October 31st, 1517

Wittenburg, Germany

It was October 31st, 1517 in Wittenburg, Germany.

Martin grasped a hammer and a long piece of paper covered with his writing. He walked out into the street and straight over to the castle church door. It was here that community messages were often posted.

Martin nailed his 95 points of discussion on the door. He only wanted to lay out his newly discovered views of the Bible to other church leaders in the Medieval Catholic church. He thought he was free to do so even though his thoughts were radical. After all, he was an Augustinian monk and a professor of theology.

Martin called himself a "stinking bag of maggots," and certainly did not dream of being a leader in a revolution of thinking in Germany and across Europe that shaped history in a powerful way. But God had determined something far bigger than the monk Martin Luther expected when he penned those 95 Theses.

Without his knowledge someone printed his words on the newly invented Gutenburg press, distributing it all over Germany. Within a very few days, Martin found that he was the subject of everyone's thoughts. In the cathedrals and great stone castles of his homeland, the pubs and peasant's cottages—everyone was talking about the views of Luther. Without a signal to announce it, the Protestant Reformation had begun!

Just what was the Protestant Reformation all about? What did Luther and others protest?

The protesters were seeing something new about how a person is accepted by God—that is, new to them. They protested that the church had been teaching the wrong view about the most important issue of life. They discovered that the Bible says we are not accepted on the basis of our religious deeds, or even our good deeds along with our faith, but that we are accepted before a holy God *only through faith in Christ.*

"Through faith alone in Christ alone" began to be heard all over Europe. The people must transfer their confidence for salvation in the church's religious traditions to Christ alone. The reformers wanted the people to return to the Bible's plain teaching on how to be a true Christian. Because heaven and hell were at stake, the passions rose very high. Many would be persecuted and some even killed for this truth. But through it all, tens of thousands of people were converted to Christ and were assured of heaven.

We have been feeling the effects of the Protestant Reformation ever since. Many of our churches have their historical roots in the Reformation. Returning to the Bible as the source of understanding about how we are to relate to God has shaped nations. Perhaps no other religious period since the coming of Christ has been so influential as this one.

But many people, and even many churches, have forgotten the great lessons that were made so clear beginning on October 31, 1517. What difference can this mean to ***you*** nearly 500 years later?

This passage from the Bible is a good place to start. It describes *God's* way to understand salvation:

> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2: 8-9)

Through these 500 years since the Protestant Reformation, and throughout time, men and women, youth and children have come to Christ in this simple way—through faith alone in Christ alone. Placing our full confidence in Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death for sinful people is the only way to God. It is not that good works are not important—they are a *result* of true faith in every believer's life. But those works cannot save. Salvation is a gift of grace, not a reward for trying to be good.

Like Martin Luther, you may come by faith alone to Christ alone even now, all these years later. In fact, this is the very way the first New Testament believers came to Him!

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