

## Thank God For The Open Bible.

Text: 2 Peter 1:19

Suggested Hymns:

195, 273, 260, 282, 262

- 1) Events leading up
- 2) Gives soul-satisfying information
- 3) Brings order to a confused world
- 4) Gives the only correct answer to the most important question of all time

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Peter 1:19, <sup>19</sup> *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

When our gracious heavenly Father finds it necessary to accomplish some monumental task, He understands full well how to provide the instrument for its accomplishment. God knows how to equip that person with the necessary qualifications and ability to perform the task for which He has selected him.

The wonderful work of the Reformation nearly five centuries ago, which revolutionised the world and opened a new era of enlightenment in the history of mankind, is one of the outstanding examples to confirm these statements.

God certainly equipped and trained Martin Luther for the tremendous task which He assigned to him. The careful reader of the history of that day is compelled to marvel at the enormous amount of work which the great Reformer accomplished in various fields of endeavour. These included the field of music, of education, and of training young and old in the principles of God's Word.

But the pinnacle of all of God's accomplishments through Martin Luther is unquestionably the momentous work of translating the Bible into the language of the people. This is the beginning of the translations of God's precious Book into more than 1,100 languages and dialects.

Our text tells us that *we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place*. So as we consider the life of Luther let us thank God for the open Bible. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Events Leading Up To The Translation Of The Bible Into The Language Of The People**

On the 31st of October, 1517 Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the Castle church door at Wittenburg. This marked the beginning of the Reformation in the 16th century.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben,<sup>1</sup> Germany, on the 10th of November, 1483. He was brought up in the faith of the Roman Catholic Church and being seriously concerned about his soul's salvation, he left the university at Erfurt and became a monk in 1505.

However, he found no peace of conscience in the teachings of his Church and the discipline of the monastery. But from the Bible he learned that God freely forgives sins for Christ's sake, and that this forgiveness was his by faith in God's promises.

As he continued to study the Scriptures, he found that many false teachings and practices had crept into the Church of his day. When he had become a Doctor of Divinity at the university of Wittenberg in 1512, he began to teach and preach what he had learned from the Bible. Thus he became the Reformer of the Church, through whom God restored to us the pure teachings of His Word.

Luther appeared before the Diet of Worms on the 18th of April 1521. He was told to recant his writings but His reply to the Diet was, *"Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted 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 recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."*<sup>2</sup>

Luther was now a wanted man so he was whisked away to the Wartburg Castle for his own safety. From 1522-1534 Luther worked on the translation of the Bible into the German language.

In 1532, when the work was within two years of its completion, Luther once remarked that only the love of Christ moved him to undertake so gigantic a task. He said, *“I have had such trouble with translating! No one would have persuaded me by favours or gold to translate a book had I not done it for the sake of my Lord Christ.”*<sup>3</sup>

The translation of the Bible by Luther removed the bushel which had been hiding the wonderful light of God’s revealed truth. It placed heaven’s dynamic and soul-saving message into the hands and on the lips of the common people. It recovered God’s precious book from the corrupt debris of destructive superstitions and brought the saving knowledge to soul-sick people who were groping about in the dense darkness of ignorance.

As in the days of Josiah, the king of Israel, the priest Hilkiah<sup>4</sup> found the Book of God’s Law under the debris at the time when the Temple was being repaired. It proved to be the light that shone in a dark place, dispelled the darkness of idolatry, and restored the worship of the true God.

Likewise in Luther’s day the Bible was practically a closed book and there was much ignorance on some of the most vital and fundamental questions of life. This ignorance and false teaching enshrouded both the laity and the clergy in the Church.

But when the Bible was translated into German and Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press was used for printing and publication of the Bible, clergy and laity alike read it with all-absorbing interest. The people basked in this wholesome and refreshing light, and sang jubilant praises to God from the very depth of their hearts.

