

Church History - Session 7 (The Suffering Church in the Middle Ages)

by Edgar F. Parkyns

The sermon explores the corruption of the papacy during the Middle Ages and the emergence of the Protestant Reformation through the life and teachings of Martin Luther.

Duration: 42:58

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 1:16-17, Romans 3:23-24, Romans 8:1, Romans 10:9-10, James 2:14-26

Topics: "Church History", "Justification By Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of realizing the preciousness of time and the urgency of spreading the gospel. He encourages the use of various media and means, such as electronic devices and word of mouth, to proclaim the salvation of Jesus. The preacher also discusses the struggle of understanding the doctrine of justification by faith, mentioning how Martin Luther had difficulty accepting the book of James due to its potential to undermine this doctrine. The sermon concludes with a mention of the spread of scriptures in England and the political maneuvering involved in gaining permission for its distribution.

Transcript

Here we are in the time of the Babylonian Captivity. This is Sally P. 778. The admirers of the Abbey-Nome Popes knew no bounds, burdensome taxes.

Every church office was sold for money, and many new offices were created to be sold to fill the coffers of the Popes and support the luxurious and immoral court. Petrarch accused the papal household of rape, adultery, and all manner of fornication. In many parishes men insisted on priests keeping concubines as a protection for their own families.

There were forty years in which there were two sets of Popes, one at Rome and one at Abbey-Nome, each claiming to be vicars of Christ, hurling anathemas and curses at each other. John XXIII was called by some the most betrayed criminal who ever sat on the papal throne, guilty of almost every crime. As Cardinal in Verona, two hundred maidens, nuns, and married women fell to victims of his amours.

As Pope he violated virgins and nuns, lived in adultery with his brother's wife, was guilty of sodomy and other nameless vices, bought the papal office, sold cardinalates to children of wealthy families, openly

denied future life. Martin healed the papal schism, or at least it was by the counsel of Constance. Pius II was said to have been the father of many illegitimate children, spoke openly of the methods he used to seduce women, encouraged young men, and offered to instruct them.

Paul II filled his house with concubines. Sixtus IV sanctioned the Spanish Inquisition, decreed that money would deliver souls from perjury, was implicated in the plot to murder Lorenzo de' Maggi, and others who opposed his policies. He used the papacy to enrich himself and his relatives, made eight of his nephews cardinals, while as yet some of them were mere boys.

In luxurious and lavish entertainment he rivaled the Caesars. In wealth and pomp he and his relatives surpassed the old Roman families. Innocent VIII had sixteen children by various married women, multiplied church offices, sold them for vast sums of money, decreed the extermination of the Waldensian believers, sent an army against them, appointed the brutal Thomas of Torquemada inquisitor-general of Spain, and ordered all rulers to deliver up heretics to heaven.

Permitted bullfights in Trompedo Square was background for Savonarola's cry against corruption. Alexander VI, called the most corrupt of the Renaissance popes, Dicientius, avaricious, depraved, bought the papacy, made many new cardinals for money, had a number of illegitimate children whom he openly acknowledged and appointed to high church office while they were yet children, who, with their father, murdered cardinals and others who stood in their way. And for a mistress, a sister of a cardinal who became next pope, Pius III.

In Luther's day, Julius II, as richest of the cardinals, with vast income from numerous bishoprics and church estates, bought the papacy. As a cardinal he made sport of celibacy, involved in endless quarrels over possession of citizen principalities, maintained and personally led vast armies, called the warrior pope, issued indulgences for money. Luther visited Rome in his day and was appalled at what he saw.

Leo X was pope when Martin Luther started the Reformation, was made an archbishop at eight years of age, a cardinal at thirteen, was appointed to twenty-seven different church offices, which meant vast income before he was thirteen, was taught to regard ecclesiastical office purely as a source of revenue, bargained for the papal chair, sold church honors, only ecclesiastical offices were for sale and many new ones were created. He appointed cardinals as young as seven. He was in endless negotiations with kings and princes, jockeying for secular power, utterly indifferent to the religious welfare of the church.

