

Revelation 16: 4; “William Tyndale and the 3rd Bowl”, Sermon # 122 in the series – “The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 22nd, 2017, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

In the history of the Reformation, the advancement of the true gospel and the formulation of Biblically correct doctrinal truth, only took place when Christians took their stand for truth publicly. If you study this history, you will find that a good many godly people ended up laying down their lives for the truth, in the time period that we are studying. (1520-1620) I have said to you, in past sermons that I believe that each of these bowls of wrath that we are studying represents an approximate one hundred year period of time; a time which began at the birth of John Wycliffe in 1320 and has continued down through each century since; God declaring His wrath upon false doctrine and false worship, through His appointed men. God was having His angel preachers pour out His wrath (His condemnation) against some particular aspect or aspects of Rome’s false doctrine and practice. I have said to you that these bowls have been, and they will be, poured out successively and progressively, and that they will have a cumulative effect when the seventh bowl is poured out. The effects of these bowls of wrath have been gathering momentum as they go, and they will culminate in the entire overthrow and destruction of this Antichristian system at the end of the 1260 years prophecy.

Those who laid down their lives took courage from the long line of witnesses and martyrs who had gone before them; John Hus and Jerome of Prague, John Wycliffe, the Waldenses and the Albigenses are those I have mentioned in the past. But there have been many martyrs for the truth of the Bible going all the way back through Church history to the time of the Pagan Roman Empire’s persecution of Christians, which extends all the way back to the time of the apostles. The apostles themselves had seen our Lord lay down His life for the truth. In Revelation 1: 5 the apostle John tells us that our Lord Jesus was “the faithful witness”. The word “witness” in the Greek is μαρτυς (martus) from whence we get the word “martyr”; a person who lays down their life for the truth.

The Reformation was a time period in which many people, old and young, men and women, noble and peasant, were persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church authorities; Popes and priests, in league with Emperors and Electors, sought to suppress the witness of the true Church through putting to death those who were bold enough and steadfast enough to hold to the truth of the Bible in the face of all opposition. This afternoon I want to speak to you about one of those martyrs, William Tyndale. Through studying the life of this Reformer, it ought to cause each of us who know the Lord, to ask ourselves – What part can I play in the advancement of truth for the cause and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1st of all – Let’s look at the life of William Tyndale (the man who gave us the English Bible). (The following is taken from the book – Historical Tales for Young Protestants, by J.H. Crosse, P. 167-176)

“This worthy man was born on the borders of Wales, of parents who were in a humble condition of life. How little did they think, as they looked on him in his infancy, that he would become one of the best friends of his country, and that his name would be held by many in more honour than any conqueror who ever lived! In the course of time, William Tyndale became a poor priest of one of the colleges in Oxford. As he sat one day with some fellow priests, he spoke of the value of the word of God, when they mockingly said, “We are better without God’s law than the pope’s law.” To which Tyndale replied: “If God spare me, before many years I will cause a boy that drives a plough to know more of the Scriptures than you do.” The young priest saw that the people were living and dying without Bible knowledge, deceived by the vain doctrines of the church of Rome, and he quietly resolved to get the New Testament printed in

English for the use of all. This was a good and great thought—a bold and daring thought—for a poor man to cherish; yet, with the help of God, he was resolved to make the attempt. He was not content to plan and arrange this important work, but with labour and patience he sought to carry it forward.

Tyndale had heard of the learning and riches of the bishop of London, and in his simplicity he thought he would surely aid him in the pious design; but he soon found that there was “no room in my lord of London’s palace to translate the word of God, nor any safe place to do it in all England.” At this time there lived in London a pious and wealthy merchant, named Monmouth, who had been taught the truth through reading the books of the reformers in Germany. He was a kind friend to Tyndale, and gave him a room in his house, where the good priest used to sit, night and day, busy with his pen and Latin Bible. But these were times of danger to those who truly feared God. Tyndale, therefore, well supplied with money by his liberal patron, set sail over the North Sea, and went to the great city of Hamburg. Then, removing to Cologne, he went on in the translation and printing of the New Testament, until ten sheets were done. Two pious friends, Frith and Boye,* assisted Tyndale in the translation. There they sat, day by day, in an old-fashioned room in an obscure street in the city of Cologne. Pens, parchment, and paper were before them; one read the Latin Bible, a second the Greek, and the third wrote down the words of the sacred text in English.

In about a year this work was finished. Tyndale then found a printer who was willing to print it. This was a service full of danger. Popish priests were on the alert to find out any who aided the reformers in their work. But onward the printing went. In this state of things, an agent of the Inquisition found out what was going forward. He heard that a learned Englishman was in the city, and that some printers had been heard to say that soon all England would become Protestant. This man thought he would find out what all this boasting meant. So with much craft, he made friends with the printers and invited them to his house. Here he well supplied them with wine. In the midst of their mirth they made known the secret, that some hundreds of copies of the New Testament in English were in the press, which were to be secretly carried over the seas by the merchants. The next morning the printer’s house was surrounded by officers, and the press was seized; but not before Tyndale, warned of the danger, ran to the rescue of his printed sheets, which he threw into a boat and pushed his way from the shore. Sailing up the river Rhine he soon came to a safer place of labour.

