

**Matthew 10:32-39**

**Everyone who confesses me before others, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven.**

**<sup>33</sup> But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.**

**<sup>34</sup> “Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup> A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.**

**<sup>37</sup> “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.**

Dear disciples and followers of our Lord and Savior. Amen

On April 18, 1521, three and a half years after he nailed the 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Martin Luther made his historic stand at the Diet (official meeting) in the German city of Worms (pronounced “Vorms”). Accused of teaching heresy (false teachings), he was directed by Emperor Charles V and other leaders to recant his teaching about the pure Gospel or face death.

Martin Luther concluded his statement to the Diet with the words: **“Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. “I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen” (LW 32:112–13).**

We will use this special day to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Luther's defiant defense of the pure Gospel **not** to worship Martin Luther and his confession of faith, but rather to remind us what it truly means to hold on to the saving Gospel that God has given to us and to make bold confessions even in the face of persecutions and the troubles that proclaiming God's Gospel will bring. Our theme for this special celebration is:

**Theme: What Is A Disciple?**

- 1. One who trusts in Jesus for forgiveness**
- 2. One who boldly confesses God's truth**
- 3. One who carries his cross and follows Jesus**

A disciple is someone who follows a teacher or leader and that is exactly what we do. We as Jesus' disciples follow the fact that Jesus our teacher willingly lived on this earth for 33 years perfectly so that he could pass his perfect life on to us. We follow Jesus who willingly walked to the cross and died a perfect death for us so that we would be righteous and holy in his sight. It is this free and full grace that we enjoy as followers and disciples of Jesus. We follow Jesus who won salvation for us by his perfect life and death.

But do you think about what the devil and this sinful world has done with this comfort of the gospel of Jesus? Throughout the ages, the devil has spent the bulk of his time trying to destroy what Jesus has done

for our salvation by leading people to follow themselves and their own good works rather than follow Jesus. Martin Luther had been tempted by this false teaching for much of his early life, but God the Holy Spirit changed his heart as he read and studied God's Word. God led him to believe and to trust that we are saved by Grace Alone, Faith Alone Scripture alone. That is what started the Reformation as he nailed the 95 Theses to the Church door in 1517. Following the 95 Theses, Martin Luther wrote many things and taught many things over the course of the next 3 years which condemned any teaching of the Catholic Church which wasn't based on God's Word and the true Gospel message of free grace found in Jesus.

What did all of these writings gain Luther? He was threatened with excommunication from the Catholic Church. He could've been locked up and his books burned and he could have been killed as a heretic. This was the potential fate of Martin Luther. On April 18, 1521, Martin Luther stood before Emperor Charles V to give his final reply at the assembly called the Diet of Worms. The task was rather simple. Luther was supposed to recant — to take it all back -- everything he said and wrote about the Catholic Church which they considered false. The only way out of this “mess” was to say that he didn't mean it. If Luther recanted his so-called false preaching and teaching, he could go free and remain in the Catholic Church. But if Luther chose not to recant, his future — and the future of his fellow Germans — was uncertain. That day, before the Holy Roman emperor and a host of theologians and spectators, a once no-name monk from a tiny, insignificant German town stood and confessed clearly and boldly — he did not recant. It is not possible to recant when one has a bold confession.

## 2. One Who Boldly Confesses God's Truth

The Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God and contains everything for our salvation and the Christian life. No other source of Christian teaching is necessary or possible. Luther declared, “*The Word of God — and no one else, not even an angel—should establish articles of faith*” (*Smalcald Articles II:2:15*). Standing on God's Word, Luther boldly confessed Jesus, Listen as Jesus says this is exactly what all of us need to do, **“Everyone who confesses me before others, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.”** What would be a correct definition of the word “confession.”? It is important to understand what it means to confess. When the Bible speaks of confession, it isn't a person sharing personal/emotional/spiritual experiences or their own opinions on a subject. A confession is not the same as a theory, idea or concept. But instead, a confession is a person witnessing and proclaiming the truth.

Like a witness on the stand in a courtroom who gives a testimony of a particular event and circumstance, when the Bible speaks of a confession, it is simply someone reporting and sharing what they saw and heard with their own eyes and ears. To give a confession or to be a witness is to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And so, to be a witness or to give testimony is nothing more than speaking openly and freely what is true.

How is our confession linked to the Bible? They are completely 100% linked together! What happens when our confession is not the same as what is stated in God's Word? Then we have a problem! The Word of God shapes our confession. From the basis of the Word, we confess that the Bible is true. To recant or speak contrary to the Word of God not only goes against our conscience, but more importantly it goes against the Word of God — goes against Jesus. Luther was obviously being challenged at the Diet of Worms. Some have argued and asked the question, “*Was Luther above the emperor and the Roman Catholic theologians? Was Luther somehow infallible and more authoritative?*” No! Consider Luther's following

comment: **“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason ... I cannot and I will not retract anything.”** In other words, how should our confession be rooted? Only on God’s Word!

