

The Testimony of Jesus

Part 4

Matthew 16:17-18: And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

There is the precious promise we have of the Lord saying, “I will build My church.” Praise God for that!

Revelation 1:17-18, and here we have this beautiful description of the testimony of Jesus as He shares about Himself.

“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.’”

As we consider this matter of the testimony of Jesus throughout church history, it is good to remind ourselves that that testimony of Jesus is all of Him; it is who He is. He is the all-inclusive One. It is His life that He is looking for, an expression of His life of His very character and nature. It is a testimony of His all-victorious nature, all that He has done and all that He is going to do; everything is found in Him. Even as we started this morning with the verses from Ephesians, we want to continue to see the working of our Lord Jesus and the focusing upon Him throughout these times in history. As we have already seen, ones have a tendency to add something to Him or take something away. Either one of those actions adulterates the testimony, and we want to be those who are keeping a clear and pure testimony, remaining in that simplicity of Christ and learning from those who have gone before us.

May we have a word of prayer:

Lord, we are thankful for all that You have done, and we have experienced it every day in our lives. As we are here today, we want to continue in a spirit of worship and adoration unto You for who You are and the great testimony that there is in You. Lord, we see that the more we consider You, the more we see all the ways that You prove Yourself faithful. In spite of man being unfaithful, even in spite of man's good intentions, good, so-called man's good works, Lord, You remain faithful, and You carry on Your testimony. We just want to be those who are continuing to focus upon that and allow You to be expressed through us in a fuller and greater way. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

Review

This is the fourth part of the series, and just as a matter of review, it is always good to remember that the church was in God's heart from eternity past, and it had a glorious birth on that day of Pentecost. It had a healthy beginning. There was a pure, precious testimony, and God's desire throughout the ages has been that we would be a people, who are staying in that place of simplicity and purity of our devotion to Him. You see that expressed in Acts 2 as they met together. There was a beautiful simplicity and purity, and it was all about Him.

As we see throughout history, it is tragic how the church compromised with the world, and this compromise brought about a lot of darkness, and it brought about much persecution. The Lord was bringing much of this persecution upon the people to awaken them to return to Him. We see that persecution is a refining fire of God trying to get our attention. First, He tries to get our attention through His love. He shows us His love and tenderness and mercy. If that does not get our attention, He will then, as the loving One, try to woo us back to Him by bringing some difficult times upon us. I think one of the things we have been going through in this pandemic in the last year has been a very difficult time. But I think the testimony that we hear from many is that they have drawn a little bit closer to the Lord. And we actually can look

back at this past year with a spirit of thanksgiving because through the trial of this pandemic, which is not over yet, we have each found Christ in a way we did not know before, and for that we can be thankful. And would that we would hold to that because we know that there is an enemy out there who is against the testimony of Jesus. But praise God, throughout this time, God has His hidden ones.

Psalm 83:1-4: “Behold, your enemies make a tumult: and those who hate you have lifted up their heads. They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted together against your hidden ones, (treasured ones, NAS). And the enemy said, “Come let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.”

I am going to change one word in that to show the significance and continuation of this battle today. In the very last phrase: “the battle today is that the name of *Jesus* be remembered no more.” That is what we are caught up in, brothers and sisters, and it is a relentless battle. It is not something of this century; it has been going on since creation. This is why we need to find Him as our all in all. It is wonderful to sit here and worship on Sunday declaring Him as our all in all, but it is in the dailyness of life that we need to find that all-sufficiency in Him and Him alone.

The Dark Ages

As we continue today, we will be looking more at the latter part of the dark ages. As with last time, we will start with the negative side, describing the environment and the circumstances that ones were living in. Then we will end up with the glorious side of that silver thread, the testimony of Him, the ones who were living in the midst of this.

There are a few major events that occurred during this time in which the Roman Catholic Church gained more and more world power. We see a rise in the Monastic orders, the Crusades, the Inquisitions where anything that was against the pope or the Roman Catholic Church was

suppressed. Also during this time there was the plague, the Black Death in which thirty to sixty per cent of Europe was wiped out.

Now to show how the pope gained more and more power, I am just going to pick a couple of examples.

