

“TRUTH WORTH DYING FOR.”

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Text for the Sermon: Acts 20:23-24; Acts 21:12-14; II Timothy 4:6-8

Introduction.

Two weeks ago yesterday, on Saturday October 16, kidnappers abducted 17 Christian missionaries, including five children, in Haiti. The missionaries are part of a Mennonite group called Christian Aid Ministries, which has been working in Haiti for years. This time, they were rebuilding an orphanage destroyed in the recent earthquake.

Haiti has been in political and social chaos for decades. The country’s people suffer under inept and corrupt governments, crushing poverty, natural disasters, and increasingly violent gangs. When news breaks of a shocking abduction like this, it prompts a question: why would a group of Mennonite missionaries from rural Ohio – or anyone – keep going back to a place like Haiti?

In the eyes of the world they are either naïve or stupid. But there is another answer, a more compelling one. They are there because Jesus rose from the dead, the Gospel is real, and Christ has called us to be His hands and feet to even the most vulnerable. These courageous brothers and sisters are ministering in the name of Jesus to the suffering people of Haiti.

They want to share the impact their faith has had on their own lives. “We want others to enjoy the joy, peace, and redemption we have experienced.”

This raises another question. Is there truth worth dying for? Paul certainly believed there was.

Acts 20:23-24; Acts 21:12-14

Acts 20:24 I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Acts 21:13 I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Why was Paul so stubborn? Why would he not listen to the wise counsel of godly men? They are trying to protect him. But Paul says “you’re not telling me anything I don’t already know.”

Acts 20:22-23 I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

He knows the will of God for him and everything else is of no importance to him. The very safest place to be in this world is in the will of a sovereign and good God. Nothing else matters. Nothing good comes from disobeying the will of God. You tell me, is it better to follow the will of man or the will of God?

The will of God changes everything and softens every pain and suffering. If it pleases the Lord it pleases me.

Paul cared nothing about himself, his freedom, his self-preservation, his grasping at this life or the things of this life. He was the freest man alive, content in every circumstance.

Paul feels a true contempt of death, he holds it in no regard. It holds no fear over him. The sting of death is vanquished for him by the Gospel of the grace of God. He doesn't give death a second thought.

Paul was willing to suffer anything and everything for the Gospel. Preaching the Gospel was his highest calling and greatest joy. He was willing to sacrifice himself for Jesus and the privilege of telling men and women the good news of God's free offer of forgiveness and salvation, of justification for the ungodly through the blood of Jesus.

Philippians 1:20 It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 2:17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

Philippians 3:8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

If only ... I may testify to the Gospel of the grace of God.

And why was this so compelling to Paul? Because he was exhibit A of God's grace.

I Timothy 1:15-16 Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

When you know how bad you really are, how wicked your heart is, how justly deserving of eternal punishment you are, how hopelessly lost you are, and then you receive so great a salvation, so great a mercy, eternal life, you are going to declare it without care of the cost.

What does God's grace mean to you? What is the cost of that grace that has come to you? The cost of the Savior's blood. The cost of countless saints and martyrs, rivers of blood have flowed through history, and rivers of blood have flowed out of the Reformation.

The cost is staggering, the cost is worth remembering, in fact it must never be forgotten or we will forget grace. Paul lived and died to make this grace visible.

Truth worth dying for.

The apostles and early Christians lived and died for the greatest truth ever revealed. Christianity is about what is absolutely true and the way you can tell is by the number of people who willingly die for the truth.

They had seen the risen Christ, their lives were radically changed, and they went into the world to tell the "Good News" of Christ's, of His death as their substitute, of His resurrection that conquered death, and that He was and is now alive. He is the way and the truth to all who trust in Him.

Over the next fifteen hundred years after the resurrection and the spread of the Gospel, the church slowly fell back into bondage, the bondage of sin and heresy. The truth of the Gospel was covered up with false teaching, manmade traditions, with works righteousness, with justification by works. A great darkness had spread across the church.

So God raised up servants of His Word to bring the truth of the Gospel back to light. These servants were of such noble character and love for God and His Word they were willing to die for the truth of the Gospel. They were zealous for the truth of the Gospel like Paul.

What was the truth they laid down their lives for? The Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. This is why remembering the Reformation is important, in fact is especially important in our day when these same truths are again being covered up. And it hasn't been fifteen hundred years, only 500 years.

We live in a postmodern and post-Christian age. We now live in an age of postmodern secular relativism that has no confidence the truth can be known with any certainty, or that it even matters. We live in an age where even those who claim to be Christian say things like:

We cannot know for sure.

