

Introduction William Tyndale

Today we have already heard some terrible stories of injustice; men, women and children being mistreated by those more powerful than themselves. Over the last two weeks, and for the next two weeks, we are doing a series on the Protestant Reformation. In 16th century Europe there were also plenty of people suffering injustice. In the Reformation, many people were killed - both Roman Catholics and Protestants - simply because of what they believed.

One of those executed was a man called William Tyndale. On October 6, 1536, Tyndale was strangled and then burnt at the stake, after being found guilty of heresy. This happened in Brussels, in modern-day Belgium, under the authority of the Holy Roman Emperor: Charles the 5th. Why was a 42 year old English Priest executed in Brussels?

The answer lies in your hands. The Bible. William Tyndale had translated the Bible into English, and this was illegal. People thought that the Bible could be interpreted only by people who had been authorised by the Roman Catholic Pope. If you went to Church in Tyndale's time, you would hear the Bible read only in Latin. Then the Priest would tell you what to believe.

People like Tyndale, Luther and Calvin, however, realised that what the Church was teaching was not what the Bible taught. They also realised that ordinary people - peasants, tradesmen, merchants - could easily understand what the Bible said. They read of Jesus talking to ordinary people in the gospels. They read the letters to ordinary Churches by the apostles. And they knew that if people could only hear the Bible in their own language, they would know the truth about Jesus.

Luther translated the Bible into German in 1522. Around this time, William Tyndale was meeting lots of priests who had no understanding of the Bible, and didn't seem to care. He said to them, "If God spares my life, I will make a boy that drives a plough know more of the Scriptures than you". Having realised that the English Church authorities didn't want an English Bible, Tyndale went to Luther in Germany.

His first English translation of the new Testament was rolling off the printing presses in 1526, and being distributed back in England. This made Tyndale an outlaw there, and he never returned home. He moved to Antwerp, near Brussels, around 1528, and for the next 7 years revised his New Testament and worked on the Old Testament. Like Jesus, he was betrayed into the hands of the Romans, in 1535, and executed the next year.

In 1990, as a young atheist, I opened the King James version of the Bible in my bedroom. This KJV was 90% the same as Tyndale's complete Bible, published while he was awaiting execution. I had been given it when I had been confirmed as a boy, but had never read it before. And as soon as I read it, I understood it, and believed it. I gave my life to Jesus three days after opening the Bible for the first time. All I needed was the Bible, and the Bible alone, just as the Reformers taught.

Two weeks ago we learnt that all we need is Faith alone to receive salvation. Last week we learnt that our salvation depends upon God's Grace alone. We receive "God's Riches at Christ's Expense" alone. Next week we will learn about the Lord's Supper, and the following week about Christ alone. All of this truth - precious and powerful - is taught in the Bible. We don't need priests and traditions and rituals to know Jesus and receive all his gifts. We need the Bible, and the Bible alone.

Why is the Bible so powerful? Hebrews 3 and 4 teaches us why. The Bible alone is powerful because it is God's Word, and because it is The Spirit's sword. What you hold in your hands is not just words on a page, but the spoken words of God, and the sharp and piercing sword of the Spirit. Tyndale knew this, and he died because of this.

God's Word

Firstly, the Bible is God's Word. Hebrews 4:12 says that ***'The Word of God is living and active'***. The writer of Hebrews is speaking of Psalm 95, which he has been quoting from in chapters 3 and 4. So the 'Word of God' is the Bible. This means that God is speaking directly to us in the Bible, and that he is speaking to us about things we didn't know. To put it another way, the Bible is Communication and Revelation.

Communication happens when one being speaks to another. Hebrews 3:7 begins with ***'So, as the Holy Spirit says'***, and then quotes Psalm 95. Verse 10, in the middle, reads, ***'I said'*** and the 'I' is God. Verse 11: ***'I declared an oath'***. Chapter 4 verse 3, ***'just as God has said'***; verse 4, ***'he has spoken about the seventh day in these words'***; verse 5, ***'And again in the passage above he says'***. Are you getting the picture? The New Testament is quoting from the Old Testament, and calling it communication from God. What God has said to people in history.

But, surely, these words were written down by human beings? Genesis, quoted in verse 4, was Moses' work, and David wrote Psalm 95. The Prophets and priests and completely anonymous people were also responsible for the Old Testament. How could their words be God's communication? Verse 7 gives us a clue: ***'God again set a certain day, calling it "Today." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."'*** God spoke through David; his voice was heard as David wrote.

