The Reformation in One Sermon

MARTIN LUTHER ON FAITH, FORGIVENESS, AND CHRIST



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Paraphrased by Vincent Pontius, 2026

Happy Reformation Day!



Every Reformation Day, we think back to that faithful All Hallow's Eve in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the door of the chapel at Wittenberg. That was the beginning of a revolution. This marked the grand recovery of scriptural faith, which had been obscured and misunderstood more and more throughout the middle ages. The substitute for true faith would no longer stand unopposed. Practices like buying the salvation of your loved ones, going on pilgrimages to earn forgiveness, relying on your priest to explain the Bible, and adoring the bones of old saints would now be confronted with the reality that we hold most dear: nothing can save you except Jesus. You don't need fragments of the one true cross. You don't need to buy your way out of sin. You don't need someone else to understand the Bible for you. You need to be willing to go to Jesus yourself and have faith in him.

To celebrate properly, here's a copy of a sermon written by Luther to highlight the heart of the Protestant movement: salvation comes through faith in Christ alone. He preached it in 1529 at the Colloquy of Marburg, which was a meeting between representatives of the two recognized Protestant groups: Lutherans and Reformed Christians. The hope was that these two forms of Protestantism

would be able to merge into one united Protestant church. Prospects seemed reasonable. They had a lot in common. They had tremendous respect for one another. And they both needed help defending themselves from Catholics. In many ways, it seemed like a no-brainer. But it didn't work out. Despite their shared interests and mutual respect, there were some important things that they didn't agree on, and they weren't willing to compromise the truth to create a false sense of unity. Union was not to be.

This sermon was given at the meeting before things fell apart. Luther was preaching to people that were of one mind with him, and people that were not. His goal was to remind them, in the middle of all the discussion, of the one thing that neither of them could ever forget, regardless of how things turned out.

Style

Luther's preaching is bombastic and direct. Keep in mind, the Catholics have already deemed him worthy of death. He's not about to pull any punches about how grievously wrong their ideas are for the sake of politeness. Expect him to rip into the concept of monks, the idea that good deeds can help you get into Heaven, and religions other than Christianity. There's only one key: Jesus. Anything else is a dangerous lie.

Not only is he intense, but he's also a master of the sound bite. You'll notice some sentences that are practically designed to stick in a person's head:

- "If you have sin, Christ has forgiveness!"
- "Your works can't earn you Heaven, but your sins can't send you to Hell!"
- "The work and the word have been separated."
- "The word has to come through the ears if the Spirit is going to come to the heart."

Of course, this is my paraphrase of Luther, not a direct translation from the German, but any foray into a more direct translation would reveal that what was reconstructed was only done to capture the original, quippy essence of Luther's preaching.

Luther is a wordsmith who sincerely sought to proclaim the key to salvation. He knew how to take his ideas and sculpt them into these beautiful, simple, memorable phrases. That doesn't mean that every line will be simple, but for the more complex concepts in the sermon, reading on will usually result in a great line that summarizes the idea vividly.

Key Concepts

There are some concepts that might feel especially challenging to wade through in this sermon without a little preparation, so let's think through some of the most obvious ones.

First, there's the core of Luther's sermon. He'll talk about two different kinds of righteousness: earthly righteousness and the righteousness of faith. Earthly righteousness is behaving in a way that's consistent with God's law and basic human decency. Luther believes this is important. It's good to do good! Scripture deals with the laws of morality at length, and it's important to ask, how am I building up my neighbors, my nation, and my world? Helping people be decent is a good thing! But earthly righteousness is never enough to earn our way into Heaven.

The only way to Heaven is through the righteousness of faith. God's standard of behavior is perfection. No matter how many good works we do, we can never be good enough to earn heaven, but Christ died for us on the cross. When we accept his sacrifice through faith in him, his righteousness is counted as our own. In essence, this is how our sins are forgiven. This faith isn't earned through works or by special revelations after mystical experiences. We build up our faith by

encountering Christ in the word of God and by having it proclaimed to us in worship.

This is why Luther is going to go after monks so consistently. Monks are, in his eyes, the ultimate example of people who think that worldly righteousness and special rituals will somehow earn salvation. Their constant attention to themselves and their abilities, rather than to Christ and his abilities, represents the fullness of the medieval failure of the Church to believe that faith in Christ is enough for our salvation.

