

Women We Should Know & Honor: Katharina Zell

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Preacher: Jon Hinkson

- [0:00] Well, we are continuing on in our series of remarkable women you should know and love. So, and this morning, we're going to hit a different period, a little bit earlier from last time. So, she described herself as a splinter from the rib of that blessed man, Matthew Sell.
- There is Matthew Sell. This is the one-time pastor of the cathedral in Strasbourg. He referred to her as mein Hilfe, or my helper, or from the old king, my strong warrior.
- The first help that she gave him was when he was under excommunication by the bishop for having married her. Opponents of the Reformation, seeking to discredit Sell, they had circulated the tale that she had caught her husband cavorting with the maid, and that when she confronted him, he beat her black and blue.
- These were hardy days of lampoon. To lay to rest this dastardly effort to wreck her husband's reputation, Catherine published a refutation.
- [1:32] First off, let me clarify, I have never, ever had a maid, she writes. And as for thrashing me, my husband and I have never had an unpleasant 15 minutes.
- We could have no greater honor than to die rejected of men from two crosses to speak to each other words of comfort. Well, in addition to flouting the fable of her husband's infidelity, Catherine continued with a very spirited defense of clerical marriage, that it is actually legitimate for pastors to marry, because in the Roman Catholic tradition, this was forbidden.
- And it was a timely task for that year, 1523, seven priests in Strasbourg, including her husband, were excommunicated for having married.
- So at this time, Reformation teaching was getting out, and among the tenants was, well, you know, there's no real biblical basis for pastors not being able to marry.
- So it's our freedom, so let's go ahead and do this. The tradition was otherwise. No, no, no, no, you can't marry. But a priest taking a mistress was winked at, indeed provided a good source of income for the bishop, who would levy a fine for the favor.
- [3:03] But as to marriage, that's impermissible. So you kind of see the way the arrangement was. Okay, you can't be expected to kind of go without, so we'll just charge you as a priest.
- Can't marry, but you can pay a fine for your indiscretions on the side here. And you can make a lot of money that way, as you would think. Well, the man who had taken the lead in this matter was Martin Busser, who married the erstwhile nun, Elizabeth Silberstein, cast out on every quarter for this daring and denounced deed, it was Matthew Tsel who took them in.
- Busser, Martin Busser, was bullish on marriage and tried to convince all of his reformer friends to follow his lead, including his host, Matthew Tsel.
- Accordingly, he directed letters to eligible lady candidates, trying to see who might step up and marry these pastors. To the noble and honorable Christian lady, Ottilie von Hohenheim of Basel.

He begins by reassuring her that the men he has on offer are not looking for a wife simply to gratify their passions. No, they are all capable of continence, but rather are acting to render the marriage of ministers reputable.

[4:32] He then flatters Otilie by informing her that of all the women he has taken into review for the task, none has outscored her for suitability.

He writes, your deportment hitherto has been exemplary. Then came the final stirring appeal. Will you crown your witness by assuming a reviled and crucified marriage?

I beseech you in the name of Christ, crucified and accursed. But alas, Otilie did not feel that this was her cross to bear, so Busser had to look further.

It would be, if you did marry a priest at the time, you would probably be shunned in society because this was such a rare thing to do at that time. But before long, Matthäus Tsel, Matthew Tsel, was standing at the altar, yet alas, only officiating for his minister friend Anton Fion.

Now a priest marrying was still the cutting edge of novelty in Strasbourg. So Tsel had to be very careful at one point in the service. You've probably guessed what it is.

[5:44] If any know any just cause why these two may not lawfully be joined together, let him speak now or forever hold his peace. So, hitherto it has been the custom, said Tsel, for the minister to ask this question.

This is a wholesome practice, but there are those who come forward with very unjust causes, claiming that priests should not marry. Tsel commended the couple's step, predicting that more and more brothers, God willing, will follow your example.

Well, as it turned out, the next brother to follow Fiern's example was Matthäus Tsel himself, taking up his own exhortation and taking the hand of Katharina Schutz.

Martin Busser, with no small relish, brought the number of married ministers up to four by solemnizing the union. And Martin Luther sent out to the bride a letter of congratulation.

Catherine was 25, and Matthew, Matthäus Tsel, was 20 years older than that. There he is, about that age.

[6:58] Well, Luther's letter of connubial congrats was not the first that he had written to Catherine. Like Luther, Catherine had suffered dire anguish of spirit, struggling after an ever-elusive forgiveness and a sense of acceptance before God.

And it was a gospel track of Martin Luther's which had delivered her from her slough of despond. And again, like Luther, Katharina constantly battled with a proclivity to depression of spirit and was rocked by recurrent wrestlings with doubt.

Doubt of God's love and his forgiveness of her. She was prone to think that her childlessness, the cells lost two infants, as a mark of defined displeasure over her sins.

Many notions that had just been so customary and superstitious just continued on, had a long afterlife, even after you have good biblical teaching.

It takes us a while to shake off a lot of our superstitions. But all of these struggles of spirit certainly did not render her inactive.

[8:17] Indeed, one wonders when she would have had any time for doler or doldrums as her days and nights seemed not merely laced but larded with acts of mercy and kindness.

It's often a good way to get over your depression or your sense of discouragement is this thing. Well, let me help some people whose lot might be even a little worse than mine and then you forget you could forget some of your own difficulties.

Well, she definitely had the gifts of helps and hospitality. The edict of Worms against Luther and his followers. Remember, that's where Luther made that celebrated statement.

