

“Luther: The Diet of Worms”
(Reformation Series: Lecture Four)

I. Introduction.

A. Review.

1. We have seen Luther’s early life to the posting of the 95 Theses.
2. We have seen Luther’s evangelical discovery, when the Lord was pleased to reveal His Son and justification by grace through faith alone to him.
3. And last week, we saw the events after the posting of the Theses up to and including the debate with John Eck at Leipzig over papal authority and indulgences.
4. In all these things we see a man who was passionately seeking to be delivered from God’s wrath, to know God, and to glorify Him by promoting His truth, not only for himself, but also for God’s people.

B. This evening, I want us to look at the events that took place after the debate at Leipzig.

1. This will include the events up to the Diet of Worms.
2. And it will include the Diet itself, where Luther is called on to repent of his writings, but who will answer in all good conscience that he cannot do so on the basis of man’s opinion: *he must be convinced by the Scripture*.

II. Lecture.

A. Events leading to the Diet of Worms (taken from B. K. Kuiper’s book *The Church in History*).

1. Luther had rejected the supremacy of pope and the infallibility of councils. His break with Rome was complete.
2. Eck went to Rome soon after debate and asked Pope Leo to excommunicate Luther, which he gladly did.
3. However, Luther was not silent.
 - a. First, he published an account of the Leipzig debate.
 - b. Then he began to write many pamphlets and letters.
 - c. In May, 1520, he wrote a pamphlet entitled *On Good Works*, an application of the principle of salvation by faith alone to everyday life.
 - (i) “‘The noblest of all good works,’ he said, ‘is to believe in Jesus Christ.’”
 - (ii) Serving God by being faithful in our daily calling as shoemakers, housekeepers, farmers and businessmen, gives more glory to Him than monks and nuns.
 - (iii) Luther clearly departed from ancient and medieval asceticism.
4. Luther also read two books that profoundly affected him.
 - a. One was a work of Huss that had been given to him at the debate by the Hussites, which showed him that Huss taught the same as he believed. Luther responded by declaring himself to be a disciple of the Bohemian.
 - b. The other was a book written by the Italian humanist, Lorenzo Valla, in which Valla proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the document called the “Donation of Constantine” was a forgery.
 - (i) Legend has it that Sylvester I, the pope from 314 to 335, the first pope to hold office after Constantine made Christianity legal in 313, had converted Constantine, cured him of leprosy and required him to close all the pagan temples of Rome as penance, which he then did.
 - (ii) Constantine in return supposedly gave him this document conferring “on Sylvester and his successors ecclesiastical primacy over the great patriarchates and temporal sovereignty over Italy and the Western Empire.”
 - (iii) However, this document was later exposed as an 8th century forgery (Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2002. © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.).
 - c. Luther was so agitated over this discovery that he no longer doubted that the pope was the antichrist.

5. Finally, on June 15, 1520, Pope Leo issued the bull that excommunicated Luther.
 - a. It began with the words, “Arise, O Lord, plead thine own cause; remember how the foolish man reproacheth thee daily; the foxes are wasting thy vineyard, which thou hast given to thy vicar Peter; the boar out of the wood doth devour it” (174).
 - b. The bull mentioned forty-one propositions with Luther as the author and condemned them as “heretical or scandalous, or false or offensive to pious ears, or seducing to simply minds, and standing in the way of the Catholic faith” (174).
 - c. It called on the faithful to burn Luther’s books.
 - d. It forbid him to preach.
 - e. He and his followers were ordered to recant publicly within 60 days. If they didn’t, they were to be treated as heretics.
 - f. It ordered the government to imprison Luther and his followers.
 - g. Any town or district that sheltered them would be placed under an interdict.
 - h. The bull was entrusted to Eck to publish in Germany, which he had a difficult time doing. Only a few places would comply.
 - i. At Erfurt, the students took all the copies they could and threw them in the river.
 - j. Luther replied with a tract of his own: *Against the Execrable [appalling, disgusting] Bull of Antichrist*.

