**“THE REFORMATION AND THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT.”**

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**Scripture Texts: Matthew 13:31-33**

**Introduction.**

There is something about the way we keep time that puts an extra emphasis or focus on years ending in zero. Whether we are taking about birthdays or anniversaries we notice the big ones, the big six oh. The century mark is an even bigger deal with two ohs and of course many of us remember all the hype around Y2K with its three ohs. So here we are as a protestant church experiencing our big five oh oh. Five hundred years, half a millennia.

The fact that it’s actually still a thing means something, something of significance happened back there that still has an influence and matters today. Let’s see if this historical event has a Biblical context.

**The Butterfly Effect.**

Last Sunday evening in my sermon on Esther 6 I mentioned a theoretical phenomenon called the ***butterfly effect***. This idea was started by a meteorologist in the 1960s who noticed how very small variations in wind could end up having huge effects. This led to the theory that the flapping of a butterflies’ wings in Brazil could set off a tornado in Texas a week later. It is similar to the domino effect, one small falling domino setting off a whole chain of events.

This theory is impossible to prove, but it introduces the idea of how seemingly insignificant events can lead to much larger events and radically change the world. History is filled with countless millions of seemingly inconsequential moments setting in motion huge changes.

Abraham Lincoln deciding to go to the Ford Theater.

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria setting off WWI.

JFK deciding to ride with the convertible top down.

Rosa Parks deciding to sit in the front of a bus.

A Chinese man facing down a column of tanks in Tiananmen Square.

Todd Beamer saying, “Let’s roll” on United Flight 93 on 9/11.

A little monk nailing a piece of paper to the door of a church. A butterfly flapped his wings.

**The Butterfly Effect and the Reformation.**

It was as small and inconsequential an event as you can imagine. At noon on All Hallows Eve, October 31, 1517 an obscure Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther nailed a piece of paper to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. It was a bulletin board not unlike that one outside of Dutch Mothers.

On that piece of paper were 95 theses or points for discussion. It was an invitation to a scholarly debate, nothing more. It is often a surprise to Protestants today to learn that among those 95 theses there was no protest against the Pope or the Roman Catholic Church, or any of her doctrines. No mention of justification by faith alone through grace alone. They were primarily opposed to the abuse of indulgences, and putting them above the importance of repenting and putting our faith in Jesus, not pieces of paper.

But the butterfly had flapped his wings and that tiniest of a swirling vortex grew into a whirlwind. Without his permission, someone took those 95 theses, translated them from Latin into German, took them to the local printer and scattered them around Germany. Within two weeks the Pope had a copy and by the next year Luther had a full schedule of defending these new-found beliefs and one domino of doctrine fell against another. In the words of our world, his blog post went viral.

***The effect of the Reformation on our lives.***

Countless books have been written about the effect the Reformation has had in our world over the last 500 years. I can’t do it justice but let me attempt a very quick summary.

At the time of the Reformation the ***original languages*** of the Bible were rediscovered. As scholars returned to the original Hebrew and Greek errors that had crept into the Latin translations were discovered and the false doctrines built on those errors were corrected.

The Reformation recovered the ***Gospel of salvation*** by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. The glory of this great Gospel had become covered up by a false Gospel full of human effort and merit and good works with sinners having to atone for their sins in penance and what that didn’t cover, thousands of years in purgatory awaited to finish the work of atonement.

Jesus Christ was restored as the ***supreme head*** over all the church. The church was delivered from the tyranny of the Pope and from the tyranny of kings and emperors.

The medieval divine right of kings fell in submission to the final authority of Scripture. Kings and Popes became subject to the law of God. Out of this grew a free church, free from the interference of the state; and the idea of democracy, the rights of people to choose representative leaders under a fair rule of law. Representative democracy has flourished in those nations where the Reformation took hold the deepest.

The ***political freedom*** that flowed through Europe and on to America was a direct result of the Reformation and the breaking free from the tight grip of the Holy Roman Empire.

Before the Reformation ***education*** was the privilege of the rich and those who wanted to become priests. But both Luther and Calvin believed education benefited all. They started schools in churches. They believed all the disciplines should be studied and integrated with Scripture. If you can read and write and think, thank the Reformers.

Wherever Presbyterian and Reformed immigrants settled they started schools along with their churches. Of America's first 126 universities, 123 were Christian, including Harvard, Yale, Princeton. Presbyterians stated a Christian college in every state in the United States. Whitworth is the one in Washington.

The birth of ***modern science*** and the scientific revolution began in the Protestant Reformation. When I got into my car Thursday morning, started the engine, turned on the lights, drove to hospital, where my wife received anesthesia before her operation, and had an effective operation done in a germ-free environment, we owe more than we know to the Reformation.

The Reformation elevated ***marriage and child-bearing*** and child-rearing as the norm, rescuing marriage from the false doctrine that celibacy was somehow more holy and should be the norm. The Reformers understood marriage to be a reflection of the relationship between Christ and the church. Children are a heritage and gift on loan from God.

Before the Reformation whatever you did on ***Monday*** really didn’t matter all that much. All secular work was secondary at best. You couldn’t really glorify God in your employment or home, but only in the church and in church related work. The world was very divided into sacred and secular, spiritual and physical, eternal and temporal. God was in the monastery and church but not in the market place.

Luther did away with the distinction of clergy and laity, he redefined the priesthood to include all believers. We become priests when we are born again.

Husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, servants, farmers and businessmen, teachers and accountants, all of these are made holy when done unto the Lord.

