





LUTHER: THE MAN WHO CHANGED THE WORLD

“  
I AM CONVINCED  
BY SCRIPTURE AND  
PLAIN REASON...  
**MY CONSCIENCE  
IS CAPTIVE TO THE  
WORD OF GOD**”

MARTIN LUTHER TO  
'HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR' CHARLES V,  
18 APRIL 1521

**INTRODUCTION:** Luther and the other Reformers did not introduce a new teaching but rather rediscovered and re-emphasised the truths of the Gospel as taught by Christ, the Apostles, and the early Church.





# WHO WAS MARTIN LUTHER?

Martin Luther was born in Germany in 1483. His father was a mine manager who worked hard to pay for Martin to go to law school. In the summer of 1505, Martin was caught in a terrifying storm and decided to change career to become an Augustinian monk in the Roman Catholic Church. As a monk he was known for his devoted life.

Luther later took up the post of Theology Professor at the Wittenberg University.

## The Church In Luther's Day

Even in New Testament times, false teaching had crept into the very first churches. In the 1500 years which followed, the light of gospel truth had at times almost been extinguished by the darkness of persecution and man-made tradition.

The Roman Catholic Church dominated Europe. It claimed that forgiveness of sin could be achieved through 'good works', or could be bought with money from the Church.

Some protesting voices had already questioned its teachings. One of these was the priest and scholar Jan Hus who was accused of heresy by a Church council in 1415 and burned at the stake in the southern German town of Konstanz.



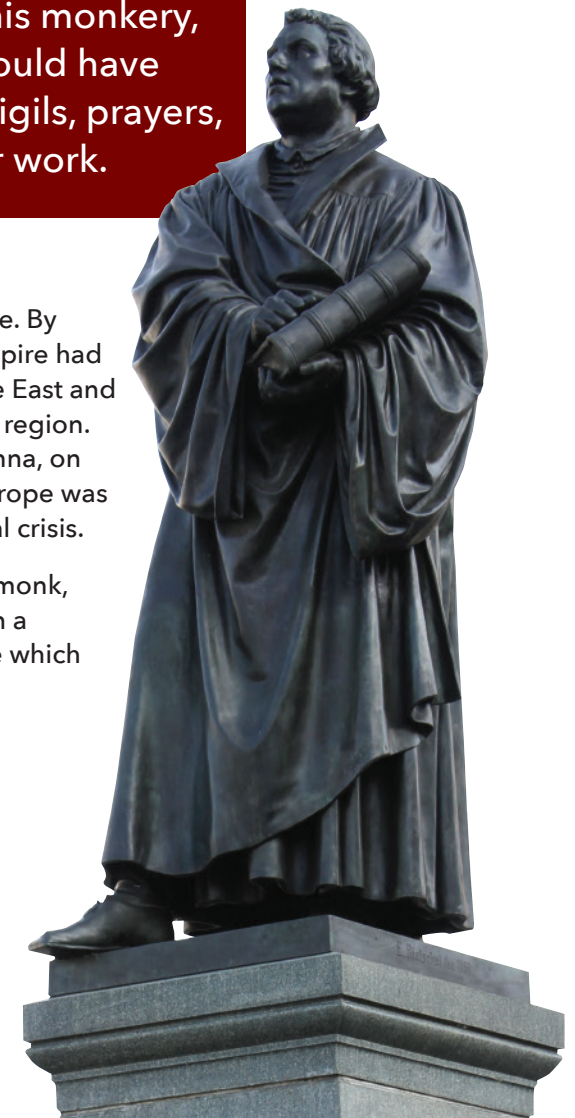
“ If ever a monk were to get to heaven by this monkery, it would be I ... I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, recitings, and other work.

## The World In Luther's Day

Islam was advancing in Europe. By 1510 the Islamic Ottoman Empire had taken over most of the Middle East and advanced through the Balkan region. In 1529 they laid siege to Vienna, on the doorstep of Germany. Europe was in the midst of an international crisis.

Few realised that an obscure monk, Martin Luther, was engaged in a personal crisis of his own, one which would change the world.

