

Church History - the Early Reformers Part 2 (Hus & Erasmus)

by David Guzik

John Huss, a 15th-century reformer, challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and was subsequently condemned to death for heresy and insubordination.

Duration: 33:34

Scripture: John 6:53

Topics: "Church History", "Reformation Theology"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the impact of the Crusades on European people and their encounters with ancient cultures. They highlight how seeing statues and sculptures from ancient Greece and Rome during their travels made a profound impression on them. The speaker then shifts to discussing the influence of cartoons on a man named John Hus. These cartoons depicted Jesus wearing a crown of thorns and the pope adorned in luxurious attire, selling indulgences for the forgiveness of sins. This stark contrast between Jesus' freely given forgiveness and the pope's commercialized approach had a significant impact on John Hus.

Transcript

We're talking in our series now about the early reformers. We talked last time about two early reformers, Peter Waldo and then John Wycliffe. Now, you take Waldo and Wycliffe, and then we're going to talk about a third one here this morning, John Huss.

To me, this is kind of interesting. I don't know if it's interesting to you, but there's a lot of it. When you deal with names, kind of the more distant names are historically, the more different readings you get on the names.

I've heard this guy referred to as Jan Huss. I've heard him referred to as John with no H Huss. I've heard Huss spelled either S S or just H U S. You know, I think there's a lot of it's just phonetic.

Now, John Huss was basically born in the generation after John Wycliffe. Lived in a different generation, in a different place, but he carried on many of the same ideas and he was rejected by the church just as strongly. Huss read Wycliffe's writings, and he was greatly influenced by them.

John Huss grew up in what is modern day Czech Republic. Bohemia is the place. You're talking about Central Europe.

In this area of Central Europe, early in his Christian life, believe it or not, two cartoons had a big influence on John Huss. Isn't that interesting? These were just pictures. Again, remember, this is in the days when Well, you're talking about 1415.

So these would probably be, you know, woodblock engravings or stuff like this. But he saw two cartoons that really made an influence on him. It was the message of the cartoons.

One, and these cartoons were basically cards. On one, on the first cartoon that he saw, on one side of the card was Jesus wearing a crown of thorns. No, excuse me.

There wasn't two sides of the card. It would be top and bottom. On the top was Jesus wearing a crown of thorns.

On the bottom was the Pope decked out in all of his papal splendor. You know, wearing a crown of gold and expensive clothes. Just seeing that, you can see how that would make a guy think, something's not right here.

My Lord wore a crown of thorns. And here's the Pope. He's wearing a crown of gold.

Now, would to God that the only difference or the main difference between the medieval papacy and Jesus' day was what they wore. Would to God that it was just a wardrobe difference. But it wasn't.

The wardrobe difference was just an indication of a far deeper difference of heart between the heart of Jesus and the heart of the medieval popes. The second cartoon that John Huss saw that really had an influence on him, on the top was a picture of Jesus saying to the woman taken in adultery, Go, your sins are forgiven you. A very powerful picture from what is the Gospel of John chapter 7. Go, your sins are forgiven you.

A very powerful picture. The bottom picture, what is it? It's the Pope selling indulgences for the forgiveness of sins. So here you have the contrast, don't you? Here's Jesus giving forgiveness freely.

The woman taken in adultery comes to Jesus and says, Go your way, your sins are forgiven. And here's the Pope. He goes, Ante up.

Let's take an offering and then we're going to see if the sins get forgiven. So you can see how these things would have a huge influence on a man. And for John Huss, the contrast between Jesus and the Pope illustrated by these cartoons made a big impact.

John Huss lived in Bohemia in the city of Prague, one of the great cities of ancient Europe and of today. And in that city, there was a church called Bethlehem Chapel. Now when we say a church, what church are we talking about? We're talking about the Roman Catholic Church, aren't we? There is no Protestant church.

There is no Methodist church. There is no Anglican church. There is no, I mean, when you talk about the church, you're talking about Roman.

