

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 11:12–19

Sermon: Reformation 2019

Happy Reformation, even though it's not till Thursday. Did you know the Festival of the Reformation was already included in the church calendar in 1528.

Most know the Boy Scout motto, "Be prepared." It is said that once when asked the obvious question, "Prepared for what?" Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting, answered, "Why, for any old thing." Good advice, of course. Be prepared for anything and everything.

Nevertheless, no one could be properly prepared for the grave consequences of humanity's fall into sin. And no one could possibly expect the way the Lord would overcome those consequences. The Seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent while himself being fatally bruised? Who could foresee that God would kill the firstborn of Egypt and part the Red Sea to deliver Israel?

One prophet would see the little town of Bethlehem producing the Savior; another would see him wounded for our transgressions, led as a lamb to the slaughter. Finally, a guy crying in the wilderness wearing camels' hair and eating locusts would tell us to prepare. But who could be prepared for any of that? Totally unexpected! That's why so many people miss God's plan of salvation in Jesus, the Messiah.

Salvation history is a repeated foreshadowing a repeated pointing forward to the one denouement that no one could have expected or planned for. So perhaps it shouldn't be surprising that the history of Luther and the Reformation, our own history was itself a total surprise. It was the God-gifted rediscovery of the unexpected, impossible-to-prepare-for Gospel the securing of our redemption by the Son of God and Mary's Son through the scandal of the cross. But it is surprising! The Reformation shocked the world! And yet, unexpected though it was, the Reformation gave us nothing new, just the rediscovery of the Messiah, so often missed.

A grumbling generation missed the Messiah long promised by Moses and the Prophets (vs 16–19).

Old Testament Israel and the Jews in Jesus' own day refused to believe God's plan could be as it was. *“We detest this miserable food.”* “We will not accept this strange Baptist.” “We reject this backwoods Jesus of Nazareth.” The refusing-to-believe world and the refusing-to-believe nature in us all want to call the shots and tell John and Jesus when to dance and when to mourn (when to bless and when to curse). This was Luther's hopeless situation as a trying-to-earn-God's-favor monk.

God's way of salvation couldn't be just to believe that Jesus does it all. Surely, we have to earn our way to heaven. That's what we expect! And anyone who would propose otherwise more often than not, led to persecution and death for John and the prophets. So why not for Luther? That's what we'd expect. Yet, Christ's salvific mission is fulfilled in spite of the world's missing him by refusing to believe, in spite of our old nature's refusal to believe.

Jesus proclaimed John greatest of the prophets. But even John did not expect this kind of Messiah. Earlier in in Mathew chapter we read: *“Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciple and said to him, “are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”*”

How the chosen Messiah came, and secured salvation was a stumbling block even for John. His fallen nature was not prepared for how the redeeming reign of Christ would break into human history. In prison, he doubted; he wondered why Jesus wasn't wielding his power if he had it after all to set things right, even to get John out of the dungeon. John was not greatest of the prophets because of his unwavering faith or superior willpower or the sincerity of his heart. He was the greatest because he was chosen to be the last prophet to usher in the long-expected Messiah. Would John himself miss that Messiah?

Luther's fallen nature and our fallen nature likewise always struggle with doubts about God's way of salvation in this Messiah, Jesus. Why didn't Jesus cause everyone to embrace the Gospel when Luther announced it to the world? Could Luther possibly be the only one who was right when the whole church said he was wrong? Why does God let our churches struggle, shrink, squabble? Why do we ourselves suffer if we really are following the true Messiah?

The Reformation shocked the world, but only rediscovered that Messiah, or was promised of old, who came just as Scripture had foretold. Nothing new but a render of who the Messiah is and why he came. No one could foresee the Reformation coming!

That one obscure monk against the power of the church? One voice in tiny Wittenberg, Germany, change the thinking and the eternal future of hundreds of millions? But what changed the world was really just that Messiah that Moses and the prophets and John the Baptist had been talking about all along. Jesus comes with faith-strengthening comfort, courage, and hope (vs 2–6).

Jesus gently leads John in taking his eyes off himself and placing them back on the sure and certain prophetic Word ultimately on the Word made flesh. John is called to accept his suffering and death as he faithfully follows his Lord's one-and-only sacrifice for the sins of the world.

And it's that cross of Jesus, proclaimed in that same certain Word of the prophets and John and preached by Luther, that rocked the world in the Reformation.

Only Christ and the One who sent him had properly prepared for the redemption of a darkened and dying world. The revelation of our deliverance through the prophets and apostles is a jaw-dropping, remarkable history of clueless sinners graciously declared saints for the sake of Christ and his cross. Totally unexpected! This is the legacy of the prophets and John, a truth rediscovered by Luther. And this is the Reformation song we also sing: Christ is greater than John because Christ is uniquely sent to save us from the tempter despite our weaknesses and doubt.

With the Christ revealed through the prophets and apostles, the Good News continues to be preached to the despairing who can give to Christ nothing save their many sins. And blessed is the one who doesn't miss this Messiah.

Nothing new just a reminder that Christ is and always has been, for us.

Amen