

English Reformation

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0 : 00] Well, this morning I want to tell you the story of the English Reformation. We heard a little bit of it from the Puritan video that we just watched over the last few weeks.

I do want to give you a bit more. Next week, Lord willing, we're going to start a new series in this class, but I wanted to end this sort of section on church history with a lesson of my own about the English Reformation.

The English Reformation did not have a single strong character like Luther in Germany or Zwingli, who was the first Swiss reformer, basically at the same time as Luther.

But England nevertheless had a reformation. And this is important to us because in many ways these are our forefathers.

These are the ones that have gone before us. We are, most of us, have this cultural heritage of coming from England. Well, and so in a certain way, this is our history.

[1 : 18] This is our story. This is what the Lord has done among our people. In the Continental Reformation, the Reformation on the continent, God did use mighty men like Martin Luther and John Calvin and characters such as those.

But who were the front-line, first sort of out-of-the-gate English reformers?

Well, it didn't happen the same way as it happened in Germany or in Switzerland or in France. It happened rather differently.

It happened through a very organic process of the word of God actually being delivered into the hands of the people.

And in a certain way, there was no one main character, one main guy that created and started to birth the English Reformation.

[2 : 17] It happened at the same time as the other Reformation, but there weren't the same genesis.

It wasn't the same genesis. It didn't have the same beginning. Instead, it really began with the word of God. And so this is where this story begins.

It doesn't actually begin in England. It begins in the city of Basel. It's a city in Switzerland where the countries of France and Germany and Switzerland come and meet together.

And the year is 1516. What year did Martin Luther nail his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church? Do you remember?

Not 14? What's that? 1517. 1517. So this is 1516. This is a year before Martin Luther's 95 theses. And it's Erasmus of Rotterdam.

[3 : 23] He's a Dutch scholar and Dutch monk. He's just finished his most enduring work. It was the New Testament in Greek joined with a new translation in Latin.

And it's very interesting. They don't know exactly why he put the Greek and the Latin together. The best we can tell is his intentions were not that he wanted everyone to see the Bible and the original Greek.

Rather, he wanted to show that his new Latin translation was a faithful one, was a good one. And so he wanted to be able to show all the scholars, look, my translation is good.

Well, so what ended up happening is he put this new Greek copy and this new Latin translation together.

They were put back to back, page to page. And it's called the Textus Receptus. And that just means the received text.

[4 : 35] And it was the Greek Bible behind Luther's German Bible. It was the Greek Bible, the Greek version of the Bible behind the King James Version.

It also was used for a Spanish translation, for many other translations, including what we're going to talk about later, the Tyndale Bible. Now, so that's where this little story begins.

This scholar wanting to get the church to have a copy of the scriptures in Greek and Latin.

Well, Erasmus loved the church, but he really saw the Roman Catholic Church, but he really saw this church really needs purified. And he saw the New Testament as a way to do that.

This is what he said. It's not from the human reservoirs fedded with stagnant waters that we should draw the doctrine of salvation, but from the pure and abundant streams that flow from the heart of God.

[5 : 32] So what happened is his New Testament, his Greek New Testament, Latin New Testament, was printed, and it was shipped all over Europe. And some of those were put into barrels, stacked with whatever packing material.

And they went over the English Channel, and they landed on the southern shores of England. And so it crossed all these miles of water, loaded in crates, it was landed, it landed in the docks in southern England.

And so from there, what happened was these copies went to booksellers all around England, and especially to the two great university cities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Now, immediately, something very unusual happened. Immediately, and this is from the work of God, the Spirit of God, with unusual and unprecedented enthusiasm, young men from those universities started purchasing copies of this Greek New Testament.

And men scrimped, and they saved to buy it, and they got together then with their friends, and they sat in their dorm rooms or whatever they had, and they read the Bible in the original languages.

[6 : 57] And they talked about it, and they discussed it, as only young college men can do. Well, so for the first time, they were able to read the Bible in the original language.

So just unvarnished, without the church's teaching, without some other foreign language on top of it. And that's where they could see the text, and they could actually start talking about it with each other.

And really what was happening, the light was beginning to shine there in England. And it really was the first rays of this new day.

And what was happening was, unbeknownst to the Roman Catholic Church, a fierce lion was being uncaged in their garden.

So something was brewing. And immediately there was this reaction from the Roman Catholic Church. And all this fervor about the Greek New Testament.

[8 : 01] This is what Erasmus said, A cry went up from the foul pools of the Catholic Church. Franciscan and Dominican monks with priests started crying against the New Testament.