Here I stand. I can do no other. I need to go by my conscience well. And then the emperor, Charles V, declared Luther and all his followers illegal, religiously illegal so that any of their followers he could be killed as a just act of legality at that time.

That's why he had to go into hiding and it ran into difficulty for any sort of Lutheran followers. So, that edict of Worms against Luther and his followers sent many a pastor into hiding or exile.

[9:37] A hundred and fifty of the men of the town of Kensington accompanied their pastor for several miles to see him off into some sort of hiding place, trying to protect him against the Austrian troops that were coming in to just kill these pastors.

So, they're accompanying him for several miles to see him off, only to discover when they tried to come back into their town that the Austrian soldiers had closed the gates against them.

One of their number was caught and executed there and then, prompting the others to flee for their lives, leaving their wives in the town. They fled to Strasbourg, Strasbourg, and there, Catherine put up eighty of them herself in her own home, feeding sixty men for three weeks.

Quite a remarkable achievement. A veritable hotel manager and short order chef all rolled into one. And in the midst of all this, including finding and organizing provision for the others elsewhere in the city of Strasbourg, she managed to write a letter to the wives left back in Kensington, which proved so mightily consoling that it was published.

Here it is, the suffering of believing Christian wives from the town of Kensington with sisterly, with your sister in Christ, always at your service, Catherine Schutz, that was her maiden name.

[11:24] She writes, to my fellow sisters in Christ, day and night I pray God that he may increase your faith and that you forget not his invincible word, my thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord.

The Lord would wean you from this world that you may rely solely upon him. Faith is not a faith which is not tried. And on it goes from scripture to scripture fostering faith and hope in their sore trials.

Wonderful, wonderful piece. I'm not aware that it's in English, but it's a wonderful piece published there. another challenge to Catherine's skills of hospitality, mercy, and administration came when the peasants' war of 1525 broke out.

There was a kind of a peasants' rebellion and they were largely slaughtered. And thousands upon thousands were massacred in a gruesome bloodbath.

And the widowed and the wounded, the mangled and the maimed who survived of the peasantry flocked to Strasbourg. Strasbourg was a city in Europe that had a reputation of being very welcoming of the afflicted, that wonderful Christian reputation.

[12:46] So they're flocking to Strasbourg to the tune of 3,000 refugees coming in, all desperate for care.

That would have been, just to give you a sense of the numbers, that would have been a ratio of one refugee for every eight inhabitants of the city of Strasbourg.

So it's a pretty remarkable challenge. So Catherine Zell was one of the two given charge of this challenge. So she had to organize the lodging, requisitioning a large Franciscan church for starters, and then spreading the rest throughout the city in private quarters, and then food.

She had to feed them all. So just call her Catherine the Catering Queen. And this crisis lasted for a half a year before the war subsided and the refugees were able to return to their farms.

So I speculate that it was during this period that Catherine acquired a certain executive tone. She is a trifle imperious, Busser once remarked of Catherine.

[14:06] Well, compared to these feats, it must have been child's play to host Zwingli of Zurich and Uckelampadius of Basel on their way to meet Luther and Melanchthon for their colloquy of Marburg.

For 14 days, I was their cook and maid, writes Catherine. No doubt she was hoping for reproachment between the Reformation leaders and when news came back to Strasbourg that Luther had declined to unite.

You remember at the colloquy of Marburg, Zwingli and Luther produced an agreement on 28 of 29 tenants of their faith and the one thing that they didn't agree on was their understanding of the Lord's Supper.

Zwingli took a symbolic view and Luther took a realist view. So when Zwingli offered Luther his hand at the end of Christian companionship, Luther wouldn't take it.

So Catherine darted off a chiding letter to the great theologian, pleading that love ought to be above all else.

[15:23] She got a swift response. Yes, wrote Luther, except where God's word is at stake. Catherine and her husband were not always the hosts, for they also traveled a good bit together.

They did so together to Switzerland, Constance, Swabia, Nuremberg, the Palatinate, and even once the 600-mile journey to Wittenberg to visit Luther and Melanchthon.

Now the cells, Matthew and Catherine, were wider in their friendship and fellowship than Luther. Theirs was a refreshing breeze in an age of pretty stormy animosities.

Anyone who acknowledges Christ as the true son of God and the sole savior of mankind is welcome at our table, said her husband, Matthew. And it is clear that Catherine had an equally hospitable soul.

Even when she didn't see eye to eye theologically with another, this was to her no disqualifier for showing them charity and kindness. This is Melchior Hoffman there, who is kind of a fringe figure, and indeed neither this radical fringe figure of Melchior Hoffman.

[16:52] When he was imprisoned in Strasbourg, it was Catherine who visited him and showed him kindness, never neglecting neighborliness despite doctrinal disagreements.

Melchior Hoffman had come to Strasbourg because of a prophecy that he would be imprisoned there for six months and then at the coming of the Lord would lead the 144,000 saints in a slaughter of the ungodly.

So a fringe figure. Only the first part of that prophecy came true. He was indeed imprisoned in Strasbourg and that was only partially fulfilled for he languished in prison there not for six months but for ten years until his death.

But we find recurring again and again in the council records this entry in their book. Mrs. Zell granted permission to visit a poor prisoner under sentence of death.

No one else visited him. In 1548 her faithful friend and companion of 25 years, her husband, whom she had helped so well, bid her a final farewell.

[18:09] After Gusser delivered the eulogy, Catherine delivered an address. Women in that day and the incident incited the allegation that she aspired to a preaching post in the city.

