

Message #1023  
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"WHERE ARE THE REFORMERS TODAY?"  
{Daniel 3}

WHAT IS A REFORMER?

Webster defined the word "REFORM" in numerous ways...

"To make better by removing faults and defects."

"To make better by putting a stop to abuses or malpractices, or by introducing better procedures."

On an individual level the word "REFORM" is defined...

"To become or to behave better; to abandon that which is evil or corrupt and return a to good state."

"An improvement in character and conduct; a reformation."

You may recall that before we had what is now called Juvenile Hall and Youth Ranch we had what was called REFORM SCHOOLS for troubled youth...

...youth with behavioral problems

...the concept was to remove the youth from their home setting and

try to help that young person to eventually adjust in society--to reform them!

There's yet another meaning of the word "REFORM"...

"To form again, or anew."

There's actually a denomination called the Reformed Presbyterian Church--a break-off from the United Presbyterian Denomination--a group that re-formed the Presbyterian Church in a new setting. {Many are familiar with Dr. D. James Kennedy, Pastor of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. He led his church into this new denomination some years ago.}

An expansion of the word to "REFORMATION" is defined...

"The act of reforming or a state of being reformed."

"In church history, the movement started by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century that aimed at reforming the Roman Catholic Church in the establishment of Protestantism."

Whether it's an individual...a political organization...or the church, reformation is a process of transformation. It is not an instantaneous action. Reformation is a something that takes time.

Webster is wrong to say that the Reformation Movement was "started by Martin Luther" for the seeds of reforming the church had been planted long before Luther came on the scene. Luther just happened to be God's man who was in the right place at the right time to bring about change; however, Luther, himself, admitted that his work was building upon a foundation laid by others.

{It would be equally wrong to say that the Civil Rights Movement in the United States was started by Dr. Martin Luther King. Dr. King was a great leader; however, the roots of reform of the Civil Rights in the United States had been planted long before he came on the scene. Dr. King was God's man who was in the right place at the right time to bring attention to an injustice which he sought to reform!}

Presbyterians have prided themselves with the motto: "Once reformed...and always reforming!"

...that is to say that the process of reformation is a continuous action

...it is present...as well past...tense!

The time is ripe for a new reformation within the church...for reformers to stand within the once great denominations and cry out: "Here I stand....I shall not be

moved!"

Two men were forerunners of the Reformation...both of whom had incredible influence on Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and other reformers.

Had it not been for...

...John Wyclif of England, born 154 years before Luther and Zwingli {1320-1384}

...John Huss a Czech, born 115 years before the noted reformers {1369-1415}

...there may never had been a reformation.

JOHN WYCLIF {1320-1384}

...was one of the most important and authoritative thinkers of the Middle ages.

The Roman Catholic Church was corrupt in the fourteenth century...badly in need of being reformed. It was bleeding the treasury of England who was facing an imminent threat of invasion from France.

...more English money was going to the Pope than to the state of the king.

...larger and larger demands were made upon the people

An ANTICLERICAL Party was formed resisting the indulgences being levied upon the English.

...in 1333 Edward III refused to pay monies that had been pledged to the popes in 1213 by King John.

England was ripe for a reformer to step forward.

John Wyclif studied at Oxford, and later became a professor of theology at that university. He was alarmed and wrote tracts expressing his concern about the inconsistencies of the church.

...these greatly influenced John Huss and later Martin Luther in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries

...they served as a guide to King Henry VIII in years to come

Wyclif's creed was built upon the Doctrine of Predestination {170 years before Calvin espoused the doctrine in Geneva}. Wyclif wrote...

"God gives His grace to whomever He wishes, and has predestined each individual, an eternity before birth, to be lost or saved through all eternity. Good works do not win salvation, but they indicate that he who does them has received divine grace and is one of the elect. We act

according to the disposition that God has allotted to us. Only Adam and Eve had free will; by their disobedience they lost it for themselves and for their posterity.

"God is the sovereign Lord of us all. The allegiance that we owe Him is direct; as is the oath of every Englishman to the king, not indirect through allegiance to a subordinate lord, as in feudal France. Hence the relationship of man to God is direct, and requires no intermediary; any claim of Church or priest to be necessary medium must be repelled.

