

## Preaching Christ: Lessons from the Reformation

500 years ago the Protestant Reformation began as Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg. What was recovered in the following years was not just a biblical doctrine of salvation, but also a healthier approach to preaching the Bible to the people. In this session we will explore some of the lessons we can learn from how the Reformers learned to preach Christ half a millennia ago.

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### I. Introduction

### II. The Reformation's changed view of the *task* of preaching

*The Preaching of the Word of God Is the Word of God.*  
Second Helvetic Confession

Calvin:

*When a man is the envoy of his prince and has complete authority to do what is committed to his charge, he will so to say borrow the prince's name. He will say, "We are doing this; we instruct; we have commanded; we want that done". Now, when he speaks like this, he is not intending to take anything from his master. So it is with God's servants.... It is said that the ministers are sent to enlighten the blind, to deliver the captives, to forgive sins, to convert hearts. What! these are things which belong to God alone... For there is nothing more properly his own than to pardon sins; he also reserves to himself the converting of the heart. Now, nevertheless it is the case that he imparts all these qualifications to those whom he appoints to convey his word and declares to them that he does not separate himself from them, but rather shows that he uses them as his hands and his instruments.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> *Calvini opera*, 26.66<sup>8</sup>-67<sup>7</sup>

### III. The Reformation's changed view of the *content* of preaching

*This is what we should in short seek in the whole of Scripture: truly to know Jesus Christ, and the infinite riches that are comprised in him and are offered to us by him from God the Father. If one were to sift thoroughly the Law and the Prophets, he would not find a single word which would not draw and bring us to him. And for a fact, since all the treasures of wisdom and understanding are hidden in him, there is not the least question of having, or turning toward, another goal; not unless we would deliberately turn aside from the light of truth, to lose ourselves in the darkness of lies. Therefore, rightly does Saint Paul say in another passage that he would know nothing except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.<sup>2</sup>*

*Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ... the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life.<sup>3</sup>*

### IV. The Reformation's changed view of the *goal* of preaching

*We are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with that empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart.<sup>4</sup>*

#### ***Suggested Reading:***

Michael Reeves & Tim Chester, *Why the Reformation Still Matters* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016)

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<sup>2</sup> Preface, p. 70 (*Calvini opera*, 29, 815)

<sup>3</sup> *Luther's Works*, Vol. 26, 130, my emphasis

<sup>4</sup> *Institutes*, 1.5.9. Following Romans 10:10, Calvin held that 'the seat of faith is not in the head, but in the heart. Yet I would not contend about the part of the body in which faith is located: but as the word *heart* is often taken for a serious and sincere feeling, I would say that faith is a firm and effectual confidence, and not a bare notion only.' (Commentary, Romans 10:10)