6. But Luther didn’t stop here. He continued to write.
 - a. All Germany hung on his words.
 - b. There were no newspapers in those days, and so the people eagerly bought and read his small books and pamphlets.
 - c. Luther was gaining a large following, not only in Germany, but far beyond.
 - d. To further diffuse the papal bull and to raise the standard against Rome, Luther published three further works in the later part of 1520.
 - (i) First, *To the Christian Nobility of Germany* (176):
 - (a) This was a call to secular authority to temporarily oversee reform in the church.
 - (b) It attacked the teaching of Rome that spiritual authority was superior to temporal, that the pope alone could interpret the Scripture and that only the pope could call a council.
 - (c) It said the pope should not interfere with civil matters and that all believers were spiritual priests who could interpret the Scripture and choose their own ministers (This material came from another source).

 - (ii) Second, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*: exposing the claim of Rome that men could only be saved through the priesthood and the Roman system of sacraments (176). It attacked the sacraments as a means of grace when dispensed by the priesthood, something central to the Roman system.
 - (iii) Third, *The Liberty of a Christian Man*: a small work of 30 pages, containing “the whole sum of the Christian life” (176). On man’s relationship to God and his fellow man. Attacked the theology of the Roman Church by asserting the priesthood of all believers.

7. But writing was not enough.
 - a. If the pope ordered Luther’s writings to be burned, he would burn the pope’s bull.
 - b. On December 10, 1520, with a large crowd of students, professors and citizens assembled, Luther first burned the books of canon law (church law) and then a copy of the bull, and said, ‘As thou hast wasted the Holy One of God, so may the eternal flames waste thee’ (176).
 - c. Luther left when the books and bull were consumed, but hundreds of students remained, and as the fire was dying, they sang “We Praise Thee, O God,” then some funeral dirges in honor of the burnt papal decretals and bull.

8. Luther is summoned by the Emperor.
 - a. Pope Leo had exhausted all the ecclesiastical means at his disposal. All he could do now was turn to the emperor.

- b. The pope had found himself unable to have Frederick elected emperor when Maximilian died.
 - (i) Frederick, believing that he couldn't afford the expense of being emperor, gave his support to Charles, king of Spain, who was known as Charles V.
 - (ii) He was elected during the days of the Leipzig debate.
 - (iii) He had already ruled over Austria, Spain, the Netherlands, a large part of Italy, and the parts America discovered by Columbus only 29 years earlier.
 - (iv) Now his territory included Germany, making it the largest dominion since Charlemagne.
- c. Charles was a devout Catholic, so Leo was successful in summoning Luther before the council of German rulers, called a diet, to be held the next year in the city of Worms.

B. The Diet of Worms.

1. Luther started for Worms on April 2, 1521.

- a. Even though he had a pledge of safe conduct from the emperor, Luther believed he was going to his death.
- b. Before he left, he said to Melancthon, his colleague and friend at the university, "My dear brother, if I do not come back, if my enemies put me to death, you will go on teaching and standing fast in the truth; if you live, my death will matter little" (177).
- c. Everywhere he traveled, crowds turned out to see the man who dared to stand up for Germany against the pope. They too thought he was going to his death.

