



# THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The Compass:  
*Encounter-Examine-Explore-Embrace* God's Word  
to  
Guide your Discipleship Path

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Sermon Series: "It's *Still* All About Jesus! The Reformation and the Church Today"

This Week's Theme: "Christ Alone" (*Solus Christus*)

Mark of Discipleship: *Radical Attachment (A surrendering heart that ascribes ultimate value and meaning in God)*

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Martin Luther is one of the most important figures in church history because God used him to launch one of the greatest revolutions of all—the Reformation. His writings are nearly five hundred years old yet still meaningful for us to read today. The Compass this week is using excerpts from Luther's sermons, commentaries, and other devotional writings originally written between 1513 and 1546. Each daily devotion is taken from *Faith Alone: a Daily Devotional* edited by James C. Galvin.

## ☐ Day #1 – Monday, October 16<sup>th</sup> Read: John 14:1-6

Thomas thought it was strange that Christ was saying, "You know the way to the place where I am going," when Jesus had said nothing about where he was going. Thomas was thinking in simple and concrete terms. He was envisioning a road that a person takes from one city to another or a path that a person walks on.

The disciples were saying, "We don't know the way. We don't even know through which city gate you're planning to leave. How can we know the way?" Christ replied to their worldly thoughts, "Here's what I mean: You know the way. In other words, you know the person who is the Way—me. For you see me and know that I am the Christ, your Lord and Savior. You are my disciples, for you have heard my message and have seen my miracles. Since you know me, you also know the way and everything else you need to know."

This is remarkable. All our teaching and faith should center and depend on Christ. Setting aside all of our wisdom and skill, we should know nothing except the crucified Christ (1 Corinthians 2:2). From God's perspective, the highest wisdom and knowledge above all other wisdom and knowledge is to truly know this person Christ. We come to God through Christ alone.

I understand what Jesus is saying here in the simplest manner, so that it all applies to this one person, Christ. Jesus is called "the way" because he is the beginning, "the truth" because he is the one who helps us continue, and also "the life" because he is the end. For he must be everything—the beginning, the middle, and the end of our salvation. That is why we place him as the foundation stone on which the other stones are set and on which the entire roof is built. He is the first, middle, and last rung on the ladder to heaven (Genesis 28:12). For through him we must begin, continue, and finally reach the life beyond.

So there is only one Christ, but he assumes different roles in our salvation experience. In the beginning it's hard to find the way. Then life becomes more difficult as we continue to walk along the way. It becomes extremely tough when we have traveled on the way for a long time and are about to reach our final shelter—heaven. So if you hold

on to Christ in faith, then you have started in the right place. If you remain with him, then you will be walking on the right path. If you persevere until the end, then you will be saved. Christ wants to pry our hearts away from trusting anything else. There is no other way, highway, bridge, or path for us than Christ alone.

### ☐ **Day #2 – Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup> Read: Colossians 2:9-10**

In Paul's letters, such as Romans, Galatians, and Colossians, there are many passages that say God has fulfilled all the requirements of the law in Christ (Romans 10:4). Christ is the fulfillment of the law, of time, and of all things. Christ is all and has all. The person who holds on to Jesus in faith will receive forgiveness of sins. God's laws will be fulfilled, death will be conquered, and the devil will be overcome. That person will receive the gift of eternal life. For in this one man, Jesus, all is settled. He has fulfilled everything. Whoever accepts him has everything. As Paul says here, "You have been given fullness in Christ."

When I feel anxious about sin and hell, I remind myself that when I have Christ, I have all that is necessary. Neither death, sin, nor the devil can hurt me. If I believe in Christ, I have fulfilled the law; it cannot accuse me. I have conquered hell; it cannot hold me. Everything that Christ has is mine. Through him, we obtain all his possessions and eternal life.