Dr. Katarina, some dubbed her disapprovingly. Well, she fired back, I am not usurping the office of a preacher or an apostle, she insisted.

I am like the dear Mary Magdalene who has not thought of being an apostle, who without, sorry, who with no thought of being an apostle, came to tell the disciples that she had encountered the risen Lord.

Catherine made it through the immediate aftermath of her husband's death, but shortly thereafter she collapsed. Her friends persuaded her to take a break, to get away from Strasbourg and for some rest and restoration and Basel was suggested.

And Busser knew a pastor there, Oswald Myconius, and wrote to him to receive her. Here is, there's Oswald Myconius there.

[19:28] So Busser writes to him, his reforming pastor friend, the widow of our wonderful cell, a godly and saintly woman comes to you that perchance she may find some solace for her grief.

She is human, I suppose with her achievements some doubted this. How does the heavenly father humble those endowed with the greatest of gifts?

Her zeal is incredible for Christ's lowliest and afflicted. She knows and searches the mysteries of Christ. Comfort her patiently for the love of her husband, a sincere and faithful servant of Christ.

From Basel, Katharina went to Zurich for a visit in the home of the eminent Hebraist Conrad Pelican. There is Conrad Pelican.

Her thank you note after staying with Pelican, with the Pelicans, along with a very nice gift. I am sending your wife and your daughter-in-law each a pound of flax for spinning shawls.

[20:39] Reported the, her concern with the introduction of the interim compromise into Strasbourg. So as battle between the Protestants, literal, literal warfare between the Protestants and the Catholics kept unfolding across Europe.

The upper hand went to the Catholics at this time and they imposed an interim compromise into Strasbourg. We do not know what is in store for us in Strasbourg.

She was relieved, however, that she was not evicted from her home, but if it would be so, she had another dwelling place. She writes, I have been allowed to keep the parsonage.

I take anyone who comes, it is always full. I don't know how long I can keep it. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord, to behold my noble husband and all the saints in the vision of God and Christ.

Well, this Catholic enforced interim, which concerned Catherine, meant exile for two of Strasbourg's eminent ministers, Busser and Faggius, and actually there were three, also Vermilli, Peter Martyr Vermilli.

[22:00] They were determined to immigrate to England, but couldn't quite pack up all the kids and the crates in the time that they were allotted.

They had a very specific time allotted that they were allowed to get out. so they overstayed their immunity to arrest by a hazardous three weeks.

And remember, once their time was up, anybody was free to take their life. So very, very dangerous. So during this time of three weeks, Catherine managed to hide them in different places.

And she certainly knew all of the places that you could stuff people in Strasbourg from the refugee crisis, her refugee placement program. Well, when they finally got off safely, they left her two gold pieces out of gratitude.

She wrote back, you put me to shame to think that you would leave money for me as if I would take a heller from you poor pilgrims, a penny.

[23:11] My reverend ministers, I wish I could have done better for you, but my Matthew has taken all of my gaiety with him.

I intended to return the two gold pieces with this letter as Joseph put the money in the sack of his brother, but a refugee minister has just come in with five children and the wife of another who saw her husband beheaded before her eyes.

I divided the one gold piece between them as a present from you, the other eye enclose. You will doubtless need it. So Catherine was now 60 years old and her health began to fail, but her indomitable zeal did not flag.

In 1558, one of the chief magistrates of Strasbourg, Felix Ambrosiotes, was stricken with a dreaded leprosy and consequently quarantined in a little hut beyond the city walls.

They would separate you way away from any society at all. Not even his family were given leave to attend to him.

[24 : 31] No one dared to relieve his utter isolation. They were so afraid of contagion except one, Catherine.

She visited him frequently and even wrote for his consolation a little treatise. Here's how it begins.

My dear Lord Felix, since we have known each other for a full 30 years, I am moved to visit you in your long and frightful illness. I have not been able to come as often as I would like because of the load here for the poor and the sick, but you have ever been in my thoughts.

We have often talked of how you have been stricken, cut off from rank office, from your wife and friends, from all dealings with the world which recoils from your loathsome disease and leaves you in utter loneliness.

At first you were bitter and utterly cast down, till God gave you strength and patience, and now you are able to thank him that out of love he has taught you to bear the cross.

[25 : 43] Because I know that your illness weighs upon you daily and may easily cause you again to fall into despair and rebelliousness, I have gathered some passages which may make your yoke light in spirit, though not in the flesh.

love he has done. She takes the lonely yet loved leper through various verses with her comforting comments for his meditation. Catherine also sought to care for a nephew who was plagued with syphilis.

In fact, to this end, she temporarily moved into the institution in which he was being treated. and no sooner had Catherine moved in than the gifted administrator in her discern numerous changes that were absolutely needed.

She shot off a letter to the town council and in it she writes, the manager and his wife live in luxury and neglect the patients.

beds rot, water is not heated for baths, tough, and sometimes wormy meat is served indiscriminately, whereas some require a soft diet.

[27 : 07] There is no religious instruction and some patients do not even know the Lord's prayer. The manager grumbles a grace so that one cannot tell whether he might not be swearing. The mercury cure martyrs the patients.

There should be a dedicated couple in charge. The number of maids should be reduced. The fewer, the less quarreling. Get rid of the savage dog which mangles all the cats.

Give up swine and goats in favor of a hundred hens. Have religious instruction every morning while the heart is fresh. For medication, use only goyak.

Whatever that is. Well, it was obvious that Catherine knew just how to run that place and her recommendations were adopted in toto, much to the relief of the grateful patients.

