

Tyndale – a life given for the Word [one]

1. We left Tyndale in Europe, hiding in Worms, supplied by funds a merchant brought him from the sale of his Bibles, ostensibly, to be burned by the Bishop of London. We need to take a moment to really consider what God did through this one man. [two]
2. He was one man. About 80 years after Tyndale made his translation a Scottish King, King James, would be made King over England and Wales and Ireland as well. He would bring in a team of about 50 of the world's greatest scholars to work full time on translating the Greek and Hebrew scriptures into English. It would take them 5 years. Tyndale's translation was done in one year, while hiding, with a price on his head, alone, and in poverty.
3. He not only gave us the New Testament in our language, he created rules of grammar and spelling which English had always lacked (at this time in European history it was considered a hick, backward language and was used in no courts, legal papers, or political debates). He created metaphors and figures of speech that had never existed before. He kept revising his translation to make it flow more easily off of the tongue (somewhat like Petersen did with The Message). He wanted the language to be so accessible that a common person could memorize passages.
4. And yet every edition of his New Testament had this in its preface: an apology to the reader: [Three] "Count it as a thing not having his full shape, but as it were born afore his time, even a thing begun rather than finished. In time to come, if God has appointed us there unto, we will give it its full shape." He gave us such lovely phrases as "For God so loved the world..."
5. As he labored, the world grew even more dangerous. Let's go back to England for a moment and look at Thomas Bilney, [four] a licensed, approved priest. He preached in the city of Norwich but, unbeknownst to his congregation, he was a secret member of the Lollards and the Secret Society. He was known to take a drink at the White Horse Inn, the haunt of the Secret Society. To get there, he had to walk by a field where the church routinely burned Lollards – over 300 between the years 1390 and 1550. He

knew the risks he was taking but his faith compelled him to engage in smuggling Tyndale's scriptures into England.

6. Torn by his conflicting duties to church and God, he went into the safest place in Europe, the confessional, and confessed his dilemma to a priest and scholar named Hugh Latimer. And Latimer promptly turned him in. The sacred rule and law of the confessional was tossed aside, Bilney was taken to the Tower of London and was tortured in horrific ways until, a literally broken man, he was required to publicly burn New Testaments as a sign of his repentance.
7. Shamed, defrocked, and broken he was released from prison. He made his way back to Norwich and told his friends he was "ready to go to Jerusalem." They had no idea what he meant until they saw him publicly teaching and preaching again, in English, and handing out books and Bibles in plain view of the authorities. They quickly arrested him and sentenced him to death. [five] He was burned at the stake in the field at Norwich where the other Lollards had been burned. As he died, he clutched a book in his hands: Tyndale's treatise on religious freedom and the separation of church and state entitled "The Obedience of a Christian Man."
8. As this was going on, Tyndale was writing about the truths he was finding as he translated scripture. [six] He produced books and broadsides (tracts) on the previously unknown doctrine of justification by faith, grace as a gift of God, and freedom in Christ. He was also teaching himself Hebrew so that he could translate the Old Testament more accurately. Most manuscripts of the OT were in Greek but he felt that if he knew the original language he would better understand the customs, world, and meanings of the words he would find in the Greek. In this, he was 300 years ahead of his time. As he worked, he repeated a phrase he found in scripture which became a mantra to him: "the just will live by faith."
9. To a world under the yoke of a church that required countless works and acts of obedience, the very idea of living by faith was world changing.
10. Warned that his life was in danger in Worms, Tyndale slipped away and into Marburg. There, he could glean information from pilgrims who passed

through there under the protection of Prince Philip. Tyndale found that he was in danger from two fronts: the church, personified by Cardinal Wolsey and the state, personified by Henry VIII. Tyndale was unaware of what was going on that caused both of these forces to array against him – an argument about divorce. [seven]