2. The Diet.

- a. Luther appeared before the Diet at 4:00 p.m., Wednesday, April 17.
- b. Here the son of peasants stood before the most powerful emperor in centuries. This is the first time Charles and Luther had seen each other. At this time, Charles was 21 and Luther 37.
- c. I pick up the story now as it is recorded by Merle D'Aubigne, in his book *The History of the 16th Century Reformation*:
- d. He advanced, and stood before the throne of Charles V. The sight of so august an assembly appeared for an instant to dazzle and intimidate him. All eyes were fixed on him. The confusion gradually subsided, and a deep silence followed. "Say nothing," said the marshal of the empire to him, "before you are questioned." Luther was left alone.
- e. After a moment of solemn silence, the chancellor of the Archbishop of Treves, John ab Eck, the friend of Aleander, and who must not be confounded with the theologian of the same name, rose and said with a loud and clear voice, first in Latin and then in German: "Martin Luther! His sacred and invincible imperial majesty has cited you before his throne, in accordance with the advice and counsel of the states of the holy Roman empire, to require you to answer two questions: First, Do you acknowledge these books to have been written by you?" — At the same time the imperial speaker pointed with his finger to about twenty volumes placed on a table in the middle of the hall, directly in front of Luther. "I do not know how they could have procured them," said Luther, relating this circumstance. It was Aleander who had taken this trouble. "Secondly," continued the chancellor, "Are you prepared to retract these books, and their contents, or do you persist in the opinions you have advanced in them?"
- f. Luther, having no mistrust, was about to answer the first of these questions affirmative, when his counsel, Jerome Schurff, hastily interrupting him, exclaimed aloud: "Let the titles of the books be read!" The chancellor approached the table and read the titles. There were among their number many devotional works, quite foreign to the controversy. Their enumeration being finished, Luther said first in Latin, and then in German: "Most gracious emperor! Gracious princes and lords! "His imperial majesty has asked me two questions. "As to the first, I acknowledge as mine the books that have just been named: I cannot deny them. "As to the second, seeing that it is a question which concerns faith and the salvation of souls, and in which the Word of God, the greatest and most precious treasure either in heaven or earth, is interested, I should act imprudently were I to reply without reflection. I might affirm less than the circumstance demands, or more than truth requires, and so sin against this saying of Christ: — Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also

deny before my Father which is in heaven. For this reason I entreat your imperial majesty, with all humility, to allow me time, that I may answer without offending against the Word of God.”

- g. This reply, far from giving grounds to suppose Luther felt any hesitation, was worthy of the reformer and of the assembly. It was right that he should appear calm and circumspect in so important a matter, and lay aside everything in this solemn moment that might cause a suspicion of passion or rashness. Besides, by taking reasonable time, he would give a stronger proof of the unalterable firmness of his resolution. In history we read of many men who by a hasty expression have brought great misfortunes upon themselves and upon the world. Luther restrained his own naturally impetuous disposition; he controlled his tongue, ever too ready to speak; he checked himself at a time when all the feelings by which he was animated were eager for utterance. This restraint, this calmness, so surprising in such a man, multiplied his strength a hundredfold, and put him in a position to reply, at a later period, with such wisdom, power, and dignity, as to deceive the expectations of his adversaries, and confound their malice and their pride.
- h. And yet, because he had spoken in a respectful manner, and in a low tone of voice, many thought that he hesitated, and even that he was dismayed. A ray of hope beamed on the minds of the partisans of Rome. Charles, impatient to know the man whose words had stirred the empire, had not taken his eyes off him. He turned to one of his courtiers, and said disdainfully, “Certainly this man will never make a heretic of me.” Then rising from his seat, the youthful emperor withdrew with his ministers into a council-room; the electors with the princes retired into another; and the deputies of the free cities into third.
- i. When the diet assembled again, it was agreed to comply with Luther’s request. This was a great miscalculation in men actuated by passion. “Martin Luther,” said the Chancellor of Treves, “his imperial majesty, of his natural goodness, is very willing to grant you another day, but under condition that you make your reply viva voce (in person), and not in writing.”
- j. The imperial herald now stepped forward and conducted Luther back to his hotel. Menaces and shouts of joy were heard by turns on his passage. The most sinister rumors circulated among Luther’s friends. “The diet is dissatisfied,” said they; “the papal envoys have triumphed; the reformer will be sacrificed.” Men’s passions were inflamed. Many gentlemen hastened to Luther’s lodgings: “Doctor,” said they, with emotion, “what is this? It is said they are determined to burn you! . . . If they do so,” continued these knights, “it will cost them their lives!” — “And that certainly would have happened,” said Luther, as, twenty years after, he quoted these words at Eisleben.
- k. On the other hand, Luther’s enemies exulted. “He has asked for time,” said they; “he will retract. At a distance, his speech was arrogant; now his courage fails him. . . . He is conquered.” Perhaps Luther was the only man that felt tranquil at Worms. Shortly after his return from the diet, he wrote to Cuspianus, the imperial councillor: “I write to you from the midst of tumult (alluding probably to the noise made by the crowd in front of the hotel). I have just made my appearance before the emperor and his brother. . . . I confessed myself the author of my books, and declared that I would reply tomorrow touching my retraction. With Christ’s help, I shall never retract one tittle of my works.”
- l. The emotion of the people and of the foreign soldiers increased every hour. While the opposing parties were proceeding calmly in the diet, they were breaking out into acts of violence in the streets. The insolence of the haughty and merciless Spanish soldiers offended the citizens. One of these myrmidons (soldiers) of Charles, finding in a bookseller’s shop the pope’s bull with a commentary written by Hutten, took the book and tore it in pieces, and then throwing the fragments on the ground, trampled them under foot. Others having discovered several copies of Luther’s writings on the Captivity of Babylon, took them away and destroyed them. The indignant people fell upon the soldiers and compelled them to take flight. At another time, a Spaniard on horseback pursued, sword in hand, through one of the principal streets of Worms, a German who fled before him, and the affrighted people dared not stop the furious man.
- m. Some politicians thought they had found means of saving Luther. “Retract your doctrinal errors,” said they; “but persist in all that you have said against the pope and his court, and you are safe.” Aleander shuddered with alarm at this counsel. But Luther, immovable in his resolution, declared that he had no great opinion of a political reform that was not based upon faith.
- n. Glapio, the Chancellor ab Eck, and Aleander, by Charles’s order, met early on the morning of the

