

Tetzel, the Super Salesman

It is about a man selling a product. Why is pastor talking about a salesman?

Now, this is no ordinary salesman: he is not selling a whole life policy, neither detergent nor is he selling cars but he is selling something much more important than the ordinary things in life. He is selling a spiritual insurance, that is, if you trust him and his product is genuine. He was selling indulgences. His name is Tetzel. He lived a long time ago, in the year 1500s; none of us lived during that time. He was giving the assurance that if you buy indulgences from the Roman Catholic Church, it could dramatically reduce the time your parents spent in purgatory. This was a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, which taught that good Catholics do not immediately go to heaven but they need to spend some time in a middle place called purgatory, where the you need to pay for your sins. There the fires of hell will cleanse your sins. This of course implied that Christ's death on the cross was insufficient to save men from their sins and you must do something to get you out of purgatory. Now, no one really knows how many indulgences you must buy. So, many generations will continue to buy indulgences to release their loved ones from purgatory. Furthermore, indulgences also absolve you of your sins, even in the greatest gross sins – even violating the Virgin Mary. There is another reason why Tetzel was selling indulgences: to raise money for the restoring of St. Peter's Basilica. So, Tetzel went everywhere in Wittenburg shouting out his tune, "When the coin in the box rings, a soul in purgatory springs". How ingenious. Often, he played on the emotions of the people appealing to their love for their parents in purgatory.

Many believed Tetzel and his product but there was one man who saw through this hypocrisy. His name is Martin Luther and a monk from the Augustinian order. He wanted a debate on this matter, so he nailed 95 statements on the castle door of Wittenburg. That was in the year 1517. That was a usual way of calling for a debate. This sparked an event in history called the Great 16th Century Protestant Reformation.

Early next month, Covenant Church together with many Reformed Churches in the world will celebrate this event. With other Reformed Churches, we believe that Salvation is by faith alone, without works. Tetzel, and the Roman Catholic Church taught a salvation by works. You need to do something in order to be saved from your sins – do-good works and purchase indulgences. Instead, we believe we are saved through faith and complete reliance in the finished work of Christ on the cross, without works. There is absolutely nothing we can do to earn our salvation. We are born sinners and will continue to commit sin but only by the mercy of God, we are saved from our sins and given a new heart to love and serve God. Rome's authority of faith and practice comes from the popes and councils. But, we believe that Scripture alone is our only authoritative and infallible guide. To Scripture alone we know the way of salvation; to Scripture alone, we know that our sins are forgiven by Christ who died for us on the cross and not by purchasing indulgences. To Scripture alone, we have assurance of eternal life. Amen.

Pastor Paul Goh