

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 6 October 2019. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **Balthasar Hübmeier: The Fruit Bearer of Austria**

This morning is the beginning of our missions conference, “Bearing Much Fruit”; and, as you know, we have, in the last couple weeks, been examining the lives of Christians who were faithful “fruit bearers” for the Lord. First, we examined the life of the Apostle Paul. Then, we learned about the Waldenses—the Christians in the valleys of northern Italy, who faithfully served Christ for at least 1,000 years. The Waldenses were faithful lights for Christ during the darkest days of the Middle Ages.

Now, in **Matthew 16:18**, Jesus made a very important promise. As Jesus was addressing the Apostle Peter at Caesarea Philippi, He said these famous words: “***And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter*** (literally, “little rock”), ***and upon upon this rock*** (literally, “large rock,” or “boulder”) ***I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.***” Christ’s true congregations can *never* be annihilated, because they are built *not* upon a fallible man such as Simon Peter, but upon the Rock of Ages, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ’s churches are continually protected and defended by Christ Himself. Throughout the church age, whenever one group of churches has been wiped out by persecution, or has slipped into apostasy, other true churches were already arising elsewhere to replace them. Now, sad to say, there did come a time when the Waldensian churches stopped being true churches. The Waldenses remained true to Christ right up until the early sixteenth century; but then, they compromised. In the year 1532, they made an ecclesiastical union with the followers of John Calvin, in Geneva, for the sake of political protection from the Catholic Church; and in order to confirm this merger, they adopted the Protestant doctrine of infant baptism.<sup>1</sup> The moment they began to baptise babies, they ceased to be genuine New Testament churches. To this day, Waldensian churches still exist; but they are not true churches, because they teach that children are brought into some kind of salvation “covenant” by way of infant baptism. This is a false and confusing doctrine, which leaves multitudes of people thinking that they are “saved” because they were baptised as babies—when, in fact, they have never been born again.

However, while the Waldensian movement was dying, God was already raising up another movement of true churches in central Europe. Here’s how it began. A Protestant Reformer named **Ulrich Zwingli** had, by 1520, become the religious leader of the city of Zürich; and many young men began to flock to the university in Zürich to receive an education in the Greek language from Zwingli. As they studied the New Testament in the Greek language, they quickly saw that salvation is by faith alone; and many of them abandoned the Catholic Church, and placed their faith in Christ. However, it wasn’t long before many of them became dissatisfied with Zwingli’s teaching, as well; and rightly so! You see, Zwingli did renounce the Catholic doctrines of indulgences, prayers to saints, purgatory, and the worshipping of images; but he continued to teach, just as the Catholic Church does, that there is some kind of mystical “presence” of Jesus in the bread of the Lord’s supper, and that receiving the Lord’s Supper somehow contributes to salvation. He continued to teach that infants should be “baptised” by sprinkling—even though the Bible says that people should be baptised by immersion, *after* they have personally repented of their sin and believed on Christ. He also continued to teach that baptism and the Lord’s Supper impart salvation to the sinner (even though he *professed* to believe that salvation is by faith alone).

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<sup>1</sup> J.T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists* (Texarkana, TX: American Baptist Association Publications, 1922), pp. 83-96, quoted in Dr. Thomas Strouse, *I Will Build My Church: The Doctrine and History of the Baptists* (Newington, CT: Emmanuel Baptist Theological Press, 2001), p. 80.

Many of the men whom Zwingli taught or influenced—men such as Felix Manz, Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock, Michael Sattler, Wilhelm Reublin, Peter Riedemann, Menno Simons, and Hans Denck—quickly discovered the true Bible doctrines of salvation by faith alone, plus nothing (no sacraments); believers’ baptism; and separation of church and state. They placed their faith in Christ; and in defiance of both the Catholic religion *and* the Protestant religion, they began to preach the Gospel, and began to baptise people with *true*, biblical baptism, and began to form *true* churches, after the New Testament model. Both the Catholics and the Protestants called these Christians “Anabaptists” (which means “re-baptisers”). But what did *they* call themselves? Well, at first, they called themselves “The Swiss Brethren”; but in time, they began to call themselves simply “Baptists.” They did not consider themselves to be “re-baptising” people, since they did not regard infant baptism as real baptism at all.

