**Solus Christus: Christ Alone**

**“Identity Re-Formed”**

To whom do you go when you face a crisis in your life? Perhaps you are facing a major life decision, or maybe some unexpected trial has overtaken you. To whom do you go? A parent, spouse, or trusted friend? Can you go to God in that moment to find refuge?

In the year 1505, a young Martin Luther was walking back to his university in Erfurt after visiting his hometown. Martin had accomplished a lot in his 23 years. He had already earned a Master’s Degree and had started studying law.

Luther was also a devout Christian, but he lived in an age where the medieval church cast great doubt on the state of your salvation. Not only did you have to perform acts of penance to earn your forgiveness, but you also were extremely anxious in approaching God directly to seek His grace. Instead, you were directed to pray to various saints who were now in heaven and who could plead your case for you.

And so it is on a summer afternoon in 1505 that out of nowhere a terrible thunderstorm overtakes young Martin on the open road. The clouds are dark and threatening, and there is nowhere he can run and hide. Suddenly lightning rips down to the earth and thunder booms from a great explosion. The details get a little fuzzy at this point. Luther himself may have been hit by the lightning strike, causing him grave danger. Some accounts say that a friend with whom he was walking with was hit and killed. Perhaps there were several bolts of lightning. We’re not sure.

Whatever the case, Luther himself confirms what happens next. He is so afraid that he is going to die, that in that moment, when his very life is on the line, he prays the prayer that he had been taught to pray as a child: “***Help me, St. Anne, and I will become a monk!***” Young Martin doesn’t feel he can approach God directly, so he prays to his family’s patron saint instead. He also feels that he has to promise some good work in order for his prayers to be heard.

How about you? Are you confident that God will hear your prayers? If so, why? Is it because you’ve made some promise to God that you will try harder and do better? Where can you find refuge when your life is on the line?

Luther would make good on his promise to enter the monastery, but even becoming a pious Monk couldn’t relieve his guilty conscience. Because of his sin, Luther felt completely unworthy of God’s love and acceptance. And then, just as unexpectedly, lightning struck Luther again! This thunderbolt was his discovery of the Gospel, and finally, for the first time in his life, Luther felt confident in God’s love for him. It was a confidence that he had been searching for his entire life. It was a confidence he could find in Christ alone.

One of the books in the Bible that was instrumental for Luther’s discovery of the Gospel was the Book of Romans. In chapter 5 we read, **“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”** (Romans 5:6-9)

You see, what the Gospel proclaims to us is that our confidence rests solely on Christ. “*While we were still weak*” Christ died for us. That is, we have nothing to contribute toward our salvation. When it comes to our own righteousness, we are weak. If your identity is tied down to your job, your wealth, your status, or even your good works, you will always be found wanting. Like Luther, your heart will never be at rest.

But God calls out to you in the Gospel and assures you that you can be confident in your status before God because of Christ alone. He died for you, and you are justified by His blood! You need not fear God’s wrath over your sin, because Jesus endured God’s righteous judgment in your place. He was forsaken so that you could be accepted.

Jesus Christ changes who you are – your very identity. 2 Corinthians 5 says, **“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”** (2 Corinthians 5:17) It means that when you pray, you don’t need to rely on some saint to deliver your message. You can approach God’s throne of grace directly in Christ’s name. You can be confident that God will hear you because your identity is now bound up in Jesus.

What’s more, you can expect God to be gracious and loving toward you, not because of any good work that you promise to do for Him, but on account of the good work that Jesus Christ has done for you. In Christ alone you can place your confidence, because by baptism and faith, you are now a new creation in Christ. Your identity is bound up in Him.

Luther puts it this way: **“It will profit you nothing to believe that Christ was delivered for the sins of other saints and to doubt that He was delivered for your sins…. No, you must take for granted in steadfast confidence that He was delivered for your sins too, and that you are one of those for whose sins He was delivered. This faith justifies you; it will cause Christ to dwell, live and reign in you.”** (LW, vol.27, p.172)

This Gospel thunderbolt is more important than ever for our world today. Indeed, Christ Jesus is the linchpin that holds all the other Reformation Solas together. Take Sola Gratia, for instance: by grace alone. Today, many people say things like, *“God is love and He is full of grace. It doesn’t matter what kind of life you lead. God knows you are not perfect and He loves you anyway.”*

This understanding of a loving God who chooses to ignore sin is not the Gospel. It is only on account of Christ that God is gracious to us and forgives us. Remember what Romans 5 says? “**God shows his love for us… in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:8)

Or consider Sole Fide, by faith alone. Many people today value faith, but don’t want to get caught up with the content of faith. They say, “*As long as you believe in God, that’s great. It doesn’t really matter what you believe*.”

But this is not the Gospel either. We are not saved by our own believing. We are saved by the One in whom we believe. It is Jesus, the object of our faith, who saves us.

Even Sola Scriptura, by Scripture Alone, is dependent on Christ. A lot of people quote the Bible for all different kinds of reasons. Even other religions reference the Holy Scriptures. But you see, all of Scripture points to Christ. Jesus is the Living Word of God, and He is the key that opens up the Written Word of God, the Bible. Luther puts it this way: **“Christ is the substance of Scripture. If He is known, then everything else becomes plain.”** (LW, vol. 7, p.285)

Solus Christus - In Christ alone do we place our confidence and find our identity. As I was thinking about an image that would clearly portray this, the picture of a labyrinth came to mind. Do you know what a labyrinth is? A labyrinth is different from a maze. You can get lost in a maze. There are a lot of dead end paths and the whole experience can become quite disorienting. More sophisticated mazes have a number of gates that can be open or shut, so that the path is never the same each time you enter it.

A labyrinth meanders about like a maze, but there is one important difference: it has only one path. You can’t get lost in a labyrinth. Since you are confident that you will make it to the end, you are able to enjoy the journey, and experience the various markers along the way.

Jesus Christ, and He alone, is our liberating labyrinth! He rescues us from the web of our wrongdoing. The world would suggest that our confidence and our identity should be wrapped up in what we accomplish or what we’ve accumulated, but chasing after such things is as disorienting as a maze. There are way too many dead ends and the goal line of success keeps changing.

Jesus says this: ***“Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it... I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*** (Matthew 7:13-14 and John 14:6)