

William Tyndale

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[0 : 0 0] now as we've as i said before this is the month of october is reformation month and because it's reformation month i'd like us to take the opportunity to trace the storyline of the protestant reformation in the 16th century because to trace the storyline of the reformation is to trace the story of four particular men and i believe that if we know the story of these four men we will know for the most part the story of the reformation and we will be able to see how god in his providence how we use these men to reform the church of jesus christ and the story of the reformation it goes from martin luther to william tyndale to john calvin to john knox and as we trace the steps of these four men we will follow the flow of the reformation we'll follow the flow from the german reformation to the english reformation to the swiss reformation and to the scottish reformation and this movement of reform it took a period of about 55 years the reformation it didn't happen overnight it took time and it wasn't the result of one man it was the result of a body of men and last time we saw that the story of the reformation it began with began in germany with the reformer martin luther but this evening i'd like us to consider the connection between the influence of the german reformation under martin luther and the connection with the influence of the english reformation under william tyndale and as i said before the way in which i'd like us to you could say meet the reformers that's what we're doing we're meeting the reformers and the way i'd like us to do it is the same way in which we interview a minister at the congregational fellowship because every time we interview a minister at the congregational fellowship we use the headings childhood conversion call and congregation but because we're meeting the reformers and they are men who made a huge contribution to the church of jesus christ i'd like us to use the fifth heading as contribution so this evening we're considering william tyndale under the headings childhood conversion call congregation and contribution okay so first of all childhood william tyndale was born in gloucestershire in england in 1494 and other than the year of his birth we don't know much about tyndale's childhood but what we do know and what i'd like us to think about is the kind of church service william tyndale would have attended in his youth because prior to the reformation church services they were completely unlike the church services that we are familiar with today not only because church services then they were held in cathedrals and they would have decorations and stained glass windows and images of of christ crucified on the cross but also instead of a pulpit where the word of god is central the priest would be standing before an altar and he would be robed in all these ornate vestments and he would apply the seven sacraments to the congregation and that's how he would infuse grace to them and at the center of the sacramental worship was the mass and the mass would be performed with lots of prayers prayers to the saints prayers to mary and there would be a lot of bowing and kissing the altar making the sign of the cross and there'd be all this chanting going on and then the climax of the mass with the bread and the wine

the priest would offer up to god the very body and the very blood of jesus christ and then mixed into all the worship was the word of god but it was all in latin the bible reading was in latin the sermon was in latin but the people didn't know latin only the clergy knew latin and william tyndale like many people in england and throughout europe at the time they would attend church services but they would have no idea what was being said the entire service was in a language that they that they didn't understand but more than that because the people didn't have latin and they couldn't read latin they didn't have a bible in their homes in the homes of many people throughout england and throughout scotland throughout europe no one had a bible but in particular in britain no one had an english bible which meant the bible wasn't read in the home there was no such thing as family worship and there was no opportunity to read the bible and to learn about god and salvation through jesus christ everything was done through the church facilitated by the priests and it was all in latin and you know this is what gave the church power because the church could interpret the

