

The Gospel under Attack

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On October 31, 1517, Dr. Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. He did this because he wanted to begin discussion on the abuses that he saw in the sale of indulgences in Germany. An indulgence was a means of eliminating the suffering people believed they had to do endure for the sins committed during this life that remained unconfessed and for which penance had not been done. The church taught that after death this would happen in a place called purgatory in which people would remain until they had taken care of these sins and would be ready for heaven. In exchange for a gift to the church, the pious Christian was told that a loved one could be released from the punishments of purgatory and join their Savior in heaven. Christians were also buying them as means to living impurely. If they bought an indulgence, some of them believed they could sin openly, because the indulgence would guarantee them forgiveness. Luther simply desired a proper debate on the issue. The way to get a scholarly debate started was to post some theses or statements on a subject, which then could be studied, discussed, and argued. After posting the theses, Luther somewhat naively furnished a copy to the Archbishop of Mainz, who was in charge of the indulgence sale in Luther's area.

Needless to say, the 95 theses immediately created more than discussion. Behind the sale of indulgences was the need to for the pope to raise money to support his lavish lifestyle and to rebuild St. Peter's church in Rome. In addition, a huge sum of money had been borrowed in order to finance the appointing of the Bishop of Mainz. He was using the sale of indulgences to raise money to repay this loan. Luther did not realize he was speaking against an issue supported by powerful men within the church who were not as much concerned with teaching the truths of Scripture as they were in advancing themselves.

Luther naively assumed that the Pope would back him and condemn the sale of indulgences and especially the sales tactics of Johann Tetzel, the salesman who traveled around Germany promoting the indulgences with great pomp and fanfare. Luther commented, "I hoped the Pope would protect me, for I had so fortified my theses with proofs from the Bible and papal decretals that I was sure he would condemn Tetzel and bless me. But where I expected a benediction from Rome, there came thunder and lightning instead, and I was treated like the sheep that had roiled the wolf's water. Tetzel went scot-free, and I must submit to be devoured."

But God was protecting Luther. The Archbishop of Mainz and the Pope were not the only ones with political power. God used the dukes and leaders of Germany to protect Luther. On the political scene, everyone knew that the current emperor Maximilian would not live much longer. As often happens in that kind of political turmoil, there were front-runners for who would be the next emperor. One of the candidates that the Pope liked was Frederick the Wise of Saxony. One of Frederick the Wise's proudest accomplishments was the founding of his University at Wittenberg. Frederick has funded the Doctor's degree in theology for Martin Luther, and Luther pledged to teach at Wittenberg for the rest of his life. Though in the end, Charles V, the King of Spain, was elected the next Holy Roman Emperor, the Pope was reluctant to deal too stringently with Luther for the sake of his relationship with Frederick. Frederick certainly did not want any harm to come his university's most capable professor.

At first Pope Leo X ignored the problem. He reportedly said, "'Tis a mere monkish squabble. The best way is not to meddle with it. It is a drunken German that has written these theses; when the fumes have passed off, he will talk differently.'" But sales of indulgences dropped sharply. The flow of revenue to Rome declined. Tetzel began to attack Luther openly. Opposition to Luther was growing, but so was support. Luther himself calmly continued to lecture to his students. In 1517 he prepared a series of lectures on the New Testament Book of Galatians, in which he continued his theological development. In an important insight, Luther began to see the Christian life as a process. He insisted that Christ and Christ alone is the only source of salvation and the only object of hope. The Christian does not attain perfection, no matter how many good works he does or how many indulgences he purchases. "The Christian life does not consist of being but of becoming, not of victory but the fight, not of righteousness but of justification, not of comprehending but of stretching forward, not of purity but of purification." After Galatians, Luther moved on to Hebrews. He stressed that the only comfort worth having was the comfort of Christ, and with this peace all hope for personal righteousness disappeared. Through faith in Christ alone, Luther said, "are we freed from the law; not that it should not exist, but that it should not be feared, and thus we are freed from the devil; not that he should not be, but that we should be afraid of him, and so from death; not that it should not be, but so that we should not fear it." Luther quietly went about his work of teaching and building the department of theology at the university with little concern about the furor that was going on over his writings all over Europe. His sermons, writings, and theses were being distributed both in German and in Latin all over Europe. People were talking about him far and wide. Pope Leo X continued to have a dilemma. He wanted to silence Luther, but he did not want to offend Frederick the Wise, the Elector of Saxony.