He maintained the most luxurious and licentious court in Europe. His cardinals vied with kings and princes in gorgeous palaces and voluptuous entertainment, attended by trains of servants. Yet this voluptuary reaffirmed the unum sanctum in which it is declared that every human being must be subject to the Roman pontiff for salvation.

He issued indulgences for stipulated fees and declared burning of heretics a divine appointment. Well, that's a sad story. The corruptions of the papacy reached their height in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The papal court was the most splendid in Europe. St. Peter's was being built, commenced by Julius II in 1506, and more money was needed. Money was raised by sales of office and by transfers of bishoprics, also by sale of indulgences.

When a man was made a bishop, he had to give the whole of his first year's income to the pope. And so when the pope wanted more money, he just shifted his bishops around. He got all their salaries for the first year, so it was quite a little game.

And also by the sale of indulgences, which became not only pardons for sin, but permissions to sin. In Mainz there was a young archbishop called Albrecht. He was made archbishop at twenty-five years of age.

He spent huge sums on music and art. He had one hundred and fifty armed knights in his courtiers and pages. He had borrowed from thuggers, the bankers of Oldsburg, thirty thousand gold florins, to buy his position as cardinal.

He also needed money. A papal bull was granted, that is, a papal declaration written, was granted declaring indulgences for stated sums for different sins and different classes. Albrecht and the pope were to share the money.

Albrecht, the local man, the young cardinal, the pope, of course, at Rome. And thuggers, the bankers, were to have a percentage of the profits. And the monk, Tetzel, was appointed to gather him the money.

He travelled from town to town in Germany. His carriage was accompanied with processions and bells and flags, songs and candles. The papal bull was carried on a velvet cushion and placed on the high altar of the cathedral in the big town.

A silken banner displayed the papal arms. A huge red cross was set up and the iron money chest was placed before it. And Tetzel was a fiery creature.

He preached forgiveness of sins for money. And not only forgiveness of sins for money, he also preached release from purgatory for money. And not content with that, he preached release for dead relatives for money.

His words were something like this. How, I should have had a copy here, I missed it. How can you be so hard-hearted to sit in comfort and ease while your relatives are tormented in the flames of hell? When for a mere, a small payment, your money can go in this box and they will be released into heaven.

They are praying, begging you to have mercy on them and bring the money that will release them. And there is a little saying of his which is quoted in different translations in different ways. The soul flies from purgatory the moment the coin tinkled in the box.

And the people were so credulous that they flocked to this imitation gospel. And the money just poured in to supply the pope with the money he needed. And Albrecht with the money to pay his debts and Fuggers to do their banking.

They had a little share as well. It was a tremendous business and it went on for some years. Dettel was kept out of Saxony where Luther was by Frederick the Wise.

But he set up his stall at Jutebald on the borders of the territory. The crowd came and the money poured in. At the turn of the century, some years before, young Luther, son of a poor miner, iron worker, at 18 years entered the University of Erfurt.

His father had, although very poor, had saved up enough to get his boy into the university. And he was there to study law. And he had been there nearly two years when he saw his first Bible.

And he was thrilled with what he saw. A couple of years later he received his MA. He was an eager student.

The same year, 1505, he became intensely concerned about his soul. A death of a friend of his, unexpected, scared him. He began to think what would happen to him if he died.

Where would he go? Would it be hellfire? What would happen to him? He was out in a thunderstorm. A bolt of lightning struck the ground very near him. And he fell on the ground and cried for mercy and swore that he would give his life to the Virgin Mary and that he would enter a monastery.

And to his father's great anger and disappointment, within a few weeks, Luther resigned all his connections and entered the Augustinian monastery, having stripped himself of all his possessions. And there he sought, with fasting and prayers and penances, vigils, going out to beg for the monastery, he sought to overcome his pride and sin. And the more he struggled, the worse he became.

A delicately sensitive soul, in some ways rough and rugged in others, he became ill. Happily, the vicar general of the Augustinian monastery, Staupitz, was a man who read his Bible and who knew God. And he often had talks with the young and failing monk and tried to get him to look away from his self and his sins to Christ the Saviour.

On one occasion, he was so ill that they feared he would die. An elderly brother monk was talking to him. Poor Luther could get no peace.