By the thinking of the day, monasteries were saint factories. It's where you went when you really wanted to take your faith seriously. Martin is reminding us that monks aren't special. They aren't more holy. These rituals aren't more important than the tasks we do every day. Where is our faith? That's what matters. If we love Jesus and seek to serve him, that's the real makings of a saint. That's the power of Christ.

As you read through the specifics of this sermon, just remember that the core of this sermon is that simple old truth: God hates sin, The Bible says so. God loves you. He sent Jesus to help. Come to Jesus. He's the only way.

A Sermon on Christian Righteousness or, the Forgiveness of Sins

Matthew 9:1-8

9 *Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town.* [2] *Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."*

[3] *At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"*

[4] *Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?* [5] *Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?* [6] *But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, take your mat and go home."* [7] *Then the man got up and went home.* [8] *When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.*



The theme of this passage is a critical doctrine: the forgiveness of sin. When you understand this doctrine correctly, you start to become a genuine Christian. This doctrine leads to eternal life. That's why it is so important that churches teach it constantly! We need to comprehend it clearly and distinctly. This is something that

will take us a lifetime to fully grasp, but it's worth it. There's nothing more important than this.

But to fully appreciate it, we have to be able to tell the difference between two distinct kinds of righteousness. One is righteousness here on earth. God taught it to us through the Ten Commandments. This earthly righteousness exists so that we can live together on earth and enjoy the gifts God gave us. He wants our life to be peaceful and harmonious, with each person going about their business without getting disrupted by anyone else. That's why God blessed us as seen in Leviticus 18:5: "The person who obeys my laws will *live* in them." In other words, anyone on this earth who finds earthly righteousness will enjoy their life. Their life will have a quality and longevity that it wouldn't have otherwise.

People who are unwilling to practice earthly righteousness will face legal consequences. At least, they should face them! When nobody enforces just consequences for lawbreaking, whole countries become so twisted and decadent that nothing can restrain our evil. God sends famine, war, and plagues to destroy those nations, as happened with the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, and countless others throughout history. Through these examples, we know that it's important to live by and maintain the law. If we don't, God will destroy us.

That is the essence of earthly righteousness. It's important that every person constantly practices this form of righteousness voluntarily before someone forces them to exercise it. We should keep God's commandments so regularly that we learn to love them and we practice them in every part of our lives. When God says, "Honor thy father and mother," every child, servant, citizen, and every person in every station should receive that command with joy. It's a treasure greater than anything on earth. Every person should know in their heart that their behavior is pleasing to God, as he commands in his word. His word is trustworthy and will never fail or deceive you.

But don't rest your conscience on this kind of righteousness. The only real hope we can have in this life comes from the gospel alone. We should love it and revere it even if we gain no tangible benefit in this world. This teaching quiets our conscience and teaches us how to really live and how to be in relationship with God.

We were blind in the past! Not a spark of this teaching enlightened us! We allowed ourselves to be taught in the name of the devil by the whims of lying preachers. We tried all kinds of works! We ran here and there, wasting all of our energy, money, and property. We practiced the mass! We built elaborate altars and monasteries. Everyone was groping in the darkness, trying to find a way to serve God, but nobody found it. We all stayed in that darkness. There was no God who would say, "This is pleasing to me. This is exactly what I commanded!" Our blind guides lost sight of God's word, separated it from good works, and focused on doing good deeds everywhere they could. They threw away the positions that God appointed, acting like they didn't know what God had asked of them.

Because of that, we have to constantly be sure to teach the word of God, which doesn't burden us with any big, special works. It just asks that we do our everyday work with thankfulness and a good attitude. Work that's done in the right spirit is worth more than all the monasteries and all the sacred orders, even if it's the most mundane work imaginable. In the past, we were fooled by the grand spectacle of elaborate works. We were tricked by hoods, bald heads, uncomfortable robes, fasts, pious looks, acting extra devout, and even going barefoot.

We were fools for putting too much stress upon the show of it all. And when there was no show to be had, we didn't think there was any value in it. We didn't see that God's greatest treasure, his word, is concerned with the most basic moments in human life. God is so interested in what we do with our family, what we do at our jobs, how we live at home, and every little act in our everyday lives. That's what

his commandments talk about! We should take his written concern with these tasks as seriously as we would if he came down here and talked to us about them in person. What would you do if Jesus himself with all the angels were to descend from Heaven and command you to sweep your house and do the dishes? How would you feel? Wouldn't you do the task joyfully? Not because you particularly enjoy the work, but because you knew you were serving the one who is greater than Heaven and Earth.