Not only elemsinary but also educational efforts animated Catherine. Early, while her husband was still living, and Matthew incidentally shared her concern for popular education composing two simple catechisms for children, Catalina issued a collection of hymns sold in four little pamphlets for a penny a piece to ensure wide circulation.

[28:29] Very, very cheap for that day. A heller. In the preface, Catherine wrote, when I read these hymns, I felt that the writer had the whole Bible in his heart.

This is not just a hymn book, but a lesson book of prayer and praise. When so many filthy songs are on the lips of men and women and even children, I think it well that folk should, with lusty zeal and clear voice, sing the songs of their salvation.

God is glad when the craftsman at his bench, the maid at the sink, the farmer at the plow, the dresser at the vines, the mother at the cradle, break forth in hymns of prayer, praise, and instruction.

Well, when the interim ended in the situation in Strasbourg, in her mind, scarcely improved, at least from her point of view, for the city then came to be dominated by stridently doctrinaire Lutherans, zealous to discern and denounce the slightest dogmatic deviance from their own narrow creed.

once during a Christmas sermon, one of the most rabid of them all, his name was actually Ludwig Rabus, he digressed from his edifying text and descended into unedifying railing against Schwenkfeld by slandering him as Stinkfeld, that emissary from Satan.

[29:59] It was so that you can kind of pun on his name and make it sound a lot like a stinking manure field. So, in those days they were no strangers to lampoon.

Well, Catherine considered this bereft of charity and she remonstrated with Rabus in private. For this private rebuke, Rabus called Catherine a disturber of the peace.

But with this, he seemed to have tripped a wire and she gave him a peace of her mind. And I certainly think he had it coming. A disturber of the peace am I.

Yes, indeed, my own peace. Do you call this disturbing the peace? That instead of spending my time in frivolous amusements, I have visited the plague infested and carried out the dead.

I have visited those in prison and under sentence of death, often for three days and three nights. I have neither eaten nor slept. I have neither mounted the pulpit. I have never mounted the pulpit, but I have done more than any minister in visiting those in misery.

[31:07] Is this disturbing the peace of the church? Why do you rail at Schwenkfeld? You talk as if you would have him burned like poor Servetus in Geneva. You say that you have left Strasbourg and gone to Ulm because the ministers here are too lenient toward the Schwenkfelders, the Zviglians, or the Anabaptists.

You behave as if you have been brought up by savages in a jungle. The Anabaptists are pursued as by a hunter with dogs chasing wild boars. Yet the Anabaptists accept Christ in all essentials as we do.

They have borne witness to their faith in misery, prison, fire, and water. You young fellows tread on the graves of the first fathers of this church in Strasbourg and punish all who disagree with you, but faith cannot be forced.

You say that Strasbourg, by her laxity, is a shame and a scorn to all Germany. Not yet, my dear fellow. She is rather an example of mercy and compassion.

My Matthew testified in private, and from the pulpit also, that he would not be guilty of the crucifixion of these poor folk. The good Samaritan, when he came upon the man who had fallen among thieves, did not ask him to what denomination he belonged, but put him on his ass and took him to an inn.

[32:25] Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, I am meek and lowly of heart. Well, Catherine's last service was to a disciple of Schwenkfeld, the wife of a distinguished physician.

On her death, the husband asked if one of the pastors would conduct the funeral. Only on the understanding that I will declare her to have fallen away from the faith, came the reply.

Well, the husband sadly declined and planned the service-less interment at 6 a.m. when none would notice.

Well, somehow Catherine heard. Too weak now to walk, she had a carriage bring her to the spot at that hour and herself conducted the service.

The town council, hearing of the act, decreed that if Catherine got well, she should be reprimanded. Well, the reprimand, that reprimand was never given.

[33 : 33] Indeed, perhaps the reverse was given her. For shortly after that, she died in her 64th year, 16, sorry, 1562, leaving behind her, in many, a memory of a strong and sweet savor of her savior.

She had welcomed the stranger, comforted the sorrowful, befriended the lonely, allayed the wounds of the suffering.

Her gospel wells ran deep, and out of them she drew to refresh many. Her life was a veritable orchard of the fruits of the spirit.

Oh, God, to raise up more Catherine Zell among us. Well, I have another profile that I'd like to hit, but I wondered if you, we may take a few minutes if you had any questions about Catherine Zell, and then I'm going to finish up some of the time that we have.

Do we still have a little time? Okay. Or would you like me just to go on, and then we can ask questions about both? Strasburg was German at this time?

[35 : 00] Yes. Yes, exactly. German speaking. All right, I'll go on, and then we can ask them. Oh, that was, that was, there's Schwenkfeld, there's Schwenkfeld.

Vibrondus Rosenblatt. Surely, one of the most inside views of the Reformation would have to have been that possessed by the much married Vibrondus Rosenblatt.

For in her matrimonial migrations, she would be the wife for, she would be the wife successively of three of the principal leaders of the Reformation.

Vibrondus was born at Basel in 1504. 1504. There's Basel in the time. Ironically, she was named after the remains of a saint, Vibrondus, which lay in the altar of the Basel Cathedral, from which very pulpit, one of her future husbands would denounce such relic-revering practices as being named after the relic of a saint.

Not quite 20, she was married to the esteemed Basel humanist, Ludwig Keller. Among the several things Keller must have liked in his new wife was her name, for he decided to call the daughter that she bore him by that very name, Vibrondus II.

