**John 8:31-36 (ESV)**

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, **32** and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” **33** They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” **34** Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. **35**  The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. **36** So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

**“Sola Salvation”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. We share similarities and differences with the Reformation. The differences are the easiest to notice. For instance, Christopher Columbus sailed to the other side of the world in 1492. Luther would have been nine. Since then, GPS has taken the place of etching out maps along with satellite imagery. Again, Nicolas Copernicus wrote his heliocentric theory about the earth revolving around the Sun in 1514. This was three years before Luther posted the 95-Thesis. Since then, observing the universe is small compared to man landing on the moon in 1969. Finally, the identity of “peasant” meant serving the king, owning no property, and most being uneducated. Since then, citizens of our country vote for leaders, people own propriety, and education is a standard.

These are differences, what about any similarities with the Reformation? For starters, if the role of priests, monks and nuns belittled the holiness of marriage. We face the same attack on the holiness of marriage by those having no need for it or others wanting to change it. If people were terrified over health as the Black Death went about killing many. We still have terror over our wellbeing when it comes to something like health care reform. If society changed by the printing press making information available. We have a similar event with e-readers, the internet, and social media. If there was an endless war standing against the Ottoman Empire. We fight a war on terrorism that is not going away any time soon. For all these similarities and difference, though, none of it is the Gospel. One message endures out of the Reformation. Salvation was by grace through faith on account of Christ alone. The single salvation, the only sola, is the one truth we have in Christ.

The challenge made by Luther was far more reaching than just to a power hungry pope or drumming up the masses. His focus was not a short-term solution for salvation in economic, political, or military strife. It was about the eternal salvation before God. For all the tricots to buy, sayings from men or extraordinary experiences offered. Scripture alone held the key to salvation. He was not denouncing the need for church. He was not telling people they could believe whatever they want. Instead, the appeal was for all to go back to the Word of God, the Bible. At his trial in 1521, Luther made that statement before threat of death, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God.” The only saving faith for sinners came from what God said. This is why Luther went out of his way to translate the Bible into German. What lead him to write the Small and Large catechism as a source for teaching the Word.

Salvation hold to the truth of Scripture. Jesus told His Jewish believers, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” You cannot have Jesus without the Word. Any other Jesus is no real Jesus. To “abide” means enduring, continuing, resting in what God alone says. Jesus told us making disciples by baptism comes with “teaching them to observes all that I have commanded you.” The Home Fires book “Broken” explains the common argument made between papal power on one side and the radical reformers of the people on the other. He writes, “….the Word of God is simply not enough for your spirituality. They argue that something more needs to be added. Scripture alone is incomplete” (44). Plenty of things try to trump the Word. It may be following the spirit of the times. It may be trying to get rid of a bad feeling. It may be allowing for any interpretation to scripture. However, confusing Law and Gospel or claiming another authority denies us the full Christ. He died for sinners to repent. He rose so that salvation is by faith in Him.

There is nothing simple about the Reformation. Luther had to abide in the Word when everything else was up for question. His life was under threat of death. The war against the Turks was a growing danger. Leaders of peasants misapplied the Gospel as reason for revolt. Stability in the one message meant drifting among the changing times. Slavery to sin was never seen deeply enough by men worshiping works. Let alone, freedom by God’s grace was an eternal kingdom not of this world. Luther saw the delusion ensnaring many away from freedom of forgiveness for sin. With the explosion of the internet and digital media. We also see a lot offered to people in life. As one person writes, “If the printing press made it possible for anyone to read and access the Holy Scriptures, the digital revolution is changing where people look for external sources of authority…There is huge competition now on who or what gets to interpret reality for people” (Barna 3 Trends). In other words, truth is what you want to make it.

Salvation castoffs the many truths found in life. There is a salvation for how to get through the day. A salvation to know how to better invest your money. A salvation for how to lose weight and keep beauty. Salvations abound when surfing the internet, watching TV, or any other media. Even the Jews speaking to Jesus sought their salvation by fleshly identity to Abraham. He told them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” Strong words that still speak for us today who identity our lives with technology. It is like Jesus saying to us, “The very machines that give you so much also enslaves you, since if by them you seek your salvation and not me alone as the Savior of sinners.” It means casting off the many truths with repentance to the one message of Christ. To be in His Word is a gift of grace for sinners. To hear His forgiveness is to be free of sin. To receive His sacrament is strength to stand against sin in our life. Salvation at the present has one purpose that, “God might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

This truthful message is far reaching beyond Luther or the Reformation era. It is to face the fact that we are still slaves, bound up, and tied down to sin, death, and the Devil. Despair would be the consequence of the Laws demand. Works would only bring discomfort if it were not for another hope. Christ made it clear to the Jews, “The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” The promise of salvation is not short-lived like works in our life. Does not rest in our ways as if we can secure salvation. Is not some fleeting victory celebrated one day only to fight next. No, the promise is for eternity, for joy of heaven, for triumph by Christ. This freedom is neither stupid to the times nor does it take the times too seriously. St. John told troubled Christians about the end times. “Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.”

Salvation sees truth of freedom in Christ. Just as Christ did not come to change the world, but to save sinners. So His Church is not transforming the culture, but is calling all to Christ. Dare we exchange a lesser glory for the greater glory God already gives? Jesus said, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Luther knew that many other things were upon the minds of men. All of it deceives, destroys, and denies what God gives to sinners. He tells us, “Christ wants us to discard and abandon everything else; He wants us to give up the illusion that anything else will avail to make us free…He says ‘If you believe that I make you free, if you know the meaning of the Creed as learned by the children, then you will be free. And then you will find the other freedom too.” This “other freedom” is the physical blessings for life. It is what comes by faith toward God and love toward others. However, what happens among men is never the central focus. God is delivering men from sin to set us free by His promising Word. The single salvation, the only sola, is the one truth we have in Christ. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.