If we kept this in mind and, by the power of God's word, looked beyond our own concerns to see God's concern with everyday life, we would RUN to do our work! No matter how common or insignificant the works were, we'd do them diligently and faithfully. The only reason we don't do this is because the work and the word have been separated. We don't respect God's commands. We move around blind and drowsy, assuming that doing "religious" works is good enough. Because we see our everyday life as insignificant, we look for more exciting things. With our own work, we get lazy, fearful, faithless, unloving, and immoral. We hurt our neighbors, or at least annoy them, and we end up causing ourselves all kinds of misery and misfortune.

"…the work and the word have been separated."

This first kind of righteousness, worldly righteousness, is important. We should plead with people to pursue it and enforce it with good laws. Don't see this as unimportant! If you hate it, you hate the word of God.

Everyone should look at what God has set in front of them, whether it's leading, commanding, and ruling, or obeying, serving, and laboring. Whatever your duties are, do them with faithfulness. God has more respect for faithfulness like that than for all of the

works of the monks, who don't have this kind of earthly righteousness. Their elaborate, fancy works have less value than the chores of a single child that does their chores with a good attitude.

Imagine how incredible our world would be if people believed this! How wonderful would it be if every person always had God's will and commands on their minds? He would shower all kinds of blessings on us, instead of the punishments and heartaches in front of us, which we well deserve.

But beyond that first righteousness is an even better one. It doesn't belong to our life on Earth. It can only be seen by God, but leads to eternal life and keeps us moving towards it. The first righteousness comes from works, which everyone on earth has to do in some form or another. It has its reward here on Earth, but it also ends when we leave this Earth. The second kind of righteousness is beyond anything on this Earth. It has nothing to do with works. How could it? Anything to do with Earth would be included in earthly righteousness.

This righteousness is called the grace of God or the forgiveness of sins. Christ speaks about it constantly in the Gospels. It's not an earthly righteousness. It's a heavenly righteousness. It doesn't come from our ability or our work. It's a free gift from God! Earthly righteousness might shield us against legal troubles and allow us to enjoy temporary rewards, but it can't earn us the grace of God or the forgiveness of sins. Even if we have earthly righteousness, we need to strive for a righteousness that puts us in right relationship with God, frees us from sin and evil, and leads us to eternal life. This is the righteousness of faith.

This righteousness alone makes Christians out of us. It is the singular most important thing we can know. This separates us from all the "saints" in the world around us. Their "sainthood" is built on a different foundation than ours. It's based on the quality of their work and the rigor of their own efforts. It's also a different thing

entirely from the biblical jobs that God ordained people to do in his churches (which are legitimately important, unlike the pompous work of monks). The people in these positions have a holy calling on their lives and certainly deserve praise for doing what God has asked of them, but all of that church work doesn't make them a Christian. You're only a Christian if you have the righteousness that comes from faith; if you're someone living in the kingdom of grace through faith and relying on the protection of Christ and his daily forgiveness of sins. Anyone who is after something else to base their relationship with God on is not a Christian. God rejects and condemns them.

This righteousness is so important that we should use all of our skill and intelligence to pursue it. We need to understand it. We need to be able to distinguish it from outer, earthly righteousness and know the difference between the two deep in our hearts. That's Christian wisdom. It's so important that the Apostles themselves couldn't stop writing about it! But there is one massive obstacle: a lot of people think they already understand it. Preachers talk about grace and forgiveness all the time, but sin is so deep in us that we hear about it once and assume that we get it. We think we're experts! And so we focus our energy on ideas that seem loftier, and in the process, we create new factions and divisions.

I have been teaching and studying the righteousness of faith with all of my energy for years (far more than anybody who claims to fully grasp it). I've read about it. I've written about it. I've preached about it. I still can't claim to have mastered it! And I'm glad that I'm still just a student. I want to be with people who want to learn more. Here's a warning for all Christians, teachers and students alike: don't trick yourself into believing you've mastered this. This subject is one of the greatest and most difficult subjects there is. Paul himself wrote that it is an unspeakable gift that's beyond the power of words (2 Cor. 9:15) so that people would know how complex it is.