Even if I am weak in faith, I still have the same treasure and the same Christ that others have. There's no difference: we are all made perfect through faith in him, not by what we do. For example, imagine that two people each have a hundred dollars. One person carries it in a paper bag. The other keeps it in an iron chest. Both have the same treasure no matter where they put it. Similarly, we all have the same Christ. It doesn't matter if one person has a stronger or weaker faith than another. Both of them still believe in the same Christ and have everything through him.

### ☐ **Day #3 – Wednesday, October 18<sup>th</sup> Read: Romans 3:28**

Our opponents insist that good works are necessary for salvation, and the world enthusiastically agrees with them. Certainly, what the saints did was admirable, and they did many great works. But even if you were to show me the holiest saint of all, would that person have done enough good works to earn God's approval?

We also recognize that love is an essential aspect of the Christian life and that all believers need to restrain their corrupt desires and practice self-denial. "But you don't do that," our opponents protest. Our reply is, "Even if we could do all that, would we have done enough for God's approval?" The only reason we think so highly of what we do is that we don't want God to receive any of the credit. We readily admit that good works are necessary. But they're not more important than what we already have: God's approval, which comes through faith. We must understand the difference between what is priceless and what is cheap, what is important and what is trivial.

This distinction is important in all of life, but especially in this doctrine. Even animals understand the difference between good and bad food. A dog knows that meat is better than bread. Therefore, we should value good works and remember that doing them is still necessary. But we should value God's Word and his promises even more highly. We will live in God's presence because we believe in what he says, not because we do good works that make us holy. We have to make a clear distinction between our good works and our faith in God's Word. Believing in God's Word defeats the devil and makes us holy children of God.

People are not justified and do not receive life and salvation because of anything they've done. Rather, the only reason they receive life and salvation is because of God's grace through Christ. There is no other way. Many Christians are tired of hearing this teaching over and over. They think they learned it all long ago. However, they barely understand how important it really is. If it continues to be taught as truth, the Christian church will remain united and pure—free from decay. This truth alone makes and sustains Christianity.

You might hear immature Christians brag about how well they know that we are justified through God's grace and not because of anything we do to earn it. But if they go on to say that this truth is easy to put into practice, then

have no doubt they don't know what they're talking about, and they probably never will. We can never learn this truth completely or brag that we understand it fully. Learning this truth is an art. We will always remain students of it, and it will always be our teacher.

The people who truly understand that they are justified by faith and put it into practice don't brag that they have fully mastered it. Rather, they think of it as a pleasant taste or aroma that they are always pursuing. These people are astonished that they can't comprehend it as fully as they would like. They hunger and thirst for it. They yearn for it more and more. They never get tired of hearing about this truth.

#### □ **Day #4 – Thursday, October 19<sup>th</sup> Read: Galatians 2:16-21**

We are justified through faith in Christ, not through our own efforts. We shouldn't let anyone confuse us by saying that faith justifies people only when love and good works are added to it.

If people hear that they must believe in Christ and that faith alone doesn't justify unless love is added to it, they immediately fall from faith and think, "If faith without love doesn't justify, then faith is empty and useless. Love alone justifies. For if faith is not formed and enhanced by love, then it's nothing." In order to prove their damaging comments, my opponents point to 1 Corinthians 13:1–2: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, . . . I am nothing." They think these verses are an impenetrable wall. But they don't understand Paul's teachings. We should avoid these comments as if they were poison from hell.

Instead, we should conclude with Paul that we are justified by faith alone, not through faith formed by love. So we shouldn't attribute the power of justification to something formed in us that makes us pleasing to God. We must attribute it to faith, which takes hold of Christ the Savior and keeps him in our hearts. This faith justifies us apart from love and prior to love. We concede that we must also teach about good works and love. But we only teach these at the proper time and place—when the question deals with how we should live, not how we are justified. The question here is this: How do we become justified and receive eternal life? We answer with Paul that we are pronounced righteous through faith in Christ alone, not by our own efforts.