In this sense all Christians are priests, and need no ordination." Wyclif soon became both the hero and the herald of the Anticlerical Party...and the enemy of the Roman Catholic Church.

He was appointed to a royal commission by Edward III and sent to Bruges to discuss with papal agents the continued refusal of England to donate further to the papal coffers. He returned urging the government to confiscate part of the church's property and indicted by the bishop as a heretic.

Wyclif recommended the ecclesiastical independence of England from Rome--mind you, this was in 1378--139 years before Martin Luther nailed the 95 Thesis on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg.

He challenged the Roman Catholic Church...

...he called the monasteries "a den of thieves, nests of serpents, and houses of living devils!"

...he challenged the theory that the merits of the saints could be applied to the rescue of souls from purgatory

...he called out: "If the pope has the power to snatch souls from purgatory, why does he not in Christian charity take them out at once?"

When one reads the words of John Wyclif you feel as if you're reading the writings and hearing the words of Martin Luther. Obviously Luther was well aware of Wyclif's challenges to the church and a century and a half later Wyclif was his role model...as was John Huss.

What brought the ire of the corrupt church then upon him is when he wrote...

"Christ had not whereon to rest His head, but men say this pope has more than half the Empire...Christ was meek...the pope sits on his throne and makes lords to kiss his feet!" He then suggested: "The pope is the Antichrist predicted in I John, the Beast of the Apocalypse, heralding the second coming of Christ!"

Perhaps Wyclif's greatest contribution, however, was translating the New Testament into the English language. He was determined that the Scriptures should become available to any Englishman who could read.

{The Catholic Church taught at that time that only the priest could read and interpret the sacred scriptures.}

Following a summons by Pope Urban VI, Wyclif went to Rome; however, before he could defend his position he suffered a stroke while attending mass and died.

Many of his writings were destroyed; however, the major elements of the Reformation came from Wyclif...

...the revolt against the worldliness of the clergy

...the return of the church to the Bible

...from a salvation by works to election by divine grace

...the rejection of indulgences and transubstantiation

...the priesthood of all believers.

JOHN HUSS {1369-1415}

I spoke to you of John Huss' contribution to the Reformation several years ago after returning from a study trip to Prague.

Bohemian students who studied at Oxford returned to Prague with transcriptions of the works of Wyclif and they were espoused in Bethlehem Chapel in that city by the reformer, John Huss beginning in 1402 {again 115 years before Luther and the 95 Thesis}.

Huss soon became the most famous preacher in Prague. Many figures high in the court were among his listeners, and Queen Sophia made him her chaplain. He preached in Czech, and taught his congregation to take an active part in the service by singing hymns. {Unheard of until now}

He echoed the words of Wyclif concerning the Eucharist...he read more and more of Wyclif's works and made copies of them.

Because of Huss by 1403 the opinions of Wyclif were taught openly in the University of Prague. The Archbishop rebuked him and ordered him to cease; however, that only fueled Huss' determination.

The Archbishop then ordered all the writings of Wyclif to be surrendered to him and to be burned. Huss refused and appealed to Pope John XXIII who rejected the appeal and ordered Huss to Rome...and he refused.

...needing more funds, the pope offered yet more indulgences

...Huss called the pope a money grabber and the pope excommunicated Huss

Huss continued to be inspired by Wyclif. He condemned the action of the priests of Prague who were selling consecrated oil.

...he saw the church as a royal priesthood of God

...he saw Christ as the head of the church, not the pope

...he said the pope was only to be obeyed when his commands conform to the law of Christ. "To rebel against an erring pope is to obey Christ." he said.

A General Council of the Church was held in Konstanz, Germany, to depose three rival popes! The emperor was anxious to restore religious unity and peace in Bohemia. He pleaded with Huss to go to Konstanz and attempt a reconciliation. He promised Huss that he would be safe.

Hussites urged him not to go; however, he set out for Konstanz in October 1414 escorted by three Czech nobles and several friends.

Irma and I saw the home where Huss resided--I have photographs of it.

He was at first treated courteously, and lived in freedom in Konstanz; however, an accuser came before the council with a list of what he referred to as "Huss Heresies." His examination being finished, he was taken from the court and a resolution was formed by the council to burn him as an heretic unless he retracted. He was then committed to a filthy prison, where, in the daytime, he was bound with so many chains that he could hardly move and every night he was fastened by his hands to a ring against the walls of the prison.