Whether changing diapers or sweeping floors or paying bills or driving a truck or making a living your work is your calling. Jesus was a common carpenter and by His own labor on earth He sanctified all labor, let no one disdain or demean their common calling and occupation.

The world doesn’t appreciate all the benefits and blessings that flowed out of the Reformation. It touched education, medicine, law, business, politics, marriage, home and the church.

Today in the Rift Valley of Kenya and in the mountains of Nepal and the jungles of Papua New Guinea and the desert SW of the United States and on the remote island of Tonga in the South Pacific and the frozen tundra of Siberia and in the urban jungles of Buenos Aries, Cape Town, Sydney, Calcutta, Chengdu, China and Seoul, South Korea there are Protestant churches.

The butterfly flapped his wings and a tsunami of changes have spread across the whole world. A seed was planted and it has grown into a huge tree.

**The Butterfly Effect and the Bible.**

I think there is more proof of the butterfly effect in the spiritual realm than the physical realm.

When God decided to create, He started with nothing, a pretty small beginning. Then Eve took that one bite, one small bite and look where we are today.

Then there was God’s promise to one man with a barren wife that one day he would be a great nation with offspring outnumbering the stars in the heavens.

Then God sets out to set up a new kingdom on earth beginning with a baby born to poor parents in a backwater little town in the middle of nowhere. Not to mention a ragtag bunch of disciples with no education.

Jesus said what you did to the least of these you did to me. Small acts of mercy have eternal ripples and rewards. God is a God of small beginnings. Beginnings as small as a mustard seed and a pinch of leaven.

Jesus is saying don’t despise small beginnings, where God is at work the smallest things can become great. In fact, that is God’s preferred method, because it keeps us humble and free from boasting. We have nothing to point to and say look what I have done, rather we must say look what God has done, far more than we could ask of imagine.

When the church started it had no money, no power, and countless enemies, yet the tree grew. Today Christianity is the most widespread and diverse of all the religions on earth, all for a very tiny beginning.

**The Butterfly Effect and our lives.**

Never scorn or despise small things and let us not fall into the trap of comparisons. Don’t think too little of small beginnings, don’t think the seed is too small, but also don’t think that because the seed is so small it isn’t worth any effort in tending to it.

Your smallest actions can make a huge difference. A casserole for a hurting family or a new mom. A kind word in the ears of someone discouraged. A single verse of Scripture. A pat on the back, a “Well done.” A word of rebuke or warning from a true friend. A prayer prayed. A small offering added to some other small offerings grows into a budget big enough to support the ministry of a whole church for another year.

What will God do with your little dash of salt, your little flicker of light, your pinch of yeast? Plant a seed this week and trust it to God’s gracious power.

Don’t grow weary in well doing, don’t give up, run the race to the finish. You don’t know what God will do and how He might use you. Don’t even assume that when you move into a retirement home or care center that God is finished or that God can’t use you there.

Anna in the temple at 86 praying should inspire us all. Out of countless thousands of prayers prayed by countless thousands of Jews, it was while Anna was praying that God showed her His answer. All the other prayers weren’t wasted, they were all part of that final answer.

Parents don’t despise small beginnings. Though there is only the smallest shoot sticking out of the ground, it’s life. Watch for the smallest signs of grace and nurture them. Applaud baby steps, praise each accomplishment. “The soul must crawl before it can walk and walk before it can run” (JC Ryle, *Luke, Vol. 2*, 128). Be diligent to build up and encourage especially in matters of faith. Look for every opportunity in the things around you to teach and train and instruct and reveal God.

Don’t underestimate what God can do to a child sitting in a worship service, one thing they hear, one spark, one thought, one idea that gets through and takes root in the soil of their heart.

Sunday school teachers, GEMS and Cadet leaders, Children’s Church volunteers, Oasis and Tribe volunteers, does it seem like it doesn’t matter or make a difference? Your work is spiritual and the results impact eternity. You will be stunned by the “thank yous” you receive in heaven. You will never have imagined or guess it possible. Not every baton you passed was dropped. Pray, pray in earnest, and trust the results to God.

**Philippians 1:6** I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Who are the people that have had incredible influence in your life? What changed because of how God used them? Who are the people you would give credit for who you are today and where you are today?

What are the butterflies in your life that have influenced where you are today? One of mine is a great-great grandmother who prayed for pastors in our family.

Often, we feel like we are doing no more than a butterfly flapping its wings. What difference will it make, so what?

We must pray and ask God to bless and use these effects. I pray continually for God to bring good and Godly influences into the lives of my sons and in the lives of this flock.

Not only can we trust God with all the details of our lives, but we also have the assurance that even our seemingly small and insignificant lives can and do have important significance to God. He is using us. Embrace this with confidence and joy.

The men and women 500 years ago are important to us, we stand on their shoulders. Their sacrifices have paid rich dividends in our lives. They fought the good fight, they guarded the good deposit and we are blessed.

They exalted and honored and glorified God. They lifted up Jesus. They grounded us in Scripture.

The Reformation was about faith and the men and women willing to stand up and defend their faith and die for their faith. We need to remember their sacrifices in order to foster gratitude, encourage our faith, strengthen our resolve and perseverance.

It is a rare privilege to live at an anniversary like this one. Let us seize the opportunity to remind ourselves of the great God we serve and his sovereign goodness. Let us point to “the glorious deeds of the LORD and his might, and the wonders he has done” (Ps. 78:4).

We have been made alive in Christ by God’s grace alone, on the basis of Christ alone, whom we have received through faith alone, so that all things we may boast in God alone, giving Him all the glory. And we know with because of the supreme authority of God’s Word alone.