Now, not only did the “Anabaptists” hold to the right the doctrine of salvation, baptism, and the church; **they also obeyed the Great Commission.** They were faithful fruit-bearers for Christ. Though small in number, they began to make thousands of converts within a very short time. Their movement began in 1525; but it soon exploded all over Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, England, Germany, and on into Poland and Russia! However, the price tag for their service to Jesus was death. Most of the leaders I just mentioned were caught and executed, either by the Protestant or the Catholic authorities. However, the more these people were killed, the more their churches increased. It was from this movement of Baptists that God raised up a godly man named Balthasar Hübmeier. It is he whose testimony we will examine this morning. The title of this message is *Balthasar Hübmeier: The Fruit Bearer of Austria.*

## I. Hübmeier preached salvation by God’s grace, through faith alone.

### Read Philippians 3:4-10.

What we have just read is the testimony of the Apostle Paul. Before he was saved, he was a proud Pharisee, confident that his good works would get him into the kingdom of God. But then, he found Christ. He discovered that only faith in the Jesus the Messiah, who bore the punishment for our sins on the cross, is acceptable to God. He repented of his so-called “good works,” admitted his sinfulness, and placed his faith in Christ; and his life was never the same again. No longer was he filled with pride. He became a humble servant of Jesus Christ.

So it was with this man named Balthasar Hübmeier. Hübmeier was born in Austria in 1480, and became a Roman Catholic priest in the city of Regensburg in 1516. Now, Hübmeier was very popular with the people; and he liked his popularity...*a lot!* He did every procession and festival with great pomp and ceremony. He venerated every saint that there was to venerate; and he did it in style. When the people of the city wanted to get rid of all the Jews, confiscate their synagogue, and clear themselves of the debts that they owed to them, Hübmeier led the charge, without the slightest pang of guilt. Though he was a brilliant scholar, he was as superstitious as they came. Every time there was a thunderstorm, he stood in the doorway of the cathedral, held up the Host, and “blessed” the clouds (as though a piece of bread can somehow calm storms). After the city turned the synagogue that they had stolen from the Jews into a chapel, people began to think that “miracles” took place there; and they flocked from near and far on pilgrimages. Whether or not Hübmeier himself actually believed in these bogus “miracles,” he loved the popularity that it brought him. Hübmeier recorded 54 so-called “miracles” in this chapel. He was proud and arrogant, and loved the praise of men.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> William Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, MI, 1963), pp. 51-53.

But then, he began to do something that changed his life. He actually began to read the Bible (especially the letters of Paul)! As he did so, he found that salvation is by faith in Christ alone. He left Regensburg for about 2 years; and when he returned to his parish, the people were shocked! He began to preach that they needed to repent, and believe on Christ alone to be saved! About this time Hübmeier wrote: “Christ, for the first time, [has] come into my heart to thrive....I lament before God that I so long lay ill of this sickness. I pray him truly for pardon; I did this [preached a false gospel] unwittingly...I confess and condemn all doctrine and preaching, such as *were* mine among you...that are not grounded in the divine word.”<sup>3</sup>

Hübmeier grieved that he had rejected Christ for so long before he was saved, and that he had led others away from the Gospel; but now, he was determined to spread the Gospel. As a result, Hübmeier was soon in danger of his life, and was forced to leave Regensburg. He went to Zurich, and then came back to Austria, to the city of Waldshut (where he soon married his godly wife, Elizabeth). Everywhere he went, he preached the Gospel. In his tracts and sermons, he constantly insisted that salvation is by faith alone. He said, “No element or outward object in this world can purify the soul; only faith can cleanse the heart of man.”<sup>4</sup> He also wrote, “Faith alone makes us holy before God. This faith is the acknowledgment of the mercy of God, which He has shown us in the offering of His only begotten Son. This excludes all sham Christians, who have nothing more than an historical ‘faith’ in God.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, Hübmeier preached that a mere “head knowledge” of Jesus, and of what He did on the cross, is not enough! Hübmeier himself had once had only a “head knowledge” of what Christ did on the cross. He was blinded by his own sinful pride, and by the false traditions of men. He thought he was “good”; and he loved the praise of men. But then, he understood what the Bible says—that we are *not* good, and that we must be redeemed. He came to understand that salvation is a gift of God’s mercy, and that it can be received only by faith.

