

The Roots of the Reformation

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Here we go. Let that thundering voice sound forth. Please turn in your Bibles to Isaiah 55, please, to Isaiah 55. If you are new or visiting, welcome.

My name is BK Smith. I have pleasure of being one of the lead pastors here. If you weren't with us last Sunday, you missed a little bit of a short announcement.

There was this expectation we were going to be getting into the Book of Romans after the parenting conference, but we decided to hold back on that series, just kind of waiting for the details of the merger with Church of 99.

We're kind of on that precipice of getting into Romans chapter 3, and if you're familiar with Romans, that's when it really gets to roll. And we kind of didn't want to go ahead before them, but I thought I would continue on this series in regards to God's Word.

If you knew from the summer, we're teaching different aspects of the Bible. We're talking about how the Bible all fits together, how the books work, what are the themes that we see throughout God's Word.

[1 : 13] And obviously, part of our teaching is to teach you to understand, so when you take that time to read your Word, you know what God is saying.

But this morning, along with that theme, I want to take a look at why the Bible became the sole basis of our faith.

And I want us to briefly look at the men and women who made sure that this Word of God could be freely read in the churches freely around the world.

If you look at the text of Isaiah 55, it's the same text Chris read. It says, Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come, buy, and eat.

The picture that Isaiah has for us, he's at the gates of the city of God, and there's this banquet table set up with the greatest foods, the choicest of wines.

[2 : 20] And we are being bought in, we are being invited in, all who are hungry. Notice it says three times, come, come, come. It is an invitation to share in the goodness of God.

No price of admission is needed. The fare is free. Why is it free?

It is free because it's already been paid in full. If you are familiar with the book of Isaiah, chapter 55 follows chapter 53.

In chapter 53, Isaiah explains who paid the price for us to be welcomed into the city of God.

Isaiah 53, starting in verse 4. You will recognize him from these descriptions. Surely he has borne our griefs. And carried our sorrows.

[3 : 26] Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds we are healed. In verse 12. Yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.

It was Jesus Christ, the redeemer that they looked forward to, who has paid the entrance for us to enter into that banquet.

Now let me ask you a simple question. Have you ever thirsted for the goodness of God?

Have you ever, at a point in your life, cried out for thirst for the love of God?

[4 : 34] Have you ever felt that you were ever in the valley of the shadow of deaths and did not feel that you would ever have an opportunity to long for that water?

Has there ever been times in your life where you can say like the psalmist, like the deer that pants for the water, so my soul longeth after thee?

Am I unique in that experience? I believe every believer knows what that longing is all about.

It's part of our human condition. Let's be honest. Sometimes we're quite content with our lives. When things are going our way, we do not think of such things.

But when the dark clouds gather, when we are faced with evil, whether it's the consequence of our own doing or evil that is against us, our soul aches for the peace that we know only God can bring. [5 : 45] Oftentimes our souls ache for the injustices of the world, the oppressed that we see. For some of you, you ache for your children.

For some of you, you ache for your parents, your friends. It matters not. But you know what it is to long for the goodness of God to heal your parched soul.

Now, what if I told you there was a time where you were denied the ability to enter into that castle, that kingdom that God so freely offered?

And it wasn't because you couldn't afford it, but you were not informed of it. Notice in Isaiah 5, it says, Seek the Lord while he may be found.

What if someone was stopping you from being found? Believe it or not, there was a time in the life of the church where God's people were denied God's word.

[7 : 06] You were denied the opportunity to read Psalm 55. You were denied the ability to read the Psalms.

The Psalms that you ate to hear because you knew you needed to hear that good news. You were denied the Gospels.

Those people that were denied had to go through a corrupt priesthood who demanded payment, who demanded penance.

For maybe, just maybe, if you worked the right works, you might hear the right words. Can you believe that there was a time such as this that existed in the church?

Well, those cries birthed the events of October 31st, 1517, the day we know as Reformation Day. It is the day when Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, confounded with the Catholic Church and its abuses, went to the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany, and with 95 nails, pounded 95 theses into a door.

[8 : 38] And he demanded answers for the questions that he had. However, how often we do think that Luther is the only hero of the Reformation.

But I want to demonstrate to you that God was working in the hearts and souls of men and women hundreds of years who cried out for God's Word long before God drove Luther in his manner that he did to do what he did on that poor, wonderful door with 95 nails.