18th to concert the measures to be taken with regard to Luther.

- o. For a moment Luther had felt dismay, when he was about to appear the preceding day before so august an assembly. His heart had been troubled in the presence of so many great princes, before whom nations humbly bent the knee. The reflection that he was about to refuse to submit to these men, whom God had invested with sovereign power, disturbed his soul; and he felt the necessity of looking for strength from on high. "The man who, when he is attacked by the enemy, protects himself with the shield of faith," said he one day, "is like Perseus with the Gorgon's head. Whoever looked at it, fell dead. In like manner should we present the Son of God to the snares of the devil."
- p. On the morning of the 18th of April, he was not without his moments of trial, in which the face of God seemed hidden from him. His faith grew weak; his enemies multiplied before him; his imagination was overwhelmed at the sight. . . . His soul was as a ship tossed by a violent tempest, which reels and sinks to the bottom of the abyss, and then mounts up again to heaven. In this hour of bitter sorrow, in which he drinks the cup of Christ, and which was to him a little garden of Gethsemane, he falls to the earth, and utters these broken cries, which we cannot understand, unless we can figure to ourselves the depth of the anguish whence they ascend to God: — "O Almighty and Everlasting God! How terrible is this world! Behold, it openeth its mouth to swallow me up, and I have so little trust in Thee! . . . How weak is the flesh, and Satan how strong! If it is only in the strength of this world that I must put my trust, all is over! . . . My last hour is come, my condemnation has been pronounced! . . . O God! O God!. . . O God! do thou help me against all the wisdom of the world! Do this; thou shouldest do this . . . thou alone . . . for this is not my work, but Thine. I have nothing to do here, nothing to contend for with these great ones of the world! I should desire to see my days flow on peaceful and happy. But the cause is Thine . . . and it is a righteous and eternal cause. O Lord! help me! Faithful and unchangeable God! In no man do I place my trust. It would be vain! All that is of man is uncertain; all that cometh of man fails. . . . O God! my God, hearest Thou me not? . . . My God, art Thou dead? . . . No! Thou canst not die! Thou hidest thyself only! Thou hast chosen me for this work. I know it well! . . . Act, then, O God! . . . stand at my side, for the sake of thy well-beloved Jesus Christ, who is my defense, my shield, and my strong tower."
- q. After a moment of silent struggle, he thus continues: "Lord! where stayest Thou?.....O my God! where art Thou?.....Come! come! I am ready!.....I am ready to lay down my life for Thy truth.....patient as a lamb. For it is the cause of justice — it is thine!.....I will never separate myself from Thee, neither now nor through eternity!.....And though the world should be filled with devils, — though my body, which is still the work of Thy hands, should be slain, be stretched upon the pavement, be cut in pieces.....reduced to ashes.....my soul is Thine!Yes! Thy Word is my assurance of it. My soul belongs to Thee! It shall abide for ever with Thee.....Amen!O God! Help me!.....Amen!"
- r. This prayer explains Luther and the Reformation. History here raises the veil of the sanctuary, and discloses to our view the secret place whence strength and courage were imparted to this humble and despised man, who was the instrument of God to emancipate the soul and the thoughts of men, and to begin the new times. Luther and the Reformation are here brought before us. We discover their most secret springs. We see whence their power was derived. This out-pouring of a soul that offers itself up in the cause of truth is to be found in a collection of documents relative to Luther's appearance at Worms, under Number XVI, in the midst of safeconducts and other papers of a similar nature. One of his friends had no doubt overheard it, and has transmitted it to posterity. In our opinion, it is one of the most precious documents in all history.
- s. After he had thus prayed, Luther found that peace of mind without which man can effect nothing great. He then read the Word of God, looked over his writings, and sought to draw up his reply in a suitable form. The thought that he was about to bear testimony to Jesus Christ and his Word, in the presence of the emperor and of the empire, filled his heart with joy. As the hour for his appearance was not far off, he drew near the Holy Scriptures that lay open on the table, and with emotion placed his left hand on the sacred volume, and raising his right towards heaven, swore to remain faithful to the Gospel, and freely to confess his faith, even should he seal his testimony with his blood. After this he felt still more at peace.
- t. At four o'clock the herald appeared and conducted him to the place where the diet was sitting. The

