

It’s only about a half a mile. The monk walked from his room in the monastery, past the university where he was a teacher, to the church at the other end of the village. There he posted a document on the door of the Church of All Saints. If any of the common people passing by were interested enough to look, they would see it was in Latin. They couldn’t read it, so on they went with their day. But it didn’t take long for university professors and church officials to notice.

That’s about how it happened on October 31, 1517, in the town of Wittenburg, Germany. I’m talking about the posting of the 95 Theses Against Indulgences by Martin Luther. Little did anyone realize that these hammer blows, posting a list on the door of the church, were a signal of unimaginable change. Luther’s stance would ignite a global transformation of church and society, but really, all he wanted was to have a theological dialogue in an academic setting.

When Martin Luther issued his 95-point call to debate, he was challenging the Church to come back to the source of faith: namely, the Word of God. It’s eye-opening to consider that at the time of Luther, the Church was doing fine—if your standard of “doing fine” is activity, people in the seats, cultural influence, and property ownership. The Collegiate Church of All Saints at Wittenburg was worthy of admiration. Their seven priests conducted thousands of masses a year, and the church began selling certificates (called indulgences) that allegedly shortened the amount of time a soul had to wait before entering heaven. It was a good deal all around, of great economic benefit to the city and church. And along comes this monk, who said...well, what did he say?

He said, in essence, “Let’s go back to the source.” What source? The Word of God. The Holy Scriptures. Let’s get back to the source. And sadly, back then, that was a dangerous move. Let me ask you a dangerous question. What have you done to get back to the source lately? How important is it to you to get God’s Word into your life? Because that’s Luther’s legacy—that’s the heart of the movement historians call the Reformation—the act of letting God’s Word speak into your life. Direct contact with God through His Word with nothing artificial to get in the way is what it was all about. And when you have direct contact with God through His Word, you come face to face with Jesus; the Son of God, born of Mary, crucified and risen for you, preaching a message of repentance leading to the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. So, in the spirit of the Reformation, let’s listen to Jesus and let him speak to us today.

Jesus said, “If you abide in My Word, you are truly my disciples.” That’s a pretty big “if.” The best medicine prescribed by the doctor will be useless if you don’t take it! Jesus himself issues the invitation to abide in His Word, but it’s just an invitation if you don’t take him up on it. Are you, in fact, abiding in Jesus’ Word?

How do you know if you are? I cannot possibly overstate the importance of Christian education, catechism instruction and regular worship attendance for the survival of saving faith. It is nothing less than a threat to your spiritual survival to disregard the Word of God or to separate yourself from it. It seems so simple—staying plugged into the power source is necessary. But how often do God’s own people act like it isn’t necessary? How healthy would

you be if you ate one big meal once a week, and the other six days you didn't eat a bit of food? Yet how often do God's own people pretend that feeding your spirit once a week is enough?

Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." That truth is the heavenly food of the Gospel. That Gospel says: you cannot free yourself from what you are. The sinner, Jesus says, is tied up and loaded down. The truth that sets you free is that Jesus broke into your prison, opened the door, and sat down in your cell so that you could leave. With His death on the cross he took your sentence. He paid your sin debt. You get to walk out into the sunlight with a new lease on life. No chains.

Jesus also said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." What a claim, and what a promise! For Christians, truth is not a theory or a philosophy or an ideology. Truth is a person. Jesus is truth. Jesus is God's saving promise to you. What do you have to do to receive the benefit of that promise? Memorize the 95 Theses? Know your way around the church constitution and bylaws or Robert's Rules of Order? Serve on a dozen church committees? None of the above. Remember Jesus' words: "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." The Son has done it. You can be free from slavery to sin. You can be free from slavery to self. You can live free from fear. The Son of God offers you himself, including his perfect performance of the Law. He gives you all for nothing. He pronounces you free and loose from sin. He calls you into a new kind of life—a life in which He has connected Himself to you for good.

Martin Luther's legacy is that he pointed people to Jesus with great clarity. That can be our legacy too. It will happen if we abide in the Word. A big 'if.' Let's go learn everything that means.