Allow me to read you a word of a woman named Catherine of Siena in the late 1300s. She wrote, God will purify his holy church by awakening the spirit of the elect.

This will lead to such an improvement in the church of God and such a renewal in the lives of her holy pastors that at the mere thought it is my spirit exalts the Lord.

See, here's the thing. Not many of us know much about our Protestant history. For some of you, feel no shame.

[10 : 03] Did you guys know that it was Reformation Week? Do you know what Reformation Day is or do you not? If you do not, well, good news.

You're here today and I'm going to explain it to you. You see, you may not know it, but for centuries the church did not always hold to the belief that God's Word was the central point of the Christian faith.

The church, the Roman Catholic Church, which ruled close to a thousand years, head to essentially to three major sources of authority.

They used scripture. They used tradition. But more importantly, they relied on what's called the magisterium. This is the teaching authority of the church, which came from priests, bishops, cardinals, and more importantly, on the Pope.

And if the Pope said something and the Pope was there for he was infallible, his truth was held in higher esteem over God's Word.

[11 : 15] It is the rejection of this belief and the understanding that God's Word is the only source of truth is what drove the saints and Luther to pound the nails in the Reformation.

You see, the Reformation, it's not just a day that we celebrate on October 31st, but the events leading up to this day are an incredible day of history. I would argue wholeheartedly more important than when the Allied troops stormed the beaches of Normandy on June 1944, freeing Europe from seven years of enemy occupation.

But Reformation Day freed Europe from over a thousand years of a false gospel and enemy occupation. Reformation was not just a historical event, but as I will argue, it's an act of God steering His church back to the heart of biblical truth.

So this morning, I want to present to you the background of our faith. I want to introduce you to some of the people and the teachings that not only birthed the Protestant church, but actually formed the backbone of why we believe what we believe.

You with me? All right. Before we do, I've got to give you a quick overview of church history just so you know where we're going to be. So obviously, we know the ministry of Jesus Christ.

[12 : 53] He birthed the church with His resurrection in, we guess, around 33 AD, which began the Apostolic Age. Those were the 12 men sent out, including Paul, to share the gospel throughout the world.

So in AD 70, the Jews were becoming such a thorn in Roman side that Rome came and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem.

And it scattered not only the Jews, but the Christians who were living in Jerusalem out into the world. So from 70 AD to 313 AD, not only are the Jews and Christians escaping Rome, but they've been escaping persecution.

So for the first 300 years, our brothers and sisters in the faith were running for their lives to share the faith of Jesus Christ. But the Christianity continues to grow so much that the New Testament becomes codified and put together in what we recognize as the Bible, the New Testament during that time.

Finally, Christianity has spread so much, the Edict of Milan goes out in 313 AD, which is when Emperor Constantine not only legalizes Christianity, therefore ending persecution, but he begins to support the church in claims and is baptized as a believer in Jesus Christ.

[14 : 33] So all of a sudden, the church as the official church starts to grow and it starts to expand. And in fact, by 381, it becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire.

However, if you know your history, in 476 AD, Rome falls, but the church kind of goes underground and it works through other countries.

In 5th century, we see the rise of the papacy where they begin to claim universal jurisdiction over the church. And as it goes on, they get more and more.

And it isn't until the 12th and 13th centuries, during what we know as the medieval period, we see canon law, development of scholastic authority, and the centralization of papal authority.

So what it tells us is that's when the Roman Catholic Church that we know of today starts to solidify itself. So it goes as far back as the 12th and 13th century.

[15 : 45] By the time Luther shows up in 1517, Rome has been ruling unquestioned for over a thousand years.

However, criticism started to rise in the church. As you can imagine, any time you combine man, religion, and government, what are you going to get?

Corruption. You're going to get power. So governments knew if they could get the priests and the papacy to work with us, much could be done.

And the papacy started thinking the same thing. We can work with these monarchies. We can get much done. So what happened is they started to grow in wealth and political power.

John Chrysostom wrote in 345, going back to 349 to 400, became one of its first critics, criticizing the moral laxity and wealth of the clergy, calling for reforms and lifestyle and church practices.

[16 : 54] So what we see is calls for reform going back to 400 AD. In the 10th century, popes were appointing positions of power to members of their family, was resulting in nepotism, and the selling of church offices started to spread, and people started to get more upset.