We have such trouble getting beyond the worldly righteousness so that we can really understand the righteousness of faith. When we face stressful times and feel our conscience weighing on us, the first thing we tend to do is grope around for deeds. We think about things that we have done or things that we want to do, and when we realize how little we've accomplished in the grand scheme of things, we lose hope. This weakness is so natural to us that even people who have faith and know about God's grace and forgiveness can't overcome the temptation without constant struggle. On our own, we can't ascend beyond earthly righteousness. We might hear all about the righteousness of faith and long for it, but we slip back into our old delusions and sinful nature so quickly. We want to make our case to God that we deserve salvation because of our own good works. That instinct exists in everyone, from inexperienced Christians right up to mature Christians who are trying to fight against works righteousness.

This doctrine, that our righteousness before God comes entirely from his forgiveness of our sins, must be rightly understood and firmly maintained. We need to get beyond ourselves and reach higher than our own reason. It's keeping us in conflict with ourselves by reminding us of both our good works and our sin. We need to soar so high that we don't see works or sin, but this doctrine and it alone. Let's pit God's grace and forgiveness against our own sin and good works and see how sufficient God's power is. There are two conflicting powers in our hearts. We're expected to deal with the world by being righteous within it, doing good works as we go, but if we reach beyond the world and try to deal with God, we'll realize that kind of righteousness is worth nothing in his eyes. Our sins will weigh on our conscience, and our instinct will be to start looking for our works to justify our existence. Don't do it. Instead, rely on the righteousness of faith! Say with confidence, "If I have sin, Christ has forgiveness! I am seated on a throne that sin can't reach!"

Think of the kingdom of Christ as a massive, beautiful arch or a huge ceiling that is over all of us to protect us from the righteous wrath of God. It's a huge firmament, radiating the light of grace and forgiveness all over the world. The darkness of sin is nothing compared to that sea of light. Sin can weigh on us, but it can't really hurt us in the long run. It disappears when God's grace shines on it. The first whisper of that grace might make you think you know it all, but it takes more than that. We need to stay humble and keep learning this lesson as long as we live.

"If I have sin, Christ has forgiveness!"

Whenever we find sin in ourselves, we try to turn it into a massive burden. Satan fans that spark and blows it up into a big fire that fills all of Heaven and Earth. We have to turn away and realize that if sin were ever as powerful as Satan wants it to seem, God's grace is bigger, wider, higher, and greater than it is, and it is completely beyond our abilities. It's the grace of the one who created Heaven and Earth and holds them both in the palm of his hand. Sure, my sins and good deeds make an impact on my earthly life, but in Heaven, I have a treasure bigger than that! There, Christ is seated on his throne. He holds me in his arms and covers me with his wings. He overshadows me with his grace.

You might think, "How could that be true? I feel the weight of my sin every day! My conscience constantly warns me that I deserve God's wrath!" You have to understand that the true righteousness of a Christian is beyond your understanding. It's forgiveness that wipes out sin! It's grace that takes away the wrath of God.

Forgiveness of sins is crucial because we're all sinners in God's eyes. Everything in us is sinful, even if we have the highest form of earthly righteousness. When God speaks about our sin in his word,

you know that it's really here and really powerful. But his forgiveness is just as real and even more powerful. When you remember this doctrine, remember that you have both sin and forgiveness. Sin destroys any hope of rewards for our works, no matter how impressive we seem on this Earth. Forgiveness takes away all of our sin and the consequences of sin. Your works can't earn you Heaven, but your sins can't send you to Hell!

When the devil tries to steal your hope by whispering to you, "You know that you're not good enough," respond with courage! Say, "You're right. I'm a sinner. I know that! I learned it long ago when I learned about the forgiveness of sins. I try to follow the law and do what I can for this world, but before God, I'm a sinner, and I'm happy to be called that because it shows the truth of God. If I wasn't a sinner, how could I know forgiveness and grace? There would only be my works and my merit. I might feel the weight of my past sins, but they're not sins anymore! Because I have a precious balm, a wonderful medicine, that takes away the power and poison of sin and totally destroys it. It's summed up in that one precious word: forgiveness. With God's forgiveness, all of my sins burn up like twigs in a bonfire. Without that forgiveness, all of our works and suffering, even martyrdom, can't do anything against the littlest sin. Without forgiveness, sin remains pure sin, and it condemns us.

