



Reformation Reflections

MAKING THE GOOD CONFESSION

“I shall go to Worms though there be as many devils as tiles on the roofs.”

Martin Luther was traveling to Worms to stand before the Emperor of the Roman Empire, Charles V. Back in June of 1520, Luther had been threatened with excommunication. By January 3, 1521, his grace period had run out and the deed was done.

The Pope expected the Emperor to enforce the excommunication, but Luther's protector, ***Elector Frederick***, demanded that Luther first be given a trial on German soil. Frederick had influence with Charles because he had declined nomination to be emperor and then voted for him. This, and the fact that the new emperor needed the support of the German princes, prompted Charles to call for Luther to come to Worms. He even guaranteed him safe passage.



These were the political circumstances surrounding one of the most harrowing confessions of faith the world has ever known. It happened at the meeting known as the Diet of Worms. A Diet was a meeting of the Holy Roman Empire's electors, princes and city representatives. This particular meeting lasted from January 28 through May 25. Luther was called before the assembly on April 17, 1521.

An aid to the Pope noted that, during Luther's ten day trip from Wittenberg to Worms, he was received as a hero of the German state. He wrote a message to Rome saying, "Nine-tenths of the people are shouting 'Luther,' and the other tenth are crying, 'Death to the Roman Court.'" It may have been easy for Luther to defy the devils on the roofs under such conditions. When he arrived in Worms, however, things changed.



In a hushed room, before the most powerful men in the world, Luther was asked two questions; would he acknowledge the books lain on a table as his, and would he recant all that he had written. Luther seemed to be unprepared for this moment. He quietly acknowledged the books, but asked for more time to consider the second question.

What weighed in the balance of Luther's confession was the true Word of the Gospel. Salvation by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, was at the core of all that he wrote. If he recanted, the Gospel would suffer. If he refused, he would suffer.

The next afternoon, April 18, Luther was again before the Court. When pushed for a simple answer as to whether he would recant he replied:

Unless I am convinced of error by the testimony of Scripture or ... by manifest reasoning, I stand convinced by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is taken captive by God's word, I cannot and will not recant anything, for to act against our conscience is neither safe for us, nor open to us. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me.

God gave Luther strength to make the good confession. Under extreme pressure, he found Jesus' promise to be true; that the Holy Spirit would give believers words when called before kings. The same promise and the same strength is yours. You may not stand before kings, but in your daily life God uses you to make the good confession of salvation through faith in Jesus.



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