



## Opening the Door to Luther Transcript

Pope:

Arise, Oh Lord, and judge your cause. A wild boar has invaded your vineyard."

Rick Steves:

A wild boar. This is how the pope, in 1520, described Martin Luther. Luther was a German monk who questioned the Church's practice of selling forgiveness. Hi, I'm Rick Steves and today, we're travel partners. The goal of our trip: to get to know Martin Luther.

We'll see how one monk sparked the Reformation, which created the Protestant movement and, eventually, the Lutheran Church. During Luther's time, Germany--which is about the size of Montana--was a confusing collection of over 300 little feudal states.

Rick Steves:

We'll travel from Eisleben where Luther was born to the university town of Wittenberg where he taught and preached. After a pilgrimage south to the Vatican in Rome, we'll follow the tumultuous events of the Reformation at Worms, Erfurt, Eisenach, Marburg and Augsburg. When Martin Luther was born, nearly all of Western Europe looked to Rome as the head of the Church. By Luther's death in 1546, Europe was divided between Roman Christians and protesting--or Protestant--Christians.

Rick Steves:

Luther was born in medieval Europe but grew up in a time of great change. Imagine medieval life. Ninety percent of the people were poor, illiterate peasants ruled by kings, nobles and bishops. Most children died before adulthood. Thirty years was a long life. Plague was a constant fear. People worked the land, hoping only to survive the winter. Life for most was a dreary preparation for heaven.

Rick Steves:

The Christian Church gave people hope for a better life after death. But by Luther's time, the medieval Church--administered from distant Rome was losing touch with people's needs. The Bible and church services were in Latin, a dead language spoken only by Europe's elite. Corrupt popes and bishops, living in luxury while others struggled, were tarnishing the Church's reputation. And worst of all, the Church hierarchy had become entangled with politics. Popes waged war. Bishops were princes. In much of Europe, there was no real separation of church and state. Sins were crimes, and tithes were collected like taxes. Bishops were treated like royalty. When one entered the room, you knelt and kissed his ring.

Rick Steves:

Throughout Western Europe, the only acceptable way to be Christian was as part of the Roman Catholic Church and that Church had begun paying its bills by selling forgiveness. In one turbulent generation, the Reformation changed all that. And Martin Luther--known as the father of Protestantism--is counted right up there with Gutenberg and Newton--as one of the most influential people of the past millennium.

Rick Steves:

Big changes were percolating around 1500: Columbus sailed to America. Gutenberg's printing press made books affordable. Imagine Europe's class of 1500. Along with Martin Luther, young Michelangelo was chipping his early masterpieces, Macchiavelli studied modern politics, and Copernicus was putting the earth in it's place. The conservative Church--which defended the notion that the world was flat and the center of the universe--found itself at odds with these new ideas. Magellan sailed around the world. Renaissance thinkers embraced science. And humanists saw life as more than just a preparation for what happens after you die. With all this, the Church's ability to control the thinking of Europe took a big hit. The Church couldn't stop these revolutionary ideas or keep the printing press from churning them out.

Rick Steves:

Martin Luther was born in this house here in Eisleben, south of Berlin. His father was in the copper mining business. And here in Eisenach, young Luther developed his appetite for learning, music, and the Bible. Martin was a hard-working guy, smart enough to get into law school. His friends nicknamed him "the philosopher." They also called him things like the "king of hops" for his love of beer.

Rick Steves:

But Martin never became a lawyer. He had an obsession which came first--finding deliverance from an angry God. According to a popular story, in 1505, returning to school after a trip home, he was thrown from his horse during a thunderstorm. Terrified, he promised St. Anne--the patron saint of miners and his family--that he'd become a monk.

Rick Steves:

Twenty-one year old Martin checked into this Augustinian monastery--famous for discipline and scholarship--in Erfurt. As a monk, Luther sought God's love with all his heart and soul and mind. Ignoring his worldly needs, he did everything he could to earn worthiness in God's eyes. He'd spend up to six hours in the confession booth--and still, he found no peace. He learned Greek and Hebrew in order to read the most ancient manuscripts of the Bible. By age 23 he was ordained a priest, said his first Mass in this church, and was on the fast track to become a professor of theology.