curiosity of the people had increased, for the answer was to be decisive. As the diet was occupied, Luther was compelled to wait in the court in the midst of an immense crowd, which swayed to and fro like the sea in a storm, and pressed the reformer with its waves. Two long hours elapsed, while the doctor stood in the multitude so eager to catch a glimpse of him. "I was not accustomed," said he, "to those manners and to all this noise." It would have been a sad preparation, indeed, for an ordinary man. But God was with Luther. His countenance was serene; his features tranquil; the Everlasting One had raised him on a rock.

- u. The night began to fall. Torches were lighted in the hall of the assembly. Their glimmering rays shone through the ancient windows into the court. Everything assumed a solemn aspect. At last the doctor was introduced. Many persons entered with him, for every one desired to hear his answer. Men's minds were on the stretch; all impatiently awaited the decisive moment that was approaching. This time Luther was calm, free, and confident, without the least perceptible mark of embarrassment. His prayer had borne fruit. The princes having taken their seats, though not without some difficulty, for many of the places had been occupied, and the monk of Wittenberg finding himself again standing before Charles V, the chancellor of the Elector of Treves began by saying: "Martin Luther! yesterday you begged for a delay that has now expired. Assuredly it ought not to have been conceded, as every man, and especially you, who are so great and learned a doctor in the Holy Scriptures, should always be ready to answer any questions touching his faith.....Now, therefore, reply to the question put by his majesty, who has behaved to you with so much mildness. Will you defend your books as a whole, or are you ready to disavow some of them?"
- v. After having said these words in Latin, the chancellor repeated them in German. "Upon this, Dr. Martin Luther," says the Acts of Worms, "replied in the most submissive and humble manner. He did not bawl, or speak with violence; but with decency, mildness, suitability, and moderation, and yet with much joy and christian firmness."
- (i) "Most serene emperor! illustrious princes! gracious lords!" said Luther, turning his eyes on Charles and on the assembly, "I appear before you this day, in conformity with the order given me yesterday, and by God's mercies I conjure (invoke) your majesty and your august highness to listen graciously to the defense of a cause which I am assured is just and true. If, through ignorance, I should transgress the usages and proprieties of courts, I entreat you to pardon me; for I was not brought up on the palaces of kings, but in the seclusion of a convent. "Yesterday, two questions were put to me on behalf of his imperial majesty: the first, if I was the author of the books whose titles were enumerated; the second, if I would retract or defend the doctrine I had taught in them. To the first question I then made answer, and I persevere in that reply. As for the second, I have written works on many different subjects. There are some in which I have treated of faith and good works, in a manner at once so pure, so simple, and so scriptural, that even my adversaries, far from finding anything to censure in them, allow that these works are useful, and worthy of being read by all pious men. The papal bull, however violent it may be, acknowledges this. If, therefore, I were to retract these, what should I do?.....Wretched man! Among all men, I alone should abandon truths that friends and enemies approve, and I should oppose what the whole world glories in confessing....."
- (ii) "Secondly, I have written books against the papacy, in which I have attacked those who, by their false doctrine, their evil lives, or their scandalous example, afflict the christian world, and destroy both body and soul. The complaints of all who fear God are confirmatory of this. Is it not evident that the human doctrines and laws of the popes entangle, torment, and vex the consciences of believers, while the crying and perpetual extortions of Rome swallow up the wealth and the riches of Christendom, and especially of this illustrious nation?..... "Were I to retract what I have said on this subject, what should I do but lend additional strength to this tyranny, and open the floodgates to a torrent of impiety? Overflowing with still greater fury than before, we should see these insolent men increase in number, behave more tyrannically, and domineer more and more. And not only the yoke that now weighs upon the christian people would be rendered heavier by my retraction, but it would become, so to speak, more legitimate, for by this very retraction it would have received the confirmation of your most serene majesty and of all the states of the holy