He made his confessions and all this sort of thing. But there was no relief for him. And the old man said, Brother Martin, recite the Apostles' Creed.

And poor old Martin recited the Apostles' Creed. And when he came to the phrase, I believe in the forgiveness of sins, his questioner said to him, Do you believe in the forgiveness of Martin Luther's sins? And a little bit of light dawned. And Luther had his first glimpse, probably at that time, of the glorious realization of justification by faith.

It was so real that he recovered from his sickness. He received divine healing by the entry of the truth. Staupitz encouraged him in reading the scripture.

And before long he was lecturing on the scripture. And within a few years was lecturing on Romans, just taking it straight out of the book and teaching it. Which was an almost unheard of thing in those days.

And crowds came to listen to the young eager lecturer with the fire of God in his heart and a passion for the Lord Jesus. That thrilled people as well as great gift and logic. They crowded to hear the young lecturer.

At this time, 1510, he was sent to represent the monastery. Priory, I think it was, Augustinian Priory. At Rome.

He traveled over the Alps. Very, very thrilled. His eager young heart thinking, When I climb the Alps I shall leave behind the lazy gluttonous Germans and I'll come over the mountains into God's own country where all the priests are pure, where the churches are glorious, where Christ's vicar dwells.

I shall be able to pray at the sacred shrine and climb the sacred steps of pilgrims that were transported by angels all the way from Jerusalem to Rome. See the bones of the saints and the sacred relics. Oh, it was going to be heaven on earth, the young Martin.

He stopped at an inn coming down from the Alps. And it was a house of the priests. And he was amazed at the way they laughed and joked about divine things.

He attempted to remonstrate with them. They jeered at him. And poor fellow, he became ill again.

And he wondered if ever he would reach Rome. But as he was lying there sick and feverish, he seemed to hear afresh that word from Habakkuk, that just shall live by faith. He took himself free of that depression, rose up once again, strengthened, and went on his journey to Rome, the sacred holy city.

And what he saw there tormented his soul. He took his part in saying matters for those who wanted it. But the other priests would say seven to his one.

And they would say to him, Come on, Brother Martin, hurry and send our lady back her son. Because, you see, when they pronounce the words, the bread becomes the body of Christ. Hurry and send our lady back her son, they said.

Don't keep her waiting. Jeering at him. And he often heard them saying, in Latin, under their breath, parodies of the service.

He was horrified at this utter godlessness among the clergy. And then, on that occasion, or perhaps a little bit later, he made his famous ascent, so they say, up the Sancta Scala, the Pilate's steps at Rome. Was it 15, 25 steps, I think.

On his knees, he was going up, doing penance, step by step, saying a Hail Mary and a Pater Noster at each step, another one further up, another one further up. And then it seemed that a voice from heaven came to him. Just shall live by faith.

And he thought, what a fool I am. And he got up, and deliberately renounced all this outward nonsense, and came down free and strong in faith. Made his way back to Germany, disillusioned as to the church, but with his eyes open as to a direct relationship with God.

His lecture showed that he no longer looked to the Pope or the Fathers for authority. He looked to the Bible alone. And then came Tetzl, just over the border from Luther's area.

And the people in his own time were flocking to listen to this mountebank preacher, bringing their money for an easy entry into heaven. And Luther got more and more disturbed about it, until at last he prepared his 95 Theses, which he was to mail on the church door in the usual manner, to challenge a discussion on the themes he wanted to raise. They weren't terribly exciting, he wouldn't be thrilled with what he got there.

Very mild questions he raised. He little knew what he was doing. His hammer was heard through Europe, his hammer shook the throne of the Pope.

Within three months, what he had mailed up there as a ground for argument, had been caught up by the printers and spread right through Europe. And all over the Christian world, men were gathering in groups in the public houses and inns, discussing Luther's Theses, his questions about the authority of the church,

and the councils, and the papacy. He set Europe ablaze before he knew what he had done.

And the Reformation was on. He was eventually summoned to Rome. There had been several letters, to and fro, one in which he had explained to the Pope that he was a loyal son of the church, and he was just trying to clear up some of her faults.