Finally, in the 12th and 13th century, reformer by the name of Francis of Assisi sought to return the priest to an apostolic poverty, calling the church to embrace humility and simplicity.

The church closed their ears to such men who criticized. Finally, what became known as the Great Schism, multiple popes rose up, each claiming they had authority, and people started to question, what is this gong show that we are a part of?

So this morning, I want to introduce you to two, four notable figures that changed the course of history. You should recognize these names, the first being a man by the name of John Wycliffe. He was born in 1328 in Yorkshire, England. He was a theologian, a scholar, educated at Oxford, and he is known as the morning star of the Reformation.

[18 : 29] Wycliffe had many critiques of the church authority and corruption as he saw luxury power as the source of the corruption of the church. This is how he affected the Reformation.

One, John Wycliffe argued that Scripture is the supreme authority. Amen? He was the one who coined the phrase sola scriptura.

We believe our faith is Scripture alone. It was a major pillar of the Protestant Reformation.

Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin echoed Wycliffe's belief that the Bible was the ultimate authority, not the Pope or church tradition.

The second thing, if you can believe it, John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English. You see, the priests, the Popes, the Roman Catholic Church did not want that because now you did not have to come to them for the answers.

You could read the Bible for yourself. So he worked in translating the Bible in a place and his desire was that even the plow boy could read English or the Bible in his own words.

[19 : 48] The third action that Wycliffe did is he criticized the Pope's authority. He denounced the Pope's supremacy directly, anticipated the Reformers' challenge to the papal office.

Later on, in the late 1300s, he ended up dying of a stroke. But he was so hated by Rome that 40 years after he died, they dug up his bones and ashes and threw them in the river to demonstrate their absolute hatred of the heresy that he taught.

Ironically enough, that action became known in the Reformation as how that river took the Reformation to other parts of the world.

The next man who caught fire of his teaching is a man by the name of Jan Hus, who lived in Bohemia, what we know as the Czech Republic today.

Jan Hus was born in 1369. Like Wycliffe, he was an educated man. He graduated from the Charles University in Prague and he noted many abuses that were going on in the church.

[21 : 24] The first point that he argued, that biblical authority Hus emphasized that scripture alone is supposed to be our major doctrine.

As Wycliffe influenced Hus, Hus, his writings influenced Luther. In fact, Luther declared we are all Hussites.

Like Wycliffe, he challenged the papal authority by rejecting the Pope's supremacy and advocating for Christ as the head of the church, Hus laid a foundation for the Protestant challenge to papal authority.

The third action which impacted the war was after his death. The Hussite wars broke out in Bohemia as his followers resisted the church and the imperial forces.

These wars demonstrated the power of a reform-oriented lay-led movement, meaning you could have church without priests. You could just simply have shepherds with the people.

[22 : 39] And like Wycliffe, he believed in translating the Bible into his own language so the people of Czech could understand it.

what's truly inspiring about Jan Hus is his death, and I want to share a little bit about his death.

Jan Hus died on July 6, 1415, during what became known as the Council of Constance in Germany. He was summoned by the Pope to come and answer for his claims.

He was offered safe passage and he looked forward to come and argue. And you need to understand, neither Wycliffe, neither Hus, nor Luther wanted to break from the church.

They wanted to reform the church from within. So Hus was summoned to this council, which was convened to address the various church issues.

[23 : 44] He attended the council voluntarily, hoping to defend his views. he was promised safe conduct by Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund, which was meant to guarantee his safety during his journey to Germany at the time of the council.

However, he was double-crossed. Despite the promise of safe contact, Hus was arrested shortly after his arrival and imprisoned. He was accused of promoting heretical ideas, primarily his rejection of the pope's authority, his critiques of church corruption, and his emphasis on scripture as the highest authority.

Hus's trial at the council was marked by intense pressure to recant his beliefs, but he refused to do so unless it could be shown from scripture that the teachings were false.

He maintained that his conscience was bound by the word of God, echoing the principle that later became central to the Protestant Reformation.

Hus was found guilty of heresy and sentenced to death by burning. On July 6, 1415, he was led to the stake, dressed in a paper crown, decorated with illustrations of devils, signifying that he was a condemned heretic.

[25 : 28] Hus reportedly prayed, Lord Jesus, it is for thee that I patiently endure this cruel death. I pray thee to have mercy on my enemies.

