

It was a day late in October when a young man walked across the city square up to the church door, which was basically the community calendar. He slowly and carefully took his piece of paper on which were written 95 points of debate called theses. He drove one nail through the paper into the wooden door. Soon he figured someone from the university would be contacting him to set up a time to debate. His intention wasn't to make people angry. He just saw some abuses in the church that he felt needed changing in order to protect the people.

Martin Luther nailed those 95 theses to the church door on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517 but the reforms it started were momentous. At least a few people probably think it's about time to start some reforms again. These could center in politics or economics. Possibly a reformation of the criminal elements of society. Or a reformation of the school system and the way we educate our children. But plenty more people would think reformation might be too strong. Revise, offer minor adjustments, but wholesale reformation of everything goes too far. The prevailing opinion is that human beings are basically good.

Today we celebrate the 496<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation started by Martin Luther. But this is hardly about Martin Luther. This is hardly a history lesson taking you back almost five centuries. This is reformation of another kind. In the first lesson the prophet Jeremiah highlights words from the Lord about reformation. It was the same reformation Luther was hoping to see. This one is desperately needed by you and me...

**This reformation makes us free  
Rescues our souls  
Directs our hearts**

Congratulations! Sign and drive this brand new car. Of course your signature obligates you to a contract, a form of covenant. The car dealership will allow you to use their shiny new car and you promise to pay them each month. They may promise to do maintenance. You may promise to bring it back after three years. Your agreement with them is two sided. They meet conditions and you meet conditions. The so called old covenant operated the same way. It was an agreement between God and the people of Israel and it was all rules and laws. God promised to bless them so long as they kept the laws.

That old covenant was broken before the ink was dry. The people were sinful in everything they did, said, and thought. That sin broke the covenant with God. They never lived up to their side of the agreement. The people tried harder and harder to keep the laws and rules. But it was a foolish exercise. More laws just meant more breaking them. The religious leaders of the people even added laws to God's laws but it just made the people more sinful. They were trying harder to keep laws they couldn't keep in the first place.

A new covenant was needed. **"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers...because they broke my covenant."** Why would God give another covenant after they broke the first one? The new one would be different. It would be one sided. God would obligate himself to all the conditions and the people would simply reap the benefits.

On Friday 200 new laws went into effect. Do you know them all? You're obligated to keep each one whether you know them or not. Beyond those new laws there are all the old ones. Do you know all those? Again, you're obligated to keep every single one. And if you fail and break one, like driving too fast, a police officer or judge might tell you to try harder next time. But the temptation to break the rules is too great. We're trying harder to keep laws we can't keep in the first place. Trying harder doesn't help you escape failure. And it's for more than just state laws. It's for God's laws; everything written in the Bible, the 10 Commandments, all of it. Yes the laws you know and the ones you don't. You're obligated to keep all of them. And you can't just try harder. You'll never escape the failure and God holds you accountable.

Your soul is anything but free under the law. You need a new covenant to rescue you. The one sided covenant is already in effect. God subjects himself to all the conditions. This new covenant is based not on laws or rules but on forgiveness. But God hasn't just set aside the 10 commandments or all the laws and rules from the Bible as if they don't matter. Instead he sent someone who could actually keep every single law and every single rule. Christ Jesus is the center of the new covenant. He's the basis for the forgiveness. His cross opens up our ability to approach God without restrictions. No rules, no laws, no regulations or limits in the new covenant. Just rescue of souls lost to sin through Jesus.

Jesus kept all the conditions of the covenant. He fulfilled all the requirements. He met all the obligations. You and I should have, Jesus did. We're not under the old covenant any more. It's irrelevant to your rescued soul. Your free status before God doesn't come about by your own works. The new covenant of forgiveness in Christ is the agreement God has with you now.

Luther nailed up those theses because his life had been spent trying to bargain with God. He so desperately wanted to please God and live up to God's demands of perfection, but he couldn't. And he beat himself up over it. He felt guilty all the time. He had a genuine fear of God's wrath. But what was starting to become clear to Luther with these 95 theses and what would become even clearer the more he studied the Bible was that God wasn't angry with him. God had provided for his soul's rescue in love. The Word of God opened up for Luther and all who read it a God who sent a Savior to rescue the world. That changed the future. The Savior would direct hearts.

The old covenant gave plenty of direction for the Israelites. That's what it was all about, written laws and religious leaders directing every moment of their lives. The new covenant would be different. **"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people."** Jeremiah described a change of heart that would come from outside a person. God would do the changing. A person with this heart change would begin to fear and love God, thank and praise him, serve and obey him. These are the actions of faith caused by this new covenant and its mediator, the Savior.

We still constantly bump up against the old covenant way of doing things. When we break a rule or sin our hearts look for some way out. We make excuses for our sins so we don't feel so bad or wicked. Swear or curse at another person and we might dismiss it as casual or occasional. They did something to cause me to sin. I'm no Mother Teresa, but I'm certainly no hardened murderer either. I'll admit I'm not perfect, but who is? I'm better than many. We want to believe God will lower his expectation of perfection so we can be excused. We compare ourselves with other sinners and not with God. An all time favorite excuse is trying to balance the bad with some good. I cheated on that test so I'll work extra hard to get good grades on my homework. I told a lie so I'll buy flowers. I sinned so I'll make up for it with God. These excuses are worthless. Nothing we do takes away sin.

We need an actual Savior from sin, someone to lift off the burden of our sins. In a stunning move, Jesus lifted off of us and all people all our sins and placed them on himself. He willingly carried this weight, this torturous weight for you and me. He carried a lifetime of sins, some of which you have yet to commit. For your benefit Jesus carried those sins to the cross. Jesus went there with a completely untarnished record. He never committed any sin. His life was a treasure chest full of perfection that as God he gave to all people. His death on the cross was the transfer. It allowed a new covenant of forgiveness to be instituted. **"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."** Forgive! Completely remove from before his thoughts any sins you had committed. No more! There's not a chance that God will withhold forgiveness because of Jesus. In love it's all gone. You have the stamp of perfection that Jesus earned.

New life under a new covenant changes how you live. It directs your life. You're connected to Jesus Christ by faith and that connects you with God the Father. You have open access to the Father. Go to him in prayer. Make requests of him. Worship him and praise him daily. It's all there for you in Christ. Live according to the law and the rules. Following the new covenant we fulfill the purpose of the old covenant. We give glory to God and live according to his will.

Martin Luther brought reformation to the church on earth and returned it to the Lord who loved it. He centered us on the Bible for all our teaching and life. He brought us back to knowledge of Jesus the only substitute we need for sins and the loving and forgiving God we have. There is nothing we see today that this world hasn't already seen. Christ's church is still here and you are a part of it. God will see you through to the end with the new covenant. That reform brings freedom, rescue from sin and direction for your life.