But the quiet was soon broken. A decision was made to ask the Augustinian order to deal with Luther. There was a regular meeting of the order scheduled for the spring of 1518 in Heidelberg. A public debate was normally part of the meeting, usually done to defend some teaching of their founder St. Augustine. Luther was selected to be the debater with the assumption that he would present his teaching on indulgences. Luther chose, however, to use this forum in more traditional way. He shared some of his own

struggles with the concept of the law. His first thesis stated: “The law of God, although the soundest doctrine of life, is not able to bring man to righteousness but rather stands in the way.” In subsequent theses, he described how works could not improve anyone’s standing in the presence of God. Human beings could not satisfy God themselves. The more they tried, the more damned they became. Luther publicly rejected the idea that people could be saved by doing “what was in them.” His thesis 16 stated: “Anyone who thinks he would attain righteousness by doing what is in him is adding sin to sin, so that he becomes doubly guilty.” Finally Luther declared the wondrous gospel. “The law says, ‘Do this!’ and it is never done. Grace says, ‘Believe in this man!’ and immediately everything is done.” As a result of the discussions at Heidelberg, the Augustinians had dealt with Luther, but not in the way the authorities had hoped. He acquired new friends, new supporters, and returned to Wittenberg as a hero. Luther became more and more convinced that the church needed a Reformation. He said only God knew when and how this would occur, but that it was the business of the entire Christian world and of God Himself.

But the opposition was gaining strength as well. Johann Tetzel found an argument that was to be used against Luther over and over again. Tetzel insisted on the absolute authority of the pope and declared that anyone, like Luther, who questioned what the pope said was a heretic. The same argument was used by another opponent, John Eck. Eck argued that Luther was disturbing the order of the church, inciting rebellion among the people, and questioning the authority of the pope. The Dominican order, the order to which Tetzel belonged, appeared to be organizing active opposition against Luther in Rome. They succeeded in having an official pronouncement from Rome declare Luther in error for rejecting the pope’s stand on indulgences. They ordered Luther to come to Rome to face heresy charges. But friends of Luther were able to work through the elector Frederick the Wise to have the case transferred to Germany. They feared for Luther’s safety were he to go to Rome. Luther was ordered to appear before Cardinal Cajetan in Augsburg.

This meeting did not have as good an ending as did the meeting at Heidelberg. The Cardinal presented Luther with three demands: “First, repent your errors and recant them. Second, promise not to teach them again. Third, refrain from doing anything that might disturb the peace of the church.” Luther asked Cajetan to specify his errors. Cajetan pointed to Luther’s teaching on indulgences and his insistence that faith rather than the sacraments justify. But the ultimate issue was authority. What is the ultimate authority in the church? If it were the pope, then the pope would have the right to declare the validity of indulgences. Luther, however, insisted that a council was above the pope in matters of doctrine, that faith was necessary before the sacraments could be effective, and that the Scriptures were finally authoritative in matters of doctrine because all human beings could err. But Cajetan insisted that Luther recant, and even many of Luther’s friends urged him to recant. Luther hurriedly left Augsburg and returned to Wittenberg. Cajetan informed Frederick the Wise that he should hand Luther over to him to be taken to Rome or at least expel Luther from Frederick’s territories. But Luther also informed the elector of what happened in Augsburg. The elector decided to continue to protect

Luther and informed Cajetan that he would not hand Luther over unless Luther was convicted of heresy. He would not do anything without Luther getting a fair trial.

Several other meetings and maneuverings took place. At the beginning of 1519, Luther met with a special emissary of the pope, Karl von Miltitz. After some discussion, the meeting with Miltitz ended with both sides agreeing to be silent if the other side would also be silent. The elector was maneuvering politically to continually delay any formal trial of Luther and to confuse the papal representatives. Meanwhile, the Emperor Maximilian died. The elector, while no longer a front runner for becoming emperor, was still one of the seven individuals who would elect the new emperor. The pope could not afford to alienate any of the electors. In fact, the pope even offered to support Frederick's candidacy, although Frederick did not take the offer seriously. God was using the political situation to provide both safety for Martin Luther and time for Martin Luther's theology and understandings to continue to develop.

