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500 years ago on October 31st, 1517, a young Catholic monk called Martin Luther nailed a piece of paper to the doors of the Wittenberg Castle Church. You can still visit this site in Germany today. Luther's paper contained 95 objections or 'theses' that set off a theological earthquake that eventually came to be known as the Protestant Reformation. It bears this name because of escalating 'protests' and challenges to 'reform' that Luther and others made from this point onwards.

The Roman Catholic Church was earning vast sums of money by selling salvation. For example, the monk, John Tetzel, visited towns and cities selling indulgences on behalf of Pope Leo X. Indulgences supposedly speeded up entry into heaven from purgatory for yourself or your loved ones. But the Bible says nothing about this.

In its corruption, the church was teaching that a person must, through good works, please God. But because every person is sinful this was impossible. Luther saw that the effect on his native German people was to leave them without assurance of ever being friends with God – a situation that grieved him.

Luther's study of the Bible, specifically Paul's letter to the Romans, had shown him that God didn't expect us to try to work at making ourselves acceptable. Rather, in his spectacular generosity, God has already reached down to us offering salvation freely through Jesus Christ.

Luther's breakthrough was that in the death of Jesus Christ, salvation and forgiveness are free gifts from God. So, there is nothing we need to do accept trust in God.

So, good works don't secure salvation. Rather, they are the response of joyful, thankful faith.

After the publication of the 95 theses Luther continued to refine his thinking and challenge the Church of Rome. Sometime later he wrote:

*'... we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience or works, but depend on that which is outside ourselves, that is on the promise and truth of God.'*

Martin Luther was a complicated man with many faults. As the leading cause of the split with the Church of Rome, his legacy is much debated. Yet his strident declaration to all the world – that salvation is 'Sola Fide' or 'by faith alone' in Jesus Christ – was much needed. It was as though a key had suddenly unlocked a door that had been ignored by many for centuries. It was an overwhelmingly exciting moment. But, of course it wasn't a new discovery; it had been there in the pages of the Bible for almost 1,500 years.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you that, at the cross, Jesus won salvation for all those who have faith in Him. Help us to always put our trust in Jesus.

**Bible verse:** *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)*