

HERE WE STAND

The Lives That Shaped the Reformation

Ulrich Zwingli

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

The Beginnings

- Born New Year's Day, 1484 in the Swiss Alps — just months before Martin Luther
 - Came from a peasant family; father rose to become a village leader and magistrate
 - Unlike Luther's parents, Zwingli's parents wanted him to become a priest and invested in his education accordingly
 - From an early age, he displayed exceptional intellectual promise
-

Early Education

- Studied at the University of Vienna; trained as a **humanist** — not “pro-human” in a modern sense, but committed to *ad fontes* (Latin: “back to the sources”)
 - Humanists returned to classical literature and original languages.
 - Studied Latin and Greek; taught himself Greek by hand-copying the entire New Testament in the original language
-

Priest in Glarus (1506-1516)

- Served as Catholic priest for 10 years; took up the role of pastor and shepherd
 - **Serious moral failure:** Despite vows of celibacy, he fathered an illegitimate child with the daughter of a local barber
 - Discovered 300 years later via a letter written by Zwingli himself, found by scholar Johannes Schulthess
 - “No. Protestantism is the truth in all circumstances.” — he archived it for all to see
 - Reminder: our hope is not in sinful men but in the perfect man Jesus Christ
-

Priest at Zurich (1519)

- Appointed to one of the most significant ecclesiastical positions in the country — this marks the start of the Swiss Reformation
 - First Sunday shock: Rather than preaching from the Catholic lectionary (Rome's assigned schedule), he began in Matthew 1:1 and preached verse-by-verse through the whole book
 - This method is called *lectio continua* — Zwingli was the first Reformer to preach this way
 - Why preach this way?
-

KEY DOCTRINE: REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP

- **Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW):** God has given instruction in Scripture on how He is to be worshipped; corporate worship should be governed by what Scripture prescribes
 - **Normative Principle of Worship (NPW):** whatever Scripture does not explicitly forbid may be used in worship.
 - Key text: **Lev. 10:1-2**
 - Applying RPW, Zwingli found no New Testament evidence of instruments in worship and stripped his church of all organs and instruments
 - Why do we use instruments?
 - Most Protestants distinguish **elements** (the “what” of worship: preaching, singing, prayer, sacraments) from **circumstances** (the “how”: service time, seating, instruments). Instrumental accompaniment is a *circumstance* within the element of singing — Scripture doesn’t prescribe exact details, so the church wisely chooses how to carry out what Scripture prescribes
-

The Plague (1519)

- That same year, Zurich was struck by what many believe was the Black Plague — high fevers, boils, blackened extremities; most victims died within a week
 - Despite warnings, Zwingli continued to visit infected congregants in their homes — singing worship, reading Scripture, offering pastoral care
 - He contracted the plague himself; his congregation rallied in prayer, and he miraculously survived after more than three months of recovery
-

The Affair of the Sausages (1522)

- As sola Scriptura took hold, some Zurich citizens noticed the Catholic ban on eating meat during Lent had no biblical basis
 - A group of Zwingli’s congregants staged a deliberate act of protest: they gathered and ate sausages
 - Zwingli did not eat with them but defended the act in a sermon — a small act with enormous theological weight; his public moment of open confrontation with Rome, comparable to Luther’s 95 Theses
 - The Bishop of Constance condemned the incident; the Zurich city council called for public debates in 1523
 - Zwingli drafted his **67 Theses** — surpassing Luther’s 95 Theses in theological depth — and debated Catholic representatives on sola Scriptura
 - Zurich officially became Protestant: Catholic doctrine outlawed, images of saints removed, fasting laws rejected, the Mass abolished
-

Zwingli’s Relationship with Luther

The Lord’s Supper — Four Views

- **1. Transubstantiation (Roman Catholic):** the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Christ at consecration — taste/appearance remain the same, but the substance changes
- **2. Consubstantiation / Real Physical Presence (Luther):** bread and wine remain bread and wine, but Christ’s body and blood are physically present “in, with, and under” the elements

- **3. Memorialism (Zwingli):** the Supper is a symbolic memorial only — the elements are visual aids to help you remember Christ's sacrifice; no special grace is imparted
 - **4. Real Spiritual Presence (Calvin — our church's position):** Christ is not physically present, but is truly received by faith through the Spirit; grace is genuinely imparted when we partake
-

The Colloquy of Marburg (1529)

- Philip of Hesse called Luther, Zwingli, and other Reformers together seeking Protestant unity against the powerful Catholic church
 - **Agreement:** 14 out of 15 doctrinal articles — remarkable unity
 - **Disagreement:** the Lord's Supper. Luther: "This *is* my body." Zwingli: "This *signifies* my body." They left without resolution
 - Luther declared he would rather share wine with Catholics than drink it with the Zwinglians — "*seven times more dangerous than when he was a papist*"
 - This irreconcilable split is the historical reason the Lutheran denomination remains separate from other Reformed traditions (Presbyterians, Reformed Baptists, etc.) to this day
-

Baptism

- Baptism has always been understood as tied to personal faith — the question with infant baptism is how infants who cannot give a credible profession of faith can receive it
 - Two prior answers:
 - o **Medieval church (Augustine):** the church believes on behalf of the infant. But faith by definition must be one's own — "alien faith" did not stick
 - o **Luther:** by a mystery of God, the infant itself actually believes. Parents and godparents answering on the infant's behalf affirm what God mysteriously works in the child. Luther appealed to divine mystery when pressed
 - **Anabaptists** — who emerged from Zwingli's own reform movement before pushing further than he was comfortable with — rejected both: only those who can make a credible profession of faith should be baptized (*believers' baptism*).
 - In his essay *On Baptism*, Zwingli opened with a bombshell: *all teachers of the church since the apostles have been in error on baptism*
 - **Zwingli's innovation:** he severed the link between faith and baptism entirely — for the first time in church history, personal faith is declared non-essential for baptism
 - Instead, baptism is primarily a **covenant sign** — an external marker of the covenant community, analogous to circumcision in the Old Covenant. Since it does not depend on personal faith, infants may be baptized as part of the covenant community
 - Worth noting: those who call Baptists "theological innovators" should consider that *separating faith from baptism* is actually the greater historical innovation — something no one in church history had argued before Zwingli
-

Zwingli and the Anabaptists

- Zwingli's former disciples, the Anabaptists, broke with him over believer's baptism and church-state relations.
 - The Anabaptists anticipated later ideas of religious liberty and a voluntary church.
 - With Zwingli's support, Zürich persecuted Anabaptists and executed leaders such as Felix Manz in 1527.
 - Despite persecution, Anabaptism spread and later influenced the Mennonite and Amish traditions.
-

Death

- Switzerland was a confederation of cantons — some Protestant, some Catholic — with no separation of church and state
- Mounting tensions escalated into the Second War of Kappel in 1531
- Zwingli went into battle in full armor as chaplain and spiritual leader; Zurich was soundly defeated
- Zwingli was killed on the battlefield; his body was ritually humiliated — burned and the ashes mixed with pig's blood, the punishment for traitors
- In hindsight, he should perhaps have been less concerned with defending the gospel by military means — yet his heart is captured in his final admonition: *"Do something bold for God's sake!"*
- Zwingli is the founder of the Reformed tradition; his theological trajectory was taken up and developed by John Calvin in Geneva — to be discussed next week