So these religious people, they have a problem, they have a severe problem with the New Testament. Now, they charged the New Testament, it was almost comical, with heresy.

They called the Greek New Testament an anti-Christ. Wow. That's how far people can go. And they said, If this book is tolerated, it will be the death of the papacy, drive Erasmus out of the universities.

Well, why are they so irritated? Why such strong charges of heresy and anti-Christ? Well, it's because the New Testament, in a certain sense, it doesn't make a lot of sense, because most people are just, you know, they can't read the Greek.

They don't read Latin. Hardly common reading for most people, so why are they so irritated?

Because they rightfully saw, this was a first step, and it easily led to, wait a second, I don't, we don't need the church to tell us what the Bible says.

[9 : 24] If I can read it, and I'm reasonably intelligent, then I can read this. And then what use is the Roman Catholic Church?

And furthermore, that's the first step. The second step is, well, now it's going to be translated into English, and then everyone's going to be able to read it. Well, they were afraid that the Word of God would be put into just normal people's hands.

I just want you to realize that. Like, their greatest fear was that people like you would have just a copy of Scripture in their own hands. That was the great terror.

That's actually what Erasmus wanted. This is what he says, Perhaps it may be necessary to conceal the secret of kings, but we must publish the mysteries of Christ.

The Holy Scriptures, translated into all languages, should be read not only by the Scottish and the Irish, but even by the Turks and the Saracens. The farmer should sing them as he holds the handle

of his plow.

[10:29] The weaver repeat them as he plies his shuttle. And the weary traveler halting on his journey refresh himself under some shady tree by the godly narratives.

Have you ever read your Bible at an airport? You said, I have 15 minutes here. I'm just going to read a chapter or a psalm. That's what Erasmus wanted.

Well, the monks and the priests saw where this was going and they railed against it. and they censored it. Now, what tends to happen when you censor books? People want them.

Right? Sometimes the very worst thing you can do is tell someone, whatever you do, you better not read this. If I've picked a book and said, whatever you do, you better not read this.

Well, I think half of you would probably go out and read it to say like, okay, what's the big deal? And the other half would probably go pick out a copy because you're like, well, he's not going to tell me what to do.

[11:31] And so the more the priests talked about it, the more these students wanted it. So now we're going to meet our first character.

That's all the background. It's the University of Cambridge. There's a man named Thomas Bilney and he's studying church law, canon law, church law.

And he was very serious. He was rather bashful and shy, retiring. He was of timid nature. He was not Martin Luther, you know, facing off against all of his enemies.

He's a timid man. And just at that time, the Lord was beginning to convict him of his sins. Something was going on in Thomas's heart. And just like with Martin Luther and just like so many other people, he was trying to figure out how can I have peace with God?

And he was doing all sorts of things. He was very sensitive. He was trying to obey God's commandments to find freedom, to be justified. He would go to his confessor and confess every single thing he could think of.

[12:45] And he would even confess things that he wasn't sure were sins, but he just wanted to make sure that that was covered. And Bilney fasted and he stayed up all night in prayer vigils.

He said masses. He paid for indulgences. Bilney did everything with this great devotion, but nothing helped. Romans 5.1 says, it's through faith that since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God.

That's the only way someone can have peace with God is through being justified by faith. Well, Bilney was pursuing it not by faith, but by like what he could do.

And time and time, the thing, thoughts started to boil up in Bilney's head and he started asking himself every now and then, like, maybe, maybe these priests are just telling me what to, telling me these things.

because they're only seeking their own gain, their own, their own money, their own power, not my salvation. And, and as soon as he started thinking that, he would begin to then berate himself for, for thinking badly of, of the priest.

[13:58] Well, one day, it's about 1520 now, so this is four years after Erasmus' copy, copies go out, Bilney heard his friends talking about this new book that they were reading, the Greek New Testament, and he was curious and he wanted to go buy one.

But remember what kind of person he is. He's, he's not a bold, courageous man at this point in his life. He's timid. He, he wanted to go read a New Testament, but he couldn't bring himself to do it because his confessor had banned all Greek, uh, and Hebrew books saying that they are the source of all heresies.

But he wanted to read it, but he shouldn't, but he wanted to read it, but he, but he shouldn't. And so back and forth and finally, he couldn't help himself.

Uh, in the late evening of one day, uh, he said later, he was urged by the hand of God. He sneaked down some back alleyway and slipped into the rear entry of a bookseller's shop.

And he bought a copy. He sold it. It was, they were sold in secret and he paid for it. He stuffed it into his coat and then scampered back to his room.

[15:20] Can you picture the scene of him taking this back, shutting his door, making sure no one is around. And then he opened it up and his eyes looked down on 1 Timothy 1.15.