It is important to note that for Luther, authority was not located in popes, councils or general consensus. Authority, for Luther, was found only in the Word of God. And so, while Luther confessed boldly to the truth of God’s Word, he was also open to rebuke and correct on the basis of clear reason and the Word of God. Only the Word has the authority to form our teachings, and since confessing is tied directly to speaking the truth of God’s Word, God’s Word needs to be the foundation upon which we stand.

In considering Luther’s *“I cannot do otherwise, here I stand”* moment, we see a bold confession. What does it look like to be bold in our confession or to stand in the footprints of Luther in the 21st century? How can we make bold confessions today? Why are our bold confessions needed today, just as much as in the past? You notice that in Scripture the disciples didn’t pray that God would destroy all the false teachers, and we notice the same from Luther’s confession. They asked that God would look upon them and their confession. They did not ask God to punish the religious leaders or erase the threats of the religious leaders, either. They did not even ask for protection against the threats. All they did was boldly confess God and his saving message found in God’s Word. May that also apply to us as we take God’s Word out into the world boldly and clearly. May we pray for the strength to accomplish the command God has given to us to confess to as many people as possible what God has done.

### **3. One Who Carries His Cross And Follows Jesus**

To boldly confess Jesus, is God’s command, but we also know that this isn’t going to be easy. Jesus writes, **“Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”** Take up your cross and follow Jesus! Just think how these words have been true in the history of God’s church. From the early church up to the present time we can see that there were always two sides to the battle. Because of sin and our sinful nature there will always be the two sides pulling in the opposite directions. Imagine the early church, as the new disciples of Christ who gave their lives to preach the message of Jesus. It wasn’t too easy to be a disciple at that time, but it had to be done as a true disciple of Christ. We think of all that Paul suffered to proclaim the true message. We think of all the people that have suffered or have given their lives for Christ over the last 2000 years. They have given all that they had to remain true to Christ. We today, especially think of Luther standing up to the Pope and Emperor who declared him an outlaw. This is part of what Jesus is speaking of in these words of our text of taking up your cross and following Jesus as one of his disciples.

Luther as he left this Diet (Meeting) at Worms was now a heretic and could be put to death at any time. What would his future hold? As he was traveling home, a band of men captured him and took him to a hidden location. Were these men going to kill him or what? As it turns out they were sent Elector Frederick (who was a good guy) to capture him and take him to a secure location which very few people knew about and he hid safely in this location for 9 months. This location was the Wartburg castle. He was isolated from his Church and his friends and he couldn’t travel out freely. He was taking up his cross and following God, even if it meant his life would be turned upside down. According to God’s great and perfect plan, Luther used his 9 months in isolation to translate the whole New Testament into German so the people could read it in their own language. He wrote many other things during this time to continue to confess God’s Word.

Likewise the days of suffering are not gone as we live in 2021 in the USA. How many times have we

really thought about these words, "**take up his cross and follow me.**" Do these words apply to us? Are these words relevant as we live in a country where we have religious freedom? We have been blessed by God as he has allowed us to live in a country that has stated we are all free to worship as we please. For this we are forever grateful. But even though we have religious freedom, we know that our lives are not necessarily free of religious hatred aimed directly against Jesus and his disciples. We are not free from those who regularly mock and ridicule us for our faith. We are not free from the many people who preach a false Christ and label us the ones who are bigots, intolerant and unloving because we preach the message of God's Word clearly and boldly.

The world is still full of those who willingly reject God's saving Word. We will always be facing those who have sided with Satan and his evil forces. We cannot escape the cross of Christ without losing our discipleship. Just think how this can affect each of us personally. There are those times as we go to work we have to face the ridicule which comes along with the knowledge that you are a Christian. There are those times when we might think it is easier to just fit in rather than risk the chance of verbal abuse for our faith. There are those times when we are asked to choose between God and a job promotion. Are we willing to give up our Saturday night get together, because it may tempt us to neglect church the following morning? Are we willing to give up the extra money that we can make by working on a Sunday to fill our hearts with the spiritual nourishment that we all need?

There are going to be many times that we are going to suffer for carrying the cross, and we must also admit that there are many times that we have failed to carry to cross of Christ as he wants us to. God has promised us forgiveness for those times when we have given in and fallen. We need forgiveness and the assurance that our sins are taken care of. Jesus alone can give us the strength to carry this cross. On our own we are sure to be crushed and fall away from the cross. We can look to Christ and the cross for the strength to guide us as we endure this suffering as one of his disciples. He does give us the strength through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. Let the cross of Christ be our guide and strength. Let us always look to him for the forgiveness and strength we need as we strive forward and when we fall back. This is our motivation as we take up his cross and follow him.

500 years ago, at the Diet of Worms in 1521, the great Reformer expressed the conviction that guided the whole course of the Lutheran Reformation. **"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen (Luther's Works 32:112).**

In the same way as Martin Luther carried his cross and boldly confessed Jesus and his grace, we as Jesus disciples are bound by Scripture. We are 100% certain that the Holy Spirit will always accomplish his purpose when we proclaim his Word. As God has promised, **"My word . . . will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it."** (Isaiah 55:10, 11). We are God's disciples who take our stand with confidence because God's Word cannot fail. That confidence inspires faithfulness in holding fast to Scripture and faithfulness in our proclamation of God's Word to the world. Amen