Luther studied both Hebrew and Greek at this time. He also began to approach the study of the Scriptures differently. In the middle ages, Scripture passages had been used primarily for proof texts. Often passages were quoted with little concern for what they meant in the context of what was said before or after the text. Luther discovered this when he began a second time to study the Psalms. Luther looked at each of the Psalms as an entity to be understood as a whole. A new way of approaching the Scriptures was dawning. Meaning was to be found from the text and its context.

Sometime during this same period, Luther made an important personal discovery. For Luther it was one of those rare moments in life when suddenly something makes sense. He had always struggled with the idea of the righteousness of God. In his earlier lectures on Romans he had moved towards understanding it as the gift of God to people rather than the characteristic of a demanding and perfect God. But during this period of Luther's life, it all came into focus. He finally understood it both intellectually and personally. Sometimes this discovery for Luther is called his "tower experience." Whether it actually occurred as he was studying or meditating in the tower of the Castle Church at Wittenberg is a matter of historical speculation. But the focus of the discovery is beyond dispute. Luther himself describes that wonderful experience.

During that year [late 1518 or early 1519] . . . I was seized with the conviction that I must understand [Paul's] letter to the Romans. I did not have a heart of stone, but to that moment one phrase in chapter 1 [verse 17] stood in my way. I hated the idea, "in it the righteousness of God is revealed," for I had been taught to understand the term, "the righteousness of God," in the formal or active sense, as the philosophers called it, according to which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

I lived without reproach as a monk, but my conscience was disturbed to its very depths and all I knew about myself was that I was a sinner. I could not believe that anything that I thought or did or prayed satisfied God. I did not love, nay I

hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. Certainly, and with intense grumbling (perhaps even blasphemy), I was angry with God and said, “As if it were indeed not enough that miserable sinners who are eternally lost through original sin and are crushed again by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments, God himself adds pain to pain in the gospel by threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!”

At last, meditating day and night and by the mercy of God, I gave heed to the context of the words, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” Then I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith. . . . Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through gates that had been flung open. An entirely new side of the Scriptures opened itself to me . . . and I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the loathing with which before I had hated the term, “the righteousness of God.” Thus, that verse in Paul was for me truly the gate of paradise.

Luther had been forced to test his discovery of the gospel in the defenses he had given. Luther was forced to think about the implications of what he was teaching. As he did so, what had been building for years suddenly became crystal clear. This was the conviction by which Luther lived for the rest of his life. This conviction, this discovery of the Gospel, is the heart and basis of Lutheran theology: the sinner is justified or declared righteous in the sight of God by God’s grace in Jesus Christ, an undeserved gift, through faith.

But even more debates lay ahead. An associate of Luther at Wittenberg, Andreas Carlstadt, was called upon to defend a series of theses against John Eck. Though Eck and Carlstadt were to debate, everyone knew the real issues they were debating were Luther’s. As the debate began, Carlstadt tried to use his extensive library, from which he was quoting at length. The formal rules of debate said that debaters were not allowed to use their books. After he was required to put his books away, Carlstadt began to weaken. Luther took over the debate. Luther in the midst of debate was again moving to solidify an important truth of the Reformation. The issue now was that of authority. Luther readily admitted that both the pope and church councils could and did err. Luther was moving towards the realization that ultimately only the Scriptures themselves were authoritative for the church. Luther began to realize that the pope and councils only had human authority in the church. Jesus Christ is the only head of the church. For the church, that authority is found in the Scriptures, not in human leaders. The lines continued to harden. There were those who supported Luther and those who wanted him excommunicated and removed from the church. Tensions were mounting. There were wholesale condemnations of Luther and his teachings, and there were calls for armed opposition against Rome. On June 20, 1520, the pope published a bull or decree in Rome against Luther. Called *Exsurge Domine* (Arise, O Lord), the bull gave Luther 60 days to recant or be excommunicated along with all of his followers. Luther, however, was in no mood to compromise. Luther published a small book entitled *On the Papacy at Rome*, in

which he stated that there were two churches in the world. One was external, visible, and had the hierarchy and the pope as its head. The other was a spiritual, inner Christendom that only acknowledged Jesus Christ. Luther told the elector that it appeared that Germany soon must free itself from the former.