Pope Gregory VII Vs. King Henry IV (Germany)

This is during the time of Pope Gregory and Henry IV who was the King of Germany. There was a change of the archbishop in Germany, and Henry wanted this certain person to be archbishop. Of course, none of these people were acting out of pure motives. Let us be clear about that. It was not because Henry wanted this guy because he was godly. Henry wanted a bishop who would show favor to him, and the pope wanted a bishop who would show favor to him. That is what it was about.

So Pope Gregory disapproved of the bishop and excommunicated Henry. Now in the olden days during this time, superstition was very strong, and the power of the church was growing. However, outside of the church there was no salvation; that is what people were taught. They did not have a great educational system that was teaching the people how to read the Bible. They did not even have access to it; it was superstition and word of mouth that was passed down. We will see throughout this period the dawn of education, and that is one of the beautiful things that believers brought about. But at this point it had not been brought in. So to be cast out of the church created a hopelessness there, and actually Henry was brought to his knees. The pope at this point was in a castle in the mountains during the winter while it was snowing, and he wanted to show his power and utterly humiliate Henry, who was a powerful man. The king of Germany was not a figurehead like the Queen of England; He was a powerful man, but he was humbled. He had to wait down on his knees three days in the snow before he could see the pope and be granted forgiveness. It was an utter humiliation for Henry as the pope was gaining this power. It was tragic.

Pope Innocent III Vs King John of England

A similar thing happened in a situation in England under Pope Innocent III with King John of England. It was a controversy over who was going to be the next archbishop of Canterbury. John wanted one and Innocent III wanted another one, so the pope threatened him with possible excommunication. John did not back down, and he was excommunicated. What that meant not only for the King but for the people of England was that the Roman Catholic Church services were banned in England during this time. There was nowhere for them to go. They could not be married, they could not be baptized, they could not be buried. It was bringing about basically a revolt among the people. There was a terror among them and a fear. Also, because the pope excommunicated the King, all the King's subjects were freed from their allegiance to him, and it also freed the King of France to possibly invade England if he wanted to since it was no longer under the protection of the pope. You can see the pressure that was brought about, and finally John humbles himself in a similar way in utter humiliation. The ego and power of these guys to come to this place of humility is hard for us to really imagine, but they did, and the pope restored everything, so they were able to continue on.

The Great Papal Schism

During this time the pope became more and more corrupt, and it is sad that they gained the popery by bribery, by making bargains, and at one time it was called the great papal schism. There were actually two popes who were claiming to be the pope, one in Avignon and one in Rome. There was a great schism and utter confusion, and they were both excommunicating each other. The one in Avignon excommunicated the Roman guy and vice versa. The people were in terror; they did not know what was going on. It shows the utter confusion, the immorality, and the corruption as it continued to grow. It was a sad time, but this was the environment that believers were living in.

Significant Dates of the Roman Catholic Church

The last time we talked about the division between the East and West. Then in 1096 AD there was the first crusade. A significant thing that occurred in 1215 AD was that transubstantiation was confirmed. This is when as they take the cup and the loaf, they literally believe that it mystically turns into the real body and blood of Christ. Every time they take the Lord's table, they are literally doing it again; Christ is being crucified every week and dying for them. It is heresy. The people believed it, for this is what they were brought up to believe in. If you did not take of that, you were in big trouble.

We also see the inquisition beginning. Another significant thing in 1229 AD was that the Bible was forbidden to laymen. During the time of the inquisition it was a capital offense if you had one. It was not only forbidden, but if you had one you could be put to death. We can see how much the enemy hates the Word of God. We see over and over again if the enemy can keep the Word of God out of the hands of the people of God, then he can gain a lot of ground. The only thing they knew was what they were told, and many of the monks and friars and priests were not that well educated. Some of them could not even read, and so they were sharing and teaching what they had been taught. There was very little first-hand knowledge of what the Bible really said. It was a sad time.

In 1302 AD a decree was issued by Pope Boniface VIII called the Unum Sanctum. It was to clarify his power and make sure everybody knew how powerful he was. In this decree he consolidated several things. Outside the Roman Church there was no salvation, the pope was the supreme head of the church, and submission had to be to all papal decrees for salvation. Anything that he said, you had to go along with whatever his decree was. Also, all temporal authority, (kings), were subject to spiritual authority, (pope). This was when it was solidified. Again it was during a time of weakness, and sometimes when you are in a time of weakness,

you shout loud. So he made this proclamation, and it held throughout the ages.

