



Empowering People to Change the World

Martin Luther – Theologian, Outlaw, Pastor, and Revolutionary

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Introduction

- He was called a “wild pig” by the most powerful man in the world at that time, Pope Leo X.
- It was in the 1520 Papal Bull, *Ex Surge Domine*, that excommunicated Luther.
- The Bull, or charge, against Luther, began with these words: “Rise up O Lord, Defend your Cause, for there is a wild boar loose in your Vineyard.” **What had caused such a strong reaction from the pope?**
- Martin Luther had nailed Ninety-five Theses, or disputations, or arguments against the Church of Rome, on October 31, 1517, and at first the Pope had thought nothing of it and said, “he’s just a drunken German who will change his mind when his is sober.”
- But something happened that no one expected.
- Luther wrote the ninety-five arguments in Latin, the trade language of the learned and the church, intended for an intellectual debate, only to be read by the learned intellectual class.
 - But the manuscript was soon translated into German and all over Germany the common people were reading what Luther wrote.
 - And now, this small piece of parchment had turned from a little theological spark by an Augustinian monk into a conflagration, a blazing fire, that was burning from a small town of Wittenberg, in Saxony Germany, all the way to Rome, the Capitol of Christendom.
 - Over the next thirty years, this man would be the most revered and most hated man Europe had ever produced.

So, who was this “wild boar,” this “wild pig” from Saxony and what did he discover that made him the most loved and hated man in Europe?

Martin Luther

- Born in 1483 to an enterprising peasant family.

- He grew up under a demanding father who wanted his son to become a successful lawyer and provide for him in his old age.
- Martin’s father, Hans, was a man of great intelligence and talent. Though he had started out as a miner, he had become a successful entrepreneur in the mining business. He owned several smelting works.
- Luther, following the dreams of his father that he become a successful lawyer, was sent to the best schools of the time—which after completing his master’s degree began to study law.
- But on one fateful night on his way back to law school, he was caught up in a tremendous lightning storm.
 - In that moment with trees splitting, rain pelting, thunder clapping, and a lightning bolt hitting so close that he was unsure if he was dead or alive: the 21-year-old Luther shouted out, “Help me St Anne, I will become a monk.”
 - Upon returning to college, he sold his law book and two weeks later held a farewell dinner. He said, “Tonight you see me, but never again!”
 - Even as they tried to dissuade him, Luther’s mind was set.
 - The next morning, he entered the Augustinian cloister and presented himself for holy orders.
 - What Luther would discover about the medieval Catholic Church was that God the Father and Jesus the Son were presented, not as love, but as a fierce judge.

The Four Key Aspects of the Penal System of the Medieval Roman Catholic Church

The penal system that the church had worked out over the centuries was complicated, but what was clear was that the priest had the authority of the Church, and the Church had the authority of God to determine what one must do to be forgiven, to clear one’s slate of sins. Four key aspects of the Roman Church of that time:

- 1) **Confession.** First, one must go to confession every day.

- 2) **Penance.** Next, the priest would give the confessor *penance*, or something he must do to be forgiven, and this involved “Hail Marys” and “Our Fathers” that the sinful person must do for forgiveness.
- 3) **Merits.** A century’s old theory of the Church that there was a *treasury of merit* that came from the saints and Jesus. The church taught that some special people had in their lives done so many good things that they had accumulated merits beyond what they needed, and they had placed these merits into a heavenly bank or treasury so to speak—they were in the black, not the red like most of us.
 - So, all the merits of these holy people, plus Jesus, plus Mary, plus the apostles amounted to this huge surplus that the sinful could draw on.
- 4) **Indulgences.** The idea of *indulgences* came from this Treasury of Merit. This was a Ponzi scheme thought up by the Church where, instead of doing penance for your sins, like doing a good deed for someone or saying “Hail Marys” or “Our Fathers”, you could purchase merits with money—and of course giving money to the church was a “good work” so it all worked very nicely.