...he was fed little and nearly starved to death

...he became ill

...the noblemen of Bohemia protested; nonetheless, Huss remained imprisoned. Shortly thereafter four bishops and two lords were sent by the emperor to the prison, in order to prevail on Huss to recant. He called God to witness, with tears in his eyes, that he was not conscious of having preached or written anything against the truth of God, or the faith of his orthodox Church. Huss replied, "Let them send the meanest person of that council, who can convince me by argument from the word of God, and I will submit my judgment to him."

...all were amazed at his stamina

...his total commitment

After six months of imprisonment Huss was again brought before the Council and ordered to recant his positions. Huss expressed his willingness to recant such as could be refuted from Scripture {precisely the position taken by Luther at Worms}. Huss was returned to prison for four additional weeks and again asked to recant his opposition to the church. He replied...

"These lords and bishops do counsel me that I should confess before you all that I have erred; which thing, if it might be done with the infamy and reproach of man only, they might, peradventure, easily persuade me to do; but now I am in the sight of the Lord my God, without whose great displeasure I could not do that which they require. For I well know that I never taught any of those things which they have falsely alleged against me, but I have preached, taught, written, and thought contrary thereunto. Should I by this my example trouble so many consciences, endued with the most certain knowledge of the Scriptures and of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? I will never do it, neither commit any such offense, that I should seem to esteem this vile carcass appointed unto death more than their health and salvation."

On July 6, 1415, in the Cathedral of Konstanz--where we visited on August 5th--the Council oddly enough condemned both Wyclif {already dead for 31 years} and Huss.

They ordered Huss' writings to be burned and led him out of the city to a place where they would execute him.

Having reached the place of execution, he fell on his knees, sang several portions of the Psalms, and looked steadfastly towards heaven, saying, "Into Thy hands, O Lord! Do I commit my spirit. Thou hast redeemed me, O most good and faithful God." As soon as the chain was

put about him at the stake, he said, with a smiling countenance, "My Lord Jesus Christ was bound with a harder chain than this for my sake why, then, should I be ashamed of this old rusty one?"

When the faggots were piled around him, he said, "I never preached any doctrine of an evil tendency and what I taught with my lips I now seal with my blood." He then said to the executioner, "You are now going to burn a goose (the name of Huss signifying goose in the Bohemian language), but in a century you will have a swan whom you can neither roast nor boil." If this were spoken in prophecy, he must have alluded to Martin Luther, who came about a hundred years after, and had a swan on his coat of arms.

The fire consumed him as he chanted hymns.

I stood on that very spot on a Tuesday afternoon three weeks ago. A rock with a plaque marks the spot where Huss died.

...it was an awesome experience...moving

...now a monument to a man burned as a heretic who later became known for his efforts in leading the church to a Reformation.

One hundred and four years later Martin Luther was called a "Bohemian Hussite" by his accuser, John Eck. Luther acknowledged that Huss had been right...that the General Council of Konstanz which condemned the beliefs of Huss had been wrong. One year later he wrote: "We are all Hussites without knowing it. St. Paul and St. Augustine are Hussites!" That eventually led to Luther's excommunication!

## CONCLUSION

Where are the reformers today?

Where are those who will reform our beloved denomination?

...we've lost our focus

...mission is no longer a priority

...we've become sidetracked by issues of inclusion and inclusiveness

...for too long we've ignored Scriptures or given interpretation that was never intended--we

who made the the Word of God central in our worship in the Reformation!

...General Assemblies seldom deal with spiritual issues

...Presbytery meetings seldom strategize of reaching our geographic area for Christ

...we've built bureacracies...top heavy structures of church government

Where is John Wyclif today?

Where is John Huss today?

Where are the Shadrach's, Meshach's, and Abenego's today?

Where are the voices calling "heresy!"

Where are those calling the church to return to the faith of the church that was so instrumental in the establishment of our nation?

Where is the voice of our session?

I weep for our denomination!

I pray for our denomination!

I, for one, call upon this congregation to say with me: "Here I am! Here I stand! I shall not be moved!"