THE REFORMATION--Lesson 13

HULDREICH ZWINGLI: THE REFORMER OF GERMAN SWITZERLAND #2

ZWINGLI THE PREACHER IN ZURICH

Prayer
Scripture: Hebrews 4:12,13
Hymn: 375 "Fight the Good Fight"

ZWINGLI'S FIRST YEAR IN ZURICH:

On Saturday, January 1, 1519, Huldrech Zwingli presented himself to the canons of the church in Zurich and thanked them for the invitation to be their preacher. He announced his plan to begin the next day a continuous exposition of the New Testament, beginning with the Gospel of Matthew. Instead of giving an exposition from the Fathers he would give an exposition according to the Scriptures themselves. From the beginning his preaching was a sensation. He drew large crowds, including people who had not been regular in church attendance. Lives were dramatically changed.

Zwingli preached almost every day. He preached in the monasteries. Every Friday he preached in the market place to the country people, taking them through the Psalms. In the church by 1525 Zwingli had worked his way through the Greek New Testament.

Zwingli was thirty-five when he began the work in Zurich. With firm resolution it was a new beginning. He considered his role that of the prophet. He was to declare to the people the will of the Lord. He had to rebuke sin in high places as well as in the lives of the common people. He took the prophets and Paul for his models. Rapidly he became the most influential figure in the city.

Zurich had three churches: the Great Minster, the Frau Munster and St. Peter's. The Great Minster had twenty canons and the Frau Munster had seven. Fifty-seven chaplains and priests served the three churches. Dominicans, Franciscans and Augustinians had monasteries in the city. Dominicans and Beguines had houses for nuns. These monastic establishments contained about two hundred monks, nuns and priests. The Bishop of Constance, Hugo von Hohenlandenberg, was the spiritual head, but most of his functions had been taken over by the political power. Zurich was one of the freest, most democratic and powerful of the thirteen cantons. It was a center of fairs and trade. It has been called "The Swiss Corinth." It furnished the pope half of his Swiss Guards.

The political power rested in two councils. The Two Hundred was the large council consisting of delegates from the craftsmen's guilds and a limited number of the Constaffel, a society made up of the heirs of the ancient nobility. The Two Hundred considered and decided all important matters. The Little Council was a select group charged with administration. At the head of the councils was the burgomaster. Zurich was accustomed to controlling its own affairs. Churches, monasteries and clergy were taxed and regulated by the council. By his powerful preaching Zwingli won the confidence of the council which began to look to him for guidance from scripture.

On December 6, 1518, just before he left Einsiedeln, Zwingli first mentioned Luther in a letter. From the beginning in Zurich his correspondence was filled with mentions of Luther. He eagerly read everything by Luther that he could secure. He urged his people to read Luther. Luther's books were sold on the streets in Zurich. The Leipzig Debate heightened Zwingli's interest in and respect for Luther. He was troubled by Luther's harsh and rough manner, but he praised him as the little David up against the great Goliath. He
found comfort in and drew courage from the fact that he found in Luther much of what he had discovered for himself in Scripture. He strongly resented being accused of being a follower of Luther. He always insisted that he first found his message in Scripture. All of his life he credited Wytenbach with opening his eyes to the sole and supreme authority of Scripture. Luther saw in indulgences corrupt doctrine that poisoned the roots of religion. Zwingli saw in indulgences an unlawful encroachment on the liberty of the church and of the individual.

In February of 1519, Samson, the Franciscan indulgence peddler, arrived in Zurich. Zwingli powerfully denounced him in his sermons. The council ordered Samson out of the city, forbidding the sale of indulgences. When some of the monks protested the council ordered them to be silent. Rome did not protest the action of Zurich.

In the summer of 1519 Zwingli was tired and exhausted from over work and was suffering from gall stones. He went to the baths of Pfaffers to recuperate. While he was at the baths the plague hit Zurich. Zwingli rushed back to minister to his people. Before the end of September he had contracted the plague and lingered near death. News spread over Switzerland that he had died. He finally rallied but was very slow in recovering. His brother, James, who had become a monk and was studying in Vienna, had died of the plague. His youngest brother, Andrew, had studied for the ministry, had spent some time with the church in Glarus, and when it was thought that the plague was over, came to Zurich to serve in the presbytery. In November he died of the plague. It was a severe blow to Zwingli.

Zwingli came to the end of his first year in Zurich a more mature, sobered and chastened man. His sufferings had drawn him closer to the Lord. Between 2,500 and 3,500 of Zurich's 7,000 to 9,000 inhabitants had died in the plague. Zwingli announced that some 2,000 had been fed on milk and were now ready for solid food. He had won the warm friendship of Froeschauer, Zurich's printer, who published his sermons and was ready to circulate anything he might write.

