

## HERITAGE OF THE REFORMATION: 500 YEARS OF EXPOSITORY BIBLE PREACHING

by Dr. John Battle, Professor of NT at WRS

If you visit Geneva, Switzerland, you will see the famous Reformation Monument. At its center stand four major reformers: Calvin, Farel, Beza, and Knox, each with a large Bible in his hands. This represents the central place of the Bible in the Reformation. Another important preacher that could well stand among them is the Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli.



Exactly five hundred years ago, late in the year 1518, young Ulrich arrived in the Swiss city of Zurich to take up his new post as parish priest. Just a year earlier Martin Luther had posted his 95 Theses, and his revolutionary ideas were sweeping through Germany. But Zwingli had been studying the Greek New Testament for several years already. Gradually but forcefully he accepted the doctrines of the Reformation, even before the Reformation was known.

In those days most priests had a reputation for lives of ease and corruption. Their primary goals were to enjoy their position, raise money for the church, and rise in the ranks of the clergy. When Zwingli arrived in Zurich, the local church leaders told him that they expected him to concentrate on getting money for them, raising offerings and charging fees for spiritual services. They told him that he did not need to preach or perform other duties so much—he could delegate those jobs to assistants. But he did have to bring in the cash!

For the previous seven hundred years preaching had been easy. The church calendar determined the topic for each Sunday of the year. Sermons were short exhortations for the people to do their duties to the church. They did not have Bibles, and sermons were not designed to teach the Bible.

Zwingli had found life, forgiveness, and joy in the Bible. He had discovered the Word of God, and he knew that his congregation needed the

true biblical gospel. So he announced a new, revolutionary policy: he would forsake the church calendar and would systematically preach from the Bible each Sunday. The church leaders were shocked!



He started with preaching through the Gospel of Matthew, verse by verse, basing his preaching on the original Greek text. Beginning with Matthew chapter one, with the list of the ancestors of Jesus, he worked through the book verse by verse each Sunday.

The people loved it! The congregation grew each Sunday until the church was full. Many other church leaders joined in the movement. The Swiss Reformation continued and gained strength through the years.

Just as in Switzerland, the Protestant Reformation brought the Bible to the people, from the original Greek and Hebrew, into the national languages—French, German, English, and other languages as well. And the preachers used the pulpits of the churches to teach the Word, developing expository preaching. This preaching was the bedrock of the Reformation. Through all the trials and struggles and persecutions to follow, the common Christians knew the Word.

When your pastor today tells you to open your Bible and then explains the text and context, he is continuing the great tradition of expository preaching, which started anew 500 years ago!

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