## **2. The Open Bible Gives Soul-Satisfying Information**

Today this infallible revelation of God gives the same glorious light to dispel the darkness of ignorance on so many vital issues. We realise that we are living in an age of both general and specialised education. Staggering sums of money have been spent to provide opportunities for the youth of the land to acquire a great wealth of secular knowledge.

However, investigations have proved conclusively that despite great secular knowledge much ignorance still prevails regarding some of the most vital and important issues of life. Mere secular knowledge simply does not furnish

adequate and soul-satisfying information about matters which the heart craves to know.

Secular learning is pitifully helpless to give answer to the momentous questions concerning God, concerning the origin of the universe, concerning the creation of man, concerning the disturbing element of sin, and above all, concerning the only positive and effective reconciliation which Christ effected.

Human wisdom has put forward all manner of theories concerning these things, but they are theories which have undergone, and are still undergoing, constant changes. What was taught a decade or two ago as positive truth today lies practically abandoned. Today the half-life of medical knowledge given in training is seven years.

Over against all these theories the infallible Word of God with divine authority sheds the only soul-satisfying light upon the matter of how the world came into being. The Bible informs us that ***“in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”***<sup>5</sup> In those six days the Lord God by His omnipotent Word called the universe into existence. With God’s all-knowing purpose and design He ordered and arranged all the various parts and assigned to them their various functions. He also placed them under His defined laws, the so-called laws of nature, that each in its particular sphere might serve the entire majestic creation. Each creature and plant reproduces its own kind.

Again, that blessed light from heaven reveals to us that on the sixth day of that divine creation the ***“Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.”***<sup>6</sup> The Bible declares in the most simple but also most profound language that man is not the product of years of evolutionary development, but of a creative act of God, fashioned after God’s own image in blissful knowledge and in perfect holiness and righteousness.

Or think of the theories which are given today concerning the existence of evil in this world and how none of them really go to the root of the trouble, but merely scratch the surface. The precious light of our God reveals that man of his own free will permitted the devil to persuade him to eat of the tree of knowledge which God had said that he should not eat.

We read in Genesis 2:16-17, <sup>16</sup> *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;* <sup>17</sup> *"but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* Adam ate of the forbidden fruit and thus violated God's commandment and ushered in sin with all of its terrible consequences.

### **3. The Open Bible Brings Order Into A Confused World**

An enormous and bewildering problem which confronts mankind today, although few realise its far-reaching consequences, is the confusion and chaos in the religious world. Liberal theology and worldly things have crept into many Christian churches and undermined the faith once delivered to the saints.

In many pulpits the preaching of the genuine Gospel of Christ has been compromised. Ministers are preaching devitalised and weakened messages. They are attempting to bring about social, moral, or civic improvement instead of proclaiming the precious and powerful Gospel of Christ, which touches and transforms the hearts of people.

The messages which these preachers bring miss the point. They lack the authority and the power of the Gospel. That kind of preaching does not make an effective impact on the hearers. As a result the church has also not exerted an influence upon the moral and social conditions of the nation.

What a shocking decline we have had in the standards of morality! Think of the frightening increase of divorces, immorality, gambling, dishonesty, murders, robberies, and thefts! The only light which will dispel this shameful darkness is the open Bible.

Only when there is a definite return to the principles of God's truths will there be any improvement in this moral bankruptcy. The Bible shines as a light. Look into history.

Look what it accomplished during the first centuries after Christ among the heathen, who without question were steeped in corruption and shame and wickedness. Look what it accomplished in the days of the Reformation. Look what it accomplishes in our day in the countries into which Christian missionaries are bringing the precious light of the open Bible.

#### 4. The Open Bible Gives The Only Correct Answer To The Most Important Question Of All Time

Let us now consider the most perplexing problem of them all. It is the most vital and most momentous of all questions. It is the question which simply cannot be brushed aside nor be silenced, but resounds with compelling force from the lips of man throughout the centuries.