In December of 1520, the bull was formally burned in the City of Wittenberg. Luther's colleagues invited the public to gather outside the city walls. There they burned a number of papal books. Luther himself stepped forward and threw the bull into the fire. In a sense, that was Luther recognizing that a final break had occurred. Luther said afterwards, "I, Martin Luther, . . . make known hereby to every one that by my wish, advice, and act . . . the books of the Pope of Rome . . . were burned."

The year 1520 saw Luther also publish three very important treatises. The first one was primarily political in intent, although it was theological in content. Luther's *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* called upon the secular authorities to step in and put in place the reforms that the pope and the church did not seem willing to do. Luther claimed that the church, its priests, and the pope himself were subject to government and responsible for their deeds and their misdeeds. The German nobility should exercise their authority and protect the Germans both physically and spiritually from the "ravens wolves who come dressed in sheep's clothing as if they were shepherds and rulers." In this document Luther also began to develop what came to be called his idea of the "priesthood of all believers." Every Christian is a "little Christ" in service to his neighbor. Christians are not subject to the priests or dependent on them for the means of grace. To illustrate his point, Luther says: "If a little company of Christian laymen were taken prisoners and carried away to a desert and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop and were there to choose one of hem, married or unmarried, and were to order him to baptize, to celebrate Mass, to absolve, and to preach, this man would be as truly a priest as though all the bishops and all the Popes had consecrated him."

The second volume dealt with Luther's understanding of the sacraments. But Luther carried his presentation one step farther, as is evidenced by the title of the book, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Of course the original Babylonian captivity was the 70 years ancient Israel spent under the heavy hand of the original Babylonians during the monarchy of the southern kingdom. But Luther saw another kind of captivity in his own day. The priests controlled access to the sacraments of the church, which of course were necessary to complete the work of salvation. Luther condemned this viewpoint. "If [the pope and all the Romanists] do not abrogate all their laws and traditions, restore proper liberty to the churches of Christ, and cause that liberty to be taught, then they are guilty of all the souls that perish in this miserable servitude, and that the papacy is identical with the kingdom of Babylon and the Antichrist itself." Returning to the sacraments themselves, Luther starts the essay by saying that he rejects the teaching of the church that there are seven sacraments. He rejects on the basis of Scripture that confirmation, marriage, ordination, and extreme unction are sacraments. Interestingly, at the beginning of the book, he says he accepts three sacraments, the Lord's Supper,

Baptism, and confession. By the end of the essay, he is down to two sacraments, the Lord's Supper and Baptism, stating that confession, "which I added to these two, lacks the divinely instituted visible sign, and is, as I have said, nothing but a return to Baptism." Most likely what was happening was that Luther's text was being published so quickly that he did not have time to edit his work. The opening pages were already printed by the time the end of the book was written. Personally, daily confession was still practiced and valuable to Luther, but where there had been seven sacraments, there now were only two.

Luther's point in Baptism was that it was based on the promise of God. "[The Christian] has a solace in every temptation from the unique truth he utters when he says, 'God is faithful in his promises, and I received his sign when I was baptized. If God is for me, who can be against me?'" Baptism is God's work, not the work of human beings. It is the Christian's assurance that no matter how far he strays, there is always a way back to the heavenly Father. God does not give up on his people. "When we rise from sins or repent, we do but return to the power and the faith of baptism from whence we fell, and find our way back to the promise then made to us, from which we departed when we sinned. For the truth of the promise once made remains steadfast, ever ready to receive us back with open arms when we return." No matter what happens, the power of Baptism remains, like a ship, solid and indestructible. "All who voyage in it are traveling to the haven of salvation. . . . True, it often happens that many people foolishly leap out of the ship into the sea, and perish. These are they who abandon faith in the promise and plunge themselves in sin. But the ship itself survives and, being seaworthy, continues on its course. If anyone, by some gracious gift, is able to return to the ship, he is carried into life . . . by the well-found ship itself. One who returns to the abiding and enduring promise of God through faith is such a man."