Monastic Orders

One of the things we see during this time is the rise in Monastic Orders. These were the monks and nuns and everybody who gathered in their monasteries. They lived together under a set of rules or a set of orders. There was such corruption at this time in general, but most of these orders started with very good intentions and even with ones who knew the Lord in a living way. They started with holy living because there was so much unholiness. There was self-denial, teaching of Scriptures and vows of poverty to help the poor. However, they saw what was happening with the mass church and the popes, and it was so adulterated that they wanted to do a reform from within. But it is almost impossible to reform from within something that has gotten so corrupt. Tragically, most of these orders that were within, as they grew they would become rich, powerful, worldly, and they began to abuse their power.

One of the ways the church at this time gained so much wealth was when people were dying, particularly anybody with nobility, the priests, the friars, and the monks would be by the person's death bed, and they would tell them: "To really insure that wonderful place in heaven that you so desire, if you give all of your property and all your money to the church, you will get a better place. So as people died, they would pass all their riches on to the church, so the church gained great wealth and great property at that time. That is one of the ways they amassed so many of their riches. As the orders would deteriorate, then another one would start up to try to improve it and start all over, but then they would repeat the same cycle. Finally, as they came under the authority of the pope, they would become emissaries to do more and more things. There are many orders within the Catholic Church; I just picked a few here. Later on after the reformation, we will see another order called the Jesuits.

These were the famous ones, and they had their vows of poverty. They were really strict in their training.

You can see within the names of the notable members that ended up being famous, like Luther, who we will see in the Reformation. He was in the Augustinians. He was a monk, and he was sold out. He was within the Catholic Church, but he was seeking the Lord, and the Lord met him there.

Also we will see the Dominicans. There was a great contrast between ones like Savonarola in Italy who was actually martyred for preaching the gospel. He was a priest in Florence, and he was a great testimony for the Lord, and also Meister Eckart. And there was Torquemada in Spain who was as evil as evil gets.

There was a mixture. You cannot say all were good or all were bad. I think we need to be clear. When we are talking about using the name Roman Catholic Church, we are not talking about the individuals within it; we are speaking about the system. Even today, there are those within it who really love the Lord. So when we are referring to names like that, we are referring to the system, not the individuals, because there are ones who deeply loved the Lord during this time. It is perplexing at times to see how they can love the Lord so much and yet stay in these places.

These orders would grow and get out of control, even the last one which was the Franciscans who were created by Francis of Assisi. It started off with a purity, but it actually grew so fast he lost control of it before he died, and they started abusing everything.

The Crusades

Another sad thing during this time was the Crusades. Before these began the believers had always made pilgrimages back to Jerusalem throughout that first thousand years. It was very common, and it was controlled by the Muslims. They would let them go in and visit the holy sites in Jerusalem. In 1070 AD the Muslim Turks prevented them from

visiting Jerusalem. So the pope got all these crusades together. Overall they were an utter failure, but he got the crusades together, and it is hard to estimate the numbers because of varying numbers from different historical sources. Some people say in the first crusade there was fifty thousand, and some people say there was a hundred thousand who went out to regain Jerusalem to free it up for the believers. In order to help recruit ones to go there were certain nobles such as the knights who would head out. Some had a very noble cause, but there were many who had very selfish reasons to go and get the loot and pillage everything. One of the things that the pope did—and you can just see the results of this in the nature of man—anybody who went on a crusade was granted absolution by the pope to all of them for their sins. Whatever they did, they were forgiven. If they got killed they went to heaven. As they went out they raped, they pillaged, they stole, they murdered all along the way. It was tragic. The first crusade actually recaptured Jerusalem for a little while, but tragically it was lost again. They were an utter failure, and the damage done through the crusades still impact us today. There are still bad feelings about them.

We often ask how the so-called church can justify these things? The wonderful thing about the Bible is that you can always find a verse to justify your actions. So they used Galatians 4:30 which speaks of Hagar and Ismael. It says, “Nevertheless what saith the scripture? *Cast out the bondwoman and her son*: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.”

So they were returning to Jerusalem to cast out Ismael and all of his descendants who were prevailing over Jerusalem at that time. It was just tragic. The crusades went through the Holy Roman Empire, Eastern Christian land, and Islamic lands.

