

## *Reformation 2012*

### **Text: 2 Timothy 2:8,9**

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.



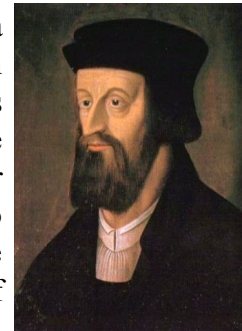
Altar with grave of John Zacharias at Erfurt Monastery

### **Theme: God's Word Is not Bound**

The year 1506 saw one of the great ironies of history when a new monk named Martin Luther prostrated himself over the grave of John Zacharias in front of the altar at the Augustinian Monastery in Erfurt Germany. It is an example of what Paul says in our text that God's Word is not bound.

#### I. [Luther's fulfillment of Hus's prophecy showed that God's word is not bound.]

Almost 100 years earlier, in 1415 Zacharias was the Roman Inquisitor who condemned John Hus to death at the Council of Constance. John Hus was a Bohemian priest from Prague who was greatly influenced by the early English Reformer John Wycliffe. He spoke against papal indulgences for the forgiveness of sins and said that only God can forgive sins. He said that people should be allowed to read and hear the Bible in their own languages, and that no pope or bishop could proclaim any teaching that is contrary to the Bible. He also condemned the lavish lives of many of the church leaders of the time. For these "heresies" he was excommunicated and ordered to appear before the Council of Constance. He went because he was promised safe conduct there and home. However, Hus was immediately arrested and ordered to recant his errors. He declared that he would do so if the errors could be proven to him.



John Hus

The Inquisitor Zacharias declared him to be a heretic and had Hus burned at the stake with copies of Wycliffe's English Bibles used as kindling. Hus means "goose" in Bohemian. This event spawned the saying, "Your goose is cooked." His last words were **"You are now going to burn a goose, but in a 100 years you will have a swan which you can neither roast nor boil."** [cf Bugenhagen's funeral sermon for Luther] The irony is that Luther made his monastic vows on the grave of the man to whom that prophecy was told. Exactly 100 years later Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. The church of the time thought that by silencing John Hus, that they had stopped the movement of the preaching of the forgiveness of sins in Christ and the priority of the Scriptures, but God's Word was not bound. Exactly as Hus proclaimed, it was resurrected 100 years later.

#### II. The same thing could be said of the Apostle Paul.

Throughout his ministry people were always trying to silence him. He was thrown out of synagogues, stoned, and put in prison. Our text was written at the end of his life. Nero had him arrested, and he was chained in a dungeon. Very soon he would be killed, but Paul knew that God's word was not

bound. The Roman emperor could kill him, but he could never stop the Gospel, which Paul preached. The Gospel would continue to have free course and be preached to the salvation of many people. Eventually even the Roman Empire would become Christian.

III. The same is true in our day also.

We see all kinds of threats to the preaching of the Gospel. It seems like throughout the western world, that God's Word is being bound today. We don't have the open persecution just as in the days of St. Paul or John Hus in which people are being beheaded or burned at the stake for the sake of the Gospel. However there are many areas of the world today where it is very dangerous to confess Jesus Christ as our Savior.

But the devil works in more subtle ways in our society to make us wonder whether the devil really isn't winning. We often call ourselves a Christian nation, but I was shocked last summer when I visited Washington DC that there are virtually no Christian symbols. To the contrary, there are many Masonic symbols, and many of our monuments resemble Greek and Roman temples. Even those that borrow Christian architecture are sometimes sacrilegious. For instance, the dome of the Capitol has George Washington seated where Christ would generally be seated in glory in our churches. It is interesting how the tables have been turned today with our stances on pro-life and traditional marriage. We are often looked at as the people who are immoral because we are so "intolerant."

Worst of all is what is happening to our churches from within. There was a time when it was difficult to keep the youth after confirmation. Today, it is no longer such a big problem because most of the kids who go through confirmation are already pretty committed. Today it is difficult to get people to have their children baptized. Almost every denomination today is in decline. People will often talk about faith in a positive sense, but fewer and fewer people are joining a Christian fellowship or let their faith and the Scriptures impact their lives at all.

That is true for each of us to some extent. There are so many things that are competing for our time today. Are the things for which people like John Hus and St Paul gave up their lives even important for us as Christians today? Would we risk our lives for the chance to hear the Bible in our own language or to hear the preaching of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ? Are those things worth getting up early on Sunday morning to hear, let alone risking all that we have, including our life for them? The things for which those men gave up their lives for have become ho-hum to us today.

We can be sure that the message of the Gospel will continue to be preached to the salvation of many. When Jesus died on the cross, it seemed like all had been lost to his followers, but Paul writes, "*Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead!*" Christ rose from the dead and won the forgiveness of sins for us. When the Roman empire tried to destroy the Church, God rescued it. The blood of those who were martyred rather than to renounce their faith in Christ still proclaims Him boldly today. At the time of the Reformation, God raised up men like Martin Luther to restore the preaching of the forgiveness of sins in Christ.

In our own day, it is still that message of Christ crucified and risen for us, that gives any hope to this fallen world. We had a good example of that in this past week. Last Sunday we had another mass shooting in our Milwaukee Metro area. This time a woman from St. Paul's Lutheran Church in

Oconomoc was among those who were killed. It is said that Maelyn Lind was killed while trying to protect the daughter of the shooter, who also worked at the spa. News reports on Monday showed a prayer vigil at St. Paul's, and Pastor O'Donnel issued the following statement, **"We weep with the family of our own Maelyn Lind and with the other families impacted by the aimless violence in Brookfield, yet as a Christian community "we do not grieve as those who have no hope, for since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep."** This was another occurrence in which the devil himself brings suffering, death, and violence into this world, but God's Word is not bound. It continues to bring peace, hope, and comfort in Christ.

Such an event could make us lose hope. Our own sins bring us to despair. But as Luther writes in the explanation to the last petition of the Lord's Prayer, **"We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul possessions and reputation, and when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven."**

God is with us in Christ, and if God is with us, who can be against us? The devil, the world, and even our sinful nature try as hard as they can, but that can never bind God's Word. It continues to create faith in Christ, which gives the forgiveness of our sins, peace and hope in every situation, and the joy of the eternal life that we will have with our Savior.

Thanks be to our God, that when the devil and all his allies think that they have bound our Lord's Word, it always breaks free to be preached to our comfort and peace in Christ.

Amen.

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