

Martin Luther, Father of the Protestant Reformation

(Medieval music playing and then fade out during introduction.)

Welcome to Germany in the late 1400's. You are about to hear the story of a man's struggle to find salvation, and then his attempts to help others find the true salvation in Christ that he had found. While on my spiritual journey I discovered truths from God's Word that were not being taught by the church, and had not been taught for many hundreds of years. The Roman Catholic Church greatly opposed me for teaching things contrary to what it taught. I did what I thought God wanted me to do. By doing so I returned many people to the Biblical faith of the early church. The people who **protested** against the errors in the Roman Catholic Church were called **Protestants**. Their efforts to **reform** the church and make it more Biblical, gave the name **Reformation**. Thus I, and other men and women like me (my wife Katherine, John and Idelette Calvin, John Hus, Martin Bucer, John Knox) started the **Protestant Reformation**. When the Pilgrims came to America in 1620, they brought with them Protestant Christianity. They wanted this new nation to be a nation who had **God as its Lord**. Their vision came to pass. Those who live in America today, and enjoy the **liberty** that the gospel has brought, have Luther and other Reformers to thank.

Narrator: Martin Luther was born in 1483 in Eisleben, Germany, shortly before Columbus' famous voyage to the New World.

Luther: My mother used to say "Martin has the potential of doing something great with his life." My father agreed so he did not send me to work in his copper mines. Instead, he sent me off to school."

Narrator: Martin loved school, especially the subject of music. His teachers were very strict, and sometimes cruel.

Luther: The headmaster of my school always started class by saying:
"God may intend many of you to be burgomasters, chancellors, scholars, and rulers."

Narrator: The headmaster thought that his pupils would do great things when they grew up. Luther wondered:

Luther: "Maybe I'll do something very important one day."

Narrator: At the age of 17, Luther went off to attend the university. He said,

Luther: "I have to study very hard, especially to learn Latin. I'm very ashamed, though, to admit that my college nickname is '*beer bag*'."

Narrator: After three years, Luther graduated. He wondered,

Luther: “Now what should I do with my life?” My father declared, “Son, I really think that you should study law, and become a lawyer.” I replied, “Yes Father, if that is your desire, I will do it. I respect you, and I trust your judgment.”

Narrator: One day, one of Luther’s closest friends died. The grieving Luther was greatly troubled and thought:

Luther: “I wonder what will happen to me when I die? Will I live on, somewhere else?”

Narrator: Shortly afterward he was walking home through some woods.

Luther: A thunderstorm suddenly developed, and a lightning bolt struck the ground right beside Luther. Thinking that I was going to die, I cried out in terror: “Help me Saint Anne; I will become a monk!”

Narrator: It is a common practice in the Roman Catholic Church to ask the “saints” for assistance.

Luther: I fulfilled his promise and became a monk, an Augustinian friar. At the age of 21, I was in a spiritual crisis.

“I have grown up in the church, I have learned to fear God, obey the church authorities, and believe in heaven and hell. Yet I don’t feel that I am really forgiven for my sins. As an Augustinian friar, I have fasted for days, I have stayed awake all night in prayer, I have repented of my sins for hours, and I have even beaten myself.”

Narrator: Why did Luther do these things?

Luther: “To please God, of course, so He will take away my sins.”

Narrator: But after all this Luther still didn’t feel forgiven! He confessed:

Luther: “I am depressed. As hard as I try, I never can please God. I hate to admit it, but sometimes I don’t even like God.”

Narrator: What could help Martin Luther? (Pause) One day, while studying the Bible, Luther read Romans 1:17:

Luther: “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith.” (*Say the following slowly....*) “The just shall live by faith; . . . the just shall live by faith.”

“I see it! It is not man’s good works in addition to God’s grace that brings salvation. It is God’s grace alone. When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the total price for my salvation. I am saved by faith in Jesus and what He did for me!”

Narrator: Luther was so happy; he felt that he had entered paradise.

Now, as President and professor at the University in Wittenberg, Germany, Luther began to criticize the corruption that he saw in the church. Luther said:

Luther: “The sale of forgiveness of sins by indulgences makes me angry!”

Narrator: Indulgences were certificates from the Pope, which, it was claimed, released a person from their sins. Indulgences supposedly wiped away their sins without the need to repent.

Luther: A monk named John Tetzel is going Germany selling these indulgences. Listen to that **John Tetzel:** “Buy your indulgences right now! If you do, you will be released from your sins! They are also good for your relatives who have died. Buy an indulgence for them, and they will be released from purgatory and go to heaven.” The peasants are spending their precious little money, thinking that they will be forgiven of their sins and relieved of their feelings of guilt.