And there were letters advising him to recant. And eventually he was summoned to Rome, and his friends knew that if he'd not left, he'd never come away again alive. So, they managed to arrange for the visit to be delayed, and instead of that, his friends arranged the compromise, and he went to dispute at the Diet of Augsburg, a comparatively small church meeting, with Cardinal Cajetan, who treated him very, very kindly.

But, when all the arguments were done, all that Cajetan had to say was, Recant. Repent. Submit to the church.

That was his only argument. Luther came with a scripture. It didn't mean a thing.

Just repent. And it was from there that Luther escaped, apparently, as one of you was mentioning to me just now, leapt out of a window onto his horse, and got away. None of his friends would let him go to Rome, but the great Diet of Worms, an enormous... I'll probably pronounce it wrong, but never mind.

It's nothing to do with fishing. One of the great church council meetings was taking place under the auspices of the Emperor Charles V, young man at that time. And all the church dignitaries were there, and Luther was summoned to appear, and given a safe conduct from the Emperor, in writing, to show that he could go there and return without molestation.

His friends were afraid to let him go. They said, you remember what happened to John Hus a hundred years ago? He had a safe conduct too. They burned him.

But Luther felt that his time had come to speak. And he... Although ever so many tried to dissuade him, he went on in his carriage. He was ill on the road, but recovered and continued.

He must have been very highly strung. They said that he would never get out of the town alive, but Luther said, if there were as many devils in Worms as there are chimney-pops on the houses, I'd still go. He arrived, presented himself at the council, and the following day he was summoned to appear.

A stack of his books was put on the table, and he was asked to retract them. Incidentally, the Pope had excommunicated him. And he had burnt the papal bull, and the copy of the forged decrees.

You remember I told you about those forged writings, which gave the medieval papacy its power. He burnt a copy of those as well. Some of the papal writings had a bonfire.

Now he was before the council. He was asked whether he would retract his books. He said, may I see them first, to see if they are mine.

So he looked at them, and he said, yes, they are mine. Do you retract them? He said, those things which were agreeable with Scripture, I cannot retract. Let me go through them.

So he was given another day, and they thought he was failing. The following day he reappeared, before all the might of Europe, and he was questioned again. He said they were his books.

He owned that he might have been extravagant in some of the things he said. He was quite rude in his writings. A shocking fellow, really, on occasion.

But he said, as far as the truth of those books is concerned, where it agrees with the Bible, there I stand. So help me God, I can do no other. He was allowed to get back to his lodgings, and after a little delay, he was allowed to get out of the town.

But by this time, the safe conduct had expired. And his life was in danger. Riding on horseback, he went some way into the Thuringian forest, and suddenly armed men surrounded him and seized him, and carried him off.

They were his friends. And Luther vanished in flight. They couldn't get at him.

He was hidden away in the castle of the Wartburg, and remained a whole year out of sight. He didn't like it. In one letter to his friends, he commented on the diet of jackdaws that were meeting on his window ledge.

But he did translate the whole Bible into the German language one has read. And Germans are still using that Bible to this day. Tremendous piece of work.

Young Jonathan, a godly young scholar, about this time, became his close friend and able helper. Luther was a man who was violent in his language. He was rough-hewn.

He didn't merely call it a spade, he called a spade a spade. He called it some other name as well. Some of his writings are quite shocking in their roughness.

But Melancthon was scholarly and gentle, and sort of rounded off his friend's fierceness. The Pope called him that drunken German, and had excommunicated him. In 1518 Luther wrote, Is the Pope the Antichrist? Later he wrote, I can hardly doubt that he is Antichrist, or his apostle.

A little later he was in full agreement with what the Waldenses and the Albigenses, the Hussites and the Rohnerts had said. To the German nobles he wrote, The Pope's government agrees with the government of the apostles, as well as Lucifer with Christ, hell with heaven, or night with day. He was completely disillusioned as to the whole system which had held men in fear for a thousand years.

The word was sweet to him. It was in his mouth as honey, and he loved it. And those who listened to him, loved it too.

And thousands were set free from the superstitious bondage of the long ages that lay behind them. But to be set free from bondage doesn't necessarily mean that you are made a captive of Christ. And there were thousands who eagerly received the beginnings of the gospel, who didn't want its full implications.