Luther statue in Dresden, Germany





# LUTHER'S CONVERSION

**LUTHER'S STRUGGLE:** He attempted to make himself right with God by his 'good works'. He said prayers, fasted for days and tried to be holy. To all around he appeared to be the holiest monk in the monastery, but in his heart he knew nothing but sinfulness. His 'good works' and the ceremonies that the church insisted upon could not bring relief to his troubled soul.

Luther realised that the Holy God demanded a perfect righteousness yet he could not be righteous before God by his own actions. That realisation caused Luther to declare that 'I hated God.'

## The Light of the Gospel

Luther began to study Scripture diligently in the original languages. In Autumn 1515, in the tower of Wittenberg's monastery, he was meditating upon the early chapters of Romans. He suddenly realised that the perfect righteousness that God requires is found only through faith in the Perfect Saviour, Jesus Christ and not by good works. The light of the Gospel dawned on Martin Luther as he grasped from Romans 1 v 17 that 'the just shall live by faith'.

“ What good works can proceed out of a heart like mine; how can I, with works like these, stand before a holy Judge?



Luther Translating the Bible, by artist Paul Thumann, 1872



## The Law and the Gospel

This discovery affirmed for Luther the grand theme of the whole Bible - that there is the Law of God which condemns us all by its demand for perfection, but thankfully there is the Gospel which brings us the good news that Jesus Christ has satisfied the Law's demands on our behalf.

“ I was seized with the conviction that I must understand Paul's letter to the Romans. Then I began to understand that the righteousness of God is ... a gift of God, namely by faith ...

Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven



# THE DAY THE WORLD CHANGED

The Protestant Reformation brought light after the long Dark Ages. It changed the world: socially, educationally, politically, morally but primarily spiritually. Historians agree that the event that commenced the Reformation was the action of Martin Luther in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31st 1517.

## Indulgences

Indulgences were payments to the Church, who claimed that these would buy 'forgiveness' of sins for the living and the dead. However, Luther was beginning to understand, through the study of scripture, that forgiveness cannot be bought or earned.

## Luther's '95 Theses'

On 31st October 1517 - the eve of All Saints Day - Luther made his protest against the abuse of indulgences. The '95 Theses' were individual challenges to the Church. In the usual manner of the time, Luther nailed his document to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg for all to see. His opening statement announced that he was motivated, "Out of love for the truth and from the desire to make it plain". Multiple copies were printed and circulated. Luther became famous.

Background: Victorian engraving of Luther nailing the 95 Theses



“ If you want to change the world pick up your pen

## Rome's Reaction

The Papacy was enraged. It decided that Luther's writings were in conflict with the church's teaching and he was declared to be a heretic. Luther was summoned to a church court called a 'Diet', in the town of Worms, in May 1521. He refused to recant, and famously said to his accusers 'Here I stand, I can do no other'. Amazingly, Luther was allowed to leave.

On the way home he was 'kidnapped' by friends and held in Wartburg Castle where he began his next great project. He translated the New Testament from the original Greek into the daily German language of the common people.

Hundreds of thousands of copies were printed. Millions of people were reading the Bible for themselves. The Reformation was unstoppable.