[36 : 49] The first marriage proved short, for her husband died only two years after their marriage, leaving Vibrondus a widow with child at 22 years old.

Her consequent availability proved a happy circumstance for a certain Basel bachelor. It was unlikely that she would not have noticed him in the city, for his post as principal preacher would have rendered him as prominent as his pendulous promontory of a nose.

Look at that guy. Wow. Gaunt, stooped, ill-nourished. He appeared to some as a mere sack of bones and friends of the gospel feared that he might, that they might lose him to the cause unless there would be someone to feed him some square meals and tell him when to blow out his candle for the night.

Concern was heightened now that his mother, who had tried to perform that role for him, had died, leaving him to fend for himself and to take care of his aged father.

His old friend, Wolfgang Capito, who we saw before, wrote to prompt him, Marriage is honorable and especially for a Christian pastor. If a suitable person is pointed out to you, I think you should not decline.

[38 : 26] To have a mate of like zeal will be a glory to the Lord. Then wondering if the old bachelor might be inadequately discriminating, added, but there is no greater cross than to be married to a daughter of Belial.

So watch out for that, gentlemen. Seeking to allay his fears, Uculumpadius, so that's who that is, Uculumpadius.

That's kind of a, that's a aggressor-sized version of his German name, Hauschein or Hauslamp. So Uculumpadius is Latin for, sorry, Greek for Hauslamp.

He replied, don't worry about my marrying. Either I will find a Christian sister like Monica, that's the mother of Augustine, like Monica, or I'll remain unmarried.

Such a woman is a rare bird, but perhaps one can be netted. Well, he found in Vibronus a Monica-like sister and netted her March 15th, 1528.

[39 : 37] She was 24. He was 45. Some thought them ill-matched, focusing on the physical.

One commented uncharitably, a decrepit old man with trembling head and body, so emaciated and wasted that you might well call him a living corpse, has married an elegant and blooming girl of 20, more or less.

Erasmus teased that it was a rather indulgent thing to do for Lent, scarcely castigating the flesh to take a 20-year-old wife. But Uculumpadius had not netted her for form or face, but for her faith.

He wrote to Pharrell, The Lord has given me a sister and wife. She is well-versed in the knowledge of Christ, with several years' experience of bearing the cross.

And before long, she was also bearing a son, Eusebius, born on Christmas Eve, 1528. It would be an eventful year for the Uculumpadiuses, for the arrival of their first coincided with the dramatic crescendo of the Reformation surge in the city, the storming of the cathedral and the bonfire of the vanities.

[40 : 57] Happily, their new baby was not colic. Eusebius, reported Uculumpadius, is a gentle and quiet child, unless hungry, thirsty, or in need of a change.

But the father also noted, he is very subject to colds and coughing, and I fear he will not live long. He would live only to 13 years old.

Other children came, two daughters, whom they named Alethea, Truth, and Irene, Peace. Vibronus, her ever-burgeoning home, was constantly the site of hospitality, offered to many of the leaders of the Reformation.

Zwingli visited, and Wolfgang Capito sampled her cooking, little knowing that in the future he would enjoy a good bit more of it. Even Servetus dropped by.

Soon, Vibronus was exchanging letters with Anna Zwingli, Agnes Capito, Elizabeth Busser. When in 1531, Zwingli died upon the field of Capel, Uculumpadius was invited to Zurich to replace the fallen leader.

[42 : 11] He declined, probably sensing that for him the sands were low. And indeed, in a month, he followed his friend to the grave. So Vibronus was thus at 26, for the second time a widow, now with four small children.

That very month, in Strasbourg, Capito's wife, Agnes, was taken. And Busser, you remember, who was always active in finding wives for his colleagues, cast his eye about for a new wife for the widower, fearing that, given Capito's inclination to depression, the bitter loss would take a devastating toll.

He didn't have to look very far. He revealed to a friend his matchmaking ambition. My choice for Capito is the widow of Uculumpadius.

And it seemed Capito already had Vibronduſ on his mind, feeling for her loſſ. He, referring to Capito, Capito writes me that he has been very touched by the ſight of the widow Vibronduſ and all her orphaned children.

Busſer propoſed to Capito that a trip would do him good and ſuggeſted the beautiful city of Baſel. Why, you could drop in on the widow Vibronduſ while you're there and offer her ſome comfort.

[43 : 43] Capito thought the trip a fine idea. When he arrived at Baſel, he offered Vibronduſ more than comfort. He offered her his hand. Oh, my, here is, there is Wolfgang Capito, her next huſband.

Um, uh, they were married on Auguſt 11th, 1532, much to the glee and ſatisfaction of Buſſer. Uh, of courſe, when Capito returned with his new wife, the family included the four children and Vibronduſ' mother.

Okay. So ſhe, remember ſhe had, ſhe had children from firſt marriage, Keller. She had, uh, two from, uh, uh, then ſhe had Aletha. So Euſebiuſ, Irena, and Alethea from Ucculumpadiuſ.

So thoſe four, uh, Vibronduſ ſlotted into the new routine quite eaſily as her new huſband's life, uh, ſcarcely differed from that of her late huſband, both being paſtor profeſſors.

Uh, the daily round ſhe took in ſtride. Her energies were ſtrained, however, by keeping the cradle full. To Capito, ſhe bore five more children.

[45 : 00] Um, her good friend in Straſbourg, Elizabeth Buſſer, had born her huſband, Martin, 13 children.

Uh, thoſe after church picnics muſt've been pretty lively when both the Capitoſ and the Buſſerſ ſhowed up in full ſtrength. Uh, but in 1541, the plague ſtruck Straſbourg, claiming 3,200 lives acroſſ the city.

