

Intro:

For our study time this Christmas, in keeping with our theme ‘The Word made Flesh’, I want to take this time for:

The Word in English
the life of William Tyndale

William Tyndale was a man under the persecution of Henry VIII of England – he was hunted all over Europe by the king’s spies and hated by men in the English church.

He was not a criminal!

Sir Thomas More, his bitter opponent, said this of Tyndale’s testimony:

“...a man of right good living, studious and well learned in Scripture, and in diverse places in England was very well liked, and did great good with preaching...(he was) taken for a man of sober and honest living, and looked and preached holily.”¹

He was hunted because he dared to translate and publish the Bible into English.

Precursor to Tyndale: John Wycliffe (ca. 1330-84)

- Translated Bible into English from the Latin
- Died of old age, but after his death, bones exhumed and burned

1408 – Constitutions of Oxford, a law passed by Parliament banning translating or reading the Bible in English without permission of church authorities.

“Whoever read the Scriptures in English could forfeit their lands, goods, and life. They were considered heretics to God, enemies to the Crown, and traitors to the kingdom. Men and women were burned for teaching their children the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments in English.”²

Tyndale Chronology

ca. 1494 Tyndale born in the Cotswolds (near Welsh border)

Studied at Magdalen College School and then Magdalen Hall (now Hertford College) at Oxford

1512 Graduates B.A.

¹ From the Study Guide for *God’s Outlaw: William Tyndale*.

² *Ibid*.

1513 Ordained

1515 Graduates M.A.

1519 At Cambridge (according to tradition – no documentation, only a sketchy reference in Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, written 30 years later)

- Cambridge was known to be very sympathetic to the ideas of the Reformation and ‘Lutheranism’
- Oxford critical of Reformation ideas
- Erasmus, Catholic scholar, had advocated the learning of the original languages in order to properly study theology
- Opponents of Erasmus thought theology rested on philosophy, not the Bible
- Tyndale’s opinion of his learning at Oxford, which emphasized philosophy:

The Oxford authorities “ordained that no man shall look in the Scripture until he be nooselled [‘spoon-fed’...] in heathen learning eight or nine years and armed with false principles with which he is clean shut out of the understanding of Scripture.”³

- Oxford championed Latin as the language of academia – no need for English, except to speak to servants

1521 Little Sodbury Manor

- Household of Sir John Walsh, probably as tutor to Walsh’s children
- Often met local clergy dining at Walsh’s house – embroiled in controversy with them. To one of them he famously said:
“If God shall spare my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth a plow shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.”⁴
- Another quotation of Tyndale’s views:
“Tyndale affirmed that *it was in the language of Israel that the Psalms were sung in the temple of Jehovah; and shall not the gospel speak the language of England among us?...Ought the church to have less at noonday than at dawn?...Christians must read the New Testament in their mother tongue.*”⁵

³ Quoted in Alistair McGrath, *In the Beginning*, p. 69.

⁴ Quoted by Tony Lane, “A Man for All People: introducing William Tyndale”, *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 16, p. 7.

⁵ From the Study Guide for *God’s Outlaw: William Tyndale*.

- Left Sodbury for London in hopes of gaining patronage for Bible Translation

1523 Seeks patronage for Bible translation from Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall

- Friend of Erasmus, scholarly man, thought to be a moderate
- Was moderate this way: “he just burned books, rather than people”⁶
- Unwilling to help, aware of political situation with the king and church authorities
- “Tyndale soon perceived that ‘not only was there no room in my Lord of London’s palace to translate the New Testament, but there was no place to do it in all of England.’”⁷
- Befriended by a wealthy cloth merchant named Humphrey Monmouth. With his backing, Tyndale left the country in order to do his work on the Continent (never returned to England).