Often had the small ships of those days passed along this famous river with the wares and wealth of the merchants of Germany, but never did one carry so rich a treasure as was in the boat which conveyed Tyndale and the Bible sheets to the city of Worms. After great pains, and cost, and toil, the last sheet of the New Testament was completed. Fifteen hundred copies were printed — a large edition in those days; and now the bread of life seemed prepared for the people of his own dear native land. English merchants took charge of the books, and carried them to England along with articles of commerce. The precious volume was packed in bales, and sent to London, Norwich, and Oxford. There they were readily bought by the rich, but though they were sold at a cheap rate, only a few of the poor could save money enough to purchase the holy book. Soon, however, they were found spread over the land, and many souls rejoiced in the Gospels and Epistles, which for the first time were held in their hands, and now cherished in their hearts. Some, on receiving a portion of the precious book, fell on their knees, and thanked God with tears of joy for it.

When the Romish bishop of London was told that the printed books were coming fast to England, he was filled with alarm and anger. He soon sent out orders to make a diligent search among the merchants of London and the students of Oxford, for the forbidden work. Among the latter, some of those who were found to have it were thrust into a dungeon, where four of them soon died. Others were made to carry fagots of wood, and with them to kindle a fire, into which

their own hands had to cast the books. As the flames rose into the air, the people were solemnly warned against the reading of the word of God. But the hope of burning the New Testament out of the land was all in vain. The printer-priest kept working off more copies, and they were taken across the seas hidden in the corn which was carried to England, at a time when great scarcity was felt. Thus bread to feed the body, and the bread of life for the soul, came in the same ships, and were sent together through the land. Decrees were issued against the possession of the New Testament; the seaports and ships were strictly watched ; the warehouses and houses were searched ; but still the blessed books arrived. Sometimes even Jews brought them over the seas. They came in pedler's packs, and in boxes of merchandise — now in one way, and then in another.

At length, the bishop of London hit upon a clever and cunning plan, as he thought, of putting a stop to the arrival of these books. He supposed, that if every copy could be bought up in the place where they were printed, the work would soon be at an end. A London merchant was engaged to do this business. "Do your diligence to get them", said the bishop, "and I will pay for them whatsoever they cost you." The merchant ordered his ship to be ready without delay, and crossing the seas, offered to buy up all the stock in hand. The bargain was soon made: the bishop had the books, the merchant the thanks, and Tyndale the money. A few days after the books were safely in the charge of the bishop, a number of people were seen making their way along Cheapside and up Ludgate Hill. It was reported that there was to be a great sentence passed, to be followed by an execution. As they came to St. Paul's Cross, a large fire was sending up clouds of smoke high above the house-tops. And now the bishop's officers came with the poor prisoners—the Testaments, which were cast one by one into the flames, while a priest stood in the old stone pulpit in the open space, and loudly praised what was being done. But when all was over, many in that crowd could not but think how wicked and how shameful it was thus to burn God's holy book.

As a further proof of their anger, the priests seized Tyndale's brother, John, and one of his friends. Then they set them on horseback, their faces turned to the tails, with bundles of New Testaments hung around them. In this manner they were made to ride through the streets of London, and on coming to St. Paul's, to throw the books into the fire. But—how great the dismay—New Testaments were still brought to England! The bishop soon sent for the merchant, and cried, "How is this, sir?" "Did you not promise and assure me that you had bought them all?" "Yes," was the reply; "I bought all that then were to be had, but I perceive they have made more since; and it will never be better so long as they have the letters and the presses ; therefore it were best for your lord ship to buy them too, and then you are sure." The bishop only smiled at this answer, for he thought that, if he parted with more money, other letters and presses would be bought with it, and he should only serve to aid the cause he wished to crush.

Finding how vain were all attempts to stop the circulation of the New Testaments, the next plan was to secure their author. Spies were sent over to decoy him to England. Though ready to suffer anything in his heavenly Master's work, he would not willingly throw himself into danger. Craft, however, brought him into the hands of his enemies. While quietly pursuing his labour, beneath the hospitable roof of an English friend, named Poyntz, at the city of Antwerp, two wolves in sheep's clothing came to the house—one in the disguise of a merchant; the other, who was a monk, was dressed as his servant. They pretended great interest in the doctrines of the Bible Christians, and were soon welcomed to their society. But Phillips—for that was the name of the pretended merchant—came to watch Tyndale, and, if possible, to seize him. One day, when Poyntz went some miles distant on business, a snare was laid for the noble reformer. Phillips called on Tyndale to borrow forty shillings, under the excuse that he had lost his purse on the road. They then agreed to walk out together. There was a long, narrow passage to go through, leading to the street. Phillips drew back, as if politely to allow his friend to go first,

when two officers were seen standing at the door. "Take your prisoner," cried the pretended friend; and in a moment Tyndale was in their grasp, while Phillips hastened to receive from the priests the reward of his treachery. Tyndale was carried to a castle eight miles from Brussels, and placed in a close chamber. Here he remained for some time, but his faith in Christ made the gloomy prison a place of hope and of happiness to him. His way of life was so holy, that the other prisoners said, "Well, if he is not a good Christian man, we know not in whom to trust."

