

Subject: newsletter Update

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Conversation: newsletter Update

Since this excerpt is rather long, but very interesting imo, I am sending it on its own, rather than wait until I have more things to add to the newsletter.

IN THE BEGINNING – The Story of the King James Bible (continued)

Excerpts:

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) His father clearly intended him to become a lawyer, not unaware of the financial benefits this would bring the family. In 1505, Luther completed the general arts course at Erfurt, and was in a position to move on to study law.

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. . . June 1505 . . . As he neared the village of Stortterheim, a severe thunderstorm gathered around him. Suddenly, a bolt of lightning struck the ground next to him, throwing him off his horse. Terrified, Luther cried out, "St. Anne, help me! I will become a monk!" . . . On July 17, 1505, Luther entered the most rigorous of the seven major monasteries at Erfurt – the Augustinian priory. Luther's father was outraged at the decision, and remained alienated from his son for some considerable time.

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Luther feared the wrath of God, whom he knew at this stage only as a vengeful and righteous figure, dispensing salvation to the few, and eternal punishment to the damned. He knew hell to be a place in which the damned writhed in agony in a sulfur-laden atmosphere, tormented by fire. It was a terrifying thought, which preyed heavily on the young Luther's imagination

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Luther wanted to know – and know for certain – that he would escape hell and arrive safely in paradise. What other option did he have? (than to become a monk)

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Luther took up his position as professor of biblical studies at the University of Wittenberg in 1512.

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(By) 1515 – 1516 . . . Luther was having serious misgivings about many of the teachings of his Church, not least those concerning how salvation was achieved, and whether the individual believer could be assured of that final salvation.

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There can be no doubt that Luther saw himself as a man who was deeply sinful. He observed the rules of his order with the utmost scrupulosity. As he later recalled: "I was a good monk, and kept the rule of my order so strictly that I can say that, if ever a monk got to heaven by his monastic discipline, that was me." But Luther was plagued with self-doubt and morbid thoughts. He was utterly convinced that he was a sinner – and that sinners could expect only condemnation at the hands of a righteous God. It was a terrifying thought.

Then – possibly in 1515 – Luther had a new insight. . . . The "righteousness of God" of which Paul spoke so highly, was not the righteousness by which God was righteous, but a righteousness given to us by God. The gospel was indeed good news, in that God provided the righteousness needed for salvation. Individual humans were not being asked to be righteous and hence be saved – they were being offered precisely the righteousness that was demanded as a condition of entry into paradise. Luther exulted at his discovery, which changed everything.

This immediately made me feel as though I had been born again, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From that moment, the whole face of Scripture appeared to me in a different light.

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What Luther was proposing, based on his reading of key sections of the bible, was that the righteousness required for salvation was not acquired through scrupulous monastic observance, or through individual moral achievement – it was the free gift of God. As Luther wrestled with this issue over the period 1514 – 1517, it seemed to him that the entire Church of his day had lapsed into a complete misunderstanding of what Christianity was all about. The Church seemed to Luther to stress achieving, meriting, or even downright purchasing forgiveness and eternal life, when in fact this was offered by God as a gift. What humans could never achieve, or hope to acquire, was given

them as a gift by a gracious God. It was clear to Luther that this was the central theme of the Bible, and that the church had lost sight of it. And if it had lost sight of so central a theme, how could it be called a "Christian Church"?

These worrying questions, which dogged Luther's thoughts throughout this period, were brought to a focus when Johann Tetzel arrived in Wittenberg in October 1517 to sell indulgences. For many scholars, the incident that resulted triggered the massive upheaval we know as "the Reformation."

I personally find this a parallel of the church of today which has lost sight of God's love for ALL.

God bless,
Mary

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