So when you say there was a church in Bohemia known as Bethlehem Chapel, are we talking about some different division of the Roman? No, we're talking about the Roman Catholic Church. But obviously, in a city, they would have a bunch of churches all over town, right? To minister to what they call today, and especially called back then, to each parish, right? Every neighborhood would have its own church, its own chapel, and have its own parish. Now, there would be maybe a little bit different emphasis, a little bit different thing from one chapel to another, etc., etc.

But here at each parish, there was the place of the Bethlehem Chapel. And what was interesting about Bethlehem Chapel? For whatever reason, I don't know exactly why. It would be interesting to figure out why or go find out why historically.

But Bethlehem Chapel was a church, Roman Catholic Church, committed to preaching in the native language of the Bohemians, which I guess would be Czech or some kind of Germanic, Slavic language, something like that. Preaching in the native language. In other words, at Bethlehem Chapel, they did not preach in Latin.

They did not conduct, well, they probably conducted the Mass in Latin, but the minister, or the priest, did not give his sermon in Latin. So, big difference there at Bethlehem Chapel. So, this would have been cutting edge.

The priest is actually preaching to us in a language we can understand. And I'm not talking about using fancy words they couldn't, I'm talking about a language they could understand. So, this was interesting, and this is where John Hus preached.

He was a priest, a Roman Catholic priest, and his job was to preach at Bethlehem Chapel. He just simply taught the Scriptures in the language people could understand, and he made a huge impact on the city. Huge.

The Mass is the ceremony centered around the Eucharist, where they ring the bells, and the priest holds up the thing, and he says the words, and all that, and you take communion. The official ceremony of the Mass pretty much ends when you come up and take communion. That's the culmination of it.

But the Mass is the ceremony performed at the altar when the priest stands up there and breaks the bread. In the Roman Catholic theology, that is the body of Jesus Christ broken again in atonement for sin. Which, as Bible-believing Christians, should be of grave concern to us.

Because the Bible speaks about those who crucify the Son of God again, putting Him to an open shame. I think that the theology behind... Now, some people find the Mass a very beautiful, very moving thing. You know, it has the ceremony and the pomp and this.

Theologically, I find the Mass deeply offensive. Because, let me tell you, according to Roman Catholic theology, the Mass is not a remembrance of the crucifixion. It's doing it again.

Now, does the average Roman Catholic know it? Probably not. The priests know it, but the average Roman Catholic doesn't. The average Roman Catholic doesn't understand.

They probably think it's a memorial of the crucifixion. But, I mean, we're not talking about something that's open to doubt. When you take a look at what Roman Catholic theologians tell you what the Mass is about, it is not a reenactment.

It is a redoing of it. It's not a remembrance of Jesus' crucifixion. They crucify Jesus again and again.

And if there is any doctrine that should be precious to the Bible-believing Christian, it is the doctrine that the work of Jesus Christ on the cross is a finished work. It's done. He doesn't need to be crucified again.

We can remember His work, we can thank Him for it, but it doesn't need to be performed again. So, I kind of got off the track on that. So that's the difference.

The Mass, the ceremony of the Mass, is centered around this. Now, in addition to the Mass, I always remember this, because when I was a Catholic and as a boy went to Catholic church, this is what they call the homily. That's the message, that's the sermon that the priest gives.

Now, yeah, that's done after the Mass. Homily comes from the word homiletics, which means the science of preaching. So, I mean, it's just like a Latin word for preaching, the homily.

I cannot tell you a... I mean, and I went to Mass on and off for, you know, 7, 8, 10 years as a boy. You know, pretty much when I was 13 I was confirmed I never went to Mass again. But I cannot tell you a single thing the priest ever talked about in the homily.

I mean, it was just that... Now, you should know that in some Roman Catholic churches there are some Bible-believing priests who really endeavor to preach the gospel and preach the word of God in the homily. And there's coming more and more of them. You know why? Because they see their church as being emptied out.

People want the Bible. There's not very many of them, but there's more than there used to be. So, John Huss, he's preaching at Bethlehem Chapel.

He would conduct the Mass. He's a priest, right? So he'd conduct the Mass. But when it came time for the homily, he'd open up the Bible and he'd say, let's see what the Bible says.