The Inquisitions

Another tragic thing that occurred during this time were the inquisitions. Inquisition simply means “to inquire or to question

someone.” They started in 1210 AD, and the whole object of it was to identify and deal with anyone who did not fully agree with the teachings and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church and the pope. At this time, the Bible was prohibited too, so if they found a Bible on you, you were put to death. In these inquisitions you were guilty until proven innocent. If there was any small disagreement, or if you had a dispute with somebody, if they did not like you, they could turn you in to the inquisitor. And what they would do, if they felt they had some kind of ground, if they did not like you, they did not care what kind of ground or basis they had. They would usually come to one’s house at midnight and arrest the person. It could be a husband or a wife, and they would take them away to a castle or prison, and that is where they would torture them. They would torture you until you confessed that you were a heretic. At the end they would go through this great elaborate religious ceremony, a big festival that they called, “Auto de Fe”. It was a public place where ones were put to death—a great disgrace. In Spain alone there was 350,00 people killed, but it is hard to get records.

There was one name during this time that spoke of horror. It was like if you wanted to say something bad about somebody today, you just say the name Hitler, and everybody cringes. This was a horror name, Tomas de Torquemada. He was the grand inquisitor of Spain. Hearing his name people would faint with fear. Again, people will say, “How could you justify the inquisitions? Well, this is the verse that they found to bring ones in, and it is totally out of context. Luke 14:23: “And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come, that my house may be filled.”

So anybody who was not walking in the fulness of the Roman Catholic Church, they would go out and compel them.” The word compel has a force associated with it, and that was the justification.

A Silver Thread in Dark Times

That is enough of the negative which was just showing you the difficult times that these dear ones lived in, but we are thankful that during this time there were faithful ones as we continue looking at that silver thread. We have the Waldensians in Italy and France, the Friends of God through Germany and Switzerland, and the Brethren of Common Life in the Netherlands. All of these are very precious testimonies. We saw last time about the Paulicians, the Bogomils, and the Cathars. The Waldensians lived in the Alps of France and Italy.

The Waldensians

The word Valdens comes from the Italian or Greek word Valley. They were the people of the valley and lived in the Alps. The Alps are real mountains. Virginia does not really have mountains; we just have little hills compared to the Alps. They were prominent from the 10th through the 17th centuries, and they get pronounced a lot of different ways. There are some in France and in Italy, and sometimes you see them referred to as Vaudois, Valdese, Albigenses, Poor Men of Lyon, various masa nations of those names. This is who they are, and these were never part of the Roman Catholic Church. They had always stayed separate, and because of that they endured great persecution, and many were martyred. This is actually a very significant group because it is the first group that we see that is still around today. They have churches and meetings, and they are institutionalized. I am not going to paint them as a grand picture of the glorious Gospel. The group itself is still around today throughout Italy, Uruguay and Argentina. And actually one of the places that they came and settled in the US in the eighteen hundreds was in Valdese, North Carolina. There is still a Waldensian group there, and they merged with the Presbyterian Church. They settled throughout many places, but we see they are still around, and they had a great influence upon many after them. We will see their influence in these other groups that we share on. We get into the prereformation with Huss, reformation with

Luther and different ones. We see their continued influence throughout history.

As we look at their beliefs, we can see that they are really based on the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. The foundation for all their living was the authority of the Word of God for their daily living. They particularly preached quite often about the Sermon on the Mount because it dealt with their daily living. They were desiring to not just do an outward thing, but they were looking to have an inward life with the Lord. They had believer's baptism, and only people who were really believers could be baptized. The Lord's table was open to all believers. It was not just their group as some kind of special thing, but it was open to all believers. It was a simple table, quite similar to what we had this morning with a cup and a loaf, except they had real wine. They do not do this grape juice stuff.