At the Buſſer houſehold, only one child of the 13 ſurvived the deadly ſcourge. Uh, Nathaniel, the one that ſurvived, was a ſeverely mentally and physically handicapped ſon.

And Elizabeth herſelf was taken. Uh, ſhe might have ſaved her life had ſhe left the city at the outbreak of the epidemic. But her huſband, Martin Buſſer, would not leave his flock and ſhe would not leave her huſband.

In the Capito houſehold, the plague took Euſebiuſ, the ſon of Vibronduſ by Ocolampadiuſ and Dorothea and Wolfgang and Chriſtoph, uh, two of her other children by Capito and Capito himſelf.

[46 : 21] So Vibronduſ was again widowed with four ſurviving children and an aged mother. She's 47 now.

As Elizabeth Buſſer lay ſtricken, it's hard to keep all theſe names. Elizabeth Buſſer lay ſtricken on her deathbed with the plague. Catherine Sell came to bring the news of Wolfgang Capito's death.

Elizabeth, aware that for her, the bell would ſhortly toll, aſked her huſband, Martin Buſſer, to take the place of his colleague Capito by taking the widowed Vibronduſ to be his wife.

Now, Buſſer answered only by tears. I mean, his wife's not even dead yet and ſhe's arranging for the next, the next wife. Uh, yet Elizabeth iſiſted and ſent for Vibronduſ who, having been only juſt widowed the night before, heſitated to be ſeen in public by day.

She came by night and received Elizabeth's dying plea to care for her huſband as his wife when ſhe died. The wiſh of Elizabeth was fulfilled.

[47 : 44] In April 1542, Vibrondu took her place beside Martin Busser as his wife, he being her fourth husband.

So there's Martin Busser. That's her husband now. Vibrondu proved a good wife to Busser. He wrote to a friend, I only hope I can be as kind to my new wife as she is to me, but oh for the pang for the one that I have lost.

The new Busser household, though sorely reduced by the plague, was still not small. And Vibrondu certainly had her hands full.

So Busser had a surviving son. Vibrondu brought her mother and four children, making for a family of eight, along with Vibrondu's mother and Busser's father with his father's second wife.

So a lot of, a lot of ages. And soon more children arrived to the new couple. Though they were now at double digits of kids, they decided to augment their brood still further through adoption.

[49 : 09] They adopted a niece of Vibrondu, Margareta Rosenblatt. So it must have felt like a Sunday school when they all gathered around the table.

Before and after every meal, Busser would read a chapter from scripture, followed by comment. Said one lodger, I always went away from this table more instructed, with doubts dissolved and confusion clarified.

I find myself wondering how Busser was able to get so much done in his life, in the midst of this nursery of little needy ones. There's indication that he managed by staying up the balance of the night.

An Italian immigrant who stayed in the Busser household for 17 days recalled of Busser, he devotes his nights to study and prayer, and I have never awakened to find, without finding him still up.

It's probably what made him so susceptible to plague is they were sleep deprived too. Not a helpful thing. But even if we imagine Busser helping with a burgeoning brood, went around during the day, there were plenty of seasons when he was not around, and Vibrondu had to hold down the fort without him.

[50 : 30] On one occasion, Busser was away on a trip for an entire year. She did, of course, have a mother to help out, but not infrequently she, being well advanced in years, required more help than she could offer.

In February 1548, a friend wrote, Another long absence came when Busser was called away to England to fill the Regis professorship at Cambridge of theology.

He went out ahead and hoped Vibrondu and the family would join him once he was settled into a home. She must have been quite secure in their relationship, along with a possession of a robust humor, for her old friend, who was with Busser in England, wrote to her teasingly, You'd better come to care for Busser, else he might marry someone else.

The Duchess of Suffolk would have him in a moment. She is a widow. Well, whatever were the hopes of the Duchess of Suffolk, it is clear what Busser wanted.

He wrote expressing the hope that she might join him soon. How I'd love to have you here, but we are in the Lord's hands. While it is obvious that it was Vibrondu he missed, it was also evident that he missed all the practical ways in which she took care of him, for he was not managing too well on his own.

[52 : 06] At the end of his plea for her to join him, he adds, But if you cannot come, I wonder if a trusty brother and his wife might come and cook for me and look after the house.

You know what kind of a housekeeper I am. If I could have that hope, I could the better spare you until the times improve, but I am in the Lord's hands. His final PS was a request for certain books she might obtain for him.

Thus, Vibrondus also acted as a book agent, it seems. It was not easy for Busser to be away from his family. Truly, it is no light cross to give up one's own household, he wrote.

But before too long, she was restored to her husband's side, making the trip to England with an advanced contingent to the family. Surveying the scene, she decided to return for the rest of the family, leaving Agnes Capito, that is, daughter by her third husband, to look after her fourth husband.

She got back to Strasbourg to find that the Catholic authorities were trying to confiscate their property. Vibrondus was summoned to appear in court. We have a hint as to her plucky nature from this incident.

- [53 : 23] It seems one of the local friends, Sol, was concerned that Vibrondus would give the magistrates a piece of her mind over their injustice. She wrote to Busser, Sol confided in me his fear that if I appeared in court, I would say something hot, and indeed I might certainly have done so.

Instead of appearing in court, she had the fine idea of a relaxing visit in a spa. They did have spas back in those days. It seems hot spring spas were a favorite retreat for the fast-paced Busser household, for Martin fantasized over his German thermal baths more than once during the cold, wet winters in Cambridge.