This had a huge impact. I mean, people were getting sad, people were getting upset. Since he's teaching people the Bible, he's in the word for himself.

So the questions are going to start coming up. Now, what were some of the things that came up with him? Well, one of the things that bothered John Huss was the Catholic practice of denying the cup to the laity. Again, you've got to know something about the Mass to know this.

When lay people... you know what a lay person is, right? You have clergy and lay people. Clergy are the church officers, the priests. The lay people are everybody else.

When the congregation comes up to receive communion at a Roman Catholic church, do they give you a cup of wine to drink? Do they give you the cup to drink? Why not? Isn't that what communion... didn't Jesus say, take this cup and the bread? I mean, when we take communion, you drink from a little cup. Why does the Roman Catholic Church deny the cup to the laity? What is in that cup, according to Roman Catholic theology? The symbolic blood of Jesus? The actual blood of Jesus. What would happen, God forbid, if they spilled it? Or if they dribbled down their thing? That would be sacrilege.

You would be wasting the blood of Jesus. You would be making sacrilege of the blood of Jesus. Because it's so holy and it's so precious, you can't trust the laity with the cup.

That was the thinking of Roman Catholic theology. It's been around for 500 years or more since the days of John Hus. If this is the thinking of Roman Catholic theology, you can't trust the laity with the cup.

Why would they say... I mean, how can they deny it? Well, it's clever. It's clever. They say, no, we give them the bread, which Jesus said was his flesh, was his body.

Now, if you came and bit a chunk out of my arm right now, you'd get some blood in there, wouldn't you? You don't have to actually fill up a cup full of my blood to drink my blood. If you took a chunk out of my... you'd consume some of my blood, too. See, the blood is in the flesh.

So we just give them the... You know what John Hus said? John Hus said, listen man, Jesus instituted this. I don't know why we're keeping the cup from the ordinary Christians. Number two, Hus believed in the authority of the Bible.

Now, you say, well, don't Roman Catholics believe in the authority of the Bible? Well, yes and no. Roman Catholic believes that there are three things higher than the Bible in authority. Number one, the Pope.

Number one, the councils of cardinals. Councils slash cardinals. And then number three, tradition.

In Roman Catholic theology, each one of those things is greater than the Bible. So, do they say that the Bible has authority? Sure it does. But not more authority than the Pope.

Not more authority than councils and cardinals. Not more authority than tradition. So, Hus believed in the authority of the Bible.

Well, number three, Hus condemned corrupt clergy. He freely criticized people for worshipping images and statues. And for believing in contrived miracles and having a superstitious spirit in the Christian life.

You know, you can imagine the depths of superstition in the Roman Catholicism of that time. Then finally, number four, and these weren't the only complaints, these were just the major complaints of John Hus about the Roman Catholic Church. Hus condemned the sale of indulgences.

Now, we haven't talked a whole lot about indulgences. We've talked a little bit about it. We'll talk more about indulgences later.

But indulgences are the thing that the Pope would sell for the forgiveness of sins. We'll talk more about the whole theology of indulgences later. Now, the religious authorities objected when John Hus spoke out against church teachings and practices.

They commanded that his and Wycliffe's writings be burned. And they had a big bonfire in the courtyard of the palace. And so they were burning all these books and they asked Hus if he was ready to obey the Pope's commands.

You know, here they are burning his works, burning Wycliffe's works. Which actually Hus probably took as a compliment. You're putting my works with Wycliffe's? Burning them together? Thanks.

You know, that's a compliment. But they asked him, are you ready to start obeying the Pope? And he said, you know what, I will obey the commands of the Pope so far as they agree with the doctrines of Jesus Christ. When I see that they are to the contrary of the doctrines of Jesus Christ, I'm not going to obey the Pope, even if you burn my body.

In the year 1409, the Pope issued a decree that John Hus could no longer preach in Bethlehem Chapel. I mean, that was the place where the big problem was. Now, Hus and his friends refused to obey this order of the Pope.

You know what Hus said? He said, Jesus Christ commissioned me to preach the gospel, not the Pope. So I'm going to keep going. So Hus was commanded to appear at a trial for heresy and insubordination at Rome.

