

Heroes of the Faith - Luther

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[0 : 00] That was in November, December. We looked at three characters from early church history. We met Athanasius and Augustine and Chrysostom. And this season, this winter, we're looking at three leaders from the period of the Reformation, so Martin Luther, John Calvin and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer.

Now it just so turns out that these talks, the ones from last year, some of them and these, I've just published in this little book called *Standing on Their Shoulders*. So this is an unrepentant plug. I've brought copies of this book along, and if afterwards you want to buy a copy, then please come and see me. Or it might be that there are people who haven't been able to make it tonight, and from that book they can get some of the material that we're dealing with.

So I'll try and present over 45 minutes perhaps, so that we can have 10, 15 minutes at the end of questions. So please feel free to jot them down and think of what we might talk about together afterwards.

Well, let me read, first of all, from Romans chapter 1. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

[1 : 56] To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And from verse 16, Paul writes, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it, for in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it's written, the righteous shall live by faith.

I suspect that all of us in the room tonight are Christians and we've met the Lord Jesus through the preaching of the gospel. The gospel in these verses from Romans chapter 1 is neatly summarised. But I want us to think about not just what Paul describes the gospel as being, but also its impact, how it shapes not just people, but countries, civilizations, nations as well.

[3 : 14] It's very easy for us to think that the gospel shaped me, and it's true. But we can easily forget that the gospel is so powerful that it shapes groups of people as well.

So Paul begins these first few verses by describing his ministry. He's set apart for the gospel, though he hasn't said yet what that is.

Then he says in verse 2, this gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures. So whatever this gospel is, we know that it was promised a long time ago. It was promised, Paul writes, beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures. So this gospel is not just about the day in which Paul lived.

This gospel is something much longer and bigger because this gospel was promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures. We still don't know yet the content.

[4 : 24] We have to wait till verse 3 when Paul says, he set apart for the gospel, he promised this beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures concerning his son, concerning his son, who was descended from David and was declared to be the son of God through the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.

The gospel is a promise from the Old Testament and it's a promise about a person, Jesus Christ, descended from David, so a human being, but also a royal human being, and shown to be God's

own son by his resurrection from the dead.

Jesus Christ, our Lord, is the big summary at the end of verse 4. Paul goes on, verse 5 and 6, to say that it's through the Lord that he's received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith, but notice it's for the sake of all the nations.

It's not just for Paul, it's for the whole world. And of course, if you read on in verse 16 and 17, we learn that this gospel is power.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel, Paul writes, for it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, the Jew first and to the Greek.

[5 : 57] It's a promise given in the Old Testament. It's about the person of Jesus Christ. And this gospel proclaimed brings power for individuals, certainly, but for nations as well.

We learn in verse 5, for his name among all the nations, or verse 16, first to the Jew and also to the Greeks. The gospel is powerful to change the world.

That gospel, which is a promise about a person for powerful transformation. Now, in these talks, it's my normal practice to begin with a brief Bible study, like this one, to introduce the theme of the night, or the theme that I'm expounding in relation to a particular historical person and their ministry. And as we'll go on to see, this passage for Martin Luther in the 16th century was one that was powerful, not just for him personally, but powerful for the world in which he lived.

The gospel changed his world. What was the world? What was it like, this world in which Martin Luther lived, was born?

[7 : 27] Well, the church in Luther's day, in the late medieval world, the 1400s, was seen as very corrupt.

It might have been corrupt because there were priests who were pursuing worldly gain. That's certainly true. Martin Luther visited Rome in 1510 and saw in Rome more corruption in the church than he'd wanted to see.

He was horrified. But one of the most striking forms of corruption in Luther's world wasn't just so much that the priests visited brothels, but that the priests controlled the lives of believers.

That's at the heart of the corruption that Luther wanted to rebuke. The priests controlled your life because they maintained a system of seven sacraments, baptism when you were born and anointing just before you died, and at every point in between there was not only baptism and the last rites, but there was confirmation or penance or marriage or ordination, communion.