### **Read Romans 3:9-28.**

Have *you* placed your faith in Jesus Christ alone? Have you confessed your sin before God, and, by faith, asked Him to save you from your sins? You cannot produce any true fruit for Jesus Christ if you do not have a relationship with Him. You *must* be receiving spiritual life from the Vine of Jesus Christ in order to bear any fruit! If you don’t know Christ personally, I urge you to repent and believe on Him! Cry out to Him and ask Him to save you!

## **II. Hübmeier taught believer’s baptism.**

### **Read 1 Peter 2:1-3.**

From the moment of his salvation, Hübmeier desired the sincere milk of the Word. He lapped up God’s Word like a kitten lapping up his pan of warm milk! He was determined to serve Christ with everything he had. From the very start of his Christian life, he preached God’s Word to others. Now, because of his preaching, the Austrian government chased him relentlessly; and he had to live as a fugitive. Finally, though, he was able to find refuge in the city of Waldshut; and at Waldshut, he led many people to Christ there. However, in one respect, he was still a babe in Christ himself—even though God was using him to lead others to Christ. Probably the biggest evidence of his spiritual “infanthood” was the fact that he was

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55.

not biblically baptised. Also, he was administering an unbiblical baptism to others. In other words...he was still baptising babies. He knew, in his heart, that baptising infants could not be right, because the Bible teaches that baptism comes *after* salvation. An infant can't have faith; so how can baptising an infant do that child any good? He knew that baptising infants did *not* save them, nor do them any spiritual good whatsoever. For a while, he baptised infants if the parents *asked* him to do so; but his conscience bothered him sorely. Finally, in 1525, he became convinced, from Scripture, that infant baptism is heresy, and that *he himself* needed to be baptised with Scriptural baptism. Soon after this, a Baptist evangelist named Wilhelm Reublin came to his city and baptised Hübmeier; and then Hübmeier baptised 300 of the people that he had already led to the Lord!<sup>6</sup> Finally, a true, New Testament-model church was formed in Waldshut! Let's take a look at some Scripture about baptism.

**Read Matthew 3:1-17.** (John made sure that people understood that they needed to “repent” before they could be baptised. They were *not* infants!)

**Read John 1:29-34.**

I said earlier that true baptism is *believer's* baptism. That means that baptism should be performed on a person only after that person has *believed* on Christ. That is what John the Baptist taught. Look at what John said to the people. He would not baptise anyone until that person had truly repented of his sin (turned in his heart from sin, and to God), confessed his sin, and believed in his heart that Jesus is the Lamb of God—the one who takes away sins. Baptism had nothing to do with their salvation: it was their faith in Jesus, and their repentance of their sin, that God accepted. Baptism was merely a first step of obedience *after* they had repented and believed on Jesus. If baptism were something that washes away sin, why would Jesus have insisted that John baptise *Him*? Jesus wasn't a sinner! He had no sin to wash away! Yet, Jesus received baptism in order to teach an important truth. Baptism is a picture—a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Though Jesus had not yet died on the cross or risen again, He was illustrating what He Himself was soon going to do to pay for our sins. He would die, and be buried (as indicated by immersion underwater), and rise again (as indicated by coming up out of the water).

**Read Romans 6:1-5.**

By being baptised, Jesus declared the Gospel message. To this day, every time a new believer receives baptism, that Christian is declaring his faith in the Gospel (Christ's death and resurrection). By receiving baptism, a new Christian is *identifying* with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. He is declaring to others, “I believe that Jesus died for me, was buried, and rose again; and *that* is what I am trusting in to save me. By my baptism, I also choose to become a member of Christ's assembly (the church).” Hübmeier put it this way: “Now when a man confesses that he is a sinner, believes in the remission of sins, and has committed himself to a new life, he must then testify outwardly before the church of Christ...that he accepts the word of Christ in his heart, and is minded to surrender himself to live, in [the] future, according to the...will of Christ...Then he must be baptised in water; by which means he *publicly professes* his faith and purpose.”<sup>7</sup> “By receiving baptism, the candidate testifies publicly that...he has submitted himself to his brothers and sisters—that is, to the church.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

Before Hübmeier received believer's baptism, he had been saved for several years; yet, he was not able to be the kind of fruit bearer for Christ that he should have been. How could he fully carry out the Great Commission when he himself was not Scripturally baptised, and thus was not a member of a true church? Remember, God gave the Great Commission not to individual Christians, but to *churches*. And what *is* the Great Commission? Let's review.