- 11.** Henry wanted to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, so that he could marry Anne Boleyn. Catherine had been unable to deliver an heir to Henry (which was always the woman's fault...even though it was due to Henry's health and STD issues) so she, like those before her, was going to be tossed away. Two giants in academia, Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell, were backing Henry. They decided to help Henry in his struggle against the church, notably as personified by Cardinal Wolsey and Sir Thomas More.
- 12.** God makes an appearance here in the form of a servant girl. One of Anne Boleyn's servant girls gave the future queen a book she thought she might like...Tyndale's book, "The Obedience of a Christian Man" – [eight] the same book Bilney held when being burned in Norwich just a year or so before. Anne was reading it when a bishop came in and was horrified to see it in her hands. He railed at her, accused her of reading rebellious, heretical literature, and confiscated the book. Anne was quite upset at went to Henry to complain. He sent armed men after the bishop and got the book back (he was smitten with Anne and men will do amazing things for a pretty girl). Wondering why the bishop was so disturbed at the sight of a simple book in a common, vulgar language, Henry VIII did something amazing: he read the book. It blew him away.
- 13.** He declared it the greatest book ever written by the hand of man. The same book held by Bilney as he burned was now at the center of the seat of power in London. Henry sent word to Tyndale that he would like to read more. Tyndale sent him his translation of Luther's "Justification by Faith" and Henry loved it.
- 14.** Sir Thomas More – [nine] a champion of the church and an avowed enemy of Tyndale and all who would translate the scripture into the common language – challenged Tyndale to a debate. The debate took place via correspondence (Tyndale was protected by Prince Philip) for any face to

face meeting would end with Tyndale's immediate kidnapping and death. While he carried on that debate and translated works on faith and theology he ALSO finished his translation of the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. It took him two years. He sailed to Hamburg to have it printed and the worst thing that could have happened did: the boat was caught in a storm and sunk. The manuscript was lost. He survived and made it to Hamburg where two other heroes met him, Miles Coverdale [ten] and John Rogers. Both of them were also hiding in Germany from the agents of the church. They pledged to help Tyndale reconstruct his manuscript. Two years later, in 1531, the first English translation of the first five books of the Bible was printed in Antwerp. Later that year, he translated the Book of Jonah and prefaced it with a broadside against the bishops of England, comparing them to Ninevah. (they had to repent before they fell)

15. Back in England, [eleven] the church was dividing along battle lines. Many priests and bishops were moving over to Henry VIII – some of them for faith reasons and some for practical reasons. Others were standing by Cardinal Wolsey and Sir Thomas More. Tyndale wouldn't support either side. He was appalled by Henry's divorce and mistreatment of women and wrote a sermon that was a denunciation of the king's conduct and what Tyndale called an attack on the institution of marriage. Now Tyndale was an enemy of both church and state.
16. Cautioned to slow down and get some rest, Tyndale replied "the word "myself" is not in the gospel." He did take two days off a week but spent them going down alley ways to find the poor so that he could give them alms and care. The end was coming for Tyndale, though. He had too many enemies to survive.
17. Tyndale's friends were as brave and tireless as he. One of them was John Frith. [twelve] He was not afraid of controversy and would often write Sir Thomas More, warning him that the English people WOULD have their Bibles in their humble homes and there was nothing high church people could do to stop it. Frith once personally escorted a large shipment of Bibles into England. He was arrested...but not for smuggling. He had been working so hard that he had a rough, ragged appearance. He was heavily

bearded and wore patched, old clothes so he was arrested as a vagrant and put into the stocks at Reading.