And it is one of those situations where the, the word of God is shown to be so powerful by the spirit of God. Uh, this is what he read. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst. Christ. And this is what Bilney said. What?

St. Paul, the chief of sinners? And yet, St. Paul is sure to be saved? And he read it again and again and he said, Oh, assertion of St. Paul, how sweet you are to my soul.

I am like Paul and even more than Paul, the greatest of sinners. But Christ saves sinners. sinners. And just like that, faith was born in his heart.

[16 : 25] And he then experienced what all of his fasting and praying and confessing could never do. It gave him peace and he heard the gospel and he believed and all of his doubts were gone.

And remember the kind of man that he was, he became a different kind of man. Sometimes that happens. I mean, salvation always creates a great change.

Sometimes it creates a phenomenal change in even personality. Well, from then on, Bilney was this gospel man and the English Reformation was beginning.

And God took Bilney, this retiring guy who wanted to be a lawyer, and he made him a gospel preacher and he just couldn't help himself. He was going to preach to whoever would listen. And so everywhere, Bilney could preach and teach the gospel of the New Testament, he would.

Now, what was happening is Bilney's conversion was just the first sort of rock that begins this avalanche. Now, meanwhile, that was in Cambridge.

[17 : 31] Meanwhile, in the other great university city in England, in Oxford, there was a man named William Tyndale. William Tyndale was a language prodigy, a savant almost.

He was the finest linguist of Maudlin College at the time. 400 years later, C.S. Lewis taught there. It was very natural for him to be attracted to the Greek New Testament.

Well, he picked up a copy and he read through it and at first, he read through it like a scholar reads through it and he just so much appreciated its aesthetic beauty. He loved the words, he loved the language.

I don't relate to this, maybe some people do, but as he's reading it, he just can't help how beautiful it is, but really, he's playing with fire. And before you know it, you know, he was reading it for learning's sake, but he just became more and more real, the realization struck him more and more, this is real.

This is talking about me. I think maybe you could probably say that. You sat in the pew, many of you probably sat in a pew and heard the preaching of God's word and maybe it was fine, it was whatever, but then the realization hit you that he's talking about me.

[19 : 00] I am the sinner and that Jesus, he's real and you believe it in a new way. Well, he was struck, William Tyndale was struck, he couldn't believe it.

Here it was, divine revelation, a word from God that in that culture, in that day, it had been hidden and now he had it in his hands and God used it to save him.

Again, it was just the word of God. It was just someone reading it. Well, the same thing that happened with Bilney happened with him.

He couldn't contain himself. He started gathering around his friends and they would take turns reading the Bible. You can see them just passing it around and reading it and talking about it.

And so, then Tyndale began to lecture on the New Testament. Well, more and more students gathered around and they were more and more excited about it.

[20 : 04] But Satan wasn't quiet. He stirred up the men and they started plotting against Tyndale. And so, he had to leave Oxford and go to Cambridge because it was safer there.

And who do you think he met in Cambridge? Cambridge. He met Thomas Bilney for the first time in his life. And it was these two people that were...

Sam, how far are Oxford and Cambridge apart from each other? Okay. A hundred miles apart. Never met. Never knew each other.

Never heard of each other. But God put them into one place together. And they, the candles started shining together. together. And this reformation was beginning to pick up speed.

And what had been a few rocks was now becoming an avalanche. Well, they were brought together. Now, so there's Bilney and there's Tyndale in Cambridge and they're teaching the New Testament as best they can.

[21 : 17] They're reading the New Testament the best they can. and at the same time a young mathematician named John Frith was drawn into their orbit.

So these are like Jupiter and Saturn and here comes a wayward asteroid and he brings them right into their gravitational pull. And he heard the scriptures and when he did every thought of math flew out of his head and out of his mind.

Tyndale then took him under his wing. He witnessed to him. He evangelized to John Frith and he taught him and Frith was converted.

And so really now we have the three these three characters that were the origin of the English Reformation. God's men were in place. And you notice Bilney they're all students.

They're all academically minded but one's a student of law one's a student of language one was a student of math but each of them in their own way had been subdued by the word of God.

[22 : 26] The Bible and the spirit of God had won them. And each of them understood that something was dreadfully wrong in the church. it doesn't take very much if you are consistently reading the New Testament that now I'm looking at this and I'm looking at that over there and these two things don't line up.

What they are saying and what they are preaching is not what this is saying and what this is preaching. The way the church looks here is not the way the church looks over there. What's going on?