THE SECOND YEAR:

In 1520 Zwingli's power as a preacher continued to grow rapidly. He was busy ministering to his people, instructing the council, and continuing his study. Notes in his Bible and his sermon notes show he was steeped in Paul, Psalms, John, Augustine, Luther, Erasmus and the Theologica Germanica. A loyal following was growing among young men who had studied under or with him, among those of humanistic leanings and among the common people. Vocal critics were attacking him. Attacks on indulgences, purgatory, the invocation of saints, and tithing became frequent in his sermons. Friends urged him to be more cautious, to move more slowly and to speak softly. The council was disturbed by the attack on tithing. Zwingli's reply was that he must declare the Truth. No one could stop the Word of God any more than he could dam up the Rhine. He was willing to lay down his life for the Word of God. The pope's maneuvering in the election of the emperor in 1519 had shaken Zwingli's confidence in the pope as a spiritual leader.

THE MERCENARY SERVICE:

In Zurich Zwingli had continued the unpopular denunciation of mercenary service. He declared that war was a great evil.

King Francis I of France at the meeting of the Swiss Diet in May, 1521, sought an alliance with the Confederacy. The Diet concluded a treaty granting the French king the right to enlist 16,000 men.
Albrecht von Stein came to Zurich pushing the treaty and claiming Zurich could raise 10,000 men. The French displayed a lavish lifestyle and offered big money. Zwingli and the burgomaster strongly opposed any alliance with princes. The council voted to continue the old league with no dealings with princes and no pensions or foreign entanglements. This was very unpopular with the other cantons and Zwingli was blamed. Zurich suffered economically.

The pope sent Cardinal Schinoner to Zurich to recruit mercenaries. The council granted him the right to raise a small force for defense of the papacy. Zwingli felt constrained to resign his papal pension. In September, 1521, a force of 6,000 set out to serve the pope. The men were sent against the French at Milan contrary to the terms. The council angrily ordered the soldiers home. The pope had not paid them what was promised and would not pay them after their return. On January 11, 1522 the council forbade all foreign service.

MEAT IN LENT:

In the spring of 1522 during Lent the printer Froeschauer gathered in his home a little group who had been persuaded by Zwingli's sermons that there was nothing in the Bible about Lent and not eating meat in Lent. Froeschauer and his friends all took a bite of sausage in the presence of Zwingli. He would not eat meat in Lent but he promised to defend their eating. Several other small groups reported they had eaten meat in Lent to demonstrate their independence and liberty. Zwingli's critics raised such a storm that the council ordered no further violation of Lent but stated that the New Testament does not authorize fasting in Lent. Zwingli preached and published a sermon entitled "On the Choice and Free Use of Foods," asserting that the Christian was free to fast or not fast according to his conscience, provided he gave no offense to his neighbor.

The Bishop of Constance sent his coadjutant bishop, Melchior Wättli and two clerics to demand that the church's authority be respected in Zurich. The council refused to take action against Zwingli. The Bishop of Constance sent Faber to warn the canons of the churches in Zurich not to be seduced by Zwingli. Zwingli had been appointed one of the canons. In August, 1522, he published his defense, the Archeteles (Beginning-End), explaining that his work would end the matter. The church is founded on the Rock, Christ, and not on the Fisherman. The downfall of unscriptural ceremonies was at hand.

Erasmus sent Zwingli a warning against his rash reply to his bishop. The church took no action against Zwingli, still hoping for Swiss mercenaries.

In July, 1522, Francois Lambert, a Franciscan monk from Avignon, visited Zurich. Zwingli let him preach and then challenged his position on prayer to the Virgin. After a friendly discussion, Lambert announced Zwingli had convinced him of the Truth.

THE SWISS SEEK WIVES:

In July, 1522, eleven Swiss priests, including Zwingli and three others from Zurich, met in the home of Leo Jud, Zwingli's successor in Einsiedeln, and drew up a petition to the Bishop of Constance for permission for clerical marriages. Bishop Hugo was enjoying a large income from fines imposed on clerics who had concubines and children. Most of the petitioners had concubines following the common practice. They offered scriptural proofs for marriage and denounced the tyranny of Rome. The bishop refused their demand.

Zwingli, after a secret ceremony, took into his house a widow of nine years, Anna Reinhard. Zwingli had taught her brilliant son, Gerold Meyer. Two years would elapse before he would publicly marry
her. Zwingli thanked God for blessing them with four children.
Regula married Rudolf Gwalter who published the collected works
of Zwingli. William died of plague while studying in Strasbourg.
Ulrich became a minister and professor and married the daughter of
Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli’s successor. Anna died in infancy.

BREAK WITH ERASMUS:

When the knights were defeated and destroyed in Germany, Ulrich
von Hutten fled to Basel where he was rejected by Erasmus. Zwingli
took in the dying outcast, admiring his attack on old traditions
not found in Scripture. This led to a final break between Zwingli
and Erasmus, Glareanus and the humanists. The humanists, like the
Romanists, began to class Zwingli with Hus and Luther.

