

## April 23<sup>rd</sup>

This week contains many historic events – April 19, Lexington and Concord, Waco’s Branch Dividians, and the Oklahoma City bombing. But there was another April 19 that changed the world through a simple monk. Martin Luther found salvation by grace alone in 1513 in his Tower Experience, and then posted 95 theses, or arguments, against the supreme power of the pope, greed in the church and abuse of indulgences. It wasn’t until about 1519 that he realized the concepts of Law and Gospel that many Christians had missed, hence had false views of faith that threatened to condemn them. Many historians say he was transformed from a critic to a Reformer with that knowledge. It was at that time that he began to write furiously, 30 books in 36 months, often about abuses in the church. It was too much for the Roman pope and he excommunicated Luther in January 1521.

Instead of diminishing support for Luther, it fueled the German people. His popularity warped the ruling authorities’ plans. Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, agreed to hear Luther’s arguments at the Diet (rotating location legislature) to be held in Worms in April. This would include secular rulers as well as church men. The church leaders all wanted him condemned to death without trial, but Luther was promised a fair trial. Duke Frederick, Luther’s ruler, talked to Staupintz, his mentor. He said he knew what was coming. They would demand Luther recant. Luther would have to agree to recant all he said. He would be placed on probation for a few years and required to confess, and that would be it. Staupintz looked at Frederick and said, “Except you don’t understand Luther. He will never recant.”

At 4 o’clock, Luther arrived in the town of Worms where 100,000 people had quintupled the population cheering him on. Luther was confronted immediately with a pile of his books and asked if they were his. Yes, they were. Then he was asked to recant everything he had written. He was stunned that he would not be heard out, just given an ultimatum to recant.

It was a replay. In 1414, Jan Hus, a Czech priest with very similar views as Luther on scripture was given assurances that his ideas would receive an audience at the Church Council of Constance, Germany. The Emperor promised his protection. When he arrived, Nov. 28, 1414, he was arrested, imprisoned and the following year put on trial for heresy, then burned at the stake. As his last words, Hus, whose name in Bohemian means ‘goose’ said, “You will kill this goose but a hundred years from now, you will find a goose you cannot kill.”

Luther’s response was very measured and wavering, “Thus touches God and His Word. This affects the salvation of souls. Of this Christ said, ‘He who denies me before men, him will I deny before my Father.’ To say too little or too much would be dangerous. I beg you, give me time to think it over.” After some deliberation, even though the bishops didn’t think he deserved it, Luther was granted a day to make his reply. Luther spend the night and next day (April 18) in prayer and at six the following evening, gave his famous answer, “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture by clear reason (for I trust neither pope nor council alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves) I am bound by the scriptures I have cited, for my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant

anything since to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor right. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand, may God help me. Amen.”

Luther went back to his quarters and waited for the inevitable summons to execution. Oddly, nothing happened. It is thought that Frederick and company partied late and were hungover. Others said he was cautious since there was such an enormous crowd favoring Luther in town. (Charles was 19 and freshly coronated.) Whatever the case, in the afternoon of April 19, Luther simply decided to start walking home to Wittenberg. He didn't get far. Riders disguised as bandits took him hostage. They were knights of Frederick. He was secretly spirited to Wartburg Castle in Saxony and instructed how to disguise himself as a knight needing R&R. Sometimes it is almost crazy how God is in control.