While refreshed from her spa tune-up, Vibrondus packed up the rest of the family, grandma and all, and made the journey back to England. But scarcely had she finally arrived when Busser fell ill.

Vibrondus, in caring for her husband, grew so exhausted herself, she remembered that teasing about an admiring Duchess of Suffolk and actually asked her if she would be willing to help relieve her of her incessant nursing through the final stages of Busser's illness.

The Duchess cordially obliged and by taking part of the load probably saved Vibrondus a breakdown. With her husband gone, there was no reason for her to remain a foreigner in England, so she worked on getting the whole family back to Strasbourg.

- [54 : 54] But alas, money was lacking, and she had to appeal to Cranmer, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury's kindness, to help them get home. This he gladly did.

She did leave the Archbishop Busser's books. What was left of them, Cranmer complains in a letter that I think the Duchess got them all.

So she did get something. Vibrondus managed to get the family home, grandma and all, but most were now gone that she had once known and loved. So she moved on to the city of her birth, Basel.

One wonders if a prospective fifth husband was waiting in the wings. In any case, her matrimonial migrations had finally come to an end.

In 1564, a terrible plague carried off 7,000 in the city, and Vibrondus was among them. She was laid to rest beside her second husband, Ucullampadius, remember the long-nosed guy, in the cloister walk of the cathedral.

- [56 : 02] And now, I suppose the pressing question is that of the Sadducees. Whose wife shall she be in the judgment? She was cast by the hand of providence into demanding callings.

She answered that call with a life of courage, character, and commitment. Firmly established upon the Rock of Ages, she was able to stand in the midst of tumults, life, and weather the fierce storms of that age.

And upon that great rock, she was able herself to be a little rock for the many God had given her to love and care for. Neither could they have been what they were without her.

And if history stints her praise, its author, the author of history, who sees all and knows all, shall not. Its history sees her behind her husbands, God sees her beside them.

Okay. Thank you. I don't know how much time we have, Tom. I will remain to answer any questions that people have, but we might need to dismiss soon.

[57:29] Yeah, I think the folks want to go there again. Yep. I think the service is still going, so, I believe, so, it's probably going to be too long. You are dismissed, but I will remain if anyone has any questions or comments or anything.

Yes! I have a question. Thank you. It was great. If you could go back and capture it for a moment. I just got some notes. Yes. So, she was a remarkable person.

A capable administrator, an earnest peacemaker, quietly courageous. But I think a really outstanding that came across was just her generous and welcoming hospitality.

Yes. And I was wondering if you would comment on what you think the role of hospitality is in the church today. Yes. Oh, that's a great question. You know, if you think about it, hospitality is a wonderful expression of the gospel.

If we think about what, hospitality is taking the riches that we have and enjoy, the joys and the delights that we have in our family and extending and extending those to others.

[58:43] And is that not what our salvation is? There's the wonderful mutual joy, delights within the Trinity, that rich dance of love and all this blessing.

And from that richness, there is an extension of that and a welcoming in of others to enjoy that. At great cost, often hospitality, costs us a lot to extend that gift of welcome and coming in and to enjoy.

And again, God, at great cost to himself, extends the richness of the savor that he enjoys to us, unworthy, without respect to our worthiness of it.

And yes, that's a, yeah, so it's a wonderful and critical picture or expression of the gospel. So this should be absolutely central.

And if you look in the New Testament, it is not distinct from the Old Testament, but reinforced in the New Testament how central this is. For example, an elder needed to be given to hospitality.

[59:53] This is something indispensable. So whether or not we think that we have gifts in it, it's commanded to do because it is so central to the gospel.

So, and the joys in it are wonderful, aren't there? It's, we never quite know how we're going to be blessed and entertaining. Is it what, Hebrews 13, I think one, maybe, where I'm talking about, hey, keep offering hospitality joyfully.

Who knows? You may end up entertaining angels unaware. There's always a wonderful blessing that comes to us too. So, yes.

Yes, Tom. So, it's just the grief that some of these folks went through and it's stunning and heartbreaking. I was wondering if you had any impressions on how they handled that grief and if, you know, there's cases of them where it just wandered in for decades.

Yeah. Because sometimes, you know, it sounds like when you hear the stories that kind of got over it, so to speak, like a little crass, and they're like, I'm just wondering what you're expecting to do with that.

[61:01] Yeah, yeah. It was, I mean, you just think of it, it's just a wave of all these woes. You know, how, just unimaginable, to bury your children.

It's got to be one of the hardest, hardest things. things. And some of it, I think, is they had a profounder sense than we often do, certainly than I have, as to what we expect in life.

And they took very seriously the fact that we are in a fallen world. And woes will be the lot of the children of God.

Not distinct from those who are not believers. believers. Indeed, it was their expectation that being believers, our woes will be greater because we will not be trying to avoid them at all times.

We will wade in. We are salt and light. We need to bear the burdens of one another. We go in and try to carry them. And so, particularly for Christians in this world, you shall have much tribulation.

[62 : 09] And they, they actually expected that and counted on that. So, it was actually true, remember in Peter, beloved, don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you that comes upon you for your testing as though some strange thing were happening to you.

So, so that was when they seemed to, to, to, to have a better sense that this is our lot. Uh, uh, then, uh, there is, uh, a, a literature that, that, that ends up developing during the Reformation.

There's a scholar named Ron Ritkers who's written a lot on this that just looks at some of the, the consolation literature and, uh, much of what there is. And, and Catherine's was a wonderful example of it where, what do we do?

