



July 16th

Memory Verse: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

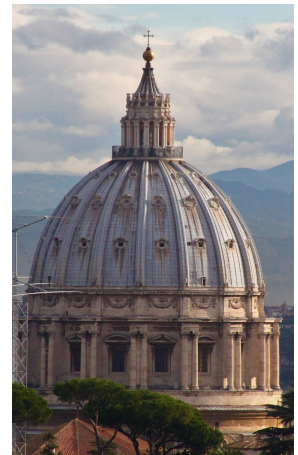
Today's lesson is about Martin Luther and Dr Eck. Both these men had remarkable memories. They were not just “gifted” in that respect. Your memory is like a muscle. If you want to develop your arm and chest muscles you might train with weights. For leg muscles you run or cycle. To train muscles you *use* them. To train your memory all you have to do is use it. Luther and Dr Eck trained their memories like a weight lifter or cyclist trains his muscles. The more memorizing you do, the easier it will be. Luther memorized whole books of the Bible some people have concluded that he knew it ALL by heart since he says that when God opened his eyes to see the truth of justification by faith, “thereupon I ran through the

Scriptures from memory,” so that he could confirm what he had discovered! What about trying to memorise *all* of Genesis chapter 1? I tried it and it's not so hard to do as it sounds if you just do it verse by verse! Another method is to break it down into the various days and learn them one by one.

A story from history¹

I expect you have heard of Martin Luther (1483-1546). He was the great Reformer who rediscovered many of the truths of the Bible. They had become lost and disregarded for many years because people had put other ideas alongside the Bible. The other ideas came from pagan philosophers called Plato and Aristotle and the teachings of Christian leaders from days gone by. Often these ideas did not agree at all with what we find in the Bible. Nor did they agree with one another. Clever men called “schoolmen” tried to make all the different ideas agree. What a muddle! They wrote more and more until there was a tangled mess which was very difficult to understand. Only the schoolmen could make anything out of this jumble and for about five hundred years their teachings ruled in the church.

Martin Luther did not find out all the Bible truths that were rediscovered at the Reformation at once. He is most famous for nailing a list of his 95 “Theses” or discussion points to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg in 1517. These theses were mostly about one thing that made Luther angry. This was the way the Pope in Rome was tricking the poor people to give him money to build the huge church you can see in the picture. The picture just shows part of the outside. The inside was full of golden decorations and marble statues, so rich and lavish it took your breath away.



The Pope got the money by promising the poor people that if they gave him money to buy what was called an “indulgence” their sins would be forgiven. He even promised that if they gave enough money the sins of their relatives who had already died would be forgiven! The poor people did not know any better because they had no Bible in their own language to read. They could not find out for themselves that no one can pay for our sins except the Lord Jesus who died to pay the price. They could not read for themselves those wonderful words, “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” At the time Luther even thought that the Pope was a good man and that his officials were doing this without his knowledge. He soon found out that he was wrong when he went to Rome for himself and saw what was going on.

¹ Adapted from D'Aubigné, Jean Henri Merle, trans. Beveridge, Henry, *History of the Reformation* (Glasgow, 1845)

Doctor Johann Eck, was an important professor at the university of Ingolstadt, in Bavaria in the south of Germany. He had a very good memory and he had read many, many books. He read Luther's theses and he mostly agreed with them. Luther was also a famous teacher by this time in the north of Germany. Students came from far and wide to learn from the two teachers, one in the north and the other in the south. Both teachers were very clever. Both were so kind that their students loved them. But Luther and Dr Eck studied different things. Luther studied the Bible. Dr Eck studied the writings of the schoolmen. The more Luther studied, the more he found out about the truth. The more Dr Eck studied...

Two years after the famous theses were nailed to the church door at Wittenberg, a great debate was to be held. The debate was to last 20 days and would finish on 16th July. A debate is a serious discussion between two people. It is held in a large hall where everyone can come and listen. The two people holding the debate have opposite ideas about something. They tell everything they can about it, taking turns to speak so that everyone listening can make up their mind who is right and who is wrong. You can see that 16th July would be an important date. By that day all the evidence would have been laid out by both sides and the debate would end. On that day those who listened would be able to make up their minds.

Dr Eck and Martin Luther were the two debaters in this debate and it was held at Pleissenburg Castle in Leipzig, Saxony in the north of Germany. Dr Eck's idea was that the Pope was the earthly head of the church and that everyone should obey him. Martin Luther's idea was that he wasn't and that they shouldn't!

At seven o' clock in the morning the debaters were ready and the room in the castle was packed with listeners.

There were some prayers and hymns and then the debate began.

Dr Eck said, "The church on earth is like a picture of the church in heaven. The church in heaven is like a royal ladder going up step by step to God who is the head. Christ has made the same steps in the church here on earth. What kind of monster would the Church be if she did not have a head!"