There were any number of different sacraments which you had to connect with if you were to be a Christian.

[9 : 15] But it's not so much that the sacraments themselves were necessarily greatly evil, but Luther's point was it was through these seven sacraments that the priest controlled your life.

Every moment or every phase of your life was indebted to the priest's control. And it wasn't just that the priest had something to say or something to give you, but the idea was that the priest would present to you these seven sacraments and as it were you had no possibility of resisting God through them, i.e.

your faith wasn't important. You didn't have to receive any gifts from God by faith. The priest just turned on the hose and sprayed you with it and you just got it whether you liked it or not.

So the world into which Martin Luther was born was a world where priests controlled the lives of Christians, Christians weren't expected to exercise faith to receive God's promises and consequently you and I would have been entirely at the mercy of what the priest gave us.

You couldn't own God's promises unless the priest first gave them to you. Now Luther himself was a man of quite tender conscience.

[10 : 55] You know there are some people who never feel guilty when they sin badly but there are other people who feel really guilty even if they just accidentally knock someone in the tram.

That was kind of the guy who Luther was. He felt guilty at everything. He was a man of very tender conscience and often felt very spiritually depressed.

He felt like the devil was attacking him. He felt down in the dumps. He felt very critical about his own spiritual experience. He became a monk against his father's will to fulfil a vow he'd made when he was walking home one night to the university where he was studying law.

It was a thunderstorm and he felt his life at risk. So he knelt down, he prayed, he said to God, if you save me from this thunderstorm, I will enter the monastery.

I will repay you with a life as a monk. Now, this is a very famous story.

[12:08] If you've seen the Luther movie, it's quite dramatic and the movie opens with this monk running through the forest. It's wet. Thunderclaps behind him. As it turns out, he just had a big argument with his dad.

He'd been visiting his parents and his father was putting pressure on him to do what he wanted with his life. And I think, scholars think, that to some degree, Luther uses the storm and makes a vow to enter the monastery as a way of avoiding what his dad wanted for him.

Because you can't then very well say to dad, I've just made a vow, I've entered the monastery. Oh yes, sure, if you want me to become a lawyer, I'll become a lawyer. No dad, you can't say that anymore because I've taken this very important vow to become a monk.

Anyway, he makes this vow, he honours the vow and he joins a monastery. He thought that in the monastery, perhaps, his tender conscience, his feeling guilty or his feeling anxious about his status before God might be resolved.

He might there stop feeling guilty, stop feeling anxious, stop feeling hypercritical. But as it turns out, to some degree, being in the monastery made matters worse.

[13:45] He had, though, in the monastery, a wonderful mentor named Stalpitz. Stalpitz was the leader of the monastery and he was a very kindly man.

And he encouraged Luther to read the Bible for himself. Now, in his day, that was unthinkable. Unthinkable that you would pick up and read the Bible.

The assumption was, in his education system, that you didn't read the original document. What you read was people making comments on other people's comments on other people's comments on other people's comments about the Bible.

Some education systems in the world today are still like that. You don't think for yourself by reading a text. You look at what really important people have said about the text.

Right? And that was Luther's world. But Luther's mentor says, why don't you read the Bible for yourself and see if you can find there some balm, some encouragement for your anxiety, for your spiritual depression.

[15:05] So what have we got so far in the story? Well, we've heard that Luther's world was one in which priests controlled the lives of people in their church.

And they controlled their lives by saying, you can only contact God through these seven channels, these seven sacraments, these seven hoses, these seven supply lines.

And of course, who gives out the supply lines? It's the priest. Luther himself is an anxious man.

He's had an argument with his old man. He enters the monastery and there he finds some measure of peace, but more importantly, he finds a mentor who helps him read the scriptures.

And though it's a long battle, perhaps over 10 or 12 years, while he's in the order, he keeps looking at this very text that we've read from Romans chapter 1.

He keeps looking at Romans 1.16 and Romans 1.17. I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

[16:34] For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it's written, the righteous shall live by faith. When Luther read this word, sorry, these verses, but particularly the phrase the righteousness of God, his instant association was with, God is right to judge me.