As the flames rose around him, witnesses claim that he sang psalms and maintained his faith until his final breath. Hus's death sparked outrage, especially in native Czech, leading to what I mentioned earlier, the Hussite Wars.

His martyrdom inspired many reformers, including Martin Luther, who saw Hus as a courageous predecessor in the fight for reform within the church.

Hus's death became a symbol of the church's resistance to reform and fueled wider dissent that contributed to the eventual reformation. The last two influences are minor, but they are no less as important.

They share the same background. They were two Dutchmen. The first being Thomas Akempis. If you're familiar with his writings, his writings still exist today.

[26 : 46] He authored a very important book entitled The Imitation of Christ. And in that book, it was simply a call to believers to live a more Christ-like way.

Although he was not a radical reformer, his teachings for spiritual renewal rather than impact on ritualistic religion.

So what he was calling for was a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, not following these religious rituals that we're going through. And finally, the last was a man by the name of Erasmus. He was a Dutch humanist and scholar, a central figure in the Northern Renaissance. And he's the man who translated the New Testament into Greek in 1516, which provided a more accurate version of Scripture for scholars and reformers.

So now they had a more accurate rendition of the New Testament. It started to start translated in other languages around the world. Erasmus called for reformation from within, but he was ignored.

[28 : 05] His writings influenced Luther, though Erasmus never broke with the church. However, it is said that Erasmus laid the egg of the reformation that Luther hatched.

Then finally, on October 31st, 1517, Martin Luther had enough. Knowing the events of the past, he knew the stories of Wycliffe, he knew the stories of Huss, he knew the writings of Erasmus, he knew the writings and the lives of these reformers, he had had enough.

But what finally broke the back for him was there was a Dominican friar traveling through Germany at the time named Johann Tetzel, and he was selling indulgences.

And if you don't know what indulgences were, indulgences were if you promised to do a great act for the Pope, or you paid money, you could shorten the time of you or a loved one in purgatory. So he would go around and he'd be selling splinters. This is a splinter from the cross of Jesus Christ. This is a stone from the cradle upon which Jesus lay.

[29 : 27] Just all these type of lies to continue to get money. Tetzel's aggressive marketing tactics included a slogan, which we know today, it says, as soon as a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs.

Outraged Luther was, for it appeared to reduce salvation to a mere financial transaction. So Luther went to that door and banged 95 arguments on this door of the church in Wittenberg.

There were a set of arguments written in Latin that criticized not only the sale of indulgence, but also the broader theological issues such as the church's teaching on penance and the authority of the Pope.

Luther questioned whether the Pope had the authority to forgive sins or release souls from purgatory, emphasizing that salvation came through faith alone, another calling card of our faith this day, sola fide, and not through Christ's sacramental system or the church's sacramental system or purchased indulgence.

But what Luther didn't intend is that people took these Latin, these arguments and they translated them into German and gave them to the printing press and all of a sudden all his arguments went all over Europe and people started to listen to him.

[31 : 13] They wanted to know what more was this about. This rapid spread of the 95 thesis ignited widespread debate about church authority, the nature of salvation, and the legitimacy of indulgences.

the thesis immediately caught the attention of church authorities leading to Luther being summoned to Rome to explain his views.

He's not ignorant to what happened to Hus, so he made sure he had the protection at the time, he had the protection of one of the princes of Germany because this is a political gambit going on and he wanted to be a part of it.

After being questioned, many, many times he refused to recant his belief and his subsequent writings deep in the crisis, ultimately resulting in his excommunication by Pope Leo X in 1521, the birth of our church.

Why was it the fuse for the Reformation? The posting of the 95 theses was not just a critique of indulgences. It was a bold challenge to the church's authority, the papacy, and its teachings on salvation.

[32 : 41] Luther's act exposed long-standing grievances about clerical corruption, doctrinal errors, and the perceived exploitation of the faithful resonating with growing discontent across Europe.

It ignited a movement that led to widespread theological debate, the emergence of the Protestant denomination, and profound changes in both church and society.

One author writes, in essence, Luther's act set in motion a series of events that fundamentally reshaped Christianity, making the posting of the 95 theses the catalytic moment that launched the Protestant Reformation.

The biblical foundation is found in Ephesians 2, 8, 9, for by grace you have been saved by faith, and that not of yourselves.

It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. The Reformation emphasized that salvation is a gift from God, not something earned through human effort or purchased with money.