In his discussion of the Lord's Supper Luther pointed to some of the abuses that had developed in the celebration of the Mass. Luther stated that withholding the cup from the laity divided Christians in the very sacrament that was to unite them and suggested that priests were somehow more special than ordinary people. The belief in transubstantiation or the idea that in the Mass the priest turned the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ) made the priest the central actor in the sacrament, rather than Christ, who gives his body and blood. Luther condemned the idea that the sacrament worked (to use a Latin phrase) *ex opere operato*. Literally, this phrase means something that works simply because it is done. By this he was rejecting the idea that the sacrament was a sacrifice performed by the priest, in short, another good work that merited grace. Luther maintained that the sacrament did not bring grace magically simply because the priest did it. Grace is rather a free gift of God. Luther preferred to describe the sacrament (to use another Latin phrase) as an *opus operans*, or literally a work working. The Sacrament is a work that God is doing that feeds God's people. What Luther was trying to say is that the Lord's Supper is a blessing to Christians not just because it is something that is done, but because God Himself is active in it bringing the body and blood of Jesus Christ to the people. As in Baptism, the starting point is God and God's promises. "God does not first accept our works and then save us. The Word of God comes before everything else. Faith follows, and then after faith comes love, and love finally yields

every good work.” The sacrament is “a promise made by God for the remission of our sins; a promise which was confirmed by the death of the Son of God.” Luther laments that in his day the words of institution that speak of this promise were commonly said privately by the priests and not in a way that they could be heard by the people. Priests and people should not approach the sacrament in fear, but in faith, believing the promises of God that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are present for the remission or forgiveness of sins. “Faith believes Christ to be truthful in these words and does not doubt that these immense blessings have been bestowed.” Any attempt to add human works or merit simply denies what Christ promises and gives.

The third book *On the Freedom of a Christian* considered the practical subject of Christian living. It was attached to an open letter to the pope, a final attempt at reconciliation with Rome. The open letter affirms Luther’s intention not to attack the pope personally. Luther’s concern is with the ungodly doctrines and corruption which have surrounded the office of the papacy. Luther attached this short book to the open letter “as a token of peace and good hope.” Luther set up two theses in tension with each other: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.” “A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Luther stated that these describe two aspects of every Christian, which he said were like “two men in the same man contradicting each other.” The one was inner and spiritual. The other was outward and what Luther called “the old man.” What Luther meant was that the Christian was free from the obligation to do good works in order to please God. Thus he was free and not subject. But at the same time, the Christian was bound to do good works, simply because they are the natural response of the Christian to being saved by grace through faith. If someone were not first a believer and a Christian, than all his works would amount to nothing. Luther said, “So the Christian who is consecrated by his faith does good works, but the works do not make him holier or more Christian, for that is work of faith alone.” Luther concluded: “We are not freed from works through faith in Christ, but from false opinions concerning works, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification comes by works.” Luther went on: “Thus what we do, live, and are in works and ceremonies, we do because of the necessities of this life and of the effort to rule our body. Nevertheless, we are justified not in these but in the faith of the Son of God.”

Meanwhile, the political situation was changing. Charles V was the new Emperor as of June, 1519. His challenge politically was to unite the German princes and gain their confidence and support. In 1520 Charles V met with a number of the German princes, including Elector Frederick the Wise. He called for a meeting of the princes at Worms in 1521. He had several problems to solve. He was not simply a puppet of Rome. In fact, his election had been opposed by the pope. He needed to unify the German princes. And there were military threats as well. The Turks were advancing from the east, moving up the Danube River into Austria. And then he had to deal with Martin Luther, as well. A simple and traditional solution would have been for Charles V to enforce the bull of excommunication, declare Luther an outlaw, and somehow convince the German princes to enforce the decree against Luther. Frederick the Wise, however, pressured Charles V

to find another course of action. Charles agreed to have Luther appear at the assembly or Diet of Worms for a hearing.