Wanting to be justified by our own works through the law is so wrong that the apostle Paul calls this throwing away God's grace. It shows not only ingratitude—which is extremely bad in itself—but also contempt, because we should eagerly seek God's grace. Instead, we shove aside his grace, which we receive free of charge. This is a serious error.

Consider Paul's argument: "If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" Paul confidently declares that either Christ's death was pointless, which is the highest blasphemy against God, or Christ's death was essential, and through the law we can have nothing but sin. Some teachers categorize various kinds of righteousness using distinctions they have made up in their heads. If these teachers try to bring these ideas to theology, they should be kept far away from the Holy Scriptures. For these people say one kind is moral righteousness, another is righteousness of faith, and they describe others I don't even know about. Let civil government have its kind of righteousness, the philosophers have theirs, and each person have their own.

But we must understand righteousness the way the Bible explains it. The apostle clearly says that there is no other righteousness than through faith in Jesus Christ. All other works, even those according to the holiest laws of God, do not offer righteousness. Not only that, but they are actually sins. Our sins are so great and so far away from righteousness that it was necessary for the Son of God to die so that righteousness could be given to us. When discussing theology, don't call anything righteousness that is apart from faith in Christ.

#### □ **Day #5 – Friday, October 20<sup>th</sup> Read: John 16:33**

We should learn to remind ourselves of Christ's victory. In Christ, we already have everything that we need. We live only to spread this message of victory to other people. With our words and example, we tell them about the victory that Christ secured for us and gave to us. Christ, our victor, accomplished everything.

We don't need to add anything to it. We don't need to wipe away our own sins or try to conquer death and the devil. Everything has already been done for us. We're not fighting the real battle. We're only suffering now in order to share in Christ's victory. All of our suffering combined, even all the suffering and blood of the martyrs and saints, wouldn't give us the victory. It's not accomplished by what we do.

Some people claim that we ought to be able to conquer sin, death, and hell on our own. By saying this, they insult Christ. But our struggles and fighting come way too late. The battle must have been won already if we are to have any comfort and peace. Christ says, "I have already won. Accept my victory. Sing about it and glorify it. Take comfort in it."

We know from the past that when believers were severely tested, the Holy Spirit reminded them of Christ's victory and strengthened them so that they could endure everything. They could even face martyrdom, relying on Christ's victory. May God help us also to hold on to Christ's victory during our troubles and when we're dying. Even though we don't understand these words of Christ completely, we can still believe in them in times of trouble and reassure ourselves: "My Lord and Savior spoke these words to my heart. In Christ I have a victor over the world, death, and the devil. It doesn't matter how small and weak I am. Amen."

### □ Day #6 – Saturday, October 21<sup>st</sup> Read: John 3:16

In this passage, Jesus tells us how he destroyed death and how we will survive it. Jesus is the antidote for death. Nevertheless, death and the law condemned Jesus so that he had to die and be buried. Yet Jesus rose again from the dead.

But how do we approach our Redeemer and Savior? Do we approach him with personal sacrifice and religious rules? No! Just hold on to the Son in faith. He has overcome death and stabbed the devil's stomach.

Although he was crucified under Annas and Caiaphas, Jesus will rule and reign. So we must remain in him. Then we will be able to tear right through death and the devil, for the passage says, "Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Accept it as true. Accept this wonderful truth that God loved the world and say, "I believe in the Son of God, who was also the son of Mary, who was nailed to the cross and lifted up." Then you will experience the new birth. Death and sin will no longer condemn you. They will no longer bring you harm, sorrow, or pain. Whoever believes in the Son will have eternal life.

Cling to Christ's neck, or hold on to his clothes. This means believing that Jesus became a man and suffered for you. Make the sign of the cross and say, "I am a Christian, and I will prevail." Death won't prevail. Death couldn't hold on to Christ. "It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Acts 2:24) because deity and humanity were united in one person, Jesus Christ. In the same way, we won't remain dead. We will destroy death if we remain in the faith and cling to the destroyer of death, Jesus Christ.