Well they knew something was wrong and each of them had hearts totally inflamed with what the truth and they were ready to lay down their lives for the word of God.

And when men are like that when they are gifted when they have the opportunity when they have mutual encouragement when they are committed the avalanche now is completely out of control.

So they enthusiastically went to work. Here's some of the things that they preached. They said no priest could absolve you of your sin.

[23 : 40] We say yes of course but you have to understand that's how everyone thought. I need my sins forgiven. I go to the confessor and he'll forgive me of my sins. He'll tell me what to do and I'll do it and I'll have my sins forgiven.

He said no religious ceremony could save you. They preached that the assurance of pardon comes by faith alone and it is faith that purifies the heart not fasting and beating your body.

They thought you must repent to be converted and when men started to preach and these three men started to preach that people were drawn to the gospel to the freedom to the joy to the assurance.

maybe sometime we will talk about Martin Luther but that was the big problem the Pope and the Catholic Church had with Martin Luther is he taught that you could actually be sure that you were saved.

They said if you did that then that's the worst thing that you could tell someone that they are actually saved and they can know it. So think about all the peace and the joy and the excitement and the encouragement that people just didn't experience because they were always wondering is God going to strike me down?

[25 : 02] Am I really saved? Have I done enough? Well these men were converted the gospel spread and persecution rose.

Soon after Tyndall had to leave Cambridge because he now had it in his mind a new very audacious ambition he was going to translate this Greek New Testament into English so that people could actually read it not just the students not just the scholars and so he goes over to Germany and he's hiding amongst the merchants I think I've told this story not so long ago and he started working on the translation in a few years Bilney and Firth were thrown into prison for preaching heresy and within like an eight year period all of them were martyred they were they were murdered they were put to the stake they were burned alive they were strangled it reminds me of Hebrews chapter 11 others were tortured and refused to be released John Firth was given the chance to be released and he refused to be released others were tortured and refused to be released so that they might gain a better resurrection I wonder do we believe in heaven and resurrection that much say I'm not going to be released because I want something better then some face jeers and flogging while still others were chained and put in prison they were stoned they were sawed in two they were put to death by the sword they went about in sheep skins and goat skins destitute persecuted and mistreated the world was not worthy of them again John Firth was imprisoned he refused to be let go and on the way to his last trial two men tried to convince him to flee but he wouldn't he said if I run away I will run away from my God and if

I flee I should flee from the testimony I am bound to bear to the Holy Word and I shall deserve a thousand hells and so on July 4th 1533 he was attached to a post and he was burned to death because he refused to compromise the gospel royal agents from King Henry VIII tracked William Tyndale down to the continent they searched for him and they looked for him and they pursued him it's almost like a spy novel and what ended up happening they finally found him right when the English translation was almost finished he wasn't quite able to finish the whole thing but it was almost it was nearing its completion and he was thrown into prison and two years later his trial began and these were the charges that were brought against him first he had maintained that faith alone justifies second he maintained that to believe in the forgiveness of sins and to embrace the mercy offered in the gospel was enough for salvation and third he claimed that human traditions cannot bind the conscience except where they neglect where neglect my occasion scandal and the list goes on and on in short order he was he was just found guilty it was a matter of going through the motions in 1536

October Tyndale was led out of his prison and just as the sun was going into the sky in the east they led him out to an open space where there was a like a grandstand you know seating bleachers everywhere they led him to this open with a gallery around so the crowds could see it and they bound his feet to the stake they fastened an iron chain around his neck they put a noose around his throat and they strangled him and then they burned him Bilney's end was the same five years earlier this was 1531 he was arrested and tried and convicted when he arrived at the place of punishment he fell on his knees and prayed and then rose up and embraced the stake and kissed it and turning his eyes to heaven he repeated the apostles creed and next he took off his gown and ascended into the pile he recited psalm 143 repeating the second verse three times do not bring your servant into judgment for no one living is righteous before you do not bring your servant into judgment for no one is righteous before you do not bring your servant into judgment for no one is righteous before you and then turning towards the officers he said are you ready and they said yes and he placed himself against the post and he held up the chain that bound him and his friend warner was filled his eyes were just he's he's weeping this man warner and they said their goodbyes and bilney said to him just as his last words doctor feed your sheep feed your sheep that the lord when he comes he might find you doing it and the torch was applied to the pile and it smoldered for a few minutes and then it burned up and he just kept on saying credo credo credo which is