Early in January, 1521, however, it appeared that the agreement would fall apart. A representative of the pope convinced Charles V to announce another bull or decree actually excommunicating Luther and a few others. In addition, Charles V was convinced to draw up an imperial edict against Luther. This would result in Luther's removal from the church on the one hand and result in Luther being declared an outlaw on the other. He would have no protection at all. This intention was announced to the assembly on February 15 and was met with objection only from Saxony and one other area. But the public began to protest. People were advocating Luther on the one hand and rejection of the Roman authorities on the other. By February 19, the German princes had changed their position. If Luther were not given a hearing at Worms, they feared riot and revolution. Luther objected to the people rising up in force: "I would not have I that people fight on the side of the gospel with force and killing. . . . The world is to be won over with the Word." But Luther agreed to come to Worms if he was guaranteed safe conduct there and back.

Luther finally arrived in Worms in April, 1521 with great fanfare. Over 2,000 people escorted him through the city gates. Once there, Luther was welcomed by at least three of princes besides Frederick. Luther was gaining respect in the political arena, as well as in the church and among the people. Luther was prepared to debate. He was fired up. He had said before he left for Worms: "Before I said the pope is the vicar of Chris. Now I declare that the pope is the opponent of Christ and the apostle of the devil." But he realized also the dangers. "I have had my Palm Sunday. Is all this pomp merely a temptation or is it also a sign of the passion to come?"

Late in the afternoon on April 17, Luther was ushered into the Diet of Worms. It was an impressive event. In the front was the emperor surrounded by his advisers and the representatives of Rome. There were Spanish soldiers all around in their best dress uniforms. The politically powerful of Germany filled the room, the seven electors, the bishops and princes of the church, other secular princes and representatives of the major cities. In the middle of the room was a table filled with books. The edict was read. "Martin Luther, the emperor has called you before his throne . . . to require you to answer two questions. First, Do you acknowledge these books have been written by you? Second, are you prepared to retract these books and their contents, or do you persist in the opinions expressed in them?"

Luther was taken by surprise. There would be no debate, no hearing. The judges had apparently already made a decision. Luther replied to the first question, "The books are all mine, and I have written more." Luther went on to the second question. "Whether I will reassert all or recant, . . . this touches God and his Word. This affects the salvation of souls. It would be rash and dangerous to say anything without due consideration, since I might say more than the things demands or less than the truth. . . . Therefore I humbly beg Your Imperial Majesty to give me time to think that I may answer without violence to

the Word of God or peril to my soul.” Luther was granted 24 hours. Back in his quarters Luther prayed and meditated. He wrote, “So long as Christ is merciful, I will not recant a single thing.”

The next day Luther was again before the Diet of Worms. The same question was posed: “Will you defend these books all together or do you wish to recant some of what you have said?” Luther replied with a short speech, apparently still hoping for some kind of debate. There were three kinds of books in the stack, he stated. There were some “in which I have taught about the Christian faith and good works in such a proper, clear, and Christian manner” that even his opponents thought well of them. He certainly could not retract these. There were others in which he had “attacked the papacy and papist teaching.” To retract these would only encourage tyranny. Finally, there were some in which he had attacked individuals. Perhaps he had done so too harshly, but he still could not retract them, because these people defended papal tyranny. If he could be shown that the teachings in his writings were contrary to Scripture, he would be the first to burn them. If they were not contrary to Scripture, then they must stand as truth.

The Diet would not enter a debate. The questioner simply stated: “You must give a simple, clear, and proper answer to the question, Will you recant or not?” Luther’s answer was simple, but it is one of the most famous statements of the Lutheran Reformation. “Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning—for I believe neither the Pope nor the councils alone, because it is an open and known fact that they have often erred and contradicted each other . . . and my conscience is captive to the Word of God, then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.”

As a result of the Diet, Luther was declared both excommunicated and an outlaw. The emperor Charles V told Luther he would honor the safe passage he had granted for the next 21 days, but Luther was to return directly to Wittenberg. Luther and a small party set out for Wittenberg on April 26. But they never arrived there. The ban declaring Luther an outlaw allowed for anyone to take him captive. It was reported that Luther and his party had been attacked by armed horsemen along the way, who had dragged Luther off. His friends in Wittenberg feared that Luther was dead.

But Luther had been kidnapped by his friends. He was escorted for his own safety to a famous castle, the Wartburg, where Luther would stay in hiding for a while. God still had more plans for Martin Luther, and the Reformation, now begun, was not yet complete.