Well, let's take these wonderful biblical truths and let's make sure that we are building our house on the rock of these promises of God.

And that is a stability in which we can stand. And you remember in Matthew 7, 23, 24, uh, uh, that, uh, that the wise one hears these words of mine and he puts them into practice.

[63 : 23] They shall be like one who builds their house on a rock that when, not if, when the winds and the rains and the storms batter against the house will stand because it's established on the rock.

So there was a sense that we need, uh, to really be building. And a lot of times in, uh, they, you, they, they did a good job.

It seems Tom always seeking to, to take in the comfort of those promises and building even in the times that weren't so difficult, knowing that they will surely come.

Uh, so almost like Joseph, uh, look, what, let's, let's harvest some of the fat years for lean years will be coming and that sort of practice.

So if we wait to try to reach out and grab the consolation of the word when we are in our distress, that often seems too late. We really need to be building that fortification for when those times will come.

[64 : 25] And they seem to have been good at, at that. Uh, they also seem to be really willing to share. Did you notice how they, they weren't isolated.

They weren't even isolated in their marriage. You know, oh my goodness, your husband died. Well, I, here, I have a husband. I'm about to die. Here, you have him. I mean, they really are, they, they're in a common, common lot and they really are seeking to lean in to bear one another's burdens.

And I think that this is, this is really critical and we ought not to think that the measure of our strength is our ability to take all of these things alone in an isolated way.

But, but to, to share and bear one another's burdens and to be involved in each other's lives. So, and they seem to have done that well as even evidenced by some of these stories.

Yeah. Yeah. Your comment about Martin Luther not shaking the hand of the, Zingley, yep.

[65 : 28] Zingley over the Lord's Supper. Yep. I think about Edwards' community controversy where sometimes secondary matters become primary court. Yep. Or Edwards, Bar, unbelievers, the Lord's table.

Yep. What would you say would be an appropriate circumstance where a secondary matter should take primary court? So, I think you want to tell us, you want to affirm our private brother and sister, the Lord Christ, the Lord Bible.

when should those secondary matters become primary courts? Yeah, yeah. Great, great question.

Challenging one. I think one, I think I'd want to say it first, I think we should always keep a distinction between primary and secondary matters.

secondary matters. So, when you say sometimes a secondary matter might function as a primary matter, I don't know that that would be the best way to put it, because that could then blur that there is a distinction between primary and secondary matters.

[66:32] So, maybe what you're asking is, when do secondary matters actually come to be of some importance that we would want to give them expression and not just say, oh, well, they don't matter because they're secondary.

secondary. And I think in those, there are times we think, well, actually, this is where we want to give expression to the faithfulness of God. So, for example, in this church, we think that a faithful expression to the truth of God is in baptism, in believer's baptism, where faith and baptism are united and not separated, because it seems like the scripture links those things.

Whereas infant baptism pulls them apart. So, we think, hey, that's an important expression. We recognize that it's not primary. We welcome people into fellowship, but we practice that truth here in this congregation, following our conscience and in good conscience and happy to do so.

So, we do give it importance, but we recognize that that doesn't mean that a person cannot fellowship with us and we receive them as sisters and brothers.

we just follow our conscience in this matter, hopefully always with charity. So, and there'd be all kinds of other illustrations or examples, but we can talk a little bit more later about particulars.

[67:56] But, yeah, yeah. Sure. Thank you so much for sharing the stories of these really remarkable things. It seems quite a monumental task to be looking after so many, this many children, visiting the leprosy ridden and incarcerated and providing comments on, like, hospital care.

you mentioned that they had a network of support amongst themselves. Was there a sense that their husbands lifted a finger to help them in these tasks, like visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned?

Yes, they definitely did, and that was considered part of pastoral care. And even domestic duties, we might imagine that this is kind of traditional, but in one sense, there were, the scriptures were kind of coming into fresh prominence, and these reformers were really trying to engage with the scriptures to figure out, well, what does this look like?

And family life for ministers, for pastors, this was a new thing. Because otherwise, you just had clerical celibacy before then in the Roman Catholic Church.

So they were coming to scripture to feel like, well, what does this look like? And many of them concluded, hey, we need to love our wives, is what it says, we need to help them in this way. So Martin Luther, changed diapers.

[69:32] Martin Luther, changed diapers. He didn't say, hey, that's Catherine's thing. Many of these men were extremely helpful, and they kind of saw it in terms of, okay, how do we survive?

How can we each bring our best to bear to the extent that we can do this? things? And there wasn't always and even typically clear roles established.

That tends to come a lot later. When you've got frontier time, when you're figuring out what does it look like to have a new family as a pastor, it's improvisational. And a lot of times it's so challenging, you're just thinking, what do we do to survive?

We're making this up as we go along. So you don't see as many of the traditional roles in this first generation. You almost need to wait for custom to kind of begin to take shape.

So they're pretty creative, frankly. Yeah, that's certainly true.

[70:41] And, you know, I just see a willingness on both part to do what needed to be done.

To take care of our families well and to take care of other people's families well and to take care of the poor. And we just do what we can do according to our gifts, according to some callings, and as the Lord provides strength.

And it looks really different from different people not a lot of clear, you know, in this first generation, not a lot of clear patterns yet because they're making stuff up as they go along.

It's kind of new. It's a new time. Yeah. Yeah. I think we probably better conclude. Well, thank you, team. And if you're able to make it, we'll see you next week, Lord willing.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.