Luther’s Wholehearted Pursuit of Heaven

One thing you must understand about Luther is that his personality was wholehearted in whatever he did. And, when he took the vows of the Augustinian cloister, he was total in his commitment.

- He followed the Canon Law of the Catholic Church and the Augustinian Order to the letter.
- It was all about earning God’s favor through a rigorous set of complicated laws that the church had set up.
- No one was as passionate as Luther in his vigorous pursuit for holiness and perfection.

Luther followed it all.

- He constantly confessed every sin he could think of, up to six hours a day.
- He made a pilgrimage to Rome in 1510 and touched the relics, the supposed bones, clothing, and artifacts of the saints, to win more indulgences.

- He crawled the fabled steps of Scala Sancta (holy stairs) that were purported to be the marble stairs of Pilate's first century palace in Jerusalem, the very stairs Jesus had mounted while on trial. It was here that after crawling the twenty-eight stairs saying "Our Father's", Luther, for the first time asked himself, "What if it's not true?"
- He didn't know what to do to untangle his guilt, confusion, and inner wrestling; depression overwhelmed him.

The agonies of his depression, what in German is called, *anfechtungen*—this feeling of utter hopelessness, ruled over his mind.

- He would later write of his hopeless search for perfection and forgiveness, "If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I."

Luther Began to Study the Bible in the Wittenberg, Germany

Johannes Von Staupitz, his mentor and the head of the Augustinian Order, seeing the anxiety of Luther, the genius in Luther, and his passion for the Scriptures ordered Luther to take a position in the new university in Wittenberg, Saxony Germany.

- Studying the Bible was unheard of in Medieval Times.
- There were no Bibles for people to read. Not even the Monks read the Bible—they were not allowed even to own a Bible!
- All authority, all knowledge, was dispensed by the church and the priests, and there was no other access to truth. The Bible wasn't necessary.
- But Luther, weary with the endless study in the monastery of Aristotle and other philosophers, was desperate to find God and he began to study the Bible in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin.

Wittenberg

In 1502, Fredrick the Duke of Saxony, had established a university and he had asked his old friend Staupitz to teach theology there and he wanted to replace himself with this rising genius, Martin Luther.

- In 1514 Luther was not only Professor of Theology and Bible but was made the Preacher in the City Church of Wittenberg. He was also the Vicar General of eleven monasteries.
- But in 1517, there was an experience that forever changed Luther's life, months before the nailing the famous Ninety-five Theses to the Wittenberg Door, God showed His grace to everything Luther had been agonizing over.
 - This was the moment where the clouds of *anfechtungen*—his hopelessness and depression—were lifted.
 - Luther wrote about the Cloaca Experience.

The Cloaca Experience and Romans 1:17

“Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love...yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God...Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon St. Paul at that place (Romans 1:17) most ardently desiring to know what Paul wanted...The Holy Spirit gave me this art in [or upon] the cloaca” (p. 95 Metaxis).

- This would become known as the Cloaca or Tower Experience at the Black Cloister in Wittenberg.
- What most of you might not know is that Cloaca is the ancient Latin term for *sewer* or *outhouse*.
- There is some speculation that Luther might be referencing the tower at the Black Cloister that also just happened to have an outhouse in the base of the tower.
- It is believed that Luther is deliberately playing upon the German prefix “auf” for *in* or *upon* probably half in jest to convey something like *while on the john...God spoke to me in a powerful way*.

Turn to Romans 1:17

Luther would write of his revelation from Romans 1:17:

“At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘in it the righteousness of God is revealed,’ as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely the passive righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith...Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Thus, a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Hereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. If also found in other terms an analogy, as the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.”

- This was the earthshaking insight that gave Luther the solid foundation from the Bible upon which to base what may well be reckoned the *greatest revolution in human history*.
- Luther had discovered through his own arduous labor and sincere passion for holiness and rightness before God, that he could never do it—he had attempted everything and more.
 - He had followed the Catholic Church’s Canon Law perfectly.
 - He had followed the rules of the Augustinian Order perfectly.
 - Yet he had no peace, no joy.
 - It occurred to Luther that this passage wasn’t talking about the righteousness of God by which God is righteous, but rather that the righteousness of God that has been provided to us—graciously, freely provided to us if we will put our faith in Christ.