Confess this doctrine boldly! Say, "Before the world, I might seem righteous, but in the eyes of God, I'm not. I am a sinner, but I'm a sinner who found God's forgiveness and sits at the throne where grace reigns supreme (Ps. 116). If this weren't the case, I'd be like Judas, who sinned and never sought forgiveness. But no matter how sinful a Christian feels, they have the abundant grace of God poured out on them."

Learn to love this doctrine and spread it as far as you can. Elevate it beyond everything in Heaven and on Earth. The word of God is so beautiful and clear on this doctrine. We need to have a faith

that truly understands God's word and rests in it if we want to overcome sin, conscience, death, and the devil.

"Your works can't earn you Heaven, but your sins can't send you to Hell!"

Think about what a true Christian looks like. Have someone in your mind who stands up against death and the devil; someone that makes sin wither up just by looking at it. Now look at yourself. How close are you to that life? Do you really understand this supposedly "easy" doctrine? Do you really know God's grace? If you really understood it, any misfortune, death, or the work of the devil would mean nothing to you. But sin still demands your attention! Death, Hell, and judgment all command your fear. Be humble and honor the word of God! Admit that you never really fully understood this doctrine.

Examine your heart and you'll find a fake Christian who imagines that they know everything about this before they've really learned the basics! We know the words. We read them. We repeat them. But it's still beyond us to live our lives in God's grace! To let the whole of our being rest on him! Anyone who wants to be a Christian should keep this doctrine in their mind constantly, practice it, and scold themselves when they walk away from it so that they can at least start to taste God's grace and be, as James wrote, "the firstfruits of all he created," (James 1:18). We'll never understand it perfectly in this lifetime. Not even the apostles, full of faith and the Holy Spirit, fully comprehended the depths of the grace of God!

So I've explained what Christian righteousness is, but where does it come from? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down from Heaven, became a human, and suffered and died for our sins. That's

where the forgiveness of God comes from. The grace of God doesn't randomly get thrown around! It comes through in the perfect way and perfectly addresses our situation. Since all of us are born in sin as enemies of God, we deserve eternal wrath and punishment. We earned that. We are condemned from the moment we're born, and there's no way we can get out of that situation. Sin is so horrible that we can't overcome it. God's wrath is so terrible that nobody can calm it. Our relationship with the Father is so damaged that we can't heal it. We are in a horrifying situation! Someone has to take our place and pay for what we did: Jesus Christ, God and man. Our sins were paid for by his suffering and death. That was the price, and he paid it so that our sin was destroyed, God's wrath was calmed, and our relationship with the Father could be healed.

Christians know this. We believe it. That's what makes us different from any other religion on Earth. Jews, Muslims, fake Christians, and anyone who claims to be righteous because of their works might claim that God is merciful, but they don't know his grace. God's grace flows from one single treasure, and they don't have it. They're blind! They think they can acquire God's grace by working hard enough and becoming good enough, which only makes God angrier.

We need to learn about this treasure and seek forgiveness in the only place it can be found. We have to know, love, and cling to the Lord Jesus Christ. No one will go into God's presence, know his grace, or obtain forgiveness through any other means. You are sinners! You will always be sinners! Your conscience constantly tells you that you're guilty and deserve God's punishments. Sometimes, it's so loud that God's grace becomes almost impossible to see.

You won't find anything in your heart that you can use to pay off your debt. There's nothing you can do or say to raise the funds you would need for God to let go of that debt. But if you have faith in Christ as your perfect substitute who took your sins on himself, who

gave himself up in all of his worthiness and perfection, no sin can stand against you. I might be a sinner, but Christ is holy. He is Lord over sin, death, Satan, and Hell. No sin can hurt me because he is my righteousness and salvation.

Because we have faith in him, we have pure grace and the forgiveness of our sins, all because of Christ. He is the only cause. Anyone who comes to God with their good works, hoping that they've done enough to earn God's grace, will be disappointed when they learn the truth. They're storing up wrath for themselves. Because of that, all other supposed methods to receive salvation are doctrines of the devil. People who rely on their own works or look to the great works of others will be disappointed. Nobody can help except God! Monks who live whole lives of self-denial and who follow rules to atone for their sins are wrong! People who tell the dying that their suffering somehow atones for their sins are wrong! Anyone who offers up anything besides the Lord Jesus Christ is slandering him, treating his precious blood as though it were irrelevant.