Rick Steves:

In 1510 Brother Martin was sent to Rome. He hiked there...about 700 miles, through a severe winter. He was enthusiastic about his trip to the Vatican. When he first saw the city, he dropped to his knees and said "Hail, holy city of Rome!" Rome--so rich in relics--was a holy supermarket

of merits for pilgrims interested in getting to heaven without a detour through purgatory. Most Christians believed they would go to heaven only if they did more good than evil. And most figured they'd fall short. So when they died, God would need to purge them of their excess sin. They called this process purgatory and thought of it as thousands of years of misery. To reduce time in purgatory, many tried to pile up good works in this lifetime by venerating relics and doing penance. In Rome, Luther did his Church business. Then, like any earnest pilgrim--he spent his free time visiting relics.

Rick Steves:

Martin visited the reconstructed steps of Pontius Pilate's palace--supposedly the very steps Jesus climbed on the day he was condemned. As Roman Catholic pilgrims still do today, he climbed the holy steps on his knees, saying the Lord's Prayer on each step. The pilgrim's reward for this climb: 9 years less time in purgatory for each step. Later, Luther wrote that, reaching the top, he stood up and thought "Who knows if it's true?"

Rick Steves:

Back home, Luther was sent here, to the remote outpost of Wittenberg to teach in Prince Frederick the Wise's new university. Outwardly cheerful and devout, inside Martin Luther was in crisis--tormented by feelings of his own unworthiness. Even as he blessed the bread for Mass, he silently hated God for demanding a moral standard no mortal could ever achieve. He devoured the Bible looking for an answer and found it in Paul's letter to the Romans.

Rick Steves:

There it was. Luther realized the "good news" is that God makes sinners righteous through their faith in Jesus Christ. Rather than earning salvation by fasting or doing good works...it's a free gift to anyone who believes. As this concept of unearned grace took hold, Luther said, "I felt myself to have been born again." As Luther studied, debated and taught his thoughts developed. As he preached here and throughout Saxony, his controversial ideas spiced his sermons. The pews were packed. People traveled to hear Luther's message.

Martin Luther:

In our Latin Bible, "repent" has come to mean "to do penance." But in the original Greek it means "to change one's mind"--and that is what Jesus meant. Jesus didn't ask for penance...works, deeds or rituals...he asks for a simple change of heart. Salvation is not earned by pilgrimages to Rome, veneration of relics, or Masses attended. We need only Jesus Christ. Jesus paid for our sins. Salvation is a gift from God."

Rick Steves:

The more Martin read the Bible, the more conflict he found between salvation through faith and the Church's salvation through rituals and good works. He kept returning to Romans 3:28: "A man is justified by faith"...for emphasis, Martin added, "and faith alone." Coincidentally, as Luther struggled with these issues, the pope kicked off a capital campaign to build a grand new church in Rome. The thousand year old St. Peters was condemned and a glorious new church

was planned. It would be very expensive--and Germans would foot much of the bill. To raise money, the papacy sold church offices--one young prince bought a bishopric for 10,000 ducats, based on 1000 per commandment. And the Church sold indulgences.

Rick Steves:

Indulgences were basically spiritual coupons relieving you from penalties you owed because of your sins. The Church got these merits from Jesus and the saints whose virtuous lives earned a holy warehouse of extra merits. Papal fund-raisers came out in full force. With a fanfare of drummers and trumpeters, the super-salesmonk, John Tetzel, came to Martin Luther's neighborhood. He offered letters of indulgence promising "full forgiveness for all sins and absolution from all punishments." These were fully-transferable and ideal for bailing loved ones out of purgatory. Peasants lined up to buy as Tetzel's men sang, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, another soul from purgatory springs."

Martin Luther:

"God's forgiveness cannot be purchased like a sack of potatoes. The pope needs more prayer than money."