They also had a great burden for the gospel, and they would send ones out two by two as merchants, and they were called the Poor Men of Lyons. As they went out to share the gospel, they went out as merchants, and they would say to people, "We have the pearl of greatest price. Would you be interested in it?" They actually went through much of Europe at this time spreading the gospel and sharing. They would go out two by two; an older one and a younger one would go together. The younger one was there to help the older one and to learn from him. It was a beautiful picture of discipleship, of raising up the next generation in caring for ones. It was very precious. They believed that only the indwelling Spirit of Christ gives real understanding to the Word. You have to have that indwelling Spirit. They also placed great value on Christian education for all their children. They created a children's catechism, and it was called "The Smaller Questions", and it was based on faith, hope and love. It was a series of fifty-seven questions, and it ended up being used by believers throughout Europe for many centuries. They were simple questions of faith, such as, what is the Ten Commandments? What is the fruit of the spirit? What do you do to get saved? They were

very basic, foundational questions. They saw the value of starting to educate the children and training them to not only think for themselves, but to read and write with the purpose of each individual coming into that personal relationship with the Lord. It was very precious how they were trained. It was called “The Smaller Questions” by the Waldenses. If you google it you can find some of the questions still out there. I could not find a book on it. So if anyone ever finds that little booklet I would love to see it.

Key Dates of Waldensian

This was a group that was very hated. One of the key figures in their group was Peter Waldo. if you google Waldensians on Wikipedia (don't ever use Wikipedia for church history study) or other history books they say that Peter Waldo was the founder of the Waldensians, and that is not true. They were around before he was, but they just associate the name. Oh, yeah, Waldo and Waldensian. He was not the founder, but he was a successful merchant in Lyons. He was actually saved by some of the Waldensians. He came across some of them, and he had the Scripture translated into the Roman dialect of that time. He was making the Bible available not only for ones to read but for others who wanted to learn to read using the Bible. He sold all of his property and ended up giving it to the poor. He was the one who initiated and encouraged these Poor Men of Lyons to go out and spread the gospel. It is a very precious testimony of how he really laid down his life for the Lord.

Because of his success the pope started forbidding any contact with him or with any of the Waldensians in the valley. They were driven out of Lyons and like most persecutions, they scattered to many countries. One of the greatest ways for the gospel and the testimony to go forth is when the believers have to scatter because of persecution. They were spread up through Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands. How precious it is!

Waldo died later in Bohemia, and it is interesting when you think of him taking the gospel to Bohemia, because later on we will see ones like Comenius, Huss, Zinzendorf from those regions. This is where we see how precious the work that God is doing, and it is a little clearer now how we can connect dots all the way back from today to about this time. That is the real encouraging thing. But most of their time together the Waldensians were under persecution.

In 1209 AD the pope actually put together a crusade against that region, and again the crusaders were given absolution like the previous crusaders. There was a massacre at Bezier and about twenty thousand were killed. The testimony of the Waldensians was within this community, and many from the outside when they saw the crusaders coming, they went to this town for safety. Because of the testimony of these Waldensian believers, when the pope's army came, the Catholic people literally stayed and stood with the Waldensians and said, "These are our friends; these are our neighbors. These are not heretics." They knew there was a reality there, and the Catholic ones were willing to stay and stand with their neighbors because they were so touched by the testimony of the life in these ones. So when the soldiers surrounded this town, the officer gave the command to go in and kill, the sergeant-at-arms said, "Who do we kill?" And he said, "Kill them all and God will know His own." When he said, "God will know His own," he meant that the Catholics would be known as God's own. Nevertheless, he uttered a great phrase. God will know His own, and that is the testimony there.

Then the inquisition began in that area, and whenever anyone was arrested during that inquisition time and were executed, their goods were divided between the church and the civil authority. So there was some incentive for the church and the local government if they did not like somebody, particularly a rich person who had many goods, to bring them before an inquisition, at which time they would lose everything. But again it brought about persecution and continued to scatter these ones all through Europe and the Balkan countries.

During the thirteen hundreds there was a relative quiet period for them. There were some battles that would go forth, but then in the fourteen hundreds a new inquisitor was appointed, and he renewed this persecution. These were people of the valley, and whenever the troops would come in, they would go up to the mountains for their security. They knew the mountains, but most of the troops who came after them were coming from the flatlands and had never been in mountains. Therefore, they did not know how to fight in the mountains, and oftentimes when the troops went to the mountains, they would have to back off and leave. But as this continued the troops would learn to go up the mountains, and they would follow them. When they found the people hiding in caves, they would set a fire at the mouth of the cave and everybody was burned. Sad also, many would flee over the mountains to Switzerland. In one particular year under some severe persecution, (all the documents say this) one hundred and ten babies died during that trip over the Alps because of the severity of winter. It was so sad.