Luther had discovered that faith in Christ and Christ alone releases the righteousness of God—the treasures of all of God’s grace and salvation into the believer by faith

- When we put our trust in Christ, God’s righteousness comes over and covers the believer.

- Luther said, “it broke upon my mind that my justification is not established by my own naked righteousness, which will always fall short, but it rests solely and completely on the righteousness of Christ which I cling to by faith.”
- The hypocrisy of works righteousness and human righteousness was revealed. The curtain of Oz had exposed the fraud of thinking we can somehow earn God’s favor through the ecclesiastical levers of the Church.
- In the end, he came to believe that Satan himself had taken over the church and that somehow God wanted to entrust him, a lowly monk from Wittenberg, with the task of declaring this to the world.
- Luther came to believe that our will was in complete bondage naturally. We can’t do anything anytime anywhere that can make us worthy of God’s love and grace. We can never earn his favor or do enough good to warrant heaven. Impossible!

And it was this conviction that led to Luther’s confrontation with churches Ponzi scheme, known as Indulgences

Johannes Tetzel and The Indulgence Controversy

Johannes Tetzel was a Dominican Friar who would have made a great salesman in our day. Some say he was one of the most persuasive preachers of the 16th century.

- Remember I mentioned merits and indulgences? Well merits could be bought as indulgences that were given to you by your payment to the church.
- You could spend them any way you wanted. So, with my money I could buy an indulgence for a sin I had not even committed yet, but knowing that I would, the indulgence would be my forgiveness for the sin I was going to commit.
- Plus, indulgences became a sure-fire income stream for the church. It was a Ponzi scheme, capital P, but even better, in the name of God.
- It even got better, when Pope Sixtus, in 1476, realized that the market for indulgences could also be extended beyond the living to those multiplied millions who had already died and were suffering in Purgatory.
- This was a huge untapped market. You could buy your grandmother Lucy’s salvation out of Purgatory by buying indulgences that knocked off a one thousand years of the flames engulfing Grandma Lucy.

- In 1517 Tetzel had been tasked by Rome to raise the equivalent of billions of dollars for the church for the needed funds to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.
- The financial needs of the Church were pressing and no one better than Tetzel to raise the money through indulgences.

“As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”

- As Luther's church members began to show him the indulgences granted to them from Tetzel, Luther exploded in anger.
- Luther had reached the point of no return. He retreated into his study in the Black Cloister and wrote and wrote.

On October 31, the eve of All Saints Day, Luther posted on the Castle Church in Wittenberg, 95 arguments or disputations against the Roman Catholic Church

- The Ninety-five Theses were a call to the academic community for a scholarly debate about each disputation.
- It was written in Latin, the language of the scholar—most people could not read or understand Latin.
- They were posted on the church door, the bulletin board of the time.
- But something happened to the Ninety-five Theses. The Guttenberg press, the first movable type printing, had been introduced to Europe less than seventy-five years before.
 - Someone, and no one really knows who, got their hands on Luther's parchment, translated it from Latin to German, and printed thousands of copies.
 - Suddenly, the masses in Saxony, outlying German provinces, and then all over Europe could read Luther's disputation. A theological and political conflagration had begun.
 - Several famous debates followed and the sticking points came down to two huge issues.

The Two Big Issues: The Roman Catholic Church believed that truth was derived from tradition, church councils, and the pope and Luther believed that truth came from Scripture and Scripture alone

- It was at Leipzig that Luther made one of his most famous speeches, and he gave it in German:

“I assert that a council has sometimes erred and may sometimes err. Nor has a council authority to establish articles of faith. A council cannot make divine right out of that which by nature is not divine right. Councils have contradicted each other, for the recent Lateran Council has reversed the claim of the councils of Constance and Basel that a council is above the pope. A simple layman armed with scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it. As for the pope’s decretal on indulgences I say that neither the Church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from scripture.”

