

a sermon:

## WILLIAM TYNDALE THE BIBLE CRIMINAL

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## I. A PROPOSITION

The LORD forbid that men should be denied the hearing and the reading of The Word of GOD, Which – with proper instruction from The faithful Church and guidance from The HOLY SPIRIT – may guide us into righteousness, bring us peace in this life and eternal salvation in the next through our Lord JESUS CHRIST!

## II. INTRODUCTION

William Tyndale was apparently considered by many to be a criminal before he came to be considered a Christian hero. “He was hunted throughout Europe by secret agents; raided while printing his underground English... [translation life’s work]; ...kidnapped by a spy; ...executed... as a heretic.” What was the crime of which Tyndale was guilty? What was the offense that caused the emissaries of The Church of his day and The King of England to hound him even unto death? For what cause was this Christian man harried, betrayed, imprisoned, strangled and martyred in flames? His crime: “he translated The Bible into English!”<sup>1</sup>

## III. A SCRIPTURE – ROMANS 10:13-14

13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?<sup>2</sup>

## IV. BACKGROUND ON TYNDALE’S LIFE

Tyndale lived from about 1492 to 1536 AD, having studied at Oxford and Cambridge, and having been ordained a Priest. In 1522 AD, The LORD put upon Tyndale’s heart to translate The Bible into English so that the Christian laity of England could read The Scriptures in their own tongue. He failed to obtain help for this work from the Bishop Tunstall of London.<sup>3</sup> Thus Tyndale concluded, “Not only that there was no room in my lord of London’s palace to translate The New Testament, but also that

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<sup>1</sup> 1, Miller and Huber, “The Bible: A History,” page 170.

<sup>2</sup> 2, KJV, ROMANS 10:13-14.

<sup>3</sup> 3, Rowell et al, “Love’s Redeeming Work,” page 33.

there was no place to do it in all of England!”<sup>4</sup> And so he fled to Germany to do the work there and have his Bible translations imported - smuggled if need be - into England.

By 1525 AD, he had completed translation of The New Testament into English from The Greek New Testament of Erasmus while in Hamburg. From there he went to Colone, where he found a printer willing to print his English New Testament. The work was however interrupted by a raid. Tyndale again found himself on the run, settling eventually in Worms, where 6,000 copies of his first work were printed. This first batch of English-language New Testaments were then clandestinely shipped into England concealed in “barrels of flour and bolts of cloth.”<sup>5</sup>

When these began to appear in England in the hands of the laity, The Church sought out all the copies they could acquire and burned them. But why would The English Church not want the English people to have The Bible in their own language to read and understand? Why would the head pastors of The Body of CHRIST on Earth in that land at that time so desperately wish to deprive the people of GOD of The very Word of GOD?

It is written in PSALM 119:105, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”<sup>6</sup> But this was a time of spiritual darkness in England, when the Christian man attending his Church could not understand the words spoken by his Priest because the words of Scripture and ceremony were given in Latin - an alien language to the common man of that time and place. For if a man can not understand the language in which The Word of GOD is presented, how can it can be a lamp to his feet and a light to his path?

Tyndale might well have read the words of the prophet Amos and seen in his own time and place the spiritual famine of his fellow men for lack of knowledge of The Word of GOD. AMOS 8:11-12 declares, “Behold, the days come, saith The Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing The Words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea... they shall run to and fro to seek The Word of the LORD, and shall not find it.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 1, Miller and Huber, “The Bible: A History,” page 170.

<sup>5</sup> 1, Miller and Huber, “The Bible: A History,” page 170.

<sup>6</sup> 2, KJV, PSALM 119:105.

<sup>7</sup> 2, KJV, AMOS 8:11-12.

## V. FEED MY SHEEP

The very men who were charged to feed the sheep of CHRIST, rather than feeding them The Light of GOD, seemed rather to feed only themselves! For JOHN 1:1 tells us that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with GOD, and the Word was GOD.”<sup>8</sup> The Word made flesh Who alone is full of grace and truth, The One made known to men through The Scriptures, was denied to the people of GOD by the Shepherds of The Church of our Lord JESUS CHRIST!

And so it is no marvel to see that, though the Light of Scriptures was shined through The Church into the spiritual darkness of pre-Reformation England, the people could not comprehend It in that alien tongue of Latin. This then was the spiritual darkness then overshadowing England that The Almighty sent William Tyndale His faithful servant to illuminate with the light of an English-language Bible!

GOD had revealed to Tyndale why the people of England needed an English-language Bible, for he wrote that “CHRIST before His death commanded and appointed that... This Evangelion, Gospel or tidings should be declared throughout all the world, and therewith to give unto all that [repent, and] believe, all His goods: ...His life, wherewith He swallowed and devoured up death; His righteousness, wherewith He banished sin; His salvation, wherewith He overcame eternal damnation.”<sup>9</sup> Tyndale declared truthfully that there is nothing more joyful than for men who are otherwise lost to sin, death and damnation to hear the glad tiding’s of CHRIST’s redeeming work and believe on Him. And as on the Day of Pentecost, men must hear The Gospel in their native tongue to do so!

## VI. TYNDALE’S PEN

Thus did Tyndale speak to the people of England through his pen against The Church for banning and burning his English New Testament: “They tell you that Scripture ought not to be in the mother tongue [of English], but that is only because they... desire to lead you blindfold and in captivity! They say that Scripture needs a pure and quiet mind, and that laymen are too cumbered with worldly business to understand

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<sup>8</sup> 2, KJV, JOHN 1:1.