When he heard the phrase the righteousness of God, he heard, God is correct in judging you, sinner. And I wonder whether in our world it would be very different.

If you spoke to some of your non-Christian friends and you said, what do you think the word, what do you think it means when the Bible says, talks about the righteousness of God? My hunch is that we could do a vox pop and most people would say, oh, the righteousness, God's right, he's holy, he's got the right to tell me what to do.

I'm just making this up, right? But I wonder whether today it would be very different. But Luther somehow is dissatisfied with this, that the righteousness of God means God's, God is right to judge us.

Because he looks at verse 16 and says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. Paul seems to think it's fantastic. He says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it's the power of God.

[18:06] So this righteousness of God, whatever it is, it's powerful. It's powerful for salvation for everyone who believes, the Jew first and the Greek.

In it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faithful faith. Whereas Luther had traditionally, not just Luther, but many people in his age, had heard the phrase righteousness of God to mean God is

right to judge, Luther came to realize that actually, the apostle Paul, when he writes the righteousness of God, actually means that God gives us a gift of righteousness. That it's not that God is righteous and he hates us, it's that God is righteous and he gives us a gift of righteousness which reflects his own character.

Can you see the difference? That the righteousness of God doesn't mean that God judges us, it means that God saves us, it's just the opposite. That God makes us right with him.

And I've got a quotation for you there printed on the page. It was written a long time after his conversion, so there's some debate about why he wrote it, but let's read it together anyway.

[19 : 33] He writes, describing the moment when he understood what Romans 1 was about, though I lived as a monk without reproach. I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience.

I didn't love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. And secretly, I was angry with God. Thus, I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.

Nevertheless, I beat importunately, that means continually, persistently, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, the verse I've just read, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

But there I began to understand that the righteous of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith.

And here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. And I extoll my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word righteous of God.

[20 : 45] Thus, that place in Paul for me was truly the gate to paradise. paradise. It was Romans chapter 1 that turned Luther's world upside down.

And consequently, it was Romans 1 that turned Germany upside down, that turned Europe upside down, where there was a new fresh breath of the Spirit of God through the Church of God.

God could do something powerful and new in your heart. That was what Luther came to understand, was the meaning of Romans 1 17.

Now, as I said, in later life he wrote those words. And it makes it sound like Luther came to this discovery just all of a sudden.

He was sitting down one day and it just jumped out at him. That's what it sounds like when he says it was truly the gate to paradise. You go through a gate, it's a very distinct moment.

[22 : 03] One time you weren't on one side of the gate, the next moment you've gone through the gate. He's probably pushed the events a bit close together. It probably took him ten years actually to work out what Paul really meant in Romans chapter 1.

It took him a lot longer than this quote probably suggests. And it's true that the older you get, I'm finding this myself, the more you look back at things and you see events kind of getting closer to each other or getting collapsed into one another.

So I think this is Luther as an old man, misremembering or figuring that it all happened in an instant, whereas it might have taken a bit longer. Whatever, Luther now starts teaching others about this new found insight.

This is the Luther that's really famous. Luther was now a teacher at a small university in a place called Wittenberg.

Luther is the teacher. You didn't post online your lecture notes or your tute readings. What you did was you went down to the church and you nailed on the door of the church the tute reading for tomorrow so that your students, who were probably walking to and fro, could stop off at the door and read, stand there, they couldn't photocopy it of course, they just stood at the door and they read it and go, that's what we're talking about tomorrow in our seminar, go off home or perhaps they took notes.

[23 : 43] So Luther decides to provoke his students to a debate in one of his classes on penance, whether you needed the priest to assure you that your sins were forgiven.

Interestingly though, when he nails these 95 theses to the door of the castle church, he nails these theses to the door on October 31st.

Now what do you know even today about October 31st? Halloween, right? Halloween is just the word for all saints evening.

So the 1st of November is all saints day and the 2nd of November is all souls day. Those were the days that traditionally medieval Catholics prayed to the saints.

