

Faith Alone

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[0 : 0 0] that you are truth, that your word is truth and by a powerful work of your spirit 500 years ago you opened people's eyes afresh to your truth may we rediscover these realities afresh today and in the weeks ahead that they would not just be information for our heads but food for our very souls so we pray that your spirit here now in us and among us will open our hearts to meditate on your gospel that we would see Christ in all his glory for we ask in Jesus name, Amen so 2017 marks this great birthday 500 years since the reformation, we mark it as beginning on the 31st of October 1517 because that was the day on which Martin Luther hammered these 95 theses to the door of his church in Wittenberg and it triggered these events that shook the world and at St. Silas it's very important for us to understand what the reformation was all about and to celebrate it we're first and foremost an evangelical church that means we're committed to the gospel where people have even evangel means gospel so the good news about Jesus that's revealed to us in the bible is what we stand for and it was the rediscovery of that news that was the heart of the reformation we're also part of the global anglican communion which is a network of protestant churches that was born at the reformation and our branch of that anglican network is the scottish episcopal church and that was one of two churches alongside the church of scotland that kind of spun out of the reformation in scotland so what was it what was the reformation well there's a lot of confusion about that in scotland it's sometimes linked with fighting the english and stopping the english from dominating the scots a couple of generations after these first events king charles the first tried to impose a prayer book on scotland that would kind of dictate how we worship up here and it was first used at st giles church in edinburgh and jenny geddis a market trader threw her stool at the minister's head it was the start of a riot you can go to edinburgh to st giles church and you can see a bronze stool commemorating the stool throwing event as the scots fought for religious independence from the pesky english bishops and in the uk as a whole the reformation is sometimes remembered as simply henry the eighth big problem he wants a divorce he wants a child and the pope won't let him so it's convenient for him to break away from the church in rome and start his own thing but the reformation is about something much more significant than that it was a rediscovery that led to a revolution so first it was a rediscovery because it wasn't about new ideas the reformers weren't making new things up about god they were rediscovering what had been lost for centuries by the church it's hard for us to imagine what life was like in medieval scotland and in medieval europe but there was one church as we'd have all known it under the pope under rome and everything was in latin when you went to church nobody could hear or read the bible in english so you couldn't understand it often the priests couldn't understand it and even for the monks and priests who were leading the services in latin they were using a latin translation of the bible called the vulgate that was wrong so for example whenever in the original languages the bible talks about repenting about changing your mind about how you're living repent they had it translated do penance so they had these real problems getting to the truth life was very religious it was shrouded

in superstition about god about who you pray for there was a terrible fear among the people of europe about what would happen in eternity and at the time of the reformation there was this rediscovery of truth that had been there all along from god in the bible and that led to a revolution it was a revolution about god and thinking about who he is and his character and how we get right with him it was also a revolution about the church and most of what we think of today naturally about church we owe to the reformation so for example just worship in the vernacular worship in a language we can understand that's because of the reformation it made worship congregational recognizing that every christian is called to serve god and that we all participate in worship together rather than just coming to watch some sacred people at the front do their thing and the sacraments were brought back to their kind of biblical simplicity and the purposes for them people went back to the bible and said well there's only two sacraments jesus said there's the lord's supper communion and there's baptism and it's god's gift to us to strengthen our faith in the medieval church all of that was completely different you know you would have come to church we wouldn't have been allowed the wine in fact i would have been allowed the wine okay because i've been ordained a priest right so you would have come and watched me drink the wine and i would have let you gaze at what was in the cup and that would have infused grace to you and you would probably if you were particularly godly you would have then run off to the next church to have a look at their wine as well to sort of stack up the grace for the week this was what was going on but the reformation was also a revolution about everything it completely transformed european society so our views on sex and marriage and family we'll see in the weeks to come they came from the rediscovery of what god says about those things in the bible our views on working life and the dignity of human labor the interview we've just had with sarah the idea that we serve god out in the world in work not just by becoming a monk these were new things for people the protestant work ethic that led to an economic revolution came from the reformation it transformed the arts people thought you could only paint things that were religious in the bible but if god made the plants and the trees surely we can paint them as well it transformed our views about children and their dignity and the need for education to give them a christian world view so life today would be totally different if it wasn't for what happened at the reformation and we can look back at the reformation using these five solas solas just means only alone and five of them summarise for us the five big ideas of the reformation sola scriptura scripture alone the bible is the sole and final authority in all matters of life and godliness sola gratia grace alone sola fide faith alone solus christus christ alone those three go together that salvation is in christ alone based exclusively on his work done at the cross granted to us by grace alone as a free gift received by faith alone and soli deo gloria the glory of god alone that all of life can and should be lived for god's glory so since it's our birthday we're going to look at these as like an anniversary series at saint silas it's worth saying i understand some people will be feeling a bit nervous about celebrating the reformation and we need to clarify understanding the reformation properly it's got nothing to do with sectarianism that has kind of blighted this city and lots of europe in history it's nothing to do with persecuting roman catholics which was a horrible thing that has happened and still goes on today at that time