If you want to be free from your sin, stop looking to your own works. Don't bring those before God! Just crawl under the wings of Christ. Rest in his arms. He took away your sins and took them on himself. You don't need to punish yourself for your sins! You don't have anything to do with them! Jesus is the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and as Peter said, "There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved," (Acts 4:12). We're Christians because we have Christ with all of his merit and all of his worthiness, not because we try hard or do impressive works. That might make a great monk; a Carthusian or a Franciscan or an Augustinian. But it can never make a Christian. Only the righteousness of faith can do that.

Now, we have to ask ourselves, how can we receive this treasure from Christ? We need to be careful with how we go about this. We

can't make the same mistake that heretics do when they think God should bend down and do something special just for them. They think that God will personally give them this special experience, like an internal light or a mysterious revelation, and *then* they'll have the Holy Spirit. They act like there's no need for the written Scriptures or sermons! Only these special experiences. Remember, God declared that no one can come to know Christ, or obtain forgiveness, or receive the Holy Ghost without the normal means that are accessible to everyone. He made his greatest treasure available through the spoken word and public ministry! He doesn't do his greatest works in some isolated corner or secretly in just one person's heart. He wants his gospel proclaimed openly so that everyone can have it. After all, Jesus commanded, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation!" (Mk 16:15)

He did that so that we would all know where to find his grace. He also wanted Christians all over the world to share certain ways of doing things. If we all just did whatever we wanted, we would definitely end up deceiving ourselves and others and falling into sin. After all, we can't look into anybody's heart! Anybody could claim to have the Holy Ghost and pretend that their thoughts are divine revelation. We wouldn't know who to trust or what to believe!

Preaching the word is a means through which Christians can know the righteousness of Christ. Here, he reveals his grace and offers it to us. Here, he lays his treasure in our laps! How else would anyone know about it? How else would we know that Christ, the Son of God, came, died for us, and rose again from the dead so that our sins could be forgiven and we could gain eternal life? He gave us grace through his suffering and death, but we couldn't accept it unless someone told us about it! If someone didn't tell us about his grace, it would be like a priceless treasure that someone buried and forgot about. Nobody would get to make any use of it!

Because of that, I have always taught that the spoken word has to come first. The word has to come through the ears if the Spirit is going to come to the heart. The word enlightens the heart and teaches it faith. Faith only comes when the Gospel is preached! That's where it had its beginning! Its strength comes from there! The word should be honored, not hated! We need to know how to proclaim the word well and practice it constantly so that we can be fruitful. You can't know how to do it too well! But watch out for people who don't respect God's word! There are some people who think it's unnecessary for their faith. There are also people who think they already know it, so they get tired of it and fall away from it. They end up forgetting everything they knew about faith and Christ!

"The word has to come through the ears if the Spirit is going to come to the heart."

Right here you have everything you need to know the righteousness of faith. It is the forgiveness of sins, offered to us through Christ, and received by simple faith in his word without any works on our part. That's not to say we shouldn't do good works! We just shouldn't mix them up with the righteousness of faith. They will never count as legitimate righteousness to God! We have to do everything we can to keep this doctrine well. If we have the righteousness of faith, earthly righteousness is sure to follow so that our communities are well maintained, but faith should always come first. Righteousness of faith puts us in right relationship with God, and earthly righteousness puts us in right relationship with our neighbor.

Questions for Conversation

1) In your own words, what is the difference between earthly righteousness and the righteousness of faith?
2) Why does Luther make that distinction?
3) When are you most tempted to measure your standing by God by what you have done (or failed to do)?
4) What ordinary parts of your life—your work, family, chores, relationships, responsibilities—might actually be places where you can faithfully serve God and your neighbor?
5) "If I have sin, Christ has forgiveness." What does that statement mean to you? What makes it difficult to believe sometimes?
6) Luther says that neither our good works nor our sins get the final word before God; Christ does. How would your life look different if you really believed that?
7) Luther repeatedly says that the Gospel must be *heard*. Why do you think hearing God's Word matters so much in the Christian life?
8) Which line or idea from Luther's sermon stuck with you most? Why?
9) If you had to explain the central message of this sermon to someone in one sentence, what would you say?