can't keep that.

I'm a law breaker. If we think we can save ourselves by our own law keeping. No. Christ died for nothing.

[27:23] And some more verses in Galatians. Galatians 5. Verse 2 to 4. I'll read verse 2 to 6 actually.

Mark my words. I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value at all.

Do you hear how clear and strong he is? Mark my words. If you think that you need to be circumcised to add to Christ's work in some way, Christ will be of no value to you at all.

Verse 3. Again, I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is required to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ.

You have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.

[28:45] The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love. If you think you need to do something to be saved, then you need to go the whole way.

That's what Paul is saying in verse 3. You need to go the whole way and obey the whole law. If you think there's something you need to do to be saved, you need to go and obey the whole law.

No, it's Christ alone. Jesus plus nothing. No other work. His work alone. That's salvation. You who are trying to be justified by the law, Paul says, have been alienated from Christ.

You've fallen away from grace. He's so strong on this. That's works. And you're a theologian of glory, not a theologian of the cross.

Paul says, Christ alone saves you. The reformers weren't doing anything new. Nothing radically new at all.

[30:04] They were recovering what is clear in the scriptures, which had been lost. Forget these penances.

Forget trying to pray someone out of purgatory or give a coin, give a bit of money to free them. No, Christ has paid it all.

Christ has done it all. Jesus paid it all. All to him, I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain.

He washed it white as snow, not me. Paul says, if you're trying to add to Christ's work, you fall away from grace.

And we'll look at grace alone properly in a future week. It's all of grace. Nothing of your own work. It's a gift of God. The law, it just keeps saying, do this.

[31:02] And it is never done. Christ says, I have paid it for you. We're going to sing a couple of songs, actually, if that's okay, Phil.

All I, but through Christ in me. Father, we praise you for this truth of Christ alone for salvation. We praise you for raising up people like Martin Luther and John Calvin and others to show people the truth that is Christ alone for salvation, clearly shown in Scripture alone.

And we pray, Father, that would be a truth we would delight in, rejoice in, take comfort in, and proclaim to others.

Help us as a church not to depart from this truth, we pray. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.