# LUTHER'S INFLUENCE

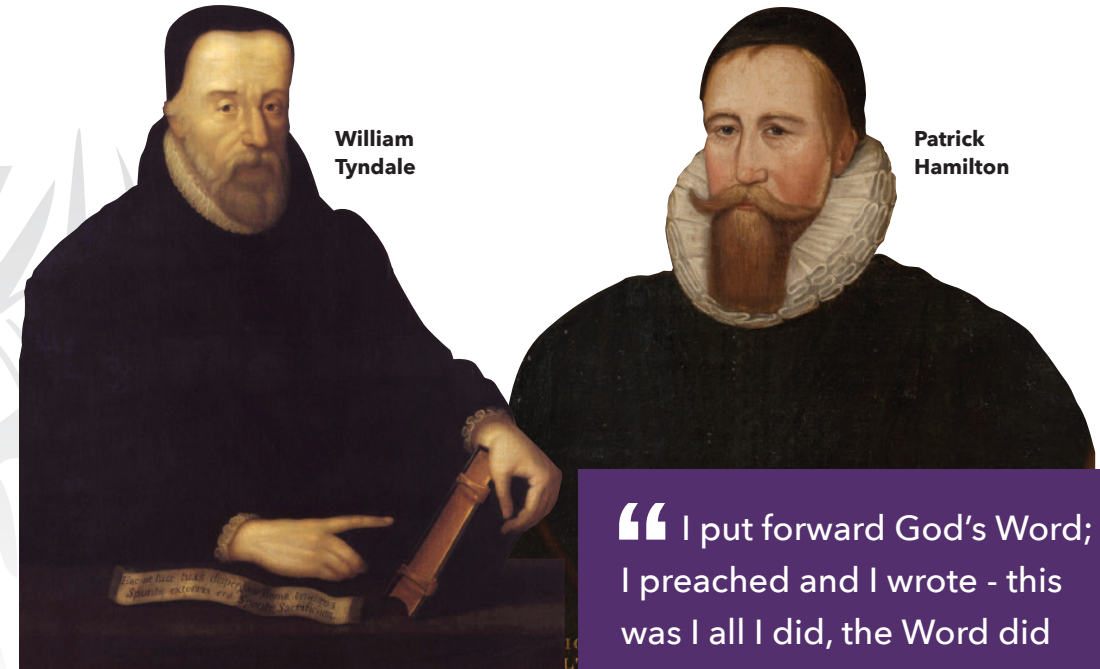
Luther died in 1546 and was buried at the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Like every human, he had flaws - such as his later attitudes towards Jewish people. However, he was mightily used by God to recover the Gospel of 'faith alone in Christ alone' from the darkness of 'works salvation'. Later Reformers built on the foundation he had laid. The gospel truth Luther had rediscovered spread throughout Europe.

## Luther and the British Reformation

Luther's writings soon reached England and Scotland.

**William Tyndale** committed his life to producing an English translation of the Bible. He fled to Luther's Germany to complete the task. It is believed that Luther met Tyndale in Wittenberg in 1525, and that same year his English Bible was printed. Tyndale was arrested and burned at the stake in Belgium in 1536. However, in death was great victory for his Bible laid the foundation for the Authorised Version of 1611.

**Patrick Hamilton** of Scotland became a Professor at the University of St Andrews in 1524 just as Luther's writings were circulating. Church authorities were alarmed that Hamilton was 'inflamed with heresy' - he also fled to Luther's Germany. Upon his return to St Andrews, he was charged with heresy, and burned at the stake in February 1528. Hamilton's death was the beginning of the Scottish Reformation, led by John Knox, and therefore the birth of Scottish Presbyterianism.



William Tyndale

Patrick Hamilton

“ I put forward God's Word; I preached and I wrote - this was I all I did, the Word did and achieved everything.

## In Society

The Reformation changed society morally, politically and educationally. Luther emphasised the importance of education for all. He commenced schools from primary level up to university level. Luther was known as the father of popular Education and the application of his principles made the land of Luther the country of libraries and schools.

## Luther's Writings

There are more books of Luther's commentaries, sermons and sayings than of any other Christian. Many of his writings are constantly being republished.



# LUTHER'S RELEVANCE TODAY

Even though we are 500 years on, we live in a time which is similar to Luther's.

### 'Good Works' Is Common

Today most people have little idea of what the Gospel is. For those who do believe in God, they think that they can be right with Him through their own good works. Sadly, these people have no understanding of Jesus Christ as Saviour, Mediator and Substitute.

### Jesus Christ not always the Focus

The message from many pulpits today is 'moralism', telling people that all they need to focus upon is good behaviour; thus on self rather than on Jesus Christ.

### 'Law and Gospel' is absent

When Jesus Christ is presented, it is often as part of a self-centred message of 'come to Jesus and your life will be improved. You'll be happier, healthier, and wealthier.' The crushing demands of the Law, the Ten Commandments, are largely unknown. And so Christ, as the only One who can fulfil the demands of that Law, is an unfamiliar idea. While many preachers speak of the gospel they are in fact preaching another gospel, which is not the true gospel (Galatians 1:6-9).

“ I fear that after our time the right handling of the Law will become a lost art



Even though scripture teaches that salvation is

### 'Not of works': Ephesians 2:8&9

pilgrims today still visit the 'Holy Stairs' in Rome - the same stairs that Luther himself climbed in his misguided efforts to earn forgiveness of sins.