- The Pope releases a Bull, an attack, on Luther, *Ex Surge Domine*, that excommunicated Luther, on June 15, 1520, and he had sixty days to recant. Luther, upon receiving the bull in October, took the Bull with the Canon Law of the Roman Church, and before a huge crowd, threw it into a bonfire.
- The Pope calls Luther to come to the city of Worms and explain himself. It would be a debate before the most powerful men in the world at the time:
 - The Emperor of the Roman Empire, Charles V.
 - The nobles of Germany and the Empire were all there.
 - And one of the great debaters and Catholic theologians of the time, representing the church and the pope, Johann Maier von Eck.
- When Luther entered Worms in 1521, over two thousand people cheered his entrance. Luther had become a rock star.
- This would be Luther’s last chance to recant or be under the edict of death from Rome.
- He was shown a stack of his books and demanded by Eck that he recant and pledge his allegiance to Rome.
- On the final day of the debate, which it was not really a debate but an inquisition—for most everyone opposed his views, Eck summed it up:

“Martin, How can you assume that you are the only one to understand the sense of Scripture? You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith...do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors which they contain?”

- In answer, Luther gave, what are probably his most famous words and most enduring legacy,

“Since then your serene majesties and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, plain, and unvarnished: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the scriptures or clear reason, for I do not trust in the Pope or in the councils alone, since it is well known that they often err and contradict themselves, I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. God help me. Amen.”

- All this Luther said, first in German, and then in Latin.
- The medieval world and the modern world would be changed forever. Through the coming Protestant Reformation, everything would change.

From a few nails and a piece of parchment in a door in Wittenberg to the highest halls of power, a revolution had begun. Over the next three hundred years, the transformation of Germany, Europe, and the new world would be monumental.

“Here I stand!” Five Revolutionary Ideas Sparked by Luther and the Protestant Reformation:

1. **A Return to the True Gospel.** Salvation is not from our own works, tradition, or the canon laws of the church, but salvation comes to us by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone from the Bible alone.
2. **The Priesthood of all Believers.** The belief that every person need not depend on a professional priest for confession and access to God but, as a result of a personal intimate relationship with Christ, they are a priest and king of thier home and work. The belief that your work, your job, can be holy and worship unto God.
3. **Every Christian can be a Biblical Theologian.** Not just the pastor, priest, or seminary professor. Everyone can read, study, and know God’s Word for

themselves. The belief that the individual armed with Scripture can be more powerful than a government or church without it.

4. **Marriage and Family is Holy, Beautiful, and Sacred.** “A return to Eden” is what Luther called it. Luther revived family life by himself getting married. After leaving the monastery, Luther married Katharina von Bora and together they had six children. It was the joy of his life.
5. **Citizens of Two Kingdoms.** In Medieval Times, there was an enmeshment of the government and the church. Luther was the first person to see the roles of government and the church, both from God, were different. That we are citizens of two kingdoms. Being a citizen of God’s kingdom and being a good citizen in your country were not meant to compete but complement each other. The belief in separation of church and state—that the secular government should be separate from the spiritual institution of the church, and that neither should rule over the other.

Luther’s Preface to Romans Sparked Other Kingdom of God Revolutions:

Luther’s Preface to the Romans: "Faith is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God...Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times. This knowledge of and confidence in God's grace makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and all creatures. And this is the work of which the Holy Spirit performed in faith..."

It was the reading of this preface that John Wesley heard in May 1738, where he said, "my heart was strangely warmed", and he was born again. It was the Methodist revival through Wesley that led a young politician named William Wilberforce to the Lord. It was from Wilberforce that slavery was eventually abolished in England. It was the influence of Wilberforce that led to the abolition movement in America in the 1800s. It was a black Baptist pastor from Georgia, Michael King, who visited Germany in 1934, who named his son after Martin Luther, who inaugurated the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.