

## Forerunners

### Last week

One major takeaway from last week that is important is that corruption in the church was on the rise.

- By the mid to late 12<sup>th</sup> century, the power held and wielded by the Popes reached its highest point under Pope Innocent III.
- During his time as Pope, among other things, the teaching that there was a Treasure House of Merit was adopted.
  - Bubba talked about that a bit last week
  - That the Pope could give out indulgences because of his ability to tap into all the extra merit Jesus and other saints had earned and which was stored in heaven
  - Those could be applied to people like pardons so that the amount of punishment for sin could be reduced.
  - Of course, this did get abused because of the corruption and sinfulness of powerful men
- Also, the doctrine of transubstantiation was solidified as official church doctrine during this time

The Catechism of the Catholic Church in section 1376:

- *"The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: 'Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.'"*

Where do they get this? One of the places is from Jesus's words in [John 6:53-57](#), but, when a person looks a little further in that section of scripture, we can see what Jesus says about what he means.

- 63 *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."*
  - Jesus is using the physical understanding of drinking and eating to describe and teach a spiritual truth.
- We do this as a remembrance, not as a sacrifice
  - [Luke 22:19](#) says, *"And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'"*

The church, however, was teaching that this was a re-sacrifice of Jesus for sins.

Now, as we continue our look at church history, we see that Pope Boniface became Pope in 1294 and his time as Pope was marked by lots of disagreement and political meddling between him and the Kings of England and France. This mixture between the church and the politics of the state was filled with manipulation, lies, and fighting.

By 1309, Pope Clement V had begun living in Avignon, France and not in Rome. This led to about 70 years of Popes residing in Avignon and not Rome, though they all claimed to be bishops of Rome.

- This was a time where the popes became tools of the French government
- It became known as the "Avignon Papacy"
- Even by some as the "Babylonian Captivity of the Church" harkening back to the capture of God's people by the Babylonians in the O.T.

It wasn't until later that, Pope Gregory XI returned the papacy to Rome. The pope after him was Urban VI and he also stayed in Rome, which led to the French cardinals electing a rival pope, again in Avignon and this was pope Clement VII.

- Now there were two popes
- In 1409 there was a meeting called the Council of Pisa, where they tried to fix this problem of two popes
- This resulted in two sides of cardinals electing a third pope, but the other two would not abdicate...now there were 3
- This is called the western schism, which ended up resolving in 1417 at the council of Constance.

We are up to the 1400s now but starting back in 1140 to 1210 there was a man named Peter Waldo. He is one of three men I want to mention today, who were not part of what we know as the reformation, but they are sort of pre-reformers.

- In addition to Waldo, there is John Wycliffe and John Huss.

### Peter Waldo (1140-1210)

Waldo was a regular guy...a merchant from Lyon, which is in what we know as France.

- Waldo ended up selling everything he owned and devoting his life to Christ in preaching a message of repentance.
- He gained followers who did the same with their possessions and they became known as the "Poor of Lyon" and later as the Waldensians.
- Waldo loved and had a focus on the word of God in his life and he commissioned translation of portions of the bible into the local dialect.
- His preaching ministry was centered on the Word of God
- His group was denounced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lateran council in 1179, (the cathedral in Rome) but he did not stop preaching, insisting that it was better to obey God than men

The Apostles had a similar problem when they were preaching Christ and the religious leaders didn't like it. They charged them not to preach Christ anymore.

- Acts 5:29-32

The Waldensians were determined by the pope to be heretics. They were persecuted and many killed, and others forced to hide.

- They were for the people being able to read the scriptures in their own language and not Latin
- They considered the Bible their sole authority, not the Pope
- They spoke publicly about the corruption of the clergy
- They rejected some of the traditions of the church like praying for the dead and the idea of holy water, they didn't venerate saints or bow at altars
- They publicly spoke out against indulgences and the false doctrine of purgatory, and they believed communion was a remembrance and not a sacrifice of Jesus.

This movement grew quickly

- In 1215, the 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council would declare an anathema on the doctrine of the Waldensians. That is, they cursed them...they are damned to hell because of their beliefs
- By the 1500s, they were still around, even though to be a Waldensian was a death sentence at the hands of the Roman Catholic Church
- They were scattered around and even made their way to Switzerland to find refuge and would join up with some of the early reformers like Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin
- There are still Waldensians in different parts of Europe to this day.

Why would they ultimately join the reformation movement? Because they held certain convictions in common. Particularly 3 of them.

1. The authority of Scripture over the authority of the Pope
2. The need to translate Scripture into the common language
3. The ability of regular people to read, understand, and preach God's Word
  - These, of course, were big problems with the Roman Catholic Church

### John Wycliffe (1324-1384)

One distinction with Waldo was that he started a movement of lay people. They were not priests, though they initially considered themselves part of the Roman Catholic Church still.

John Wycliffe, whom you have probably heard of, was an English priest and a professor at Balliol College, part of Oxford University.