All saints day, 1st of November, you pray to the saints. All souls day, you pray to dead souls. So Luther, in nailing these 95 theses to the door of the castle church on the 31st of October, he's not just giving his students some truth reading, he's kind of making a statement about why would you pray to saints?

[25 : 14] Why would you seek the intercession of the dead? Of course, we still have a bit of Halloween left, or actually in Australia it's getting more and more kind of obnoxious really.

But that's a very ancient tradition that went along with All Saints Day the 1st of November and All Souls Day the 2nd of November.

Luther isn't stating here what he thinks about justification. There's not much mention of justification or the righteousness of God in these 95 theses.

He's really making a point about how you can be assured that your sins are forgiven. penance was the way traditionally in his day that people found reassurance in seeking out the priest and asking the priest for his blessing and absolution.

But in those 95 theses, and you should remember the thesis doesn't mean like a doctoral thesis or something. A thesis is a sentence. The 95 theses are 95 sentences.

[26 : 23] So, you know, they could fit on that page. There's not a lot of them. They're just 95 sentences. But look at the one I've got printed for you. This was in the middle of them. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God. Now, he doesn't mention in this sentence righteousness or justification but he is making a very distinct point that if you want to find grace if you want to experience God's mercy then it's the gospel where you find it not in the treasures of the church.

the saints the pope the relics the true treasure of the church is not praying to a saint but is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

Well, this set off quite an enormous series of events. 50, 60 years earlier the printing press had been invented in Europe it was probably invented in China earlier but at least in Europe for 50, 60 years people had been distributing literature very cheaply and so even though Luther's theses two pieces of paper worth or perhaps a bit more were designed for his students.

Perhaps in the back of his mind they might have been designed for something else because remember he posted them on the 31st of October perhaps he knew that by posting them in a public place they could easily take them down and someone else could set not type them up that would be an accuracy but set the printer and distribute copies for a cent apiece which is exactly what happened within months the whole world the whole German Christian world was talking about this rebellious monk who through reading the scriptures had discovered a new insight about the gospel this very quickly came to the attention of the pope and the emperor now Germany was a political mess in the day that

[29 : 18] Luther lived you had lots and lots of tiny kingdoms hundreds and hundreds of tiny kingdoms and Luther lived in one of these tiny kingdoms called Saxony and over seeing these hundreds and hundreds of principalities was an emperor who wasn't born to the job the emperor had to be elected to the job and it just so happens that the way you got elected as the German emperor was you had to be voted on by seven princes only seven men chose who the emperor would be but Luther's local prince in Saxony was one of those seven important men who decided on the future emperor so Luther's prince was a very important man in

Germany because he was only one of seven who got the right to voice his opinion about who the next emperor would be now as it happened an election was about to happen and so Prince Frederick Luther's prince was to be called to a meeting where they were going to decide on the next emperor everyone wanted to know what this man was going to do but he was a very wise and clever and canny leader and he was actually getting lots of publicity from his rebellious monk at his university so the prince who doesn't like Luther's ideas nonetheless decides to back Luther and protect him it's earning him money right students are coming from England and from France and from Italy to study it with this Mr. Luther and the prince is thinking to myself this is pretty darn good I haven't had to do any publicity to get people coming to my town paying my taxes listening to my lecturers so perhaps one of those wonderful moments in history that there's a great relationship between the prince and his protestant lecturer however though a new emperor got elected this new emperor was a very young man he was 15 he was 15 I think when he got elected and he was a Spanish man his name was Charles V and he didn't like the Germans he thought they

were so beneath him and not only did he despise the Germans even though now he was the German emperor he particularly didn't like Luther so he calls Luther to his imperial diet a diet doesn't mean a kind of a plan for eating steak or only drinking banana smoothies or something a diet is just a different word for a parliament so there's an imperial parliament and it's been called for a city in Germany called Worms I've got it printed there for you or if you are speaking bad English or bad German you'd say worms so when you hear the phrase the diet of worms it doesn't mean that Luther's eating grubs it's the imperial diet the imperial parliament that's meeting in a German city called Worms and the emperor a kid really of 15 asks