bible any way they wanted and no one could question it because the ordinary man in the street couldn't understand the bible or even read the bible and even the pope he could teach whatever he wanted and claim authority over the bible and nothing could be said and that's what happened the church was controlling the people and there was no freedom of worship and there was no possibility of questioning the church in anything in fact roman catholicism taught and it still teaches today that there is no salvation outside the church and so if you're outside the church if you're not baptized you'll be condemned to the fires of hell now of course we know that the bible teaches that our baptism doesn't save us because it's a sign and seal of god's promises to us but that's not what roman catholicism teaches roman catholicism teaches that you're justified by your baptism and then you're sanctified by the sacraments but looking at the bible they're wrong and they're leading people into error because no one in the catholic church was allowed to own a bible or to see the bible for themselves they had to submit to the authority of the church and not to the authority of scripture and you know in the day and age which we live in with bibles we have bibles in our cupboards and we have bibles in every format every version every language possible we've got it printed or even electronic and yet we take for granted the fact that we have the bible in our own language and we have the ability to read it and we even have the ability to meditate upon it we take it for granted but when william tyndale was in his childhood and many others before him they didn't have the privileges that we have today and to some extent you know it's very difficult for us to actually comprehend how viciously opposed the catholic church was to the translation of the bible and to the reading of the bible in english and just to explain at the beginning of the 15th century so in 1401 which is nearly a century before william tyndale was born the parliament which was enforced by the catholic church they passed a law making heresy punishable by burning people alive at the stake and sadly the law was passed with the bible translators in view and then only a few years later in 1408 the archbishop of canterbury he created what they called constitutions of oxford and these constitutions they said it is a dangerous thing to translate the text of holy scripture out of one tongue into another we therefore decree and ordain that no man hereafter by his own authority translate any text of scripture into english or any other tongue and that no man may read any such book in part or in whole the church claimed sole authority and the grip that the church of rome had upon the people was that they threatened to burn you alive for simply reading the bible in english and there are many accounts of of this in john fox's book of martyrs it tells of men who were burned at the stake for just possessing the lord's prayer in english and other men who were burned for trying to teach their children the lord's prayer in english but you know when we consider the upbringing of william tyndale we not only have to consider what was going on in the church on the in the ecclesiastical scene we also have to consider what was happening in the political scene because they both come together because as well as the beginning of a reformation taking place in the church there was also this the beginning of a reformation taking place in the state and interestingly both the church and the state they coincide with one another and they reformed together because early in the 16th century henry the eighth he's well known to us he was on the throne of england and although henry the eighth he was a deeply religious catholic he attended the mass said to be three times a day and he supported the pope in any way that he could but henry wanted to divorce his wife catherine of aragon and henry wanted to divorce her because of her failure to give her a male heir to the throne but in order to put catherine to one side henry needed to have his marriage dissolved to be dissolved by pope clement problem was pope clement was under the power of the roman emperor charles v and charles v he so happened to be a nephew of catherine of aragon and so it was this very complicated family dispute and the dispute it finally reached boiling point when the roman emperor charles v and pope clement they refused to dissolve the marriage between henry the eighth and catherine of aragon and that move it drove henry the eighth to seeking not only a divorce with his wife but also a divorce with the catholic church and in 1532 a number of laws they began to be passed in england that saw the church of england becoming more and more independent from the pope and more and more dependent upon the king where the church in england was you could say it was given new headship headship was given not to the pope but to the king of england that time the king became the head of the church and not the pope that was 1532 10 years earlier in 1522 that's when everything changed for william tyndale so that brings us to consider his conversion childhood conversion in 1522 at the age of 28 william tyndale he was already an ordained priest having studied at oxford university but tyndale's conversion it came when he was serving as this private tutor in the home of a wealthy man called sir john walsh and tyndale's remit at the time he

wasn't preaching he was just teaching

sir john walsh's children he was teaching them greek using the greek new testament as a textbook now by this point the greek new testament had only been in print for about six years in 1516 the dutch scholar erasmus he had produced the first ever printed edition of the greek new testament and you know we can't underestimate the role that erasmus played in the reformation that's a name we should remember because even though erasmus he didn't want to break with rome he didn't want to leave the catholic church his work on the greek new testament it was for the most part that was the catalyst to the reformation because in 1522 while tyndale was tutoring children the greek new testament martin luther was translating the greek new testament into german and he was having it printed and distributed throughout germany and what's remarkable is that tyndale wouldn't be far behind luther in his translation of the greek new testament into english because as tyndale taught greek to the children of sir john walsh and as he spent more time studying the greek text he came to this deeper understanding of the word of god in fact tyndale became so convinced of the reformation principles that he began to preach he began to preach god's word of course the catholic church they didn't like it they didn't want anyone preaching god's word but you know it seems that tyndale's break with rome it finally came when he was having dinner at the house in the house of sir john walsh sir john walsh he would often invite many learned men to come round for dinner and have dinner with the walsh family and tyndale was there and at the dinner table tyndale would be constantly talking about things that he was seeing in the greek text and it said that on one particular occasion a catholic priest was there he was there for dinner and he got so fed up with tyndale mouthing off about the greek text all the time that the priest made this audacious statement across the dinner table he said to him we would be better off without the word of god because all we need is the pope's interpretation but you know tyndale he just fired back he said i defy the pope and all his laws in fact said tyndale if god spares my life i will cause a boy that drives the plough in the field to know more of the scriptures than you do and with that tyndale he felt this call to overthrow the power and the errors of rome by translating the bible from the original greek and hebrew languages into english and like it was for luther in germany tyndale had become convinced that the word of god it was not just for the elect clergy it was for everyone including the man on the street and so that brings us thirdly to look at his call we've looked at his childhood his conversion but thirdly william tyndale's call now after this dispute around the dinner table the in the house of sir john walsh tyndale he came to this sobering realization that the majority of people in his nation they were lost tyndale could see that their ignorance of scripture meant ignorance of salvation and the result was they were perishing and so tyndale's solution and his desire was to place into the hand of every man in britain the word of god in their own language but but as we know the church they had put up this wall around the bible