### **Read Matthew 28:18-20.**

Every church has the responsibility to 1. Teach all nations (give them the Gospel, so that they may believe and be saved) 2. Baptise them after they are saved, thus making them church members, and 3. Teach them to observe all things that Christ has commanded. You cannot serve God as you should until you submit to biblical baptism, and become a church member. Perhaps there are believers here today who have not received biblical baptism. Maybe you were sprinkled as a baby. If so, that is *not* baptism. Perhaps you were baptised by immersion—but you were baptised into a church that teaches that baptism saves, or that good works save. That is not Scriptural baptism either, because any church that preaches a false Gospel is not a true church, and has no authority to administer baptism. If you have been saved, but you still need to receive Scriptural baptism, I urge you to obey Christ's command!

### **III. Hübmeier had a passion for souls.**

When a person truly gets saved, there are many fruits that immediately begin to appear in that person's life. Because Christ is now in that person's life, that person now begins to change from the inside out. Profane, filthy language, and taking God's name in vain, disappear from that person's lips. People who had been addicted to drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol before their salvation now hate these sinful things; and they begin to seek the Lord to help them overcome these addictions. (As they abide in Him, He will give them, the victory, too!) A new Christian will immediately begin to hate the devil's music (Rock and Roll, Rap, Country, etc.), and will come to the conviction that he needs to throw it out of his life. In short, the new Christian will begin to show the fruit of the Spirit, which is ***“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance”*** (Galatians 5:22-23).

However, probably the very first thing that a person wants to do after he is saved is to *tell others* about what has happened to him, and to tell *others* how they can be saved, too. I remember what it was like after my own salvation. I wanted immediately to tell other people! That is the way it was for Balthasar Hübmeier after his salvation. In one of his tracts, he wrote, “Faith cannot remain passive, but *must* break out to God in thanksgiving, and to mankind in all kinds of works of brotherly love.”<sup>9</sup> To Hübmeier, these weren't just words. His life overflowed with the desire to spread the Gospel, and to see people saved. Hübmeier was saved only 6 short years before the Catholic Church caught up with him and executed him; but in that short time, he led thousands of people to Christ, and baptised them. In one year in the city of Nikolsberg, he led about 6,000 people to Christ, and baptised them!

Christian, if you do not have a passion for the Great Commission, then you cannot possibly “bear much fruit” for Christ. If spreading the Gospel to others, and endeavouring to see people saved, baptised, and added to your church be not a top priority to you, then you are not drawing much spiritual nourishment from the Vine. Being an ambassador for Christ, and

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55.

helping to send missionaries from your church, is at the very heart of a Christian's service to God. Supporting our missionaries *financially* is, of course, an important part of the Great Commission; but before even our wallets, God wants our *hearts*. Christian, do you have a burning passion to see people saved, and to see Christ's church grow? You should! Sharing the good news of salvation is a Christian servant's duty; but it is also a labour of love!

**Read 1 Corinthians 9:16.**

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:13-15.**

Why did Paul preach the Gospel? For Jesus' sake! He was *driven* and *motivated* by love for the Man who suffered and died for him. Paul couldn't keep his mouth about the Lord Christ! No matter what it cost Him, He was willing to pay the price. Christian, is spreading the Gospel a labour of love to you? The Lord promised His servants in **Hebrews 6:10**, "***For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.***"

#### **IV. Like Simon Peter, Hübmeier stumbled—but got back up!**

When I was deciding which of the Anabaptists to preach about, I strongly considered preaching on someone besides Balthasar Hübmeier. For example, there was **Conrad Grebel**, who found Christ as his Saviour, left Catholicism, became a Baptist, and then went door-to-door, witnessing, leading hundreds to Christ, baptising, and writing literature for two short years, before finally dying of the plague. Though he constantly had to run for his life during those two years, he never denied the Lord. There was **Felix Manz**, who was put to death by drowning, only two years after his salvation and baptism—but not before leading many people to Christ. There was **Michael Sattler**, who was executed by drowning; and **Blaurock**, who was burned at the stake. Most of the Baptist leaders of the 1500's died martyrs' deaths: and so did their wives; and so did thousands of their converts. They were stretched on the rack; had their flesh ripped off with red-hot tongs; had their tongues ripped out; and then were either drowned, or burned at the stake: and none of them denied the Lord.