Rick Steves:

Hoping a scholarly debate would lead to reform, Luther posted his famous 95 thesis here. This is a copy of the original door. That date--Oct 31, 1517--marks the most important religious event of the last 1000 years. It kicked off the Reformation and October 31 is still celebrated as Reformation day. Luther, who had no thought of rebellion, began with a conciliatory tone.

Martin Luther:

Out of love and zeal for truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following thesis will be publicly discussed at Wittenberg University.

Rick Steves:

Topics ranged from giving alms to the scriptural basis of purgatory. But for most, the key issue was the sale of indulgences. Luther's propositions--quickly printed and circulated--were the talk of Germany. He became famous almost overnight. People were energized by Luther's ideas. The sale of indulgences dropped dramatically. Tetzel had to actually go into hiding from angry German mobs who now sang "When the coin rings in the pitcher, the pope becomes richer."

Rick Steves:

Luther's challenge was taken up. Nearby, at the university of Leipzig, the famous scholar, John Eck, debated Luther. Declaring himself victorious, Eck headed for Rome and helped write a papal bull. That's a decree issued under the papal seal--threatening excommunication. It gave Luther 60 days to recant or be kicked out of the church.

Rick Steves:

Saying, "The Romans can overcome us only on the grounds of reason and the Scriptures," Luther

backed up his stand by publishing four influential pamphlets. These struck much deeper at church doctrine than his views on the simple sale of indulgences. Luther argued that there were two church hierarchies: a visible one based in Rome and a more important spiritual one acknowledging only Christ; he called on local governments to legislate reforms that the Roman Church refused to make; he rejected the idea that Christians must earn salvation through good works; and, he explained how a Christian is both lord of all and servant of all.

Rick Steves:

This war of words escalated. The pope ordered the burning of Luther's books. Luther responded.  
47 CU of Luther in previous painting

Martin Luther:

"If they damn my books, I'll burn the entire canon law."

Rick Steves:

As the pope's men burned Luther's books, Luther's supporters burned books of Church laws. Really heating things up, Luther tossed the papal bull into the fire. The two most powerful people in Europe were the pope and the Holy Roman Emperor. The pope was furious. And the emperor--Charles V--was a devout Catholic. But he was also the German king. The Holy Roman Empire was a confederation of German states. Since these states elected the emperor, Charles' power required their continuing support. He needed to deal with Luther.

Rick Steves:

To further complicate things, the Turks were threatening Europe from the east. Charles knew he'd need German help to beat them. Knowing Luther had powerful German friends, Charles proceeded cautiously. He agreed to give Luther a hearing and called him to the imperial diet--that's like a congress--in the city of Worms on the Rhine. Germany was thrilled with Martin Luther's challenge to Rome.

Rick Steves:

Traveling to Worms, he was greeted with a hero's welcome at each stop. Pamphlets showed him with a halo, accompanied by a dove--symbol of the holy spirit. In one town, sixty horsemen escorted Luther to the church so filled with people eager to hear him preach that the balcony groaned and nearly collapsed. Imagine the showdown here at Worms: Papal representatives, princes, Imperial troops--all power-dressing...and Charles, sitting high on his throne. In the center of the room: Martin Luther stood beside a table stacked with his trouble-causing books and pamphlets.

Martin Luther:

Unless you can convince me by scripture or by clear reasoning, I am bound by my beliefs..I cannot and I will not recant. God help me. Amen.

Rick Steves:

The prosecutor, John Eck again, condemned Luther as a heretic. Summing up his case, he asked "who are you to go against 1500 years of Church doctrine?" Luther left Worms an outlaw. Now "outside the protection of the law," Luther could be captured and killed by anyone. On his way home, he was kidnaped. Many thought Luther had been killed. The great German painter Albrecht Durer wrote "O God, if Luther is dead, who will teach us the holy Gospel so clearly? All you pious Christians, pray that God will send us another enlightened man."