they couldn't touch it warning that if anyone translated the bible or even read the bible in english they would be burned and so just a year later in 1523 tyndale he traveled to london hoping to escape this condemnation and he was seeking official authorization for translating the bible into english and he was seeking authorization from the bishop of london and tyndale he had hoped that the bishop of london would side with him because the bishop of london was someone who had worked alongside erasmus in producing the greek new testament but the bishop of london refused he refused to help tyndale because he had heard of all that was going on in germany and the printing of luther's bible and the chaos it was causing because luther's translation of the bible it was stirring up a storm in germany and the church was beginning to lose its power and its its dominance over the people and so the bishop of london he he didn't want to take responsibility for anything like that happening in england so he refused tyndale's request and you know if we were in tyndale's shoes the bishop of london saying to us no this isn't this isn't the way it's going to be you know if we were in tyndale's shoes i'm sure that most of us would have concluded well this is the lord closing the door on us this is the lord closing the door not to go any further but you know tyndale he didn't take no for an answer because even if the door was closed tyndale was ready and willing to knock the door down in order to translate the word of god into english and so in 1524 tyndale he left england and he went to germany and for the rest of his life tyndale would live as an exile from his people and an outlaw against henry the eighth just so that he could translate the bible into english and the first place tyndale went in germany was to wittenberg and he went to meet martin luther that's where luther comes into the story and in wittenberg working from erasmus erasmus greek text and the latin translation of the bible and luther's german version tyndale sat down to translate the bible into english and you know what's remarkable is that at the same time of translating the

bible into english tyndale began to teach himself hebrew this blows your mind and the reason he taught it was trying to teach himself hebrew was because the old testament was written in hebrew and he's trying to translate it into english and well the old testament was written in hebrew and the new testament was written originally in greek you know it's amazing to think that in all of europe hardly anyone knew hebrew hebrew let alone taught it in fact there wasn't one teacher in all of england who was a teacher of the hebrew language and yet hebrew would be tyndale's eighth language to master and there's no doubt god had given tyndale a gift with languages tyndale knew english latin greek german french spanish italian and hebrew and it said that tyndale knew all these languages so well that whenever he spoke them natives thought that he had been born in their country but after being in wittenberg for less than a year tyndale was ready to publish his work on the new testament and one historian says that tyndale's new testament it was a gem of a translation it was accurate and beautiful you could say it was a page turner but of course to the english bishops tyndale's new testament was dangerous

[20 : 12] and it was dangerous because tyndale's translation it completely changed how people understand the bible because phrases like do penance they were translated as repent church was translated as congregation confess confess was now simply acknowledge acts of charity which the catholic church promoted was translated as love love one another and with all these changes you know it pulled the carpet from right from under the feet of the roman catholic church because how to be saved and what it meant to be a christian it now looked completely different because in the place of all these outward forms and external rituals in order to get into heaven the call was now for a change of heart it was all reformation on the inside but you know although tyndale's translation was dangerous to the english bishops it was going to be salvation to the english-speaking people and that's where we come forthly to congregation childhood conversion call and congregation now although he wasn't an ordained although he was an ordained priest he didn't have a congregation of his own tyndale wasn't preaching week by week in a parish but you know you could see that tyndale sought to shepherd his own home nation with his production of the english bible because tyndale he cared for his own people he saw that they were lost and he wanted them