Luther to change his mind and renounce the things he's written about the corruption of the church or the way that the clergy have captured the consciences of parishioners Luther asks for time to think about it which is kind of a clever play he'd had he'd taken him three months on a donkey to ride there in the first place so he had plenty of time to think he says dear emperor thank you sir tugging four locks thank you so much for giving me safe passage can I have until tomorrow to think about whether I'm going to change my mind the emperor huffs and puffs but he grants Luther an extra day Luther then overnight has put together two piles of books and he says dear emperor those books that I've written those tracts or those documents I would not change my mind on because what

[34 : 31] I've said there is what Christians through all history have believed that's what Augustine believed or that's what Athanasius believed or that's what Chrysostom believed so he says to the emperor sir I could not recant those ideas because then I'd be renouncing all the church forever the emperor kind of agrees and Luther says these things well I would be happy to change my mind if dear emperor you can show me where they are incorrect so he throws back the onus on the emperor to show now now he's getting a bit impertinent the emperor doesn't like this play but Luther I've got printed for you says unless I'm convinced of error by the testimony of scripture or by clear reason I cannot and will not recant that means change his mind recant anything for it's neither safe nor honest to act against one's conscience which of course was part of his critique of the clergy that they captured the conscience of people like him he says

I'm bound by the scriptures I've quoted and my conscience is captive to the word of God he probably said though we're not sure here I stand I can do naught else but he certainly said God help me amen Luther has stared down the emperor Charles V and has refused to change his mind unless the emperor can show him from the scriptures why he's wrong which the emperor does not do in fact the emperor says of Luther you are now an outlaw you now have no human rights no civil rights in our nation you now are a non person you are persona non grata Luther by now has been excommunicated by the pope and he's been outlawed by the emperor he doesn't have any rights to be alive he's taken his stand on the freedom of the conscience and the authority of the scriptures behind them lurk a new view of justification by grace through faith he leaves

Worms this German town fearing for his life and rides on horse back to the safety he thought of his hometown Wittenberg where the prince protected him but something weird happened on the way home from this imperial audience in the middle of the night he's kidnapped deep in the forest some men on horseback grab him and race off with him he has no idea who they are he has no idea where they're taking him it's just if you do get a chance to see the movie with Ralph Fiennes who's the most handsome Luther you'll ever find in the movies it's really well done the movie's excellent and this moment when he's kidnapped in the forest is true and it's gripping it just so happens that he's kidnapped by his own prince at least by men sent by his own prince these aren't guys who hate Luther these are guys who've been sent to protect him so that no one else can kill him and these kidnapers take Luther to a castle called the Wartburg printed there for you where he's given safety he's put under house arrest he stays eight months just shy of eight months in the castle and gets to basically by himself he can't leave he's not safe and in these eight months he does something remarkable he translates all the new testament from Greek into German he just sets himself down and just starts working and then there have been German translations of the Bible before but this is Luther's this reflects Luther's passion and the phrasing he uses is fresh and it's vibrant language and he uses clever little German proverbs instead of you know kind of middle eastern imagery so when people then start getting copies of this the Bible comes alive they've never heard they might well not have heard the stories before in German that's perfectly possible but in this particular translation people are just queuing up for copies and while he's in the Wartburg he writes a number of other things as well but he's most famous there for writing or translating the Bible into contemporary

german he wants he wants the the the the the cobbler the baker the tailor the candlestick maker the farmer anyone to be able to read for themselves so he makes the translation as clear and simple as he can he wants to evangelize the people by getting to read the scriptures for themselves now so far the story i've told is only a small part of his life but it's the most famous part of his life right i'm going to spend just a few minutes on the later part of his life in much less detail but by trying to make a very stark contrast because the young luther might have been a man of ardour and passion but the