1524 At Hamburg and Wittenberg

- Translation work done at Hamburg
- Some speculation that he travelled to Wittenburg to learn German and study under Luther himself – records uncertain
- His friend and cohort, William Roye was registered at Wittenburg in 1525. The 1524 register lists a “Guillelmus Daltici” – Guillelmus is Latin for William, Daltici could be a pseudonym by mixing letters of Tyndale around... but no one can no for sure.
- Tyndale certainly would have access to Luther’s writings due to the miracle of the printing press.

1525 Prints part of New Testament at Cologne

- Tyndale and Roye found a printer in Cologne named Peter Quentell
- Quentell also was producing the work of Johannes Cochlaeus, an opponent of Luther.
- One of Quentell’s printers got drunk in a local tavern and let slip that they were printing Lutheran New Testaments

⁶ McGrath, p. 71.

⁷ Lane, p. 7.

- Cochlaeus saw this as a chance to gain standing with the Catholic authorities, so reported it
- Tyndale was alerted to the raid, and escaped with the text of his translation plus some of their printing.
- 8 of these original sheets survived to be discovered in 1834

1526 First complete printing of New Testament at Worms by Peter Schoeffer

- Only two copies of this printing survive to this day – neither with a title page
- Tyndale’s name did not appear anywhere in this edition, neither did printing information
- Tyndale only included a note that the translator wanted the work to be in ‘proper English’, which to him meant that his goals were accuracy and clarity.
- He was willing to “alter any parts of the translation in which he has ‘not attained the very sense of the tongue, or meaning of Scripture, or has not given the right English word.’”⁸
- Features thought to be a threat by English Catholics:
Translated *presbuteros* as ‘senior’ (instead of ‘priest’); later changed it to ‘elder’ in 1534 edition.

“The English word ‘priest’ should, he argued, be reserved solely for translating the Greek term *hierus*, used in the New Testament exclusively to refer to Jewish or pagan priests.”⁹

Translated *ekklesia* as ‘congregation’ instead of ‘church’. “As a result, many New Testament references that could have been taken as endorsing the institution of the Church were now to be understood as referring to local congregations of believers.”¹⁰

- Bishop Tunstall preached a sermon against Tyndale’s translation and had copies burned at St. Paul’s Cathedral
- Following year, Archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham had a brainwave to buy up copies of the New Testament and then destroy them — except the money then made it into Tyndale’s hands and financed printing of an updated and improved edition in greater numbers!

⁸ McGrath, p. 75.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Romans 12.1-2 from 1526 edition:

“I beseeche you therfore brethren by the mercifulness of God, that ye make youre bodyes a quicke sacrificise, holy and acceptable unto God which is youre resonable servynge off God. And fassion note youre selves lyke unto this worlde. But be ye chaunged [in youre shape] by the renuynge of youre wittes that ye may fele what thyng that good, that acceptable and perfaicted will of God is.”¹¹

Lk 14.12-24

^{TNT} **Luke 14:12** Then sayde he also to him that had desyred him to diner: When thou makest a diner or a supper: call not thy frendes nor thy brethren nether thy kinsmen nor yet ryche neighbours: lest they bidde the agayne and a recompence be made the. ¹³ But when thou makest afeast call the poore the maymed the lame and the blynde ¹⁴ and thou shalt be happy for they cannot recompence the. But thou shalt be recompensed at the resurreccion of the iuste men.

¹⁵ When one of them that sate at meate also hearde that he sayde vnto him: happy is he that eateth breed in the kyngdome of God. ¹⁶ Then sayd he to him. A certayne man ordened a greate supper and bade many ¹⁷ and sent his servaunt at supper tyme to saye to them that wer bidden come: for all thinges are now redy. ¹⁸ And they all atonce begane to make excuse. The fyrst sayd vnto him: I have bought a ferme and I must nedes goo and se it I praye the have me excused. ¹⁹ And another sayd: I hove bought fyve yooke of oxen and I goo to prove them I praye the have me excused. ²⁰ The thyrde sayd: I have maried a wyfe and therefore I cannot come. ²¹ And the servaunt went and brought his master worde therof.