Through his teaching the jailer and his daughter were converted to God. But once in the power of his enemies, nothing could save him from their wrath. From that castle he did not come out till eighteen months had passed, and then only to die as a martyr. At length, in October, 1536, he was condemned as a heretic, and ordered to be burned. On being fastened to the stake, he raised his eyes to heaven, and cried, "Lord, open the eyes of the king of England". His prayer was heard; for, before three years had passed away, king Henry of England gave his consent to the circulation of the Bible, in the native tongue, throughout the kingdom. Thus perished this noble man, one of England's best reformers; as someone has said of him, "Inputting the New Testament into the hands of Englishmen, he gave them the charter of salvation, the book of eternal life; while his own history affords a beautiful example of its purifying and saving power, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit."

2nd – Let me relate to you a little of God's great blessing upon the labors of this godly man. (This material taken from Merle D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation in Europe in the Time of Calvin, Volume 5, P. 265)

"His fellow-countrymen profited by the work of his life. As early as 1526 more than twenty editions of Tyndale's New Testament had been circulated over the kingdom, and others had followed them. It was like a mighty river continually bearing new waters to the sea. Did the reformer's death dry them up suddenly? No. A greater work still was to be accomplished: the entire Bible was ready. But could it be circulated? The king had refused his consent to the circulation of Coverdale's Bible; would he not do the same with this, and with greater reason? A powerful protector alone could secure the free circulation of Scripture. 'Richard Grafton, the printer, went to London to ask permission to sell the precious volume, and with the intention of applying to Cranmer.'

"Grafton, the printer, had an audience of the archbishop at Forde, in Kent: he presented the martyr's Bible, and asked him to procure its free circulation. The archbishop took the book, examined it, and was delighted with it. Fidelity, clearness, strength, simplicity, unction all were combined in this admirable translation. Cranmer had much eagerness in proposing what he thought useful. He sent the volume to Cromwell, begging him to present it to his Majesty and obtain permission for it to be sold, 'until such time that we (the bishops),' he added, 'shall put forth a better translation which, I think, will not be till a day after doomsday.' Henry VIII ran over the book: Tyndale's name was not in it, and the dedication to his Majesty was very well written. The king regarding (and not without reason) Holy Scripture as the most powerful engine to destroy the papal system, and believing that this translation would help him to emancipate England from the Romish domination, came to an unexpected resolution: he authorized the sale and the reading of the Bible throughout the kingdom. Inconsistent and whimsical prince! At one and the same time he published and imposed all over his realm the doctrines of Romanism, and circulated without obstacle the Divine Word that overthrew them! We may well say that the blood of a martyr, precious in the eyes of the Supreme King, opened the gates of England to the Holy Scriptures."

"For centuries the English people had been waiting permission to read the Bible, even from before the time of Wycliffe; and accordingly the Bible circulated rapidly. The impetuosity with which the living waters rushed forth, carrying with them everything they met in their course, was like the sudden opening of a huge floodgate. This great event, more important than

divorces, treaties, and wars, was the conquest of England by the Reformation. 'It was a wonderful thing to see,' says an old historian. Whoever possessed the means bought the book and read it or had it read to him by others. Aged persons learnt their letters in order to study the Holy Scriptures of God. In many places there were meetings for reading; poor people dubbed their savings together and purchased a Bible, and then in some remote corner of the church, they modestly formed a circle, and read the Holy Book between them. A crowd of men, women, and young folks, disgusted with the barren pomp of the altars, and with the worship of dumb images, would gather round them to taste the precious promises of the Gospel. God himself spoke under the arched roofs of those old chapels or time-worn cathedrals, where for generations nothing had been heard but masses and litanies. The people wished, instead of the noisy chants of the priests, to hear the voice of Jesus Christ, of Paul and of John, of Peter and of James. The Christianity of the Apostles reappeared in the Church."

"But with it came persecution, according to the words of the Master: The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child. A father exasperated because his son, a mere boy, had taken part in these holy readings, caught him by the hair, and put a cord round his neck to hang him. In all the towns and villages of Tyndale's country the holy pages were opened, and the delighted readers found therein those treasures of peace and joy which the martyr had known. Many cried out with him, 'We know that this Word is from God, as we know that fire burns; not because any one has told us, but because a Divine fire consumes our hearts. O the brightness of the face of Moses! O the splendor of the glory of Jesus Christ, which no veil conceals! O the inward power of the Divine word, which compels us, with so much sweetness, to love and to do! O the temple of God within us, in which the Son of God dwells!' Tyndale had desired to see the world on fire by his Master's Word, and that fire was kindled."