

## Lecture 4 – “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”: The Life of Martin Luther

“...It is always essential for us to supplement our reading of theology with the reading of church history....If we do not, we shall be in danger of becoming abstract, theoretical, and academic in our view of truth; and, failing to relate it to the practicalities of life and daily living, we shall soon be in trouble.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1

### Background Reading

Gonzalez, chs. 2 and 4

### Prayer

From Luther’s prayer the morning before the Diet of Worms:

“My God, *stand by me*, against all the world’s wisdom, and reason....Not mine but yours is the cause....I would prefer to have peaceful days and to be out of this turmoil. But yours, O Lord, is this cause; it is righteous and eternal. *Stand by me*, you true Eternal God! In no man do I trust....*Stand by me*, O God, in the name of your dear Son Jesus Christ, who shall be my Defense and Shelter, yes, *my Mighty Fortress*, through the might and strength of your Holy Spirit. Amen.”

## “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”: The Life of Martin Luther

### I. Luther’s Illness and Depression—Mid-1527

- A. “Completely abandoned by Christ, I labored under the vacillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against God.”
- B. “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”

### II. “A Mighty Fortress is our God, A Bulwark never failing; Our Helper He amid the flood Of mortal ills prevailing.”

- A. Prayer at Worms—“my mighty fortress”
- B. The Wartburg—“a bulwark”

### III. “For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; His craft and pow’r are great; And armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal”

- A. Luther: *Man Between God and the Devil*
- B. Luther’s comment on his going to the Diet at Worms—“I will go there, though I should find there as many devils as there are tiles on the house tops.” (“And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us...”)
  - C. The inkwell incident at the Wartburg

### IV. “We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.”

- A. Luther rejected the authority of popes and councils and came to Scripture alone
- B. Luther at Worms—“Unless I am convinced by the evidence of Scripture or by plain reason—for I do not accept the authority of the pope or the councils alone, since it is established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves—I am bound by the Scriptures I have cited and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. God, help me. Amen.”
- C. Here I Stand, *A Life of Martin Luther* (Roland Bainton)

Kenneth Clark: “Whatever else he may have been Luther was a hero; and after all the doubts and hesitations of the humanists, and the hovering flight of Erasmus, it is with a real sense of emotional relief that we hear Luther say: ‘Here I Stand’” (*Civilization*, 157).

- D. Luther’s sermon—“All I have done is to put forth, preach and write the Word of God, and apart from this I have done nothing. While I have been sleeping, or drinking Wittenberg beer...it is the

Word that has done great things. I have done nothing; the Word has done and achieved everything.” (See more “Colorful Sayings of Colorful Luther”)

V. “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill...”

A. “The body they may kill”

1. Opposition from church (excommunication) and state (temporal ban)
2. Frederick’s intervention; Luther at the Wartburg (German New Testament)

Albrecht Dürer on hearing the rumor that Luther had been taken prisoner: “Is he still alive? Or have they murdered him? I do not know. Oh God, if Luther is dead, who will henceforth proclaim the holy gospel with such clarity? Oh God! What would he not have still been able to write for us in ten or twenty more years?”

B. “Let goods and kindred go...”

1. Luther’s marriage to Katherine von Bora—love and realism (See “A Monk Marries”)
  - a. “My lord Katie,” “My rib” (and Galatians was “my Katie”)
  - b. Luther: “Marriage does not consist only with sleeping with a woman—everybody can do that!—but keeping house and bringing up children” (LW 54:441). The husband and father washing smelly diapers may be ridiculed by fools, but “God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling—not because the father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith” (LW 45:40).
2. Luther’s children
  - a. He taught his children and learned from them
  - b. He loved his children and they loved him—Magdalena died at 13; Luther was devastated (“It’s strange to know that she is surely at peace...and yet to grieve so much” [LW 54:432]).

VI. “God’s truth abideth still; His kingdom is forever”

A. Luther’s mistakes (*simul iustus et peccator*)

1. His role in the Peasants’ War (Against the Murdering and Thieving Hordes of Peasants)
2. His recommendation of secret bigamy for Philip of Hesse
3. His attitude toward the Jews (*On the Jews and their Lies*)
4. His coarseness in language and conduct

B. Luther’s faith and hope

“Did we in our strength confide, Our striving would be losing; Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God’s own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He, Lord Sabaoth His name, From age to age the same, And He must win the battle.”

C. Luther’s death on February 18, 1546 (“The charioteer of Israel has fallen”)

### Questions from Class

What was Luther’s role in the Peasant’s War?

What happened during the two year period after Magdalena’s death?

What else can be read about Katie?

### For Further Study

\**Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (1950), Roland H. Bainton

\**Luther the Reformer, The Story of the Man and his Career* (1986), James M. Kittelson

\**Luther, Man Between God and the Devil* (German 1982; English 1990), Heiko A. Oberman

\*“The Word of Martin Luther,” *National Geographic Magazine* (October 1983) 418-63

\*“Martin Luther: The Early Years” and “Martin Luther: The Later Years and Legacy,” *Christian History Magazine* (issues 34 and 39)

\**A Simple Way to Pray, for a Good Friend* (summarized in Walter Trobisch’s *Martin Luther’s Quiet Time*)

A. Read the “Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Writings.” This is a delightful autobiographical piece from the year 1545. It is “pure Luther”—bombastic, funny, serious, moving, sharp, generous. It is Luther’s “personal testimony” from the time he was a monk “and a most enthusiastic papist” to his stand at the Diet at Worms. Read especially for the biographical information Luther provides.  
\*What do you think of him?