Luther replied, "Dr Eck is correct in saying that the universal Church must have a head. If there is any one here who says the opposite, let him stand up! The remark does not at all apply to me."

"Then," answered Dr Eck, "If the Church on earth has never been without a head, I should like to know who that head is, if he is not the Pope of Rome?"

"The head of the Church on earth is Jesus Christ himself," replied Luther, "I believe this because the Bible says so: 'Christ,' it says in the Bible, 'must reign until he has put ALL HIS ENEMIES under his feet.' Christ is not limited to heaven. He reigns on earth as well. We cannot see our Head, and yet we have him just the same."

In this way Luther explained that the head of the church is Jesus Christ who speaks to his people through his word, the Bible. The Pope in Rome is not the head of the church.

I cannot give you all the debate here but every point that Dr Eck made, Luther answered from the Bible.

Dr Eck was surprised but he was not beaten. He could not think of any more arguments so he thought of something that would convince everyone listening that Luther must be wrong. It had nothing to do with deciding whether what he said was *true* or not. Dr Eck decided to give up trying

to do that. Instead he would explain to everyone that Luther's ideas were the same as those of Johann Hus of Bohemia!

Johann Hus (1372-1415) was a great Christian man.² Together with Wycliffe in England, he, like Luther, discovered the truth that the Bible is our only guide to salvation. Look at his dates; he died 68 years before Luther was born! Luther had had to discover that truth all over again. Everyone in Germany thought Hus was wrong, a heretic, a false teacher. Bohemia was not far from Saxony. There had been a terrible war with Bohemia over the whole matter. In the hall listening to the debate were noblemen whose fathers had lost their lives in this war against Bohemia. To say that Luther agreed with Hus's ideas would finish him off in the debate. No one would listen to his ideas if they were the same as those of Hus. They would not bother to try to find out if Luther ideas were *true* any longer.

Dr Eck cleared his throat. "From the earliest times" he began, "it was believed by all good Christians, that the Church of Rome holds that the Pope received his authority from Jesus Christ himself." Then, looking round, he fired his shot, "I must confess, however, that the Bohemians, while obstinately defending their mistakes, attacked this teaching. Pardon me," he said, sounding very humble, "if I am an enemy of the Bohemians, because they are the enemies of the Church. The present discussion has reminded me of these heretics; for, according to my poor judgment, the conclusions to which Doctor Luther has come are all in favour of their mistakes. Everyone knows that this is what the followers of Hus think, they make no secret of it."

Dr Eck's plan had been a good one. It was not just his own supporters who clapped enthusiastically; the applause went through the whole the audience.

"I do not like division in the church and I never shall," replied Luther, hoping to disassociate himself from Hus, "Because the Bohemians, just on their own say-so have separated from the rest of us, *they* are wrong to do so even even if what they *teach* is right; for charity is the most important thing along with the unity of the Spirit."

Now it was time for dinner. The debate stopped for a break. Luther felt uneasy. Had he gone too far in saying that the Christians of Bohemia were wrong? They believed the very doctrine which he was defending didn't they? Luther sighed. A very difficult step was ahead of him. He must choose. The idea that the church *exactly as we see it on earth* was an unbreakable unity was something he had been taught since he was a child. Should he cling to that idea or should he admit that the church council which condemned John Hus was wrong? His mind went through passages of the Bible stored in his memory. No! Hus was correct. He had died for the truth of the Bible, not because he was in error. So those who condemned him were in the wrong.

Have you ever studied sets in maths and drawn Venn diagrams?³ If you have you will understand what I am going to explain next very easily. Luther now saw that there was a set of people who were true believers. There was another set of people who were members of the Catholic Church with the Pope at their head. These two sets overlapped but *they were not identical*. Luther himself at that moment was in the overlapping area in the middle. Johann Hus was not. It would not be long too before Luther himself stepped over the line.

"I must do my duty come what may," he thought.

It was two o'clock. Dinner was over and the debate was beginning again. Luther stood up to speak, "Many of the teachings of Johann Hus and the Bohemians are quite correct," he said firmly, "For

2 See the lesson for June 21st.

3 See Lesson for 4th April.

instance they are right when they say, 'there is only one universal church,' but also when they say, 'to be saved we do not have to believe that the Roman Church is better than others.' I do not care if Wicliffe has said it or Hus has said it. It is the truth.”

Sensation! The hated names of Hus and Wycliffe actually spoken with approval by a monk right in the middle of a Catholic assembly! A murmur was heard all round the room.

Duke George of Saxony, who had arranged the debate himself, was alarmed. The states belonging to his ancestors on his mother's side of the family had been torn apart and ruined in the war with Bohemia. What he was hearing was like seeing the banner of that awful civil war, unrolled and flying again here in Saxony. He could not hide his feelings, he slapped his thigh, shook his head, and exclaimed, loud enough to be heard by everyone, “The man is mad!”