older luther becomes very conservative and cranky he stresses the importance of order not just ardour he's in the wartburg and he hears that there are riots going on in his hometown and his prince says to luther get out of the castle i need you now come home to wittenberg and please calm down the riots you know why they were rioting because someone in a communion service gave to everyone present bread and wine traditionally it was only the priest who got bread and wine you guys the crumbs you only got bread and you only got it once a year perhaps perhaps twice people are rioting because this is just this is a step too far and the guy who gave the communion with bread and wine to all the people wasn't wearing robes can you just imagine that a church where you don't wear robes this is too much for the prince and he calls luther home to settle things down and he does that quite successfully but it's not just at that moment that luther brings order out of chaos repeatedly now in his life he's asked to bring order where people are going too far some peasants rise up and ask for freedom from their lord the lord who ran the farm this is a couple of years later they'd heard luther preach on freedom luther's name by the way originally was l-u-d-e-r luder but he changes his name to make it rhyme with the greek word for freedom elutheria so it just changes the d into a th but nonetheless now he's you look at luther and he said my name is freedom that's what he's doing so the peasants rise up and they say but luther's telling us that we should be free it's all about freedom now right and luther's going whoa this is going this is getting out of hand well yes i said i talked about freedom personal freedom spiritual freedom no no you get back to work you peasants no i'm not saying that you should rise up against your masters in fact look at the quote i've got for you it's really extraordinary luther writes the peasants are starting a rebellion and are violently robbing and plundering monasteries and castles which are not theirs and by this they've doubly deserved death in body and soul as highwaymen and murderers if a man is in open rebellion everyone is both his judge's executioner just as when a fire starts the first man who can put it out it's the best man to do the job for rebellion is not just simple murder it's like a great fire which attacks and devastates a whole land therefore let everyone who can smite slay and stab secretly or openly remembering that nothing can be more poisonous hurtful or devilish than a rebel it's just like you must kill a mad dog if you don't strike him he will strike you and a whole land with you luther saying this is really dangerous it's okay for randomly people to kill peasants in their uprising he also got really frustrated with the jews who weren't becoming christians he thought that with now the gospel being preached in german and a new fresh wave of understanding that jews should be converting in great numbers and when they didn't he asked for

their synagogues to be put to flame and to be burnt down now you might know something about german history in the 20th century when hitler quoted luther and said it's okay for us to burn down the synagogues of the jews because luther told it was that told us it was okay now i get that luther was old and cranky i'm pretty old and cranky too on my not so happy days and i get that he was a man facing extraordinary odds he'd stared down the pope he'd stared down the emperor his life was at risk he's living in a in a new kind of world a dangerous kind of world for a man of his conviction religion but i don't think nonetheless that you want to justify this kind of extreme response i understand that in his day disorder was dangerous but i don't want to excuse luther and suggest that he was right in saying you should kill peasants or burn down synagogues he did get cranky he did get agitated he wanted to rattle the cage why aren't people becoming christians why aren't people responding i thought this is all it would take the gospel in german in fact if you'll allow me perhaps something that's a little bit close your ears if you don't like words that are a little bit naughty this is what luther said in his later days i'm fed up with the world and the world's fed up with me i'm like a ripe stool and this world is a giant anus and we're about to let go of each other he used this kind of bold and and kind of almost disgusting language and he's just ready to die he's had enough in fact at his funeral his best buddy whose name was melancthon he taught greek at the university with luther describes luther as a violent physician at his funeral did i have i got that as the heading yeah it's at the top of the page what melancthon meant was sometimes you need a doctor who's going to break the bone before he resets the bone sometimes you need a doctor who's going to

give you a diagnosis and medicine that's going to be really painful to receive but actually the doctor's doing you a good service through his violence and i'm kind of with with melancthon sometimes in history you need those leaders who just shake the shake the cage a bit and sometimes they go too far sometimes they go too far now i love luther i could talk for hours and hours and you might one day be in one of my classes where i do talk for hours and hours about mr luther why i like him so much is because he's the kind of person whom god uses despite his great weaknesses remember these words from 2 corinthians 12 to keep me from becoming conceited the apostle paul