Rick Steves:

But Luther was alive, safely hidden in the Wartburg Castle at Eisenach--courtesy of Frederick the Wise. Around 1500, emerging nations were becoming bolder. And many German princes--like Frederick--saw the Roman Church as an obstacle to greater power. After all: year after year local fortunes went to Rome in the form of tithes. The only people who could thumb their noses at a prince's laws were pope-appointed Church officials. And the biggest local landowner in their realm was the Church. Nobles often willed their land to monasteries and convents in return for prayers to speed them through purgatory.

Rick Steves:

But breaking with Rome could cause a war. While Charles V--with the mighty Spanish army at his disposal--wanted a German alliance against the Turks, he was also ready to defend the Church. The battle lines--if confused--were drawn. For nearly a year, Luther hid out at Wartburg Castle.

This was Luther's room. Restless, over-fed, and lonely in the castle--he continued his lifelong battle with Satan. It was here that he employed his favorite weapon--the printed word. Believing that everyone should be able to read the word of God, Luther began the huge task of translating the New Testament from Greek to German.

Martin Luther:

Give us simple words...not those of the court, for this book should be famous for its simplicity.

Rick Steves:

As protesting Christians read the new German Bible and found no mention of indulgences, purgatory, or even a pope, the fires of reform were fanned. breath, looking at exterior of castle at twilight Eventually, Luther, disguised as a knight with a big beard, left the castle and returned home. Luther settled back into his monastery dormitory, at Wittenberg today called Luther Hall. It was here that Luther wrote the Little Catechism--used by centuries of Lutheran parents to teach their children, and composed many of his great hymns.

Rick Steves:

With his inner circle, he gave direction to the reformation. This theological think tank was the birthplace of the Lutheran church. Luther's faculty colleague--the Greek scholar--Philip Melancthon was the quintessential emaciated intellectual. Melancthon became Luther's lifelong ally and friend--and the second most important figure in the Lutheran reformation. The Lutheran movement introduced two essential changes: First, salvation is a gift from God--we're saved by

our faith--not by good works or sacraments. Second, the Bible alone is the word of God and the only source of religious authority. Luther rejected five of the Roman Church's seven sacraments--keeping only those actions commanded by Jesus: Baptism and Communion. Luther helped make Christianity accessible. In his "priesthood of all believers," whether a school teacher in front of a blackboard or a farmer behind a plow, we're all equally capable of understanding God's word and can receive salvation without the help of intermediaries.

Rick Steves:

Luther taught that those who call themselves bishops, popes, and priests are, in the scriptures, called shepherds and servants...their task is to care for the rest of us. And pastors were free to marry. There's nothing in the Bible that says they can't. The former monk Martin married a former nun, Katherine von Bora. Martin and Katherine had six children and raised four orphans. And Katie--who ran the huge and busy Luther household--was a welcome partner in Luther's circle.

Martin Luther:

Marriage is a better school for the character than any monastery for it's here that your corners are rubbed off.

Rick Steves:

Luther's dining room table was a social and intellectual jam session. It was where his students, house guests and fellow reformers gathered, drinking Katie's home-brewed beer and eating the Luther's almost out of house and home. They'd spend long hours discussing and debating religious issues and applying their faith concretely to everyday life. Luther's followers hung on his every word. Over 6000 entries--from silly to profound--were collected by his students in an anthology later called "Table Talk."

Martin Luther:

The monks are the fleas on God Almighty's fur coat. What lies there are about relics! How does it happen that 18 apostles are buried in Germany when Christ had only 12? I would have died if I had been in the ark. It was dark, three times the size of my house and full of animals. God uses lust to impel men to marriage, ambition to office, avarice to earning and fear to faith.

Rick Steves:

It's from these notes we sort through Luther's moral pluses and minuses. He was earthy and certainly enjoyed his beer. He was intolerant of Jews and everyone else who disagreed with his theology. He was also vulnerable. When his daughter died he was broken but found healing in the scripture. Luther struggled with depression all his life. He fought the devil during these times.

