

GREAT RESOLUTIONS

Program Twenty Two

Young Martin – Ignorant of God’s Righteousness

Introduction

In the book of Romans Paul tells us that the way to lay hold of righteousness is through faith. The Jews at Paul’s time pursued righteousness, but they did not attain to it. Why? – Paul asks. Because they did not pursue it out of faith, but out of works. Therefore, they stumbled at the stone of stumbling (Rom. 9:31-32).

This was similarly the case with Martin Luther in his early days: though he was seeking for salvation, he was ignorant of God’s righteousness and sought to establish his own righteousness. Let us look at the early history of his life, which was under the strong influence of Catholicism.

Humble Beginning

Martin was born on November 10, 1483, in the humble home of a miner in the small village of Eisleben, in Germany. Hans and Margarett Luther were happy at the birth of their first-born son, but had no idea that he would be a chosen vessel used by God as a dispensational instrument for the reformation of the church.

The very day following his birth, Martin’s parents dedicated him to God by christening him. This day happened to be known as St. Martin’s day, thus his parents decided to give him the name of Martin.

During Luther’s early years, his parents were poor. They had to sacrifice to care for the needs of their children. They had hopes for their children’s futures, and especially desired that their oldest son would be educated.

Disciplined

Martin Luther’s childhood was not a pleasant one. He was strictly disciplined by his parents, who held the view that strict discipline was necessary for the ultimate benefit of their children. Martin recalled the severe punishments that were measured to



Hans and Margarett Luther

him even for small infractions of household rules: “My father flogged me so severely one day that I ran away and had a grudge against him. My parents were so hard with me that I grew shy. On account of a miserable nut my mother once beat me till the blood flowed.” But he later acknowledged, “In the depths of their hearts they meant well.” Martin’s severe upbringing caused him to hold to a different approach when he himself became a parent. He said, “One must punish so that the apple goes with the rod. We must whip children, but we must at the same time love them.”

Living in Fear

Hans Luther would sometimes kneel in prayer at Martin’s bedside to petition God that Martin would remember the Lord’s name and one day contribute to the spreading of the truth. This prayer was surely heard.

However, Martin did not grow up with a view of Christ as the loving Savior, but of Him as a stern Judge. Luther

stated, “From early childhood I was accustomed to turn pale and tremble whenever I heard the name of Christ, for I was taught that we ourselves had to atone for our sins, and since we could not sufficiently

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make amends or do acceptable works, our teachers directed us to the saints in heaven, and made us call upon Mary the mother of Christ, and implore her to avert from us Christ's wrath, and make Him inclined to be merciful to us."

Martin's family was religious, but as was common for people at that time, was also engulfed in fear and superstition. Martin lived in fear of witches, evil spirits and of ghosts he imagined dwelt in the nearby forests. This was surely an age of darkness and superstition that needed the penetrating of light.

Luther's early school days were years of poverty. The overseers of his religious school had a custom whereby poor students could earn money to help with their needs by strolling through the wealthy neighborhoods and singing to its residents. Martin learned to sing in harmony with other students. They went caroling about the city in hopes of receiving charitable hand-outs.

Luther related the following experience: as he and his singing group stopped in front of a farmer's house, the farmer called out for them, "Boys, where are you?". They all fled in fear. Luther said, ". . . we ran as fast as our legs would carry us. We had no reason to be alarmed, for the farmer offered us assistance with great kindness; but our hearts no doubt were rendered timorous by the menaces and tyranny with which our teachers were then accustomed to rule over their pupils, so that a sudden panic had seized us." After the farmer's continued calling, Luther and his friends forgot their fears, and turned back. They gratefully received from the farmer the food he offered them. Luther said, "It is thus that we are accustomed to tremble and flee when our conscience is guilty and alarmed."

The young Luther, while away at school, often went hungry and sometimes even became ill. He later commented, "And yet I should not be where I am if I had not gone to school, if I had not learned to write."

In his youth Luther witnessed adults who were in bondage to false religious teachings. At age 14, Luther saw a former prince who had renounced his royal living to become a lowly, begging monk. This man went about in

his monk's habit, begging bread on the highway. Often he would be seen bent over from the weight of heavy sacks he was expected to carry. Luther said the man "fasted, watched, and mortified his flesh that he looked . . . mere bone and skin. Indeed, he soon after died, for he could not long bear to live such a severe life." This severe treatment of the body was common among the monks and was carried out with a motive to put others to shame for their "worldly occupations."

Sweet Kindness

One day while strolling the neighborhood, caroling and being turned away, Martin and his friends came upon the home of a noble family and sang again. This home was different. They were warmly welcomed by a town

official and his wife and were invited to partake of a meal. This couple's heart went



out to Martin and they offered for him to live in their home, which he did. This was truly timely help for the poor student. The wife cared for Martin almost as a mother would. He always was grateful for her loving care, which softened and opened his heart. He never forgot her kindness, noting "There is nothing sweeter on earth than the heart of a woman in which piety dwells." No longer did Martin have to be concerned about his next meal, so he could thus focus on his studies. His learning was not just in the classroom. He also learned music and art from the couple he was living with. God had opened the heart and home of this family so that Luther was not compelled to return to working in the mines with his father, but was enabled to continue his education.

Advanced Education

Martin's father, even while poor, placed a

high value on education. He often invited learned schoolmasters and clergy to his table for meals. This had an impact on Martin in his younger years, and he aspired to become a schoolmaster one day. Now that he was a little older, he whole-heartedly gave himself to his studies and began to show marked progress. He loved languages and also began to take an interest in poetry. This later became useful to him in his hymn writing.

Some began to take notice of Martin's abilities. Once a visiting scholar from the university at Erfurt came to Martin's class and told his instructor, "Keep an eye on that Luther. There is something in that boy. By all means prepare him for the university and send him to us at Erfurt." To Martin he added: "My son, the Lord has bestowed special gifts on you, use them faithfully in His service."

Not only did Martin excel, but his father also made progress in his business. Now Hans Luther was financially able to send Martin to the University of Erfurt after his graduation from St. George's at Eisenach. Although his father provided the funds, he also gave the direction by telling Martin that he must become a lawyer.

Troubles and Turmoil

During his college years, Martin experienced many troubles without and also much turmoil within. He suffered from poor health. A great shock to him was the sudden loss of a close friend. It caused him to ask himself, "What if it had been I? What would become of me if I were thus called away without warning?" Thus Martin began to consider eternal matters.

Then in 1504, while in travel to his parents, Martin accidentally wounded himself by his own sword. He nearly bled to death before a doctor came to attend to his condition. He cried out in fear to the only one he knew to address – the "Virgin Mary." Later he told his friends, "Had I died then, I should have placed my trust for salvation in Mary."

It is a wonder to consider that after many years of Catholic education, Martin still had not found salvation. This was mainly due to

the fact that the gospel had not been presented to him. Instead he was only hearing of superstitious things and of the commandments of men.

In the midst of his outward troubles, Martin also was at turmoil within. He was not at peace with God within his own heart. He did not have any assurance of salvation, nor did he consider that God would be gracious or favorable to him.

Then, on another visit home to his parents, a major event took place which would alter the course of his life. While on his journey, a violent storm suddenly came upon him. He was in great fear, especially since there was no shelter available. In the midst of the lightning and thunder, Martin again cried out in fear on his knees. He was afraid that he would encounter both death and judgment. In great terror, he called upon St. Anne, the patron saint of miners saying, "Help, dear St. Anne, and I'll become a monk!" His life was spared, and he honored his vow to become a monk and to devote himself to God. He would turn his back upon a bright future in law and forsake the world and the dreams of his father.

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