Peter explains this a bit further when he writes ***'Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.'*** (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Bible is not simply what people thought: their own interpretation of things. Rather, Scripture came into being as people spoke from God, being carried along by the Holy Spirit. God was communicating through people as they write the Bible!

You see this also in what Jesus spoke. He explained it this way: ***'Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life'*** (John 5:24), and ***'he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world.'*** (John 8:26). God sent Jesus, who spoke God's Word. As people heard Jesus speak, they were listening to God. Then the Apostles, those who knew Jesus, also spoke God's Word as they wrote the New Testament. Peter put Paul's letters on the same level as ***'the other Scriptures'***, meaning the Old Testament (2 Peter 3:16). Therefore the whole Bible - the Old Testament written before Jesus, and the new Testament written after Jesus - is God's Word. God's Word is Communication.

That's terrific and exciting ... so what does God say? It speaks of things we didn't otherwise know; things we can't otherwise comprehend. To know about history, I read books. I can't just sit on my own and figure out what happened in the first World War, for example. History must be revealed to me through human records. When it comes to God,

and even ourselves, we cannot know some things without God revealing them. God's Word is Revelation.

The first few verses of Hebrews say ***'In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son ... The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being'***. Jesus is God himself revealed to us. This is true of the whole Bible: God is telling us what he is like and what he thinks. We know God through the Bible alone.

We also know ourselves through the Bible. Hebrews 4:12 says ***'the Word of God ... judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.'*** The Bible reveals us to ourselves. Because, as verse 13 says, ***'Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight'***. God knows each of us, in the depths of our being - all our thoughts and attitudes and history and feelings are known and understood by God. So don't depend upon psychology and philosophy to understand yourself; listen to God explain you to yourself.

The Bible is Communication from God, and it is Revelation of God and of us ourselves. The Bible alone is God's Word, and that makes it precious and powerful.

Sword of the Spirit

Secondly, the Bible is the Sword of The Spirit. What I mean by this is that the Bible is not just information, it brings transformation. Hebrews 4:12 says ***'The Word of God is living and active'***. As we listen to the Bible, it does something to us. Or, I should say, the Spirit does something to us. Ephesians 6:17 says that ***'the sword of the Spirit ... is the word of God'***.

As the Word of God enters our ears and eyes, it penetrates deep, and the Spirit changes us. Hebrews 4:12 says ***'Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow'***. The Sword of the Spirit like a surgeon's scalpel during a heart transplant. With the knife, she cuts out the bad organ, and then puts a new heart in its place. That's what the Spirit does in our soul when we hear the Word of God. He gives us life. Isaiah 55 puts it this way: ***'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! ... Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.'*** (Isa 55:1-3). The Spirit gives life through the Bible alone.

How does the Spirit do this? He firstly convicts, then moulds, then equips us. The cutting out part is the conviction. This is the context of these words in Hebrews 3 and 4. The preacher warns his audience against falling away from faith in Jesus. 3:12 says ***'See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God'***. He is encouraging his listeners to listen to the Word, so that any unbelief might be cut out of them. This is true of all sin; as we listen to the Bible, the Spirit examines us and cuts it out of our lives.

Then he moulds us to look like Jesus. Think of the Word as a chisel in the hands of a wood-sculptor. 2 Corinthians 3, speaking of the Word of God, says that we are ***'being transformed into Jesus likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit'***. The Holy Spirit, as his Word pierces into our soul moulds us into Jesus' image. We start off as misshapen pieces of wood, and he moulds us to look like

Jesus. He gives us peace and patience and kindness and joy - what Galatians 5:22-23 calls '*the fruit of the Spirit*' - so that we will be more and more like Jesus.

Lastly, He equips us to do the work of God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says '*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*' The sculpture, like Pinocchio, is animated to do something - every good work. The Spirit puts tools in our hands - elsewhere the Bible speaks of these tools as '*gifts of the Spirit*' (Rom 12, 1 Cor 12), and sets us to work.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, what an incredible privilege to have the Word of God in our hands. Tyndale died for this: that you had I might have the Word of God in our own language. So that God would communicate to us and reveal himself and ourselves to us. So that the Sword of the Spirit would convict, mould and equip us. Do you want to hear God speak? Then read the Bible. Do you want to know God and yourself? Then read the Bible. Do you want to be like Jesus and serve him? Then read the Bible alone.