- Now Wycliffe was a scholar and not just a lay person, though he would have the same problems with the church as Waldo did.
- He also had the same bold practice of speaking out about the corruption in the church, but he was on the inside.

Wycliffe and others at Oxford would become involved in translating the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into English...a big no-no. In addition to this, he also wrote harshly about the corruption in the church in areas like:

- Transubstantiation
- The sale of indulgences
- And the mandatory celibacy of the priests
- He felt that the church, which had amassed a lot of property holdings, should give it all up and that the clergy should, like Waldo, take on a life of poverty and devote themselves to Christ.

He also taught that the church was actually made up of the souls of the elect. This would also be referred to as the “invisible church”. The “visible church” was made up of priests and cardinals and popes.

- The idea is that you are not a part of the church because you go to the church or are a leader in the church, but because God has saved your soul.
- Invisible because you are identified not by the visible position you hold, but because of the profession of faith you make in Christ alone.

Wycliffe would later become known as the “Morning Star” of the Reformation. He died in 1384, but like Waldo, his views on scripture and the church would gain in popularity and influence.

- He was also declared to be a heretic long after his death, by the council of Constance in 1415 and they eventually dug up his body in 1428 and burned it in effigy, since that is what was done with heretics
- He held the same beliefs as Waldo about the authority of scripture over the pope and once wrote:
  - *“I believe that a Christian man well understanding it, may gather sufficient knowledge during his pilgrimage upon earth; that all truth is contained in Scripture; that we should admit of no conclusion not approved there; that there is no court besides the court of heaven; that though there were a hundred popes, and all the friars in the world were turned into cardinals, yet should we learn more from the gospel than we should from all that multitude; and that true sons will in no wise go about to infringe the will and testament of their Heavenly Father.”*
- He held the desire to have the Word of God in the common language, writing:
  - *“Believers should ascertain for themselves the matters of their faith by having the Scriptures in a language which they can fully understand...Christ and His Apostles evangelized the greater portion of the world, by making known the Scriptures in a language which was familiar to the people.”*
- And he held that it could be read and understood by the common person.

A century and a half after Wycliffe, William Tyndale would also translate the Bible into the English language, but he would do so from the Greek and Hebrew instead of the Latin Vulgate.

- We can thank men like these, who stood firm on the foundation, truth, and authority of the Bible and we have benefited from their sacrifices for the church

### **Jan Hus (1369-1415)**

Or (John Huss), was from what we know today as the Czech Republic. He was from a village called "Husinec" which means "Gooseville." Also, interestingly, the Bohemian word "Hus" means "goose."

He was very much influenced by the writing of John Wycliffe, and he was a preacher who regularly did so in the Bethlehem Chapel in the city of Prague.

- He preached in the Bohemian language and so, exposed the speakers of that language to God's Word.
- About God's Word he said, *"I humbly accord faith (meaning trust) to the holy Scriptures, desiring to hold, believe, and assert whatever is contained in them as long as I have breath in me."*

Again, like the other two pre-reformers, Huss preached out against the corruption of the clergy and the sale of indulgences. He held strong convictions about the authority of the Word of God for the Christian.

- He wrote a book called "On the Church", where he put forward that Christ alone is the head of the church, not the pope.
- He said, *"If the papal utterances agree with the law of Christ, they are to be obeyed. If they are at variance with it, then Christ's disciples must stand loyally and manfully with Christ against all papal bulls whatsoever and be ready, if necessary, to endure malediction and death. When the pope uses his power in an unscriptural way, to resist him is not a sin, it is a mandate."*

The Roman Catholic authorities called Huss to come and defend his views at the council of Constance and he was promised to be given safe passage. He did arrive in 1414, but he was arrested and put in prison.

Interestingly, in 1415, at the same council where they declared John Wycliffe a heretic, they put John Huss on trial. There were a lot of accusations made against him, but he was not being given the chance to explain his views.

- This caused him to say, *"I appeal to Jesus Christ, the only judge who is almighty and completely just. In His hands I plead my cause, not on the basis of false witnesses and erring councils, but on truth and justice."*

On July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1415, they would take Huss outside the city and burn him at the stake, and this would set off a bunch of armed conflicts with the Bohemian people who were angry over his execution.

- Now, I mentioned earlier that his name means goose
- **Question:** Does anyone know which English expression is associated with this fact?
  - “Your goose is cooked” comes from the execution of John Huss.
- In Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, it is reported that Huss told the executioners *“You are now going to burn a goose, but in a century, you will have a swan which you can neither roast nor boil.”*
- Now who knows if Huss saying those words is only a legend or not, but those words have been used to show his connection to the coming protestant reformation.

That hundred years later was 1517 and the swan is Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses on the church door at Whittenburg. That event is widely thought to be the official beginning of the protestant reformation and Martin Luther the one who lit the spark.

Luther would even be nicknamed the “Saxon Hus” because of his similarities with Joh Huss and the fact that he was heavily influenced by his life and writings.

Who is the head of the church?

- Read Ephesians 1:18-23

Colossians 1:18 *“And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”*