the roman catholic church was the church and the reformers were people in the church rediscovering truth and they were extremely reluctant to have any kind of break from the church in rome eventually that did happen because the church in rome looked at things and denied what was being discovered in the bible but it's not anything to do with sectarianism today it's just people rediscovering truth about god and we owe a great debt to those key figures who did that so we're going to get going this morning with faith alone sola fide and we're particularly focusing on martin luther four points what luther feared what he discovered what faith alone is and what faith alone means so first of all what luther feared we've heard a bit about him already he was born in 1483 he was well educated his dad wanted him to be a lawyer he gets caught in a storm and he's 21 years old and he prays in his anxiety saying Anne help me

I shall become a monk and he survives but he wants to honour the vow so he goes into a monastery at that time people knew God was holy they knew God was righteous they knew nobody could be holy and righteous like God so how on earth do you get right with God how do you get justified so that God sees you as righteous well what they believed was this right Jesus Christ came and lived a life of perfect obedience and it moved God and God was so moved by how obedient Jesus was that he created a new pact with humanity a new agreement and basically the agreement was if you do your best God will do the rest and to help you do your best God gave you the sacraments so if you fell into sin you went through some religious rites that God used as part of his pact so that he could forgive you and restore you to his grace you could go to a priest and he used sacramental confession and you'd be given some penance to do like say some

Hail Mary prayers you could go to mass and on the altar the priest would represent Jesus as a sacrifice to God to deal with our sin again afresh that day and even after all those sacraments there's always purgatory strong belief in this thing purgatory which was that after you die you didn't go to heaven to be with God your soul went to this place where you were kind of punished for the things you hadn't made up for in life and God prepared you to be in a more holy place so the more Luther tries this kind of pact the more he is overwhelmed by his own sin he's thinking do your best and God will do the rest but am I really doing my best and how do I know that God is really going to do the rest so he's getting increasingly troubled now his 95 theses that he hammers to the door of this church aren't actually to do with that they're connected what happened was there was a thing going around the church in

[11 : 08] Europe at the time called indulgences and indulgences were a way that you could pay some money and the church would grant you an indulgence they believed God had given the church the right to do that and it would free somebody you loved who died out of purgatory if you gave money so there was a particular friar called Johann Tetzel you can imagine it was like the televangelists of the day who were kind of making money out of this and Tetzel arrives in Luther's neighborhood and he's selling these indulgences because they want to build a new church in the Vatican and he's extremely successful one of his big phrases is as soon as a coin in the coffer rings a soul from purgatory springs okay and he tells people even if you'd raped the blessed virgin Mary one of my indulgences will get you out of purgatory now Martin Luther is appalled by what's going on but at this stage the reason he's appalled is because he thinks people are not repenting okay so he still thinks these things would work in principle but he's really upset about the way these indulgences are being cheapened by