Then was the good man of the housse displeased and sayd to his servaut: Goo out quickly into the stretes and quarters of the cite and bringe in hidder the poore and the maymed and the halt and the blynde. ²² And the servaut sayd: lorde it is done as thou commaundedst and yet ther is roume. ²³ And the lorde sayd to the servaut: Go out into the hye wayes and hedges and compell them to come in that my housse maye be filled. ²⁴ For I saye vnto you that none of those men which were bidde shall tast of my supper.

¹¹ Quoted by Lane, p. 8.

Rm 7.7-10

^{TNT} **Romans 7:7** What shall we saye then? is the lawe synne? God forbid: but I knewe not what synne meant but by the lawe. For I had not knowne what lust had meant excepte the lawe had sayde thou shalt not lust. ⁸ But synne toke an occasion by the meanes of the commaundement and wrought in me all manner of concupiscece. For with out the lawe synne was deed. ⁹ I once lived with out lawe. But when the commaundement came synne revyved and I was deed. ¹⁰ And the very same comaundement which was ordeyned vnto lyfe was founde to be vnto me an occasion of deeth.

[Note concupiscence is a Latinism, following the Vulgate, means ‘coveting’. Tyndale obviously thought readers of his day would understand the term.]

- Man named William Malden testified that he determined to learn to read so that he could read Tyndale’s New Testament for himself, despite the opposition of his father:

“Divers poor men in the town of Chelmsford in the County of Essex, where my father dwelt, and I born and with him grew up, the said poor men bought the New Testament of Jesus Christ and on Sundays did sit reading in lower end of church, and many would flock about them to hear their reading. Then came I among the said readers to hear them reading of that glad and sweet tidings of the gospel, then my father, seeing this that I listened unto them every Sunday, then came he and sought me among them, and brought me away from the hearing of them, and would have me to say the Latin matins with him, which grieved me very much, and thus did fetch me away divers times, then I see I could not be in rest, then thought I, I will learn to read English, and then I will have the New Testament and read thereon myself.”¹²

Phrases coined by Tyndale

“The powers that be” (Rm 13)

“My brother’s keeper” (Gen 4)

“The salt of the earth” (Mt 5)

“A law unto themselves” (Rm 2)

“These phrases continue to be used, even in modern English, precisely because they are so well shaped in terms of their alliteration, rhyme, and word repetitions.”¹³

¹² Quoted in McGrath, pp. 78-79.

¹³ McGrath, p. 79.

1528 Obedience of a Christian Man

- Answered charges that the Reformers were encouraging disobedience to civil authorities and stirring up rebellion
- Wycliffe had been accused of stirring up peasant revolts, as had Luther
- Tyndale wrote to encourage obedience to the government
- Taught that if it was necessary to obey God rather than man, Christians should submit to whatever punishment government would mete out (if they could catch him!)

Our teaching is that of Christ, to obey the civil powers and leave all vengeance to God. What then is the duty of the Christian in this terror? He must disobey ungodly commands but he must not resist by force. If the king, at the bidding of the Bishops makes Bible reading a treason against the State and punishes it with prison and the fire, true believers will stand firm and suffer every penalty for Christ's sake.¹⁴

- When Thomas Bilney, a Reformation martyr, was executed at Norwich, he had a copy of *Obedience* in his hand
- Anne Boleyn, had a copy which found its way into Henry's hand. He was pleased with the book and said, "This is a book for me and all kings to read!"¹⁵

1529 Translates Pentateuch, published 1530 Antwerp

1529 Sir Thomas More begins writing against Tyndale.

- Sir Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was 'the greatest literary man in England' – he had been a bitter (and vulgar) opponent of Luther. Now he turned his literary guns on Tyndale.
- His antagonism for Tyndale showed the impact of Tyndale's work.
- June 1529: *Dialogue...Touching the Pestilent Sect of Luther and Tyndale* published
- 1532-1533: five volume *Confutation of Tyndale*
- More's objections:

Church made Scriptures and church teaching as authoritative as Scriptures

¹⁴ Quoted in the Study Guide for *God's Outlaw: William Tyndale*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

God raised up prophets and teachers in the church who could speak with authority of Scriptures

Scriptures very difficult to understand – even theologians didn't completely understand Scripture

Since Origen, Scripture had been interpreted allegorically, how could the average person know how to do this accurately

“Tyndale, however, believed in a literal, non-allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and there was no reason why the common people of England could not understand the same words that were first addressed to the common people of Israel.”¹⁶

Thought simple faith and repentance too slight to escape hell and purgatory

Worship of images of Christ and saints were the same as worshipping Christ himself

- More was eventually executed for treason: objected to Henry's divorce, continued to support pope, and refused to attend Henry's wedding to Anne Boleyn in 1533 – so More executed July 6, 1535.

1531 Meets Steven Vaughan, refuses invitation of Henry VIII to return to England (Henry thought he could use Tyndale to write against the pope for him — in process of divorcing himself from his wife and Catholic Church.)

1534 Publishes a revision of the New Testament

- Settled in Antwerp, thinking himself safe in the home of Thomas Pointz, a relative of Lady Walsh of Little Sodbury Manor

1535 Betrayed by Henry Phillips, arrested at Antwerp, imprisoned at Vilvoorde

- Henry Phillips was an Englishman who was in debt – something of a scoundrel
- Someone in church authority put him up to betraying Tyndale for money
- He gradually befriended Tyndale, then induced him to venture into the streets of Antwerp
- Giving a signal, soldiers ambushed Tyndale and took him to Brussels (a Catholic city)

¹⁶ From the Study Guide for *God's Outlaw: William Tyndale*.

1536 Strangled and burned at Brussels

- Tyndale’s last words, “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes.”
- Ironically, things were changing in England. Even while Tyndale languished in prison (1535), his friend Miles Coverdale published a complete Bible that was largely Tyndale’s work, dedicated to Henry VIII and gained royal approval.
- ‘Tyndale’s associate John Rogers issued ‘Matthew’s Bible’ in 1537 (‘Matthew’ was a pseudonym used for protection). This included Tyndale’s New Testament, Pentateuch, and his translation of Joshua through Chronicles. This was basically Tyndale’s work, and Matthew’s Bible became the basis for the King James Bible.”¹⁷
- By 1539, every parish church in England was required to have a copy of the Bible in English available for all parishioners.
- Almost every New Testament until some recent editions were simply revisions of Tyndale – 90% of KJV, 75% of RSV.

Conclusion:

“John Foxe began his famous Book of Martyrs by quoting Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:18, “...I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Foxe noted that in these words three things are to be noted: first, that Christ will have a Church in this world; secondly, that the same Church should be mightily impugned, not only by the world, but also by the powers of hell; and thirdly, that the same Church, notwithstanding the efforts of the devil, should continue.

“Tyndale’s life and death are tremendous reflections of these observations.”¹⁸

From a paragraph Tyndale added to his translation of Luther’s *Prologue to the Epistle to the Romans*

Now go to reader, and according to the order of Paul’s writing [referring to the Epistle to the Romans], even so do thou. First behold thyself diligently in the law of God, and see there thy just damnation. Secondly turn thine eyes to Christ, and see there the exceeding mercy of thy most kind and loving father. Thirdly remember that Christ made not this atonement that thou shouldest anger God again: neither died he for thy sins, that thou shouldest live still in them: neither cleansed he thee, that thou shouldest return (as a swine) unto thine old puddle again: but that

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

thou shouldest be a new creature and live a new life after the will of God and not of the flesh. And be diligent lest through thine own negligence and unthankfulness thou lose favour and mercy again.¹⁹

¹⁹ Quoted in the Study Guide for *God's Outlaw: William Tyndale*.