Oftentimes, when the Waldensians would flee to the mountains, and the troops who had become a little more experienced in marching up the mountains, would drive the people over the cliffs. But they always had the option to repent and join the Catholic Church. That was always available to them, but they did not choose that one.

There was a couple of official documents that came out, and one was the Edict Nantes in 1598 AD, which was during the reformation period. It gave the people lots of religious liberties. This also impacted the Huguenots as we will see later, but that ended up being revoked a little later in the persecution.

In 1689 AD this is called the “Glorious Return” of the Waldensians. Many of them were living in Switzerland in the Geneva area, and as they were praying before the Lord, they felt they were supposed to return to their land. Some of them were still there, but most had fled. They felt they were supposed to return. So nine hundred men left Geneva in

August to return. They had to go over the Alps, and they were attacked by the French and Italian armies which meant they literally had to spend the winter in the Alps which was very severe.

The next spring in May the French and Italian armies were beginning to battle them again, and as they were chasing this remnant of three hundred who were left up this mountain, an amazing miracle of the hand of God took place. As the troops were chasing these ones up the mountain, they thought the end was in view because the army of trained troops was right behind them. And then a fog came in and encapsulated the mountain. However, these mountain men knew what to do with a fog. They did nothing; they stood still. The troops who were not experienced in the fog panicked, and they knew that they needed to go back down because they could not see a thing. Most of the troop fell off the mountains because the pathways were not nice little highways. It was a little footpath with a cliff on both sides. So if you were not experienced and did not know the mountains, you did not know how to handle fog on the mountain, and these troops literally fell off the cliff. It was the hand of God who protected these dear ones, and the three hundred were able to arrive back into the valley and reclaim their land.

At the same time, there were some other political things that was going on. Alliances between this king and that king were severed, so the persecution of the Waldensians stopped at that time. It is a tremendous testimony of how these ones, particularly these three hundred, made it through. It reminds me of that little verse that says, "Stand and see the salvation of God." When we are in the midst of a fog or battle, and we do not know which way to go, do not go anywhere! Stand there and see the salvation of God! He delivered them, and He will deliver us. There might be days ahead where everything is so dark around us we do not know what to do. We can stand in Him! They stood and did not budge. They knew what to do, and we could say that they were prepared for that day. And we have been hearing a lot over the last few years of being

prepared for what is ahead. These ones were prepared, and they knew how to handle it. We are so thankful for them.

The persecution of the Waldensians was so severe that John Milton wrote a poem about it. Milton was in England, but they had heard about this in 1655 AD. It is a precious poem, a testimony and almost a prayer.

The Late Massacre in Piedmont

Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered On the Alpine mountains cold,
Even them who kept Thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones;
Forget not: in Thy book record their groans
Who were Thy sheep and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmonts' that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To Heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
Over all the Italian fields where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundred-fold, who having learnt Thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

Out of this they would learn to flee that Babylonian woe. The Roman Catholic Church oftentimes would refer to it as a Babylon. It is very precious the testimony of these ones and if you ever have an opportunity to read more of them I would greatly encourage it.

Friends of God

Along the same line with these we see the Friends of God. This was during the 14th century, and it was mainly through Strasburg, Cologne and Basel who were in Switzerland, and the key brethren there were Eckhart, John Tauler and Henry Suso. Tauler was saved by Waldensian merchants. All three of these were Dominican friars and were part of the Roman Catholic Church, but they were really seeking the Lord. Tauler heard about these Waldensian merchants, and while he was talking with them, interchanging with them, his eyes were opened, and he came to know the Lord in a marvelous way. Eckhart, in a similar way, was saved. As these dear ones would go around they would continue to teach and bring much spiritual wisdom. Eckhart ended up being charged for heresy by the church, and he was brought to trial. He went through the trial before the pope, but he died before they could sentence him. He went to glory beforehand. Tauler stayed in Strasburg during the plague and died there serving ones and caring for them in the midst of the plague.

In general, these were more mystical people. They emphasized communion with God, and they would go outside of the cities either in the forest or on the mountains to find hidden places to have their times of prayer and the Lord's table. They did not allow the circumstances to restrict their worship. They found a way to be together and worship the Lord. We see their influence, and their key writings in: "Theologian Germanica". This really impacted Luther as he was seeking the Lord and finding his way. He found these writings, and it really impacted him and opened his eyes more and more.