[33 : 58] It was a return to the core teachings of Jesus Christ, amen, and a rejection of man-made doctrines that led people away from true faith.

Other Reformers also rose to prominence. John Calvin, the French theologian, emphasized the sovereignty of God in the centrality of Scripture. His work in Geneva created a model for reforming churches across Europe.

Another man was raised in the name of Ulrich Zwingli, based in Zurich. John Knox in Scotland all shared Luther's conviction that Scripture alone should guide faith and practice, advocating for a return to biblical simplicity in worship and church governance.

These men and many others were imperfect vessels, yet they were the ones that God chose to ignite a spiritual awakening. 1 Corinthians 1.27 says, But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty.

This passage perfectly captures the Reformation spirit. Ordinary people being used by God to restore his truth to his truth.

[35 : 27] You see, the Reformer's primary tool was the word of God, which was unleashed in the people's languages of Europe, bringing light to those who had long been in spiritual darkness, those who longed to thirst at the goodness that God offered them at the banquet table.

Now, allow me to conclude with the words of one church historian who writes, The Protestant Reformation was not merely a product of human effort.

It was a movement orchestrated by God to revive his church. Throughout history, we see God intervening in human history to correct his people and bring them back to himself.

the Reformation was another chapter in that story, a testament to his faithfulness and sovereignty. Despite immense opposition from both political and religious authorities, the Reformation thrived. Luther faced excommunication. Calvin encountered resistance in Geneva. It eventually was expelled and later asked to return.

[36 : 43] many reformers were martyred for their beliefs. Yet the movement continued to grow. This was not due to human strength, but because of God's hand was upon it.

Philippians 1.6 reminds us that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. God started the work of the Reformation and ensured its continuation not only for the church at that time but also for the generations that followed.

My friends, the most powerful weapon that the reformers used was a Bible in the language that the people could read and understand.

stand. As people read scripture for themselves, they found the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

This unleashed a wave of personal faith, freeing believers from fear-based religion and reconnecting them to the assurance found in Christ alone.

[38 : 01] If you were new and visiting this church, you now know why the people here at Squamish Baptist Church love this book.

It's why we come here every single week. It's because God wrote it. Have you thought of that? This is God's book.

God wrote a book. He did not write a book so we could look holy by putting it on our bedside table. He did not write a book so that we could put it on our dining room table when we do not eat. He did not give us his word so we could create some cherished family heirloom.

He gave us a book so we could know him. To know the goodness of his word. To know the goodness of when he writes come everyone who thirsts come to the waters and he who has no money come buy and eat come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

[39 : 33] Why? I have paid it for you. The salvation that you so desperately want I have paid the price for you.

Will you accept it? this is why we are dedicated just in these last couple of months and why in the next few weeks we're going to continue to go through the story of the Bible and how each chapter points to God's goodness that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone.

That my friends is not only the message that changed the world it is the message that continually is changing the world amen let us pray dear Lord heavenly father I know this morning felt like a little bit more of a history lecture and most people when we're young we hated history lectures but father I pray that you would put a deep appreciation on our hearts of these men and women who died to get us these good news even the side stories of Luther's wife Catherine von Bora a nun who escaped in barrels of mead from the trappings they had in the covenant to be free so they went and married pastors in order to help serve them to shepherd the flocks across Germany father there's so many amazing stories and we just don't know them the fact the matter is most of us don't even know each other's story about how you humbled us how we were going one direction you inserted yourselves in our lives and we are now going a different direction father that is what your word does it change it changes father

I give you thanks for men like Jan Husted although although he was betrayed he kept the faith and he death went on to inspire Luther and others who followed that the gospel was worth dying for the truth that can set us free needs to be known by all men.

Some of us may not be faced with death presenting the gospel, but sometimes there's social shame. Sometimes there's the risk of being put out of a certain group.

[42 : 26] Perhaps there's times where we may lose a friendship. But Father, I pray that our witness be clear. It's not us that is ending the friendship, but it is them that's ending the friendship because they do not want to know the truth.

Father, I pray for a boldness in this congregation. I even pray for a boldness to start looking up some of these heroes from church history, these people that you used to bring about your gospel.

Father, I give you thanks, and just even for my weekend of study, the tears shed knowing that there's times where I was not as strong as I should have been, not as clear as I could.

Let us be strong. In your name we pray. Amen.