We should not make firm judgments.

We need to be more modest in our proclamations.
Christianity is about searching, not about discovery.

“What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition and settled upon the organ of conviction, where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table” (G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy).

To this I would add we are well on the road to producing a race of men too uncertain to be willing to die for much of anything.

We are in danger of forgetting sola Scriptura, Scripture alone as the divine revelation of the living God which gives us the perfect revelation of Himself, who He is, what He has done, what He wants us to know and what He wants us to do.

God has not left us in the dark, trying to grope around to find Him or guess or have vague impressions. God wants us to know and to remember.

Thank God the apostles were not postmodern. They never hemmed and hawed, they never stuttered and stammered. They never prevaricated. What a great word, prevaricate. It means to equivocate. Don't you love it when someone defines a word with another word that needs definition. It means to be unclear, misleading, to speak in an evasive way, to throw up smoke, to dance around the truth.

I John 2:21-22 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

II Timothy 1:12 I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

John 8:31-32 “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

How is the apostles experience so different from ours? How do they know the truth and we don't? How can they keep saying, “We know ...” “We are convinced, we are confident, we are certain”?

Because they knew Christ, they knew the Gospel, they loved Christ and they loved the Gospel. And the proof of it was their willingness to die for it. They didn't consider this life, or their freedom, or the pursuit of happiness worth anything compared to the Gospel.

Their words had the weight eternity behind them, because everything they wrote was about eternal things, God, Christ, eternal salvation, heaven and hell.

May the blood of the early saints not be in vain, may they not have labored and died in vain. On this Reformation Sunday, may the blood of the martyrs not be spilled in vain. May the labors of Luther, Melanchthon, Calvin, and Zwingli not be spent in vain. God raised them up to free the Holy Scriptures for us.

The real main character on Reformation Day is not Luther or Calvin. It's the Word of God.

Luther discovered that the true teaching of the Word of God had become covered up by centuries of tradition. By the grace of God he pulled back the blinds and uncovered the power, beauty and truth of the Gospel.

That's why we remember Reformation Day, out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light. We need to remember what we believe and why, and the cost of our faith, our salvation, our reformation.

Our nation owes its existence to the blood of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in battle, and we keep the memory alive with Memorial Day. In the same way, our church owes its existence to the blood of those who were willing to die for the truth of the Gospel and willing to die for the spread of that Gospel. Reformation Day is one day to remember. It all started with the blood of Jesus. And the blood has never stopped flowing.

Some time when you are writing out your check for your church think about the cost others have paid compared to what we are paying. Some time when you are thinking about whether you should volunteer to help, think about what those who have gone before willingly volunteering, sacrificing and giving.

Forgetting is spiritually dangerous. For those reading through the OT tomorrow begins Exodus which begins with this verse:

Exodus 1:8 Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

They forgot what Joseph had done for them, how he saved their lives. And so began 400 years of oppression, bondage, slavery. Forgetting carried a great price for the Israelites. Moses warned them:

Deuteronomy 4:9 "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children.

The event in the OT that God wanted His people to remember more than anything else was the deliverance from the angel of death and their deliverance from bondage in Egypt through the Red Sea. To forget God is to fall into idolatry and back into bondage.

God created us with memories because there are important things in the past that ought not be forgotten, things in the past that have shaped us, informed us, that are part of us, and give meaning to our lives in the present and future.

Application and conclusion.

History calls us to an earnest concern and great affection for the truth.

History calls us to be serious and vigilant in our contending for the faith.

History calls us to remember and fight forgetting.

If we are going to persevere as a Biblically grounded, doctrinally pure church we must know the *Word of God*, to be equipped to fight the arrows of the enemy and stay out of bondage.

Know it, live it, breath it, take it to heart, and share it. It is the all-sufficient, complete, infallible, unchangeable anchor, guide, and gift to us and the church and the world once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Be ready to defend it and die to yourself for it.

We must never cease *praying* for the pulpit and the classroom, pray for wisdom, pray for discernment, pray for boldness and clarity, pray for strong preaching, pray for protection from evil and the evil one. Pray for your pastors, your denomination, your Christians Schools, for missionaries who faithfully follow the will of God in dangerous places for His glory. Pray for the reformation of all our souls and of our church.

History proves that the enemy of the church never rests from trying to lead the people of God astray and into bondage. We are all called to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. May we persevere that on the last day we may say with Paul:

II Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Soli Deo Gloria, to God alone belongs all the glory.