Tetzel and he goes and hammers these theses to the church door in Wittenberg but at that stage he still thinks penance is what I need to get me right with God so he's wearing chafing under his clothes because God will like that he sleeps on the floor he sleeps without a blanket in the freezing cold he often goes three days without food and water he visits the priest for confession his confessional visits were taking up to six hours at a time as he went before and the priest started saying Luther can't you wait until you've done something bad these are minor things six hours in the confessional by the time he came out he'd missed chapel so then he was already stacking up the things he'd done wrong again to go back in he went to Rome and he climbed up the staircase in Rome the Scala Sancta on his knees and at every step he kissed it and he said the Lord's prayer and he got to the end and he's thinking how do I know this is going to be enough for God and key to understanding how Luther felt is recognizing he was one of the few people around who could read the

Bible in the original languages and as he's reading it he is confronted by the holiness of God he could read about Isaiah having this vision of God you know Isaiah's vision of God in Isaiah six the train of God's robe is so big it fills the temple and Isaiah he is the angels saying holy holy holy is the Lord good almighty the whole earth is full of his glory and Isaiah's response is water me I cried I am ruined for I'm a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the king the Lord almighty that is the natural reaction of a human who meets God like Peter in the boat with Jesus he sees the miraculous catch of fish and he says depart from me Lord for I'm a faithful man he's afraid and Luther starts reading Romans and it keeps going on about the righteousness of God and whenever he reads that he hates it because he thinks yeah God is righteous but I am terrified by that sheer goodness of

God in Romans chapter 3 it says there is no one righteous not even one there is no one who understands there is no one who seeks God in verse 20 therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law rather through the law we become conscious of our sin Martin is terrified so it's human nature whenever you have whenever humanity invents a religion that says by my good things I can get right with God one of two things always happens okay you either end up in despair like Martin Luther because you realize God is too good for this or you diminish the holiness of God and we see that today in nominal Christianity where God is like Santa Claus and yeah we have to be good but you know no one's perfect God knows that it's what I used to think that Christians believed I think it's what most British people think

Christians believe today I remember a partner at the law firm I worked at who would have said he was a Christian would have said he goes to he went to church his kids went to a church school and he was describing to me how he every year used to rally people who were Christians at work to go on this trip where he would take holiday and he would take disabled people to a pilgrimage site so that they had the chance to go and it was like this trip away and he was describing it to me once I asked him a bit about what they do and why they do it and he was saying oh it's great you know when you get away and you take these disabled people to this site and they wouldn't be able to go and it's a great thing to do and then he said to me but it's alright you know it's not too serious you know we all get the beers in every night you know no one takes it too seriously it's fine and I thought what a great example of kind of the folklore of our land about God you know no one's perfect and God kind of knows that just get the beers in it's fine he'll be alright he'll forgive me that's his job and we need to be gripped like

[16:19] Luther was by the reality and the terror of the holiness of God his sheer perfection that means that he could not allow us into his presence he can't even do that without destroying us he is holy so Luther was in despair because of the judgment of God that's what he feared and then he makes this wonderful discovery that's our second point what Luther discovered he's reading the Bible in the original languages and the spirit enlightens him to this great moment he reads Romans 1 17 where it says this for in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed a righteousness that is by faith from first to last just as it is written the righteous will live by faith so for the first time Luther realizes that the righteousness of God that keeps being mentioned in Romans is a gift from him to us received received by faith alone just by trusting and he says this here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates we see that truth explained further in

Romans in chapter 3 just go on to the next slide but now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify this righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe so Luther had discovered faith union with Christ that by putting your faith in Jesus any believer no matter what they've done is united to Jesus you have a union with him so that whatever happens to him happens to you so we read in 2 Corinthians 5 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God if we're in Christ because we have faith in him at the cross as he dies we're in him so that as he is being punished for our sin we're there and God can acquit us because he's dealt with it then in Romans 4 25 we read this he Christ was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification so because