Martin Luther:

Whenever the devil pesters you, at once seek out the company of friends, drink more, joke and

jest, or engage in some form of merriment.

Rick Steves:

Luther loved music which he figured the devil hated. In perhaps his deepest depression he wrote one of Christendom's greatest hymns, "A Mighty Fortress." It declares that all the power of the devil and all the evils of the world cannot stand up to God. Luther opened a flood gate of reform. He trained an entire generation of new pastors and church leaders. Pastors led worship in German without wearing the traditional robes. They purged churches of relics and put a halt to the lucrative enterprise of reciting Masses for the dead. City councils kept charitable money formerly sent to Rome for local needs. And by breaking Rome's hold on Christianity, Luther opened a Pandora's box. Some new religious groups reformed way beyond Luther's comfort zone: often tossing out all remnants of traditional worship.

Rick Steves:

The Roman Church warned that the Reformation would bring a storm of conflicting interpretations of the Bible. It did. And most Protestant leaders were not particularly open-minded. One reformer wrote: "Individual interpretation of the Bible allows each man to carve his own path to hell." The Anabaptists--a group prominent in Switzerland--believed in adult rather than infant baptism and were strictly non-violent. When Swiss authorities began executing Anabaptists for their refusal to serve in the local military, Luther supported the crackdown because he was against civil disobedience.

Rick Steves:

By 1529 a group of states protesting the emperor's attempt to force all of Europe to be Roman Catholic, realized that to survive, they'd need to hammer out a theological common ground and make a political alliance. Now called "Protestants," they met here at Marburg castle--just north of Frankfurt. The meeting included Luther, the leading Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli, and a number of other reformers. They summarized their beliefs and agreed on everything except one point: the actual presence of Christ in the wine and bread of Communion. On this issue, Luther--still listening only to "logic backed by scripture"--was inflexible. He said "God commands 'take, eat, this IS my body.'

Rick Steves

This issue--how Christ is present in the sacrament--still divides many Christians today. A world away from all this theological debate, the Turks were now actually threatening Vienna. Emperor Charles V returned to Germany. His mission: to settle these religious issues once and for all and unite Europe against the Turks. He reassembled the congress at Augsburg. The Protestant leaders drew up a list of ways they differed with Rome. Luther--still technically an outlaw was sidelined for his own safety at this castle in Coburg. Luther enthusiastically endorsed this document--the Augsburg Confession--written and presented by Melancthon. To this day, this founding document defines the Lutheran church.

Rick Steves:

But the Roman theologians and the Protestants were unable to agree and the negotiations broke off. This exasperated Luther and left him believing the Roman Christians were hopeless. It also left Charles without his German alliance. The German princes' break with Rome eventually led to a hundred years of religious wars. Many historians call this the first world war since virtually every part of Europe was involved. In 1648, with Europe dazed and a third of Germany dead, a treaty was finally signed. The result: not religious freedom. But now the leaders of each country were free to decide if their subjects would be Roman or Protestant Christians. Much of Europe was divided between a Catholic south and a Protestant north. After Augsburg, Luther returned to Wittenberg where he preached, wrote, and taught.

Rick Steves:

Productive until his last days, he helped establish public education for both boys and girls. He was a valued arbitrator throughout the region. And he enjoyed lots more table talk. Martin Luther died in 1546 in this house in Eisleben, the town where he was born. The biggest funeral procession in memory accompanied his body to the castle church in Wittenberg where he's buried. To this day pilgrims bring flowers.

Rick Steves:

For most of the 500 years since the Reformation, relations between Catholics and Protestants have not been good. But in our lifetime, huge strides have been made. Now, many of the issues have been resolved, and Lutherans and Catholics are working closer together as children of God and followers of Jesus. Today, there are 350 million Protestant Christians. And Christians around the world understand what Martin Luther worked so hard to teach: that we are saved by God's grace through faith. And it's all in the Bible. Thanks for joining us, I'm Rick Steves. God bless each of you and...Auf wiedersehen.