[49 : 38] writes because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations a thorn was given me in the flesh a messenger of satan to harass me to keep me from becoming conceited three times i pleaded with the lord about this that it should leave me but he said to me my grace is sufficient for you my power is made perfect in weakness therefore i will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so the power of christ may rest on me for the sake of christ i'm content with weaknesses insults hardships persecutions calamities for when i am weak then i am strong luther's life is one of great powerful achievements and his life is one of flawed sinful man being used by god anyway doesn't that give us encouragement that god can use us despite our weaknesses despite our feet of clay despite our sin despite our flaws i love luther and i love what he stood for so i'm happy to call myself a protestant christian someone who owns the authority of the scriptures who understands the importance of the freedom of human conscience who understands the gift of grace that comes to us described by the doctrine of justification and i hope tonight you like luther just a little bit as well be happy to take some questions or comments or feedback for a few minutes before you buy the book yes so luther in this period wouldn't have described himself as a protestant no he described himself as an evangelical that was his word for himself what happened was other people started calling the people who followed luther protestants it wasn't a negative word they they were the people who'd summarized what they believed in a document and the document was called the protestatio the protestation and so anyone who held who agreed with the dot points got the name protestant not so much from luther but through this summary of doctrinal points which luther had provoked but it is the same period though luther wouldn't have used it of himself yeah and of course his day had so many different standards from ours about what's acceptable behavior and what's not acceptable behavior and they were scared of things that we're not scared of and they reacted strongly to things that we don't react strongly to so there's all those cultural transpositions that you have to make

I want to learn from Christians who've made mistakes who have some wonderful ideas they might well go too far and I think I should still learn from them and that just because you're a great sinner doesn't mean that I don't have great things to learn I don't want to learn your sin but I want to learn nonetheless from you there was a fellow in England a few years ago who was leading a Baptist church in Cambridge and he had a mighty moral fall and he left the church but he'd published many books and it was interesting that the churches in Cambridge at the time said we're going to keep selling his books because though he's had a mighty moral collapse what he wrote in those books was still true now we've discovered in the meantime that he wasn't able to live it out but that doesn't mean that what he said there was untrue just because he wasn't able to live properly in the light of it and I thought it was a really interesting moment my reaction would probably take the books off the shelf but they were pretty determined to say you can learn from people even if they've made great moral mistakes and I suppose we've seen in the media even in the last week in Australia the controversy about whether

Mark Driscoll should speak at Hillsong next month and of course the invitation has been withdrawn largely because of media pressure now I think I don't agree with Mark Driscoll on a lot of things but I think I still want to learn from him what he thinks he's done wrong and how he could avoid doing that thing wrong and do I stop reading anything that Mark Driscoll ever said or ever wrote or do I stop listening to any sermon he ever preached because he's a sinner I don't listen to much anyway but I don't think I'd make that the line the line of the sand there's about 17 questions there I'll answer at least this way Luther didn't mind being in the minority and I think that's an important lesson for us more and more so in the post-Christian

West we've got to be content with being in the minority and not get frustrated when the government doesn't listen to our voice well we're a very small number of people in a sense in a democracy they don't have to so I think learning to be in the minority in our churches and having a prophetic voice

still speaking the truth speaking truth to power perhaps even though we might not go very far and holding on to those important insights even if we're ignored that's not answering the megachurch question my fear with lots of megachurches is that they've actually accommodated themselves to the culture too much and I've recently read some articles that say the next wave of liberalism in the United States is coming out of megachurches because they've given up the doctrine of the trinity and if you give up the doctrine of the trinity you give up everything the doctrine of the trinity is very hard to sell so you build a church around what's easy to sell and you end up actually letting the culture decide what you believe and what you don't believe

I think probably our time is done but I'm happy to stay around for a few minutes and answer more questions or you might bring them along next week and swap them up with your questions on Calvin so let me pray it is so wonderful heavenly father that we can enjoy our fellowship tonight thinking about our brother Martin and thinking about the ways you've guided and protected and reformed your church through the ages please help us as we can to pick up insights from Luther's ministry to know better how to live as a minority in our own world for we pray in Christ's strong name Amen Amen