Luther: They are even buying them for mothers or fathers who have died in the past few years. I can’t believe what I hear **Tetzel saying to them:** “Thank you; you are now released from all your sins! When in the coffer a coin doth ring, a soul from purgatory springs! Your mother is now leaving purgatory to go to heaven!”

Luther: “I am ready to challenge this nonsense!”

Narrator: So on October 31, 1517, he went to the castle church at Wittenberg and nailed a document to the door containing 95 statements, which challenged the church’s false teachings on indulgences. Luther will now read eight of the 95 Theses.

Martin Luther:

Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following truths will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of the Reverend Father Martin Luther. He requests that you debate with him, either in person or by letter.

- 1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ wants believers to repent of their sins every day.*
- 21. The preachers of indulgences are wrong, who say that by buying an indulgence you are free from your sins, and saved.*
- 27. It is not true that as soon a penny jingles in the moneybox a soul flies out of purgatory and goes to heaven.*
- 36. Every Christian who truly repents of his sins is free of the penalty of sin and of guilt.*
- 45. God is angry with any Christian who uses his money to buy indulgences rather than help someone who is in need.*

52. *It is vain to believe that you get salvation by buying an indulgence.*
86. *Why doesn't the Pope, who is very rich, build the church of St. Peter with his own money, instead of trying to get the money from poor believers?*
94. *Christians need to be diligent to follow Christ, their Head, no matter what the cost.*

Narrator: When Martin Luther nailed these 95 theses upon the church door, he began what we now call the Protestant Reformation.

Luther: I have many other concerns about the teachings of the church. The church does not allow anyone to own or read the Bible. The Bible was only available in Latin. I am very concerned that the common people should be able to read the Bible in the language that they could understand. In church, Latin is spoken . . . “*In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram.*” The peasants and common people don’t know what is being said. They can’t understand one word! They just had to trust the priest to tell them what to believe.”

Narrator: Luther decided to do something about the common people not being able to understand.

Luther: “I will translate the Bible into German, so the people can read the Bible for themselves, and understand what they are hearing.” I could hear the peasants now exclaiming, “I can read and understand this Bible now. It is in German instead of Latin!” One told me, “Now **I** can learn what the Bible says and not depend upon priests or church officials to tell me what it means!”

Narrator: Luther learned many new Biblical truths, and taught them to the people.

Luther: “The Bible is God’s message to His people and is **totally true**. Every person should be able to read the Bible in his own language. If there is a difference between what the Bible teaches and the tradition of the church, we must follow the Bible. All Believers are priests. We do not need a priest to pray for us since we can pray directly to God ourselves, through Jesus, and He hears us.”

Narrator: The church officials did not agree with what Luther was teaching. They said, “Martin Luther, you are wrong!” and “Be quiet! Stop teaching these things.”

Luther: But I did not stop teaching the truth. The church officials became even angrier! They called me a heretic! They declared that I was preaching lies! I was ordered to recant; admitting that I was wrong!”

Narrator: Martin Luther did not stop preaching, teaching, and writing books for Christians.

Luther: Pope Leo X ordered that my books be burned.

I was put on trial before Charles V, Emperor of the Roman Empire. So I traveled to the city of Worms in Germany.

Narrator: At his trial he was ordered to recant – to say what he had written and what he was teaching were all lies.

Luther: Church officials said that I was dividing the church. I was ordered to stop what they said was heretical preaching and writing.

Luther: My response: “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my **conscience** is captive to the **Word of God**. I cannot and I will not take back anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”

Narrator: Martin Luther did not win his trial. He was declared a heretic and an outlaw. No subject of the emperor was to give him a place to sleep, or food or drink.

Luther: Yet God protected me through my friends, and I worked for God for 25 more years. And thus began the Protestant Reformation which would set the world on fire for Christ.

Narrator: We will conclude by reflecting on Luther’s use of music and the words of Martin Luther’s most famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*.

Luther: I love music. *If any man despises music, as all fanatics do, for him I have no liking; for music is a gift of God, not an invention of man. I would allow no man to preach or teach God’s people without a proper knowledge of the use and power of sacred song.*

Narrator: One of the results of the Reformation was the restoration of congregational singing. Psalm 46 begins,

Luther: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.” Based on Psalms 46, I wrote the beloved hymn A mighty Fortress is Our God. It became the battle cry of the people and a source of strength for many who were martyred for their faith. It

has been translated from German into almost every known language. The first line of this hymn, *A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing*, is inscribed on my tomb.