Now they had two things to condemn Hus of. Heresy and insubordination. Right? Because he wouldn't do what the Pope told him to do.

Now, Hus would not go to Rome. What Hus did was he sent representatives. And this did not sit well with the Pope.

I mean, he wanted John Hus to come. So what the Pope did was he excommunicated John Hus. But John Hus still had a lot of support in his native land of Bohemia.

His friends routed around him and made it possible for him to continue preaching. Hus was even elected to a prestigious new post in a university. But this did not end his struggles with the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1411, the Pope commanded a new crusade to be fought. And it takes a lot of money to fight a crusade, doesn't it? So the Pope commanded a whole new business of selling indulgences. Hus was just, again, outraged at the selling of indulgences.

Which we'll talk a little bit more about later. I'm kind of saving that for Martin Luther. Because that was the flashpoint of Luther's Reformation.

The preaching of John Hus really rebuked the Roman Catholic Church for the sale of indulgences. They went and they started, you know, there was a big attack on the city. Roman Catholic troops were trying to overthrow the city and take it over.

The Pope declared the city of Prague to be under special curse from God. Because they would not deliver John Hus to the trials for heresy. Hus saw that his usefulness was being diminished.

So what he did was he left the city of Prague and he just started traveling around from place to place. But this issue was still burning. In the year 1414, the Roman Emperor, not the Pope, the Roman Emperor Sigismund, this Roman Emperor wanted to help the Pope out and resolve this issue.

So what he did was he called a special council. Let's get together a special council and examine these accusations against John Hus. And he tried to put it in a way that would make John Hus come.

You know, look, we're going to have a council where we get together and we discuss these theological issues. We'll just sit down and we'll discuss them. You know what John Hus said to this invitation? What? I know what's going to happen.

I'm going to go there and you guys are going to arrest me and burn me at the stake. You're not looking for a friendly little discussion about doctrine here. You want my head.

But Emperor Sigismund made John Hus a promise. He gave him what's called the promise of safe passage. You come.

We'll guarantee you safe passage to and from the council. We just want to get this thing resolved. Well, Hus agonized over the decision.

I mean, he had this promise from Sigismund that he wouldn't be harmed, even if he was found guilty on all charges. They said, we won't harm you. We'll let you go.

But we want to get this resolved theologically. He agonized over the decision. You know, he'd be leaving his safe home.

He'd be going into the territory of his avowed enemies. But the Emperor promised no harm would come to him. So Hus eventually decided to go.

You know, he thought, maybe I'll have the opportunity to make a stand for the truth and to clear my name. Because he was accused. There were a lot of things that the Roman Catholic Church could get Hus on, right? But then they piled on top of that a lot of false accusations.

So it didn't work out that way at all. Once Hus got to the city where the council was to take place, it didn't take long before he was very treacherously lured into a trap and then imprisoned in a dungeon. By the way, the dungeon was close to the outlet of the city sewer.

You can imagine what that was like. Then they had the trial. And you can imagine what the verdict was on the trial, right? Guilty.

Guilty on all accounts. But before he was finally condemned for heresy, he was allowed one public hearing where John Hus was allowed to present his case, right? I mean, that's what Hus was really looking for. He was looking for the opportunity to speak before this council, to present his case, to say, let me tell you my views.

Not what other people say I've said. Let me say what I want to tell you. So after they found him guilty, they said, fine, we'll let you speak.

They brought him up, but then they wouldn't let him speak. And they misrepresented his teaching. They condemned him as guilty.

And they refused to let him clarify what he taught. Do you realize how agonizing that would be? Here you are on trial and have a guy say, well, he believes this and he believes that and he believes this. And you're like, no, no, that's not what I believe.

Let me clarify. But they won't let you talk. And so you've got to go a guy going on, well, he believes this and he believes that and he believes the other thing.

Well, they won't let you clarify what you mean, what you're saying. Or defend it. When Hus was finally condemned, the officials at the council shouted this out.