[31 : 15] I believe I believe I believe it took him a while for him to be burned but finally he expired now so the catholic church destroyed the men that god had used to start the reformation they were all martyred but by that point it was too late the word of god was now in people's hands and more and more people were reading it and more and more men were preaching it and Jesus talks about pouring new wine into old wineskins and the new wine just burst the old wineskins and that's what happened the gospel got poured into England and the catholic church burst so there was not a luther there was not a calvin there wasn't a zwingli but it did just start with the same book it started with the new testament it now we have four minutes left

I just want to make some quick lessons we'll say I just want you to first notice the power of the word of god how we take it for granted how we do to build me and firth and tendal they didn't plan the reformation in england they didn't like go into some back room and make some sort of scheme and that's not how it was God's word was read and remarkable things happened it's the power of God unto salvation it lays men open to their faults it shows them their false hopes and it gives birth to faith it's through exposure to the word of God that we see the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit takes what is true and says to us it is true and it changes us and that's what happened the Lord said to Jeremiah is not my word like a fire declares the Lord and like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces that's the power of the word of God secondly do you see where revival comes from the English Reformation was a revival of religion it's a very complicated event but at its heart at its core it was the work of the Spirit through the word of God just those two things the Spirit of God as he comes and he produces life and he revives life and he does it through the word of God where does revival come from?

do you say we need revived well where does that come from? we need to have this church revived where does that where does it actually come from? does it does it come from singing the newest songs or or changing the format or or what?

no real revival comes from the Spirit of God powerfully taking the word of God and putting it into people's hearts in a new way in a powerful way maybe for the first time maybe again all over again so you know this is a lesson for me what do I do when I'm feeling dry when I just don't have desires when my obedience is lagging and I'm just tired and I'm losing encouragement where do I go for revival?

I have to go to the word of God it's funny when we need revival that's sometimes when we're the most spiritually anorexic when we refuse to eat what God is giving to us and I really think and I have to tell myself this when I don't feel like it that is precisely the time that I need to double down and and read my Bible study it spend time in it third this is last I guess it's not last here's third do you see what we need to preach at Grace Fellowship Church?

[36 : 03] what needs to be the meat and potatoes of the preaching of God's word is not esoteric or difficult complicated doctrines we have to preach the gospel which is justification by faith alone through Christ alone by grace alone to the glory of God alone those very simple doctrines that I can have peace with God that I am a sinner but I can have peace with God through Jesus Christ sacrificed and by believing him I can have peace I can be free I can be reconciled those very bottom baseline doctrines they have to be the meat and potatoes of preaching here that's what those people preach to their world and that's what we have to preach to our world fourth and this is last do you see what men have to suffer

Christians have to suffer in order to see the kingdom of God advance England in the 16th century was nominally a Christian country everyone claimed to be a Christian but it wasn't the kingdom of God wasn't strong real religion wasn't there but the price of bringing salvation bringing the gospel bringing a new and true church to that country it was the cost was life you had to be willing to die and that that isn't comfortable for us to think about in our culture in our country but the only way Christ's kingdom will advance into dark corners of this world is through suffering and I think we need to just have our minds adjusted to that this is the way that it is the only way people in other countries will get

Bibles in their languages is if someone from our country someone from a country that already has it is willing to leave everything and go we have two missionaries now in the reformed baptist network that have left everything everything here they've left careers jobs one went to Princeton was a an electrician engineer or something like that I don't remember exactly but now they're in a jungle trying to learn a language that's not been written and they're doing it one so that these people can have the word of God in their language that's the only way that's going to happen that's the only way the gospel is going to reach them as if someone goes and someone loses and someone suffers Billing was willing Tyndall was willing maybe that's not our calling but it certainly needs to be someone's calling and if it's not our particular calling parents

I'm speaking to us like we need to be willing to see our children do that that might be a heavy price to pay for mom and dad but the Lord might call our children to do that it might not be us it might not be our children but there's always a need for finances none of these things happen for free and someone has to send them and part of sending them is to to pay so we need to think about that I just am reminded Jim Elliot one reason that he went to South America was he was working he wanted to put a bible in the translation of the Aka people he was trained as a bible translator he was a gospel minister but he was trained as a bible translator and he knew how to do it in languages that were not written yet they'd been trained for that and that's why he left mom and dad in Oregon that's why he flew down there and that's why he desperately was trying to get to know them and he was giving them gifts they landed their airplane on a little dirt path in the river or something and they were trying to meet the

Aka people and on the second or third day a group of men came out and killed them but what happened was afterwards the Aka people got the gospel in their language and they heard preaching and many of them were saved and I'm just reminded of what Jim Elliot said a man is no fool to give up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose that's what Bilney and Tyndale and Firth and Jim Elliot teach us and I think we need to learn that lesson again well our time's up we're dismissed