This question is, “*What must I do to be saved?*” All the various religions on earth have sought to give an answer. These answers differ widely, but all the suggestions stand upon one common foundation. They all teach salvation through the merits of man. Man must do something to bring about a reconciliation with God.

But despite all his efforts man has never been able to eradicate even the slightest blotch or blemish of sin. No man can undo anything which he has done. He cannot revoke a single word which he has spoken. He cannot erase the slimy trail of any sinful thought which he has ever harboured. Sin is simply un-erasable as far as man is concerned. Yet everywhere the natural religions of men declare that man must effect his own reconciliation with God.

Martin Luther in his great work of the Reformation brought to light again the decidedly unique and marvellously precious doctrine of the Bible that God has effected the reconciliation Himself. He did it at the astounding sacrifice of His only-begotten Son on Golgotha’s cross, that through Jesus Christ, perfect atonement was made for all our guilt. This means that by faith in Christ we now appropriate to ourselves the entire benefits and blessings of Christ’s life, suffering and death.

Into all the dizzying darkness of men’s hopeless religions the open Bible sheds the wonderful, heavenly light which shines forth with sparkling brightness.

Luther often remarked that the turning point for him came when he understood the force of the phrase “*the righteousness of God*” in Rom. 1:17

Luther wrote, “At first I clearly saw that the free grace of God is absolutely necessary to attain to light and eternal life; and I anxiously and busily worked to understand the word of Paul in Rom. 1:17: The righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel.

I questioned this passage for a long time and laboured over it, for the expression ***“righteousness of God”*** barred my way.

This phrase was customarily explained to mean that the righteousness of God is a virtue by which He is Himself righteous and condemns sinners. In this way all the teachers of the church except Augustine had interpreted the passage. They had said: The righteousness of God, that is, the wrath of God. But as often as I read this passage, I wished that God had never revealed the Gospel; for who could love a God who was angry, who judged and condemned people?

This misunderstanding continued until, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, I finally examined more carefully the word of Habakkuk: ***“The just shall live by his faith”*** (2:4). From this passage I concluded that life must be derived from faith. ... Then the entire Holy Scripture became clear to me, and heaven itself was opened to me. Now we see this brilliant light very clearly, and we are privileged to enjoy it abundantly.”<sup>7</sup>

And God’s children throughout the centuries have come to that light. They have received the glorious truth which it reveals, namely, ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.”***<sup>8</sup> Thank God for that light! It has saved unnumbered thousands. It is the only light which will save you too.

In conclusion, let me plead with you to keep the open Bible open. The Bible is closed too much today. Although we have it in practically every home, although Bible societies are distributing millions of copies every year, although it is translated into more languages than any other book, yet the indifference of many people is closing the Book which God opened again 490 years ago.

When you do not read your Bible, it is a closed book to you. When you are not increasing in knowledge of God’s revealed truth, you are closing it. When you do not open your Bible in your home, or in private devotions, you are closing God’s precious Book.

Today the Bible is available on many different types of media. This includes books, tapes, CD’s, MP3 files, and on computers, i-phones and the Internet. We are certainly greatly blessed today to have the Bible so readily available! Thank God for it everyday!

God opened the Bible again through the Reformer, Martin Luther, that it should be a true light for us. Hence God wants us to use it, and use it diligently.

May God grant that we may take heed to it, *as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,<sup>9</sup>

In these last days of sore distress  
Grant us, O Lord, true steadfastness,  
That pure we keep, till life is spent,  
Thy holy Word and sacrament.

Lord Jesus Christ, Thy blessing give,  
That in Thy Word we e'er may live,  
And when our life is ended here  
We may in heaven Thy glory share. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> EWA Koehler, *Luther's Small Catechism*, Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1981, 25

<sup>2</sup> R. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, New York: A Mentor Book, 1963, 144

<sup>3</sup> E. M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1991, No. 323

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings 22:8

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:1

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 2:7

<sup>7</sup> E. M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1991, No. 2600

<sup>8</sup> Acts 16:31

<sup>9</sup> Hymn 260