Jesus is a righteous man and at the cross he dies God raises him to life and if you put your faith in him you're in him as he's raised and you're given new life in him we're vindicated by his death and resurrection and Luther's own picture of this his illustration was of a marriage he said if you think of sin like a huge financial debt when you get married if you have a massive financial debt like if you're not Scottish you've got a student loan or something you've had to pay fees and you marry somebody and they're good enough to share their bank account and not everyone does that these days but in Luther's day everyone would have done that and they're rich your debt is immediately cancelled out isn't it and Luther told the story of a king marrying a prostitute to describe King Jesus and his union with a wicked sinner the king's wife immediately becomes a queen she has royal status and there's this joyful exchange whereas as she is granted that royal status all of her debt is just swallowed up by her new husband and so he described faith as like a wedding ring faith is what draws us into that union that relationship with Jesus where what happens to him happens to me that was his great discovery we're going to just think for a few minutes about what faith alone is and what faith alone means so first of all what faith alone is faith is not a blind leap into the dark it's reliance or dependence or trust it's belief in action

Hebrews chapter 11 verse 1 the writer says this now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see so it's literally taking God at his word trusting his promises believing with conviction his promise that by faith alone Jesus has died for my sins he's risen to rule and I have a right standing with God and so that means faith is not a work that God rewards it's not a virtue that God said well because you've taken this leap into the dark and trusted me I will reward you for that faith is just putting your trust in God's promise so that when we're saved by faith alone what we're saying is that our good works have absolutely no effect in fact you've got to let go of them to be saved by faith you've got to be able to say when I stand before God nothing in my hand will I bring I don't contribute anything but I I'm forgiven because of

Jesus and my trust in him so Martin Luther wrote provocatively about this a lot he's a very provocative man but he was writing to someone who was still feeling guilty and worried that God wouldn't approve of them because of their sin and he said this we'll just put it on the screen be a sinner and sin boldly but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly for he is victorious over sin death and the world no sin will separate us from the lamb even though we commit fornication and murder a thousand times a day do you think that the purchase price that was paid for the redemption of our sins by so great a lamb is too small it's like there was a preacher in the 20th century in the UK who said that when he was explaining the Christian faith to a non-Christian he would always know that he'd explain it correctly if the non-Christian hearing it would say that can't be true because if that's true what I do doesn't matter then he think I know I've explained it right because they've realized it's faith alone that saves you now what we then need to add is that saving faith is never without works because when you put your trust in God's promises you're coming to a conviction that God loves you enough that though he's concerned deeply about how you've lived he has at great cost to himself provided the answer so you can be saved and knowing that truth changes you so that out of love for God you want to live differently so in other words we're saved by faith alone but saving faith never remains alone good works always follow true faith because true faith changes you but it's important to remember that it's faith alone that kind of faith alone isn't a work because otherwise you end up quite introspective about your faith and thinking oh is my faith good enough and am I trusting God enough or will I get to kind of

[23 : 13] I'll die and God will say well your faith wasn't strong enough but that's not what it's like at all it's much better to think not I'm saved by faith but I'm saved by Jesus Christ and his work and I access that by faith in him it's his good works that save me and I don't need to worry that my faith is enough it's a bit like sometimes being in Christ has been described as like an airplane if you imagine that you need to get to London and you go to Glasgow airport and there's an airplane going to London it wouldn't be a Ryanair one these days but you find a plane it's going to London how do you get to London well standing under the plane won't get you to London standing beside the plane won't get you there you've got to get on the plane but once you're on the plane whatever happens to the plane happens to you now it's a bit like that when we go and put our faith in Christ it's like getting into him getting on the plane now if you take the plane analogy sometimes you can get on a plane and you're sat next to someone who's a seasoned flyer and they barely even notice that the plane's taking off and landing they have no fear no doubt this plane will get me there other times you can be with someone who's a very nervous flyer and they're terrified and their palms are sweating and they're looking at the wing to check it's still there and they're saying their prayers and they're really worried that the plane won't land but they will get there because they got on the plane it doesn't matter that they're full of fear and doubt as long as you get on the plane the plane gets you there and if you put your faith in