They shouted this in unison. We commit thy soul to the devil. You know what Hus cried out in reply? He had all these voices saying in unison, we commit thy soul to the devil.

And immediately Hus cried out in response. One voice, he said, and I commit it to the Lord Jesus Christ. They hurried him out of the council.

They put a burning crown of blasphemy on his head. And falling to his knees, he said, into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. I am willing patiently and publicly to endure this dreadful, shameful, and cruel death for the sake of thy gospel and the preaching of thy word.

We've got some things here from the writings of John Hus, if I can find him here, from his treatise on the church. If he who is called to be Peter's vicar, again, that means representative, that's what they said that the Pope was, Peter's vicar. If he who is called to be Peter's vicar follows in the paths of virtue, we believe that he is his true vicar.

And the true pontiff of the church over which he rules. But if he walks in the opposite paths, then he is the legate of Antichrist against that variance with Peter in Jesus Christ. Look at the last quote I have in that section, where he says on page 5, No Pope is the manifest and true successor of Peter, the prince of apostles, if in morals he lives at variance with the principles of Peter.

And if he is avaricious, then the vicar of Judas, who loved the reward of iniquity and sold Jesus Christ. You know, there's something beautiful about the way they wrote back then. They did not pull punches.

You know? And there's just something wonderful about that. From a letter to friends concerning his struggles in prison. It says, Paulets came to visit me in prison and accosted me in my deep distress by telling me in the presence of the commissioners that since the birth of Christ there had arisen no heretic more dangerous than Wycliffe and myself.

He further declared that all those who have listened to my preachings are infected with his heresy, which consists of affirming that the material bread remains in the sacrament of the altar. Oh, Paulets, I answered, how cruel are these words and how much you have sinned against me. I'm about to die.

Perhaps when I rise from my bed, I should be conducted to the stake. What reward will they give you in Bohemia? I should have perhaps abstained from these things for fear of appearing to hate them. And then he says, A worthy shoemaker, Andrei Polina, said while bidding me farewell, May God be with you.

I can hardly hope that you will return safe and sound, my very dear master John, you who cling with so much force to truth. May the king, not of he of Hungary, but of heaven, bestow on you his blessing for the true and excellent doctrines that I've learned from you. That's what a guy, one of his parishioners, said to him before he left Bohemia.

These are the words of John Hus before he left as they carried him from the council. He said, Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. I'm willingly, patiently, and publicly to endure this dreadful, shameful, and cruel death for the sake of thy gospel and the preaching of thy word.

And then this is what he said when they brought him to the stake. On the sixth of July, John Hus was burned at the stake. He was condemned by the same church that had promised him safe passage.

When he arrived at the stake, he was asked one more time to recant his views. Right? Last chance. This is what he said.

God is my witness that the evidence against me is false. I have never thought nor preached except with the one intention of winning men, if possible, from their sins. Today I will gladly die.

John Hus was a remarkable early light of the Reformation. All right, let's take ten minutes and talk about the last early Reformer. And his name was Desiderius Erasmus.

One of the big influences that led to the Reformation was the Renaissance in Europe. The Renaissance was a cultural and educational rebirth of Europe. This is what brought Europe out of the Dark Ages.

That's what we call medieval Europe, right? The Dark Ages. Or sometimes we call it the Middle Ages. You know, both of those are pretty much a slap.

When you call something the Middle, usually you mean what's before and after is more important. Out of the Renaissance came a much greater interest in learning and in culture than before. By the way, one of the big ways that the Renaissance began, believe it or not, was by the Crusades.

Before the Crusades, not many people in Europe traveled very much. When you grow up in a village, live in a village, die in a village, your world doesn't go much beyond that village, does it? But when you go out on a crusade and see a lot of different things, and encounter different people, and travel, and when your world is suddenly interacting with the world around you, it makes a big difference on you. And one of the things that they did was they went back and they saw these lands of ancient Greece and Rome and the lands of the ancient worlds of the Bible.

And they realized something. They realized, and again, I'm condensing a lot of stuff into a few sentences here. Anybody who knows the history of this, and if they're listening to this tape, they're probably groaning and saying, how can you explain it like that? I'm oversimplifying by a million fold.