Most of the writings of these people were all destroyed. One of the things the Roman Catholic Church did whenever you were declared a heretic or they did not like what you said, everything that you had ever written was destroyed. So we do not have many writings of these dear ones, and most of the things we have about them is what the church accused them of. They would say, "These people believe that only

believers can be baptized; these people believed that anybody could take the Lord's table. It varied from what the official church said. It is hard to find any of their writings now. However, we are thankful for their faithfulness and their continual pressing on. The Waldensians impacted them, and they ended up impacting others.

The Brethren of Common Life

These brethren lived during the 15th and 16th centuries in the Netherlands, especially Deventer. The key brethren there were John van Rysbroeck, Gerard Groote, Thomas A' Kempis. Gerard Groote had a precious testimony of caring for saints so much that when the plague came, he stayed in the area he was living in, caring for ones in Deventer, and he lost his life. As many fled and went other places, he stayed and was impacted unto death for that.

One of the brothers who was impacted by these was Thomas A' Kempis, and his famous writing was "The Imitation of Christ" which is still with us today. Kempis impacted Erasmus who ended up being one greatly involved in the reformation.

Probably what is noted the most about these Brethren of Common Life was that they emphasized the Christian based education. They said, "The root of study and mirror of life must first be the gospel of Christ." They used the Waldensians little book, "The Shorter Catechism of Smaller Questions" to teach the children. They had it published in different languages, and it spread throughout many places. They also started many schools, and by the end of the 15th century, there were many schools started by this group throughout the Netherlands and also into Germany. They ended up later on being taken over by the government when everything changed after the Reformation, but these ones saw the value of education. So what we are beginning to see here is that as they were focusing more and more on the value of education, it is one of the things that will bring about the Reformation. More and more people were beginning to think for themselves, they had begun to

read, they could understand the Word of God which was now available to them.

Also, these dear ones were encouraging people to work for themselves like these merchants. There was a whole other class of merchants that was starting to be created throughout Europe that opened the door also for the gospel. It helped the country itself economically, but it was a merchant class that was beginning to be created and not just the nobles and the serfs. Life within Europe at that time was beginning to change. Next time we will look at the prereformation leading right up to it.

We can see how God, in a wonderful way, maintains ones. Where there are those who desire to live and stay in that simplicity and purity of Christ, they find the all-sufficient One. When you read some of the writings of these dear ones, they did not have the greatest clarity that we might have today, because the Lord has brought more and more things to light, but they had that simplicity of Christ and a devotion for Him.

We can be encouraged in the days we are living in as things are becoming more and more against us. There are so many temptations to compromise because there is so much out there in this age that is really pressing Christians to compromise. You have a choice between being called a hate group or to be accepted. It has not been formalized yet, but it is working that way. Sometimes we can think that compromise will bring about peace. It never does, and it is sad because it weakens the testimony of Jesus. So may we be encouraged by ones who have gone before us and have stood for the Lord. We do not know what type of persecutions we will be facing. It could be economic persecutions; it could be social persecutions. There are various types of persecutions, but we can find our all-sufficiency in Him. As we rely upon Him and stand in Him, we have His precious and magnificent promises that He will carry us through, not somehow, but in an overwhelming, overcoming way to

His glory and honor! That is our desire. That is what we are looking to learn from and to be encouraged by these ones who have gone before us.

Let us pray:

Lord, as we look at many who have gone before us, it breaks our heart to see what some of our dear brethren had to go through. We cannot even imagine it. But Lord, we know that they found You in a very living way, and they have received that eternal weight of glory. And Lord, we too want to be those who are learning of You in the circumstances of life that we find ourselves in, that we could be the testimony You are calling us to be. Lord, as we look around today in general throughout Christendom, the testimony of Jesus is in a weakened state, but we are praying, Lord, that You would be touching ones here and throughout this country, throughout this world, that the testimony of Jesus could shine brighter and brighter, that there would be that recovering of the simplicity and purity of devotion to You. And all of the outward entrapments and all the machinations of everything that goes on could be put aside, and we could come back to that place of being the people of God that You have called us to be. In Thy name we pray. Amen.