

John Wycliffe: The Man Who Preached From His Grave

Nearly a century has passed since the confrontation at Runnymede, where the Magna Carta was obtained, but as of yet, not much liberty is to be found as a result. The world is dark and not a man in a thousand can read. There are no schools and the ordinary ones live without gaining knowledge, and since knowledge is power those in authority strive to keep it that way.

Lying quietly in the Lutterworth Church yard are the remains of a good man. His bones resting peacefully for nearly a half-century will on this night be disturbed as a party of monks with picks and spade make their way to dig up the remains of Dr. John Wycliffe. They will soon kindle a fire, burn his remains and after crushing them to powder, scatter them in the little brook coursing through the Lutterworth Church yard, which will carry them to the Avon and on to the Severn, which will bear them to the seas and the seas to the corners of the earth.

So, too, will his greatest contribution scatter wildly to the ends of the earth, bringing light and hope to the world. Wycliffe's contribution is the translation of the Holy Bible into English.

The reason for this drastic measure against John Wycliffe's remains? Simply put, they could no longer tolerate Wycliffe's preaching from the grave.

Many of Wycliffe's followers, often called "Lollards" for their boisterous worship and bold singing, were transformed and liberated through his teachings. The numbers of people greatly impacted by his gift of the Bible were increasing rapidly. He had dared to dream of placing the Bible into the

hands of the ordinary ones. They would often make a pilgrimage to his gravesite and even chisel a piece of his headstone off that they might carry it back home as a piece of hope for all to see and hear.

Little could the monks have imagined that Wycliffe would continue to preach, his parish would be the world and his followers citizens of every land. There are some things fire simply cannot burn, hammers cannot crush—such as truth, liberty and justice.

John Wycliffe was little impressed with the clergy of his day. He seemed to have even less appreciation for the luxury and pomp of local parishes and their endless ceremonies of extravagance. It was, however, his overwhelming conviction that the Scripture was the only authoritative reliable guide to the truth about God that drove him to translate the Bible into English. It appears Wycliffe translated the entire New Testament while his good friend Nicholas of Hereford translated most of the Old Testament. Into the 1500s, those who followed the teachings of Wycliffe were also simply called “Bible men.”

Could it be the hand of providence working invisibly through his life crafting the foundation for the great reformation that would follow nearly 200 years later? Wycliffe certainly could not see the end from the beginning, and neither can we. We must be assured the Lord is working mightily and more broadly than we have imagined, to reveal the great plan of God for the redeeming of nations and the reaping of the great harvest of souls.

Would there be others who would follow him that would continue to form an awakening mosaic of ordinary ones contending faithfully for a cause of transforming revival in the land? There are said to be about 150 manuscripts, complete or partial, containing the translation of what we know as the Wycliffe Bible. We recently got to see one of these at the

Museum of the Bible in Washington D.C.—a must stop, by the way, when you visit the nation's capital.

Wycliffe died of natural causes shortly after suffering a stroke. His life had been under intense scrutiny and examination for years by men much more powerful and influential than he. He would preach that a holy office does not make the one who possesses it holy. Above all he was guilty of exercising an opinion which was in his day the beginning of individual liberty. Watch carefully for liberty's erosion when one's own opinions are castigated and threatened.

The only Bibles in England were locked away in the libraries of Oxford, Cambridge, monasteries and a very few churches. They were all written in Latin or Hebrew on parchment and allowed by the pope to be read only by the church prelates: priests, bishops and some monks. John Wycliffe had a bold and radical belief that the people—the ordinary ones—have a right to read the Bible. Producing the Bible in the language of the ordinary ones became his life mission and his greatest gift to the human family.

He would, through bold and courageous acts of courage, seal the hope of generations to come by pioneering with many others the path for the Bible to become the book of the ordinary ones. The Bible would soon become the beacon of hope to the entire world. The boundless mercy and everlasting love of the Lord God Almighty would manifest as a brooding eagle, rescuing, redeeming and releasing generations into their bold future.

Many problems would arise, not the least of which would be the lack of uniform language in England. So Wycliffe chose the dialect of the East Midland section to translate the Bible into and along with his friend, Geoffrey Chaucer, author of *The Canterbury Tales*, began to lay the foundation for the English language. This language would become the language of liberty, and his gift of the Bible, in the newly forming

language, would become a global road map to truth, liberty and justice.

Finally, they have gotten rid of Wycliffe—or have they? Could it be that the movement that began in Wycliffe, who would become known as “The Morning-Star of the Reformation,” set a fire in Bohemia that would transform the whole world?

Wycliffe was a man, an ordinary man, captured by a cause greater than he! Today history continues to be shaped by those willing to be captured by a greater cause and champion the dream of light and hope to all mankind through the revelation of the Holy Bible. The great history of tomorrow will be written today upon the lives of courageous men and women—*ordinary* men and women. The movement that began in the life of the man who preached from his grave will soon light a fire in Bohemia through the life of a boy who sang for his breakfast.

Please join us for our next episode in this series on the *An Awakening Mosaic* podcast on the Charisma Podcast Network. And as always, we invite you to allow the information you have heard today to inspire you to embrace a brighter and bolder future by discovering how God has always chosen to use ordinary men and women to shape the future. If you have enjoyed this podcast, please subscribe and share it with a friend. {eo}