- 18.** People would always come to make fun of the hobos in the stocks at Reading. Once scholar from Eton came to join the fun but got the surprise of his life. Frith recognized the scholar because they had gone to Cambridge together. Frith started discussing issues in linguistics with the scholar – in the classical Greek of the Illiad. His schoolmate was stunned. He got the authorities to release Frith but the word quickly got to Sir Thomas More that there was a stranger around who knew ancient languages. Sir Thomas immediately sent out spies to find out who he was and what he was in England to do.
- 19.** Frith was captured in London and imprisoned in the Tower of London. Here, several things happened at once. The new archbishop, Thomas Cranmer, didn't want the young man to die. He was sympathetic to the reformers and asked that a message be smuggled into Frith. Just moderate your tone in front of the judges, he pleaded. Tell minor lies if you have to. And if you won't, if you refuse, Archbishop Cranmer said, I will try to find a way to get you out of England alive any way.
- 20.** The second thing that happened? Henry VIII got fed up with Sir Thomas More and dismissed him as Chancellor. A great enemy of the reformation, of the Secret Society and the translators was gone, out of power.
- 21.** But bad things were also afoot. The Bishops Longland and Stokesley had risen up to become champions of the church and hunters of the translators. They went to the Tower of London and personally questioned Frith. They were impressed by his knowledge and things were going well until they asked him if he believed in transubstantiation. [thirteen] Tyndale had never addressed this point because it was a divisive one among the reformers. The followers of Luther and Zwingli had even gone to war over it. Tyndale felt that it wasn't important enough to divide over but Frith wasn't Tyndale; he had already written a book attacking the doctrine. When he argued his point, the Bishops Longland and Stokesley considered him a foul heretic of the worst sort.

- 22.** Archbishop Cranmer tried to get Frith to moderate his tone or back down but he refused. Even after being beaten, he would stand up straight and use scripture and logic against the bishops. He also refused to escape (“will a man like me run?”). And so, on a morning in 1532, he was led to the stake and burned. Tyndale mourned his “son in the faith.”
- 23.** Henry VIII made a decree that it was now legal to own the Bible in England – in a church -- even in the English language. Archbishop Cranmer and another ally, Thomas Cromwell, put into church law provisions that blunted the bishops’ ability to persecute their own people. Tyndale wondered whether it was time for him to return to England...but he was in Antwerp, [fourteen] Belgium and that was going to be a problem. Antwerp had laws which sound strange to us but which were common in the Holy Roman Empire (most of Europe at the time). The pope’s law held sway over all other laws...but only in the streets. In a man’s own home, he was free to do what he liked. A man’s home was truly his castle. If you remained in your house, the authorities could not enter.
- 24.** Where Tyndale was staying was not his house but that of Thomas Poyntz. Poyntz did not trust a frequent visitor to his house, a man named Henry Philips. Philips had worked his way into Tyndale’s confidence and was often in Poyntz’s home under the pretext of needing to study more of Tyndale’s writings. Henry Philips was, in reality, an agent of Rome. One day, when Poyntz was out, Philips got Tyndale to step outside to help him with a problem (he claimed to have lost his purse and was in need of money). Tyndale, always ready to help someone in need, stepped outside to hand him some money when soldiers of the Roman Church leapt out and seized him. He was taken to the Castle of Vilvorde (a copy of the Bastille in Paris). He would never leave. [fifteen]
- 25.** For 500 days Tyndale stayed there in a dark, wet, cold cell. We have very little information from this period in his life but one letter and some records still exist. In a letter, Tyndale pleads with the warden to allow him to have a blanket, a coat, a candle, and some books. It is thought that all of those were denied him. Poyntz tried to get Tyndale out but was arrested for his trouble. He was able to escape but failed to even get food sent to Tyndale in prison. Miserable, weak, and sick on October 6, 1536 Tyndale

was led into the courtyard of his prison, tied to a stake, strangled and burned. [sixteen] His last words were “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes.”

26. Gone was the man who save the Bible for the English speaking people and who really created the English language as we know it today. [seventeen] He is thought to have done more to establish English as a separate, understandable language than Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Donne combined. He stood in front of the power bishops of the day and said “I defy the Pope and all his laws, and if God spare my life, I will make it possible for the boy who drives the plow to know more Scriptures than you.” And he did. After 1500 years, the Bible was back in the hands of the people. And God wasn’t done yet.

27. Next week...the Great Bible and the move to King James.