



# EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



## From My Window

On Oct. 14, 1735 John Wesley set sail from England to Georgia with his brother Charles to do missionary work among the Indians in Georgia. About two years later he returned to England a spiritually broken man. In the middle of his trip home (Jan. 13, 1738) a fierce storm came upon the sea. John's ship was tossed to and fro and he thought he was going to die. He later wrote, "I can talk well, but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled." It was not until four months later when he heard a public reading from Luther's *Preface to Romans* that he placed his faith in Christ. Salvation is not a matter of works or words, but as Paul states "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" (Rom. 10:10).



This week is an exciting moment of history for VBTS! After several years of prayer and planning, the Doctor of Ministry in *Expository Preaching* is now underway. The purpose of our degree is to deepen the exegetical and homiletical skills of these ministers of the Gospel. What a blessing to have on campus our first cohort of five godly, qualified men—four pastors from Virginia and Illinois (one not pictured) and one missionary from the Dominican Republic. These are outstanding leaders who are committed to the clear exposition Scripture. The class, titled *Preaching OT & NT Narrative*, entailed a full week of lectures on campus, which is followed by reading, writing, and preaching assignments over the rest of the semester. The course professors are Dr. Brent Belford, Senior Pastor of Colonial Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, and Dr. Samuel Horn, President of The Masters' College and Seminary in Los Angeles, CA. These men bring years of teaching and pastoral experience to the classroom. Thank you for your prayers as this class of Doctor of Ministry students seek to sharpen their skills in the exposition of Scripture for effective ministry in the body of Christ.



## Luther's Discovery of "the Righteousness of God" Rom. 1:17

\*Quotes taken from Ronald Bainton, *Here I Stand* and J. H. M. D'Aubigné, *The History of the Reformation*

**Martin Luther was a young Augustinian monk** who saw that he was a great sinner in the eyes of God and thought it was impossible to "propitiate God on his own." His spiritual struggle focused on the Pauline phrase in Rom. 1:17, "the righteousness of God." Luther described his struggle with astounding transparency:

*Though I lived a monk without reproach, yet, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience.... I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, ... was angry with God and said, "As if ... it is not enough that miserable sinners are eternally lost..., are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law, without having God, add pain to pain by the gospel, for in the gospel He threatens us with his righteous wrath."*

**Luther sought God's peace through hours of confession** in his Augustinian cloister. He confessed several times a day, and one time confessed for six hours straight. He searched his memory and ransacked his motives until finally his confessor grew weary and exclaimed, "Man, God is not angry with you; you are angry with God." Luther said in later years, "I tortured myself almost to death in order to procure peace with God for my troubled heart and agitated conscience; but I ... found peace nowhere."

**Luther sought God's peace and joy by going to Rome**, the epicenter of Christianity in the 1500s where the pope reigned as Christ's Vicar over the church. But in Rome, he saw uncontrolled sin and unrestrained wickedness—even the clergy were openly living with their mistresses. He wrote, "No one can imagine what sins and infamous actions are committed in Rome.... If there is a hell, surely Rome is built over it." Full of anguish, Luther left Rome and returned to Wittenberg. In the words of D'Aubigné, "Turning his eyes with disgust from the pontifical city, he directed them with hope to the Holy Scriptures."

**Luther finally discovered peace** when he gained a proper understanding of "the righteousness of God." Through his meditation upon Paul's writings, he finally recognized the connection between the "righteousness of God" and "the just shall live by faith." He understood it to be a "gifted righteousness" to all who trust Jesus. He said, "I grasped that 'the righteousness of God' is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith. Thereupon, I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into Paradise." Luther, as we, must learn that salvation is a spiritual transaction—"our sin forgiven; his righteousness given."

**In conclusion, listen to Luther's moving words** as he describes the joy and peace he experienced upon his spiritual rebirth:

*I saw the Holy Scriptures with other eyes ... as previously I had detested with all my heart these words, 'the righteousness of God,' I began from that hour to value them and to love them, as the sweetest and most consoling words in the Bible. In very truth, this language of St. Paul was to me the true gate of Paradise.... If you have true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly, but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.*

Oh what a Savior, oh what peace! May we today enjoy the righteousness that is ours in Christ—as sin reigned in death, grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life (Rom. 5:21).