<sup>9</sup> 3, Rowell et al, “Love’s Redeeming Work,” page 34. “A Summary of Scripture” by Tyndale.

it... [But] who is so tangled with worldly matters as the... [Church leaders]? They say that laymen would interpret it each after his own way. Why then do the... [Priests] not teach the people the right way? They say we need doctors [of theology] to interpret Scripture because it is so hard... [But] there are errors even in Origen and Augustine... If the... [Priests] will not teach The Gospel, the layman must have The Scripture, and read it for himself, taking GOD for his Teacher!"<sup>10</sup>

Tyndale next began translating The Old Testament into English, but he never survived to see them printed. Constantly on the move to evade capture by English and Church agents, he was eventually "set up by an English agent who claimed to favour the emerging Protestant beliefs." Tyndale was at last arrested while living in Antwerp, having taken this seemingly Christian man into his confidence. From there, Tyndale was carried of "to the state prison near Brussels," where he rotted for 1 ½ years. In 1536 AD, Tyndale was convicted of heresy.<sup>11</sup>

## VII. TYNDALE'S OTHER CRIMES AND DEATH

Tyndale was also guilty of other crimes against the then Church-State monolith. His theology grew closer to Luther's with time, coming to see The Bible as the central authority upon which Christian faith should be based - not upon the dictates of the Roman Church. He further offended by teaching that "salvation [is] through faith [and] not The Church; he [also] denied purgatory existed; ...that the Virgin Mary and the saints [in Heaven] do not intercede for us; that we should not pray to them," but rather pray directly to GOD through CHRIST. On top of all this, Tyndale denounced King Henry VIII's divorce proceedings, which earned him the enmity of the then good king of England.<sup>12</sup>

For his troubles Tyndale was martyred as a heretical enemy of both the state and The Church. For his brave and pious Christian service to The Church, The Crown and the English nation, Tyndale was "chained to a stake where an executioner publicly strangled him with a rope, then burned his body." Tyndale's last words on this earth

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<sup>10</sup> 1, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," page 170.

<sup>11</sup> 1, Miller and Huber, "The Bible: A History," page 171.

<sup>12</sup> 3, Rowell et al, "Love's Redeeming Work," page 33.

were, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.”<sup>13</sup>

But as Providence from On High would have it, Tyndale’s last prayer was indeed heard by The Almighty, for his translation works on both the Old and New Testaments “became the foundation for later English [Bible translations].”<sup>14</sup> “At the time of Tyndale’s death, a printed edition of the English Bible, bearing [of all things] a dedication to King Henry VIII, had been circulating in England for nearly a year.” The cover page ironically read, “Set forth with the King’s most gracious licence.” This was the Coverdale Bible, compiled by Miles Coverdale, a friend and associate of Tyndale. Coverdale used Tyndale’s translation of The New Testament and The Pentateuch, with the remainder of the Old Testament translated from other sources.<sup>15</sup>

#### VIII. TYNDALE VINDICATED

Another associate of Tyndale - John Rogers - published in 1537 AD another English Bible translation, “The Matthew Bible.” This Bible was so named as Rogers, no doubt fearing for his life, adopted the name “Thomas Matthew.” The cover page of this Bible also carried the ironic words, “Set forth with the King’s most gracious licence.” The Matthew Bible used Tyndale’s translations into English of The New Testament and The Pentateuch, but additionally used Tyndale’s unpublished translations of JOSHUA to II CHRONICLES into English.<sup>16</sup>

By 1538 AD, King Henry VIII himself was Providentially moved by Tyndale’s last prayers, for he issued a royal decree ordering that “one Book of the whole Bible of the largest volume in English‘... be placed in every parish Church in England where the people could have access to it.” This led to the printing in England of “The Great Bible” in 1539 AD, which was “Coverdale’s revision of Matthew’s Bible... - essentially a copy of Tyndale’s translation!” By 1560 AD, the English-language “Geneva Bible” appeared in print, in which began the practice of dividing Scripture Chapters into verses. In 1568 AD, the English-language “Bishop’s Bible” appeared. And under King James I, the

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<sup>13</sup> 1, Miller and Huber, “The Bible: A History,” page 171.

<sup>14</sup> 3, Rowell et al, “Love’s Redeeming Work,” page 33.

<sup>15</sup> 4, Lockyer et al, “Illustrated Dictionary of The Bible,” page 171.

<sup>16</sup> 4, Lockyer et al, “Illustrated Dictionary of The Bible,” page 171.

English-language “King James Version Bible” made its debut in 1611 AD.<sup>17</sup>

And so William Tyndale did not work and die in vain, for no Christian labour is in vain when to the glory of GOD. Within half a decade of Tyndale’s martyrdom, all parish Churches in England were required by law to have an English-language Bible placed where the laity could read it. And Tyndale’s translations still speak to us today, being greatly retained in The King James Version Bible.<sup>18</sup>

#### IX. IN CONCLUSION

Let us thus note this well: ROMANS 10:13-14 declares, “For whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”<sup>19</sup> Shall then a preacher knowingly declare the Word of Salvation in CHRIST to the people in an alien tongue that they do not understand? GOD forbid! The Gospel of our Lord is rightly then to be preached so that the hearer, understanding the Words which he hears, may believe and call upon The Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST unto salvation!

The LORD forbid that men should be denied the hearing and the reading of The Word of GOD, Which – with proper instruction from The faithful Church and guidance from The HOLY SPIRIT – may guide us into righteousness, bring us peace in this life and eternal salvation in the next through our Lord JESUS CHRIST! For, as it is written in ROMANS 10:17, “... faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by The Word of GOD!”<sup>20</sup> In the Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN!

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<sup>17</sup> 4, Lockyer et al, “Illustrated Dictionary of The Bible,” page 172.

<sup>18</sup> 1, Miller and Huber, “The Bible: A History,” page 171.

<sup>19</sup> 2, KJV, ROMANS 10:13-14.

<sup>20</sup> 2, KJV, ROMANS 10:17.



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