Every one was excited now. They stood up and kept talking to each other. Those who had fallen asleep, woke up. Luther's opponents were overjoyed: he had condemned himself now! Luther's friends were very embarrassed. Several of them, who until then had listened to him with pleasure, began to doubt him. As for the duke, he never forgot that moment. From then on, in his eyes, Luther was his enemy.

Luther had taken a large step forward. In 1516, and 1517, he had only attacked the sermons of those who sold the Pope's “indulgences”. He had at first respected the decrees of the popes. Later he rejected the decrees of popes but recognised the authority of church councils. It was the *Council* of Constance that had condemned Johann Hus so now Luther was rejecting the authority of councils too. What remained then as an authority. Where was the truth to be found? In the Bible alone!



“Venerable father!” said Eck to him, “if you believe that a council, called together legally, can be wrong, you are to me only a heathen man and a publican.” You can see that this is only an insult with no reasoning behind it.

The discussion on the authority of the pope lasted five days. Then came other topics: repentance, absolution by the priest, and penance. Eck, as usual, quoted the schoolmen, the Dominican monks, and the canons of the popes. Luther closed the discussion with these words: “The reverend doctor flees before the Holy Scriptures, as the devil does before the cross. For my part, with all due deference to the Fathers, I prefer the authority of Scripture, and recommend it to our judges.”

For the rest of the debate this was Luther's defence. On every point raised he went to the Bible for his answer. *Sola Scriptura* “by the Bible alone” became the watchword of the Reformation. By 16th July, whatever his hearers may have decided, Luther was not in doubt about where the truth was to be found.

Something listen to

Debates have always been an important part of church history. Perhaps the most famous debate in more recent times was that held at the University of California, Irvine, in 1985 between Dr Greg Bahnsen, a Christian scholar, and the atheist, Dr Gordon Stein. Dr Stein had written a pamphlet *How to Argue with a Theist* [believer in God] *and Win*.⁴ He did not win this debate! We have

4 Older children (say over 11) will benefit from listening to the debate here:

included information about the debate in the lesson for 11th February. If you did not listen to the debate then today would be a good day to do so.

Something to think about



Have you ever been to Trafalgar square in London? At each corner of the square is a statue of a national figure. The statue to the south east of Nelson's column, nearest to the Strand is particularly interesting; you can just see it in the picture on the left in front of the bus. It was the very last statue made by Queen Victoria's official Sculptor in Ordinary, William Behnes (1797-1864) and it was the very first statue ever to be made by a sculptor using a photograph for reference. There is an exact copy of the statue in Sunderland, the birth place of the subject, Major General Sir Henry Havelock (1795-1857). Henry Havelock never actually knew that he had been made a Major General because the news of his appointment did not reach him until after his death. Next time you are in London make a point of going to see this statute and reading the words written on it.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Kahn, has suggested that these particular statues in Trafalgar Square should be replaced with something more “relevant” to present day Londoners and (referring to Havelock's statue and one of the others) explained that he did not know what they did! If you read what follows you will be better educated and informed than the Mayor of London.

In 1823, Henry Havelock was a Lieutenant in the army on his way to serve in India when he was converted through the witness of a friend, Lieutenant James Gardener. Together they prayed and read the Bible throughout the voyage. In India Lieutenant Havelock made friends with William Carey and Joshua Marshman the Baptist missionaries who were stationed in Serampore. He was baptised and his Christian witness affected everything he did. He distributed Bibles to all soldiers under him and he also began the practice of holding Bible studies. To these Bible studies any soldier was welcome to come *regardless of his rank*. Under Havelock for the first time in the army, church services were allowed which were not Church of England. These two things may sound rather ordinary but they were actually monumental (if you will excuse the pun) changes in army practice and attitude which have benefited servicemen ever since and well merit a statue regardless of anything else Havelock did.

Henry Havelock was famous for his action at the Battle of Cawnpore, in India. You can read about it in H E Marshall's *Our Empire Story*; I have put the relevant chapters in the optional resources files for today. It was on 16th July 1857 that he arrived at the Battle of Cawnpore.⁵

Being a Baptist constantly caused Havelock to miss out on promotion. As a Baptist he was not a member of the Church of England and in those days this made one something of a second class citizen. Non-members of the Church of England have only been allowed into Oxford University, for instance, since 1854. His statue is therefore a monument to the achievements of a man from a rather despised minority. Surely most Londoners would consider that relevant – if they knew about it!

Something to do

We have read about debates and statues today so an interesting idea would be to do something almost like a debate today. Think of people you know about and decide to whom you would put up a statue of – if you could choose. A group of children could make their own choices and jot down their reasons for their choice. Then each participant can present the case for their statue as a short speech. At the end hold a secret ballot and see which statue gets the most votes.

5 You can read Havelock's conversion story here: <https://salvationcall.com/sir-henry-havelock/>