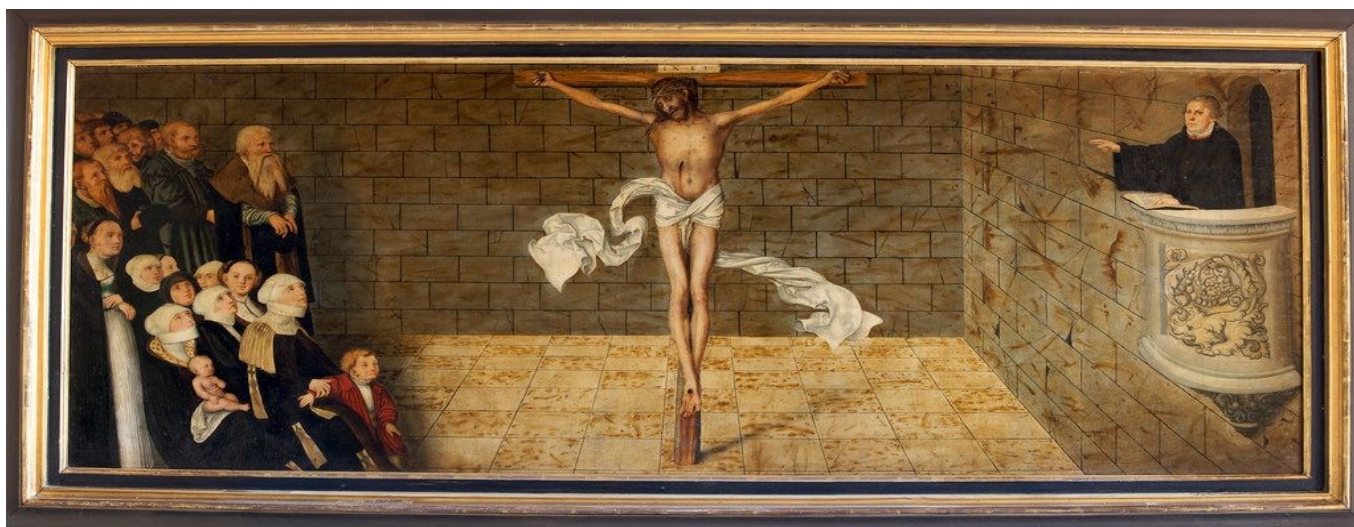




Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This painting is a part of the Reformation Altarpiece at St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Its meaning is theologically deep, but it should comfort our hearts. Starting with what we obviously see, we look at who is on the cross; He showed his love for those who followed him in the past and shows his love now. We see Jesus hanging from two pieces of wood. Nails running through his hands and his feet, a gash in his abdomen, and thorns across his brow.¹ Then you see the crowd of people listening, not just any people; it is men, women, and children.² Then we look at Luther. One hand on the Bible, and the other pointing to Christ.³ There is nothing else in this image. It's that simple. When I was a child and looked at Jesus' picture, I never understood what he did for us. I was too naive, but now that I know, I feel torn. I feel remorse for things that happened to him 2000 years ago. I regret what I have done in the past; I feel sorry for what others have done and what we might do in the future. The thing is that we can't help it; sin will always look good to the sinner, and we are the sinner. If you remember my sermon about Christ as our fortress, you will remember me mentioning that the devil's intentions are to disguise evil as something that only appears good.⁴ Focus your attention on Jesus; he is hanging on the cross because he wanted to call us his own. Look at the crowd; who has their attention? It is surely not Luther, but it is Christ. Luther is pointing to him and holding his hand on what proclaims the good that we can accept: the gospel that will heal our broken hearts.⁵ What makes this special to me is the placement of the painting. Christ is in between the preacher and the people, with all their eyes on Christ.⁶ The preacher does not replace Christ but rather proclaims what he did. The people don't gather around a great personality; they gather so that they might hear about Jesus. Jesus died on a cross, suffered the punishment of our sins, and when he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven; he forgave the sins of the world and called us to faith in him.⁷ But if we are sinners, we will forget everything good in us. That is why we must continually fight temptation to one day live with him.

Yours in Christ,

Jared Walters

WORLD'S BEST INTERN

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:23 & 2:2; Galatians 6:14; John 3:14-15; 1 Peter 2:24

² Hebrews 10:24-25; Acts 2:42; Colossians 3:16; Romans 12:4-5

³ Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 2:2 & 3:5-7; 2 Corinthians 5:20

⁴ Genesis 3:1-6; 2 Corinthians 11:14; Isaiah 5:20; Matthew 4:1-11

⁵ Ephesians 2:8-10; Galatians 2:20 & 5:6; Titus 3:4-8

⁶ 1 Timothy 2:5; John 14:6; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20

⁷ 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2; Luke 23:46-47; John 3:16