But they came into contact with these cultures, and some of them were ancient cultures that they discovered through the remains. They saw a statue, a sculpture. For example, and I'll just make a hypothetical illustration.

Here's a bunch of European people, a bunch of people from France, poor peasants, and here they are in the army of the crusades. And they come across, and they're traveling across, and they're going through Greece on their way to the Holy Land, and they see this magnificent statue from ancient Greece. Something like Poseidon or Apollo.

And they look at it, and they say, we have never seen anything like this. Never. Have you ever seen medieval artwork and stuff? A lot of it's real crude looking, like almost block figures.

And they look at the sculpture, and they go, think of the people that produced this. They were far more advanced than we were. Far more advanced educationally, culturally, linguistically.

And so they started to discover the writings and the culture of ancient worlds, of ancient Greece and ancient Rome mostly. And you know what? They came to the realization, you know what? We've slid back. One of the things that we take for granted at the end of the 20th century is progress.

But from the fall of the Roman Empire through the Middle Ages, educationally and culturally, there was not an advance. Here's the fall of the Roman Empire. Actually, you could even date it from before that if you want to.

Here's the fall of the Roman Empire. Let me put it to you this way. In the days of Rome, they had things like indoor plumbing, trade using money, a money-based economy.

You know how you traded in medieval Europe? You traded chickens and stuff like that. It was barter. Society was just so much more advanced in the days of Rome and Greece than it was in the days of medieval Europe.

And so they said, man, we've gone down. Well, the Renaissance said, let's change that. And they started wanting to go back up into restoring some of the glory of ancient Greece and ancient Rome.

Well, one of the things that really made a difference in that was getting back to the original documents. I mean, you want to know what the Romans said, what the Romans wrote, what the Greeks said, what the Greeks wrote. You don't want somebody to tell you what they said.

They said, let's get back to the sources. In Latin, the phrase is *ad fontes*. You could say to the fount, the source, the beginning.

Get to the beginning. Get to the fount. Get to the source.

Let's check that out. And so that's what they were doing. That's what they had a commitment to do.

In its later period of the Renaissance, a lot of this had to do with a guy named Desiderius Erasmus. Erasmus was a brilliant scholar and one of the things that he did, now I say you can call him an early reformer in some ways and in some ways not. He lived at the same time as Martin Luther.

Erasmus and Luther corresponded back and forth. But what Erasmus did is, he's almost a picture of a guy who wanted to reform the church from the Renaissance end. Erasmus' difficulties with the church were not primarily spiritual.

He wasn't a particularly spiritual man. His differences with the church were scholarly and moral. He looked at the low moral state of the church and he said it's got to be cleaned up and he looked at the low scholarly state of the church and he said it has to be cleaned up.

Martin Luther's reformation was fundamentally a spiritual reformation. Erasmus was not mainly interested in truth or dogma. He was interested in morality.

One of the great contributions that Erasmus made was he made an edition of the Greek New Testament that all of Europe was reading. And this is very Renaissance. You want to get back to what the Bible says? Don't read it in Latin.

Read it in Greek. Read it in the language it came from. That's how you know what it really says.

And this would really lay the groundwork for the ideas of the Reformation for getting back to the Bible. If you're going back to the sources, get back to the Bible. A common saying.

And in a lot of ways, it's true. Well, let me put it to you this way. This is what Luther said of Erasmus.

Martin Luther said of Desiderius Erasmus, he has pointed out the evil, but he's unable to point out the good in leading to the promised land. Erasmus was good at saying, this is wrong, this is wrong, this is wrong. But he didn't come up with the solutions the way Luther did.

A more common way of saying it, and this is a saying. You might want to write this one down. Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it.

That's a common saying about the Reformation or Reformation history. Erasmus laid the egg, but Luther hatched it. Laying it is important, but if you don't hatch it, you don't hatch it.

So, next week, we'll talk about Martin Luther himself. That'll be a fun one. Lord God, we thank you for our time together here this morning, and I just pray for a blessing on all these, my friends, Lord.

And we thank you and praise you in Jesus' name.

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