Christ his work will save you you just got to stay on the plane come and drink the living water that Jesus offers and sometimes it's as though we have people investigating the Christian faith and people hold back thinking I want to become a Christian but I've got to wait until my life is more in order but faith alone says don't wait for anything just come today and receive forgiveness and eternal life from Jesus the whole point is you're not good enough and Jesus has come to save you come and receive secondly go and tell because nobody can be saved by their good works and anybody can be saved by faith alone and faith comes by hearing so that's a major implication later in

Romans chapter 10 Paul says this how can they call on the one they have not believed in and how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard and how can they hear without someone preaching to them and how can anyone preach unless they are sent so that when this truth of faith alone gripped the first reformers it led to a massive movement of mission the number of reformed evangelical congregations in France went up from five to over 2,000 in 20 years wouldn't that be exciting today to think let's plant 2,000 churches in the nation in 20 years that's what happened in other words let this truth sink in and value it enough to go and tell others tell others and bring them here and together let's plant more churches that hold to these truths because there are lots of people in Glasgow who have never heard this in language they can understand in the northwest of

England where I lived before I came here there was quite an exciting little church planting movement but what had caused it was one day at a conference an Australian who they invited to come and speak to them as a group of church people and church leaders saying to them you do realize very powerful for them to sit and think if we're not the ones raising up workers for the harvest field of Scotland training people up paying for them to be trained giving our money and giving our time so that people hear about Christ planting churches if we're not doing that nobody is going to do it because the cavalry is not coming that is up to us and sometimes it can feel as though and I'm guilty of this as well as Christians we sit around grumbling about things like the color of the carpet so that the clock doesn't work or something while people around us need to hear that it's only by faith alone that you get right with God go and tell and lastly we need to rejoice rejoice because the burden of trying to get right with

God by yourself is a horrible thing and that burden has been lifted from us Romans chapter 5 verse 1 since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ Martin Luther knew that joy and it transformed him in that same generation in Norfolk there was a young man Thomas Bilney just like Luther he'd spent his kind of early adult life busying himself with fasting and all kinds of religion and then he had this moment when he grasped salvation is a gift he read the Bible in the original languages and he said this immediately I felt a marvelous comfort and quietness in so much as my bruised bones leapt for joy and we see that joy in the great hymns shaped by the reformation Philip Bliss lost his whole family in a shipwreck across the Atlantic his wife sent him a telegram saying everyone else was lost he wrote it is well with my soul he says this my sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought my sin not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and

[29 : 06] I bear it no more praise the Lord praise the Lord oh my soul William Cooper who battled mental illness his whole life sang this ever since by faith I saw the stream by flowing wounds supply redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die and Edward Mote this prayer should be everyone's prayer when the last trumpet voice shall sound oh may I then in him be found clothed in his righteousness alone faultless to stand before the throne on Christ the solid rock let's pray together father god we praise you for your holiness and we ask for a powerful work of your spirit that your spirit will blow through this nation of Scotland and strike people with a fear of you a renewed awareness that you are there that you are holy that we stand condemned without hope and we pray this so that in your great mercy as you did with

Martin Luther you could open the eyes of this nation to the wonder that any of us can be made righteous not because of anything good in ourselves but by faith alone in Christ and him crucified increasing us we pray our sense of these realities that we would be overwhelmed with peace and joy and would be those who preach that good news to our city and to the world for Jesus name's sake amen and hand over to the band we're going to respond by singing together let Neptune thank you for