GROWING OPPOSITION:

Late in 1522 Leo Jud moved from Einsiedeln to Zurich to be the
preacher in St. Peter’s. He was vocal and powerful in his support
of Zwingli. Zwingli sent letters to other cantons to ban the
mercenary service. The Bishop of Constance and Faber denounced
Zwingli and warned the people against him. The monks in Zurich asked
the council to forbid Zwingli to make any attacks on them in his
sermons. Zwingli insisted it was his right and duty to preach the
Word of God. The council ruled that Zwingli would preach in the
monasteries. Leo Jud interrupted an Augustinian monk preaching on
the street and argued with him. The monks’ friends gave Jud a fierce
beating. Tension mounted in the city. Zwingli received warnings
that he would be killed.

Zwingli’s Archeteles brought forth the protest that the common
people could not understand the Scriptures without guidance from the
pope. Zwingli replied with "Of the Clarity and Certainty of the
Word of God"—the Word of God is a bright light. He followed this
with "Of Mary, the Pure Mother of God," in which he denied the
immaculate conception of Mary. Both sermons were printed and
circulated.

The Bishop of Constance began to exercise severe discipline
where possible. Priests from Knonau and Höngg were summoned to
appear before his tribunal. The priest of Fialisbach in the province
of Baden was arrested and thrown into prison for holding the ideas
of Zwingli. Action against Zwingli was impossible because of the
protection of the council. Rome was reluctant to take action because
of dependence on the Swiss.

Zwingli’s friends feared for his life and tension and strife
grew in Zurich. Zwingli committed his case to God.

THE FIRST DEBATE:

Near the end of 1522 Zwingli petitioned the council for a public
debate on the issues disturbing the city. The council set and
announced the debate to be held in the Town Hall on January 29, 1523.
Invitations were sent to the Bishop of Constance and to the clerics
and representatives of the cantons. Zwingli prepared his Sixty-seven
Conclusions to be defended in the debate. Six hundred people flocked
to the debate. The audience included the Bishop of Constance and
high ranking ecclesiastics, representatives from a number of the
cantons, members of the two councils of Zurich, and many from the
city and surrounding villages and country. Burgomaster Rost presided.
Zwingli presented his sixty-seven propositions. The first fifteen
set forth the Gospel as the source of Truth. Christ as the only
Savior, Christ as the head of the church, and the church as the
children of God. Then Zwingli began an examination of the customs
and practices of the church in the light of these principles. He
rejected the pope, the sacrifice of the mass, the invocation of
saints, the wealth of the clergy, fasting, pilgrimages, monastic
orders, the tonsure and clerical clothes. He defended the right of
the clergy to marry and condemn vows of chastity. Excommunication
belonged to the local church. The wealth of the monasteries should
be used to care for the poor. Civil authority was ordained
by God, should be honored, and should promulgate laws according to
the divine will. Prayer should be quiet and without pomp and show.
Christ alone can forgive sin. He denounced penances and purgatory.

Zwingli had open before him a Hebrew, a Greek and a Latin Bible.
At the end of his presentation he called for an answer to his
propositions.

The Bishop of Constance in the red cap and robe spoke in
conciliatory terms of Zwingli as his "good friend" and "dear
brother" declaring that these propositions could not be debated
before an audience. They could only be considered in a general
council of in the universities of Paris, Cologne and
Louvain. Zwingli asked why not in Wittenberg or Erfurt. He pointed
to his open Bibles and declared that Zurich had competent scholars
to expound the Word of God. The Bishop declared he had received
the propositions too late to read them. After considerable prodding the
bishop spoke briefly praising the invocation of the saints and the
celibacy of the clergy. A man in the audience shouted, "For twelve
hundred years now the priests have not been allowed to marry... but
have been allowed to take prostitutes!"

The burgomaster called for a lunch break during which the
council would prepare its decision.

After the lunch break Zwingli again invited an answer to his
propositions. The Pastor of Neftenbach rose and asked the bishop
why he had imprisoned the Pastor of Fislischach. Faber replied that
he was an ignorant man who had been convinced of his errors with the
aid of Scripture. Zwingli called for the Scriptures. When no reply
came the burgomaster replied that the weapon that had stabbed the
Pastor of Fislischach could not be produced. Faber attempted to
defend church tradition and the mass. Zwingli kept pressing for
relevant passages of Scripture. Faber called for competent judges
of the Word of God. Zwingli declared that the Word of God was self-
evident and the only judge.

Finally the burgomaster declared the discussion closed and
announced the decision of the council: Master Zwingli had not been
convicted of heresy and would continue to proclaim the Word of God
according to the Holy Spirit. Zwingli cried, "God be praised and
thanked, for His sacred Word shall prevail in Heaven and on earth!"

The hierarchy returned to Constance inflamed by the defeat.
Zwingli gained great confidence from the victory. To his people
he was a great hero. Between February and June he prepared his
Commentary on the Sixty-seven Theses, which was printed in July
and dedicated to Glarus, his first parish.

Rome still did not move against Zwingli.