empire. Gracious God! I should thus become a vile cloak to cover and conceal every kind of malice and tyranny!.....

- (iii) “Lastly, I have written books against individuals who desired to defend the Romish tyranny and to destroy the faith. I frankly confess that I may have attacked them with more acrimony than is becoming my ecclesiastical profession. I do not consider myself a saint; but I cannot disavow these writings, for by so doing I should sanction the impiety of my adversaries, and they would seize the opportunity of oppressing the people of God with still greater cruelty.
- (iv) “Yet I am but a mere man, and not God; I shall therefore defend myself as Christ did. If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil (John 18:23), said he. How much more should I, who am but dust and ashes, and who may so easily go astray, desire every man to state his objections to my doctrine! “For the reason, by the mercy of God, I conjure you, most serene emperor, and you, most illustrious princes, and all men of every degree, to prove from the writings of the prophets and apostles that I have erred. As soon as I am convinced of this, I will retract every error, and be the first to lay hold of my books and throw them into the fire. “What I have just said plainly shows, I hope, that I have carefully weighed and considered the dangers to which I expose myself; but, far from being dismayed, I rejoice to see that the Gospel is now, as in former times, a cause of trouble and dissension. This is the character — this is the destiny of the Word of God. I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword, said Jesus Christ (Math. 10:34). God is wonderful and terrible in his counsels; beware lest, by presuming to quench dissensions, you should persecute the holy Word of God, and draw down upon yourselves a frightful deluge of insurmountable dangers, of present disasters, and eternal desolation.....you should fear lest the reign of this young and noble prince, on whom (under God) we build such lofty expectations, not only should begin, but continue and close, under the most gloomy auspices. I might quote many examples from the oracles of God,” continued Luther, speaking with a noble courage in the presence of the greatest monarch of the world: “I might speak of the Pharaohs, the kings of Babylon, and those of Israel, whose labors never more effectually contributed to their own destruction than when they sought by counsels, to all appearance most wise, to strengthen their dominion. God removeth mountains, and they know it not; which overturneth them in his anger (Job 9:5). “If I say these things, it is not because I think that such great princes need my poor advice, but because I desire to render unto Germany what she has a right to expect from her children. Thus, commending myself to your august majesty and to your most serene highness, I humbly entreat you not to suffer the hatred of my enemies to pour out upon me an indignation that I have not merited.”
- (v) Luther had pronounced these words in German with modesty, but with great warmth and firmness; he was ordered to repeat them in Latin. The emperor did not like the German tongue. The imposing assembly that surrounded the reformer, the noise, and his own emotion, had fatigued him. “I was in a great perspiration,” said he, “heated by the tumult, standing in the midst of the princes.” Frederick of Thun, privy (private) councillor to the Elector of Saxony who was stationed by his master’s orders at the side of the reformer, to watch over him that no violence might be employed against him, seeing the condition of the poor monk, said: “If you cannot repeat what you have said, that will do, doctor.” But Luther, after a brief pause to take breath, began again, and repeated his speech in Latin with the same energy as at first. “This gave great pleasure to the Elector Frederick,” says the reformer.
- (vi) When he had ceased speaking, the Chancellor of Treves, the orator of the diet, said indignantly: “You have not answered the question put to you. You were not summoned hither to call in question the decisions of councils. You are required to give a clear and precise answer. Will you, or will you not, retract?” Upon this Luther replied without much hesitation: “Since your most serene majesty and your high mightinesses require from me a clear, simple, and precise answer, I will give you one, and it is this: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils, because it is clear as the day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or by the clearest reasoning, — unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted, — and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the Word of God, I cannot and I will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience.” And then, looking round on this assembly before which he

stood, and which held his life in its hands, he said: "HERE I STAND, I CAN DO NO OTHER; MAY GOD HELP ME! AMEN!"

- w. Luther, constrained to obey his faith, led by his conscience to death, impelled by the noblest necessity, the slave of his belief, and under this slavery still supremely free, like the ship tossed by a violent tempest, and which, to save that which is more precious than itself, runs and is dashed upon the rocks, thus uttered these sublime words which still thrill our hearts at an interval of four centuries: thus spoke a monk before the emperor and the mighty ones of the nation; and this feeble and despised man, alone, but relying on the grace of the Most High, appeared greater and mightier than them all. His words contain a power against which all these mighty rulers can do nothing. This is the weakness of God, which is stronger than man. The empire and the Church on the one hand, this obscure man on the other, had met. God had brought together these kings and these prelates publicly to confound their wisdom. The battle is lost, and the consequences of this defeat of the great ones of the earth will be felt among every nation and in every age to the end of time.
- x. The assembly was thunderstruck. Many of the princes found it difficult to conceal their admiration. The emperor, recovering from his first impression, exclaimed: "This monk speaks with an intrepid heart and unshaken courage." The Spaniards and Italians alone felt confounded, and soon began to ridicule a greatness of soul which they could not comprehend.
- y. "If you do not retract," said the chancellor, as soon as the diet had recovered from the impression produced by Luther's speech, "the emperor and the states of the empire will consult what course to adopt against an incorrigible heretic." At these words Luther's friends began to tremble; but the monk repeated: "May God be my helper; for I can retract nothing."
- z. After this Luther withdrew, and the princes deliberated. Each one felt that this was a critical moment for Christendom. The yes or the no of this monk would decide, perhaps for ages, the repose of the Church and of the world. His adversaries had endeavored to alarm him, and they had only exalted him before the nation; they had thought to give greater publicity to his defeat, and they had but increased the glory of his victory. The partisans of Rome could not make up their mind to submit to this humiliation.
- aa. Luther was again called in, and the orator of the diet said to him: "Martin, you have not spoken with the modesty becoming your position. The distinction you have made between your books was futile; for if you retract those that contained your errors, the emperor would not allow the other to be burnt. It is extravagant in you to demand to be refuted by Scripture, when you are reviving heresies condemned by the general council of Constance. The emperor, therefore, calls upon you to declare simply, yes or no, whether you presume to maintain what you have advanced, or whether you will retract a portion?"
- bb. "I have no other reply to make than that which I have already made," answered Luther, calmly. His meaning was understood. Firm as a rock, all the waves of human power dashed ineffectually against him. The strength of his words, his bold bearing, his piercing eyes, the unshaken firmness legible on the rough outlines of his truly German features, had produced the deepest impression on this illustrious assembly. There was no longer any hope. The Spaniards, the Belgians, and even the Romans were dumb. The monk had vanquished these great ones of the earth. He had said no to the Church and to the empire. Charles V arose, and all the assembly with him: "The diet will meet again tomorrow to hear the emperor's opinion," said the chancellor with a loud voice.

C. Conclusion.

1. We will end the story here and pick it up and finish it next week.
2. I want the power of this one thought to remain with each of us here this evening: *We should never accept the opinion of any man on matters of faith or life, if it cannot be proven by Scripture.* This is where Luther took his stand. This is also where we must take ours. Amen.