And Luther had great trouble with the people who made a beginning, and then when they found the cost of the gospel began to fall away. And at the same time, with the new liberty, a very natural thing happened, hundreds of sects appeared. All disagreeing, each one disagreeing with all the others.

Bitter in the many. And Luther was much distressed about this. There were some who were interested in baptism by immersion.

Luther would have nothing to do with it. Some were interested in the gift of the Spirit. Luther would have nothing to do with it.

Some were following wild prophets with wilder visions into gross excesses. Trying to set up Jerusalem on earth like some do in America to this day. These brethren who are doing that on the West Coast are not the originals.

Obviously, in Germany it was being done in Luther's time. Almost the same pattern repeating itself. Some, realizing freedom from law, went into evil antinomianism.

They said, well, Christ is our righteousness, and we're complete in Him. There's no need for us to worry about it anymore. We can do precisely what we like.

People are always looking for that excuse, and Satan is always willing to provide an excuse if you want one. So, these reactions were distressing to Luther and to all those who loved the Lord in that time. In his reaction to all this, he evolved a church which was allied with the state.

So that church and state were joined together. Now he had authoritative discipline to deal with people who weren't in line with what he felt was right. And in this church they were not radically freed from all the errors of the medieval past.

They retained many of the vestments, the same kind of buildings, a similar form of service. Luther taught consubstantiation instead of transubstantiation. What else? Infants were sprinkled.

There were many, many compromises all the way along. He didn't want to overthrow. More than was absolutely necessary.

And so the German Lutheran church was founded with many of the characteristics of the old Roman church still in it. And unhappily, Luther was quite bitter against people like Anabaptists who wanted to be baptized by immersion or by effusion. For the Peasants' Revolt of 1525, but he himself was not in sympathy with it and he strongly opposed it.

So much so, that he lost many of his followers. Meanwhile, in Switzerland, the revival was spreading, the Reformation was growing everywhere. In Switzerland, Zwingli, Ulrich Zwingli, arose about the same time as Luther and apparently received the truth independently of Luther.

Probably from the Hussites. And was a great student of Scripture, a very broad-minded man. Did a lot to bring the light of the gospel into Switzerland.

But, unhappily, was mixed up with politics. Took part in a war between the cantons and was killed fighting. In southern France, young Calvin arose just within a few years.

All this was happening, a tremendous move of God with a mixture of good and evil in it, both sweet and bitter, as the prophecy indicated. Calvin passed in southern France as a young man and wrote the famous Institutes of Religion when he was only 26 years of age. A book which is still referred to to this day.

And later, rather against his will, consented to pastor the church in Geneva, which was a great city-state just on the borders of Switzerland. A city governed by its own citizens. And Calvin was invited to be the pastor.

This meant getting, once again, mixed up with civil government. It's not a good thing. So Calvin was not only pastor of the church, but governor of the city.

Geneva was a free city. And to it, everybody who didn't want the miseries of medieval Christendom and who was a bit of a rebel, would flee. So all kinds of rogues and freethinkers and all sorts of people turned up in Geneva.

Not only godly people, but ungodly. It was a very mixed state of affairs. Calvin took his duties very seriously and forbade these ruthless, godless men from partaking of the Communion.

Although he said the Communion is a memorial, he still said it's holy and he forbade these people taking part in it. And as a result, he was driven out. Three years later, the city was in such corruption that they called him back again.

He stayed there for the rest of his days. Serious godly man, but now mixed up with civil government. And the rules of the church and the rules of the government were the same thing.

And once again, there was bitterness. The worst thing he did was to consent and probably approve the death sentence of Servetus, the freethinker, who was denying the Trinity. And Calvin begged him to leave the city.

Don't stay here, we don't want you. But Servetus, with new ideas about the freedom of man, stayed and continued to promulgate his theories. He was arrested and Calvin gave his official consent to the death of Servetus.

Unhappily, as bad as the Roman Catholics, it was by burning. Bitter. Sweet and bitter.

See how accurate the prophetic picture is. In England, the spread of the scriptures was bearing fruit. Many small meetings of believers were being held with connections on the continent.

Old Henry VIII was on the throne. And he was the defender of the faith. He got his title, defender of the faith, because he wrote a tract against Luther.

And the Pope was so pleased with him, he gave him the fit death that appears on English coins to this day. Defender of the faith. But, Henry was a bit impatient over the matter of the divorce of his wife.

His wife hadn't brought him any children, and he had his eye on another rather charming young lady. But his wife was the daughter of the French king. The one he wanted to divorce.

Now, the Pope was busy playing off the emperor of Germany against the king of France. And so, although the Pope himself was a most immoral sort of fellow, who had all sorts of mistresses, he hesitated to give Henry his divorce. And the thing dragged on, because he wanted to see which way the game was going to go, before he jumped.

He played off one king against another. You'll get that picture in Revelation later on. And, at last, the Pope gave his consent, wrote the document, sent it off.

But, Henry jumped a trifle too soon. He got tired of waiting, because it took a long time for a message to get across from Rome to England. In the meantime, Henry said, I'm going to form my own church.

And, of course, there are a lot of Protestants and Bible lovers in Britain. And so, he formed the Church of England. And most of the clergymen who had been Roman Catholics were sufficiently easygoing to join the new set-up.

Others were really godly men. Like Archbishop Cranmer, who was the head of the church there, there were really God-fearing men, and there were elements of good. So that, in the Anglican church, from the beginning, you had those who were really Romanists at heart, but just went along with the church, because it was the comfortable thing to do.

And there were others who were Protestants by conviction, and who really believed the Bible and loved the Gospel. It's interesting to find that in the Church of England to this day, those elements are there, even now. You can go into one church and find a brother who loves the Lord, and is open to the Holy Spirit, and to another, and the local vicar or rector is interested in hunting, shooting, and fishing, and politics.

And all his church might as well be Roman Catholic, as far as the outward display is concerned. The Church of England was to become a persecutor too, and drove overseas those whom you know as the Pilgrim Fathers. Here ends the lesson.

His grasp of justification by faith was fought through through tremendous spiritual agony. And at last he held it. He had been ill three times over it, physically.

And James was always used by those who wanted to overthrow what he had to say. And so, as he went through the Scripture teaching, and he came across James, he decided that it wasn't very good. He called it an epistle of straw.

I think one can understand him when he feels that the blessed doctrine of justification by faith is so vital to all true religion. You can understand him being a bit scared of James. Indeed, we all have to read James with a little bit of care, even to this day, or else we could go back into bondage.

Well, I'm sorry, I didn't have time to get into it tonight. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, tremendous.

Some tremendous ones coming up. Praise the Lord. Now we're going to find out where we all came from in our heresies, right? Alright, let's stand and be dismissed.

Thank you, Jesus. Father, we are grateful, Lord Jesus, that you are making us aware of the price that your precious Son, Jesus, paid for our salvation. And Lord, for that Lamb blood that has been shed right down through history, that we might stand here tonight and meet openly in public place and proclaim the Lordship of Christ.

Father, we are not unaware that thousands before us have given their lives that we might have this freedom. And Lord, we pray that through the hearing of these things and the truth and the unfolding of your prophecy, that we might more appreciate the freedom that you've given us to proclaim the Lordship of Christ. And Father, the violent forces that would try to take that freedom away from us, and even now as we're standing here this night, are actively at work trying to take that freedom from us.

Lord, help us to realize how precious time is in our own lives and in the propagating of the gospel. Father, help us to realize how close we are to the end of the curtain. Help us, Lord, that we might be propagators of the gospel with the miraculous tools that you've placed in our hands, the electronic devices, the praying, and Lord, the age-old speaking by word of mouth.

Help us, Father, that we might blend all of these medias and means to proclaim the precious blood of Jesus for the salvation of mankind before that curtain closes. Now, Father, we thank you for teaching us, opening our eyes that we might see what a precious heritage has been handed to us on a silver platter.

Help us to be champions of it.

Help us to walk in faith and carry it, not stumbling, until you call us to be with you. Now, we bless you this night, Jesus. We bless you in Jesus' name.

Amen. God bless you.

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