### Faith Under Attack

The Reformation doctrine of *Justification by Faith Alone* is, and always has been, the number one target of the enemy's attack.

In Luther's time the Church criticised and persecuted people of true faith, while promoting its own false religion. Today our media frequently attacks true Christianity while at the same time insisting upon tolerance for other religions. Christians can end up in court for standing firm for their beliefs, just as Luther and many Reformers did.

Luther used the newly invented Printing Press to spread the truth. We should use every legitimate means to spread the same message.

“ The Gospel cannot be truly preached without offense and tumult



# HERE WE STILL STAND

**THE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH** is unashamedly a Protestant Church. The term Protestant has been maligned, misunderstood, and too often misrepresented. It has been used wrongly by some to label all non-Roman Catholics.

Some evangelicals are reluctant to use the term and others, while claiming to be Protestants, have embraced the very errors the Protestant Reformers opposed.

## Faithful to the Faith

We do not agree with or condone everything Martin Luther and other Reformers taught or did, but we stand where the Protestant Reformation stood on the vital question of how a sinner can be accepted before the Holy God.

The Reformers did not introduce a new teaching but rather rediscovered the truths of the Gospel as taught by Christ, the Apostles, and the early Church.

The Free Presbyterian Church was formed in 1951 out of a similar desire to defend and declare those same truths, free from any associations with the World Council of Churches or any similar organisations.

In an age of Ecumenical concession, Charismatic confusion and Evangelical compromise, the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster continues to stand firmly and unapologetically for the truths of the Reformed Protestant Faith.



## Testifying to the Truth

This Gospel truth has been summarised in the FIVE SOLAS (Sola means 'alone' in Latin) of true PROTESTANTISM:

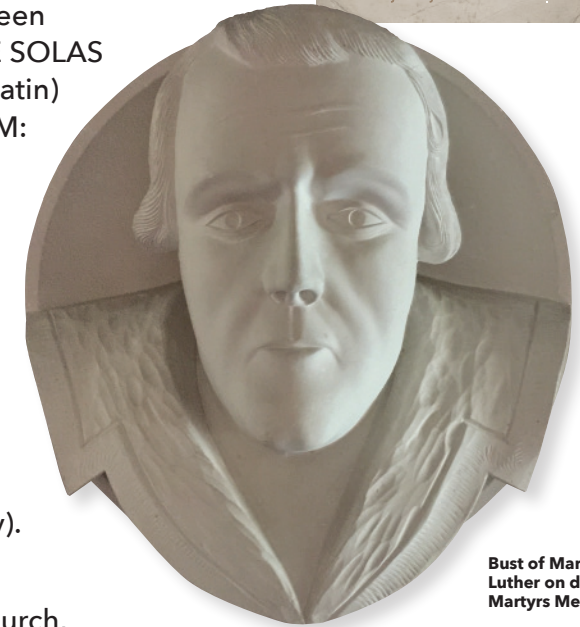
**'Sola Scriptura'**  
(Scripture Alone);

**'Sola Gratia'**  
(Grace Alone);

**'Sola Fide'**  
(Faith Alone);

**'Solus Christus'**  
(Christ Alone);

**'Soli Deo Gloria'**  
(To God Alone Be Glory).



Bust of Martin Luther on display at Martyrs Memorial

## Guarding the Gospel

The Roman Catholic Church, along with many other professed Christian groups today, speak of Scripture, grace, faith, Christ and God's glory, yet they do not and cannot use the term 'Alone'. To Scripture is added sacred tradition, new revelations, and the teachings of men.

Salvation, they claim, is through a combination of God's grace and man's efforts. They maintain that we can be justified by faith and the works that we produce. They cannot declare that we are accepted as righteous before God solely by the merits of Christ. It is Christ plus something. Their teaching means that the glory for a sinner's salvation cannot be attributed to God alone, as is taught in the Scriptures.

As Protestants, we seek to implement the twin pillars of Protestantism, namely a positive witness for Christ and a protest against error (Galatians 5:1).





PUBLISHED BY THE  
FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ULSTER  
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