*Except*, that is, for Balthasar Hübmeier. There was one time in Hübmeier's life when he denied the Lord. He did not directly reject His name; but he recanted ("took back") his teaching against infant baptism. In 1525, Hübmeier had to flee from Waldshut, because the Roman Catholic authorities of Austria had found out where he was; and so, he ran to Zürich. However, while he was hiding in Zürich, the *Protestant* authorities found him and his wife, and arrested them. Out of fear of torture and death, he wrote a recantation, and took back what he had taught against infant baptism; and he read it aloud to the city council.

Hübmeier knew he had blown it...big time. This was no small thing. To say that baptism imparts saving grace to a baby (or to *anyone*) was to deny the Gospel, and the *Lord*; and his heart was smitten with guilt. The next day, he was ordered to read his recantation to the whole city; but instead, he got up and took back his recantation! He said, "Oh what anguish and travail I have suffered this night over the statements which I myself have made. So I say here and now, I can and I will not recant."<sup>10</sup> He then began to preach about salvation and believer's baptism. He was arrested and imprisoned immediately; and he did not yield—until he was put on the rack. While he was in excruciating physical pain on the rack, he uttered the few words of recantation that the authorities wanted to hear; and they let him go.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

Hübmeier never forgot his shame over his denial of the truth. Before his denial of the Lord, he had sometimes had a proud and arrogant spirit about him; but never again. All pride was stamped out of him, because he knew very well that he was weak, and could fall. Again and again he pleaded the pardon of his brothers in Christ, whom he had let down. However, it was after his repentance that he led the most people to Christ! Thousands were saved and baptised in the short time between 1525 and 1528! But then, in the year 1528, the Catholic authorities of Austria finally caught up with him, and imprisoned him. Though they tortured him on the rack, he would not recant. He was taken to the stake; and as they were rubbing sulphur and gunpowder into his beard, he raised his hands and called out to the Christians in the crowd, “O dear brothers, pray God that He will give me patience in this my suffering.” As his hair and beard caught fire, his last words were, “Oh, Jesus, Jesus.”<sup>11</sup> His testimony in his death was powerful. To this day, Balthasar Hübmeier’s testimony is still strengthening Christians. You know, that is the irony of it. We are all weak. Yet, God can use Christians who have been humbled by their own weakness. Let’s look at one more Scripture.

### **Read Luke 22:31-34.**

Did Peter lose his salvation when he denied he Lord? No! The Bible makes it clear that those who are truly saved will never be cast out of God’s family. That word “converted” *can* sometimes refer to the conversion (change) that takes place in a person’s life when he is saved; but it can also simply mean “to turn back around.” That is what Peter did. Peter sinned grievously; but he turned around. He got right with the Lord: and God was able to use him again. Jesus promised that after Peter was “turned around,” God would use him to strengthen his brethren. It wasn’t just one time that God used Peter to strengthen his brethren, either. As the years went by, God converted (changed) Peter from a proud man, who was always shooting off his mouth and arguing that he was the greatest disciple, into a gentle, kind, and humble servant.

For the *rest of his life* Peter strengthened his brethren. He was like the “poster boy” for what God’s grace can do in a Christian’s life. Though he had stumbled greatly, and though his heart had been full of despair because of his weakness, God raised him up and used him again. At nearly the end of his life, Peter encouraged persecuted Jewish Christians everywhere with a letter, which we call the book of **1 Peter**. In this letter, he exhorted Christians, again and again, to keep serving God, and witnessing for Christ, and winning people to Jesus, even though they were being terribly persecuted. He wrote, “***But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.***” He also wrote, “***Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.***”

**Conclusion:** Despite his weakness, Balthasar Hübmeier was a faithful fruit-bearer for God. Christian, if you are like me (and you are), then you are weak, too. We may not have ever denied the Lord outright, in words; but every time we go our own way, and disobey the Lord in some area of our lives, we are denying Him. When we fail to witness to someone, when we know the Lord wants us to witness to that person, we are denying Him. Thank God, He does not cast us out; but He is grieved. Christian, if you have stumbled, let the Lord lift you up. He wants to use you. He has given you the incredible privilege of being His servant and ambassador! Serve Him with all you have! I would also ask this question: Have you truly been saved? Are you like Hübmeier was before he was saved? Do you think that you are all

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 67.

right with God because you are a “good person”? If so, you are not saved: you are lost. Repent (agree with God about your sin, and turn, in your heart, from sin and self), and trust in Christ alone to save you!