

**To him who overcomes – Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2014**

***“The Lord is my portion;  
I have promised to keep Your words.” Psalm 119:57***

Beloved in The Lord,

497 years ago, on October 31<sup>st</sup>, Martin Luther nailed a document known as The 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church. He had no idea what the ensuing result would be. Basically Luther put a match to tinder, that caused a mighty fire to burn, that became known as The Protestant Reformation.

In Luther's time, the main Church (Roman Catholic) had broken the promise that is stated in our text today - ***“I have promised to keep Your words.”*** Even though this is a very basic and simple promise, that should be straightforward, so many, even today, find it hard to keep God's Words. Over and over again throughout Scripture, as well as throughout history we find that people, churches and nations fail to keep God's Word.

Last week there was a fair bit written in Christian Media about Hillsong Church. The issue was that the leader of the Church was not able to clearly state what he believes on the issue of same sex marriage. He danced around the issue saying that the Church is under immense pressure to remain culturally relevant.

Herein is the problem, not only with Hillsong, but with so many Churches. They don't understand that the Church is not about being culturally relevant, but it is about standing for The Truth of God's Word, which never changes.

Jesus said it very clearly and succinctly: ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).***

God's Word – The Holy Bible does not change and it will never pass away or become irrelevant. People's interpretations and opinions change, but God's Word remains the same forever. It is important that we understand this vital truth.

In the time of Luther the Church desperately needed reforming. The Church had so twisted and distorted the Bible that it even taught that people could purchase indulgences – slips of paper that forgave their sins. This was so far from God's Word that it is hard to imagine. It is totally blasphemous and degrading to the Blood of Jesus which alone can bring forgiveness for sin. If you can purchase forgiveness from the Church, then Jesus died in vain. This was only one of many false teachings in the mainline Church. So much doctrine was Scripturally incorrect.

The Church today is in desperate need of reform as well. The issue today is one of Scriptural Authority. So many Churches no longer stand on God's Word Alone (Sola Scriptura). They

water down the truth to make it more palatable to the sinful human. Ministers no longer preach the truth because they don't want to be unpopular or to lose members. Truth has never been popular with the masses. This is nothing new.

Jesus had many followers. We know of one occasion where he fed between 15,000 and 20,000 people with a few fishes and loaves. (There were 5000 men plus women and children). It wasn't long after this great miracle lunch that many dropped off, because they couldn't bear what Jesus had to say. His teaching was cutting into their guilty consciences. It got so bad that Jesus said to His disciples: ***"You do not want to go away also, do you?" (John 6:67)***

Peter had the right answer on this occasion: ***"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69).***

Well stated. To whom shall we go? This is the question that every Christian, every Church needs to ask. If we back away from God's Word to whom shall we go? Where will we find truth? Where will we gain wisdom to lead and who will lead us? Where will we find peace? In what shall we hope?

Peter understood that only Jesus had, and was the answer. ***"You have words of eternal life."***

Apart from Jesus, there is nothing. If we back away from Him and His Word then we lose it all – we forfeit eternal life with Him.

We need to understand that this backing down or drifting away is usually a gradual but effective process. In Luther's time the Church did not plunge into heresy overnight, but drifted slowly further and further from the truth. It was a gradual but systematic decline. The same is true today. It is not that Churches and denominations decide overnight to reject the truth, but it happens one step at a time. A compromise here, a little softening there, a blind eye here and before long the path is set. Every time the Church caves into social pressure it takes a step further away from God. Erosion occurs over a period of time, but there comes a point when enough has occurred that the collapse comes suddenly and swiftly.

Luther understood this and that is why he stood his ground. The Church tried to dissuade him, shift him. They threatened him with excommunication and even death and he simply said: "Here I stand, I can do none else." Praise God for this stand. Praise God that Luther could say along with the Psalmist: ***"The Lord is my portion; I have promised to keep Your words" (Psalm 119:57).***

Today, as we celebrate Reformation Day, I stand before you as your Pastor, called by God and by you, to serve God and His Word, and I reaffirm to you today that I have promised to keep God's Word. I have tried to be faithful in this promise throughout my career and by God's grace I will continue to be faithful in this matter. My heartfelt prayer and faith is that you, my beloved congregation will continue to stand with me, as you have up until now.

We need to understand that the way ahead is difficult. The pressure against us will increase. A few weeks ago Pastors' in Houston Texas received subpoenas to hand in all their sermons to the courts so that it could be ascertained whether they have spoken out against "Gay marriage" laws passed in that City. The city mayor is an active lesbian. This is in the USA where freedom of speech and religion are at its core. This is one example of the type of things we can expect in the not too distant future.

The Book of Revelation, the last Book of The Bible begins with seven letters from Jesus, given to the seven Churches of Asia Minor. These Churches represent the whole of Christianity, seven being the number of fullness. In each of the letters there is a promise from Jesus to the ones who overcome.

***"To the angel of the church in Ephesus: To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God."***

***"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna:***

***He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'***

***"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:***

***To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'***

***"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:***

***He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall<sup>1</sup>rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father;<sup>28</sup> and I will give him the morning star.***

***"To the angel of the church in Sardis write:***

***He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.***

***"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:***

***He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name***

***“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:***

***He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.***

Jesus promises rewards to the “Ones who overcome.”

I want to be amongst the ones who overcome. In order to be amongst them I must stay true and faithful to God’s Word Alone.

I want our Sydney Latvian Church to be among those who overcome. In order for that to happen we must remain true and faithful to God’s Word Alone.

In order to stay on the right path we must regularly remind ourselves of today’s text: ***“The Lord is my portion; I have promised to keep Your words. “ Psalm 119:57***

In keeping God’s Word, we can be sure and secure in Him no matter what!

Luther wrote in his famous Hymn “A Mighty Fortress” “

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:  
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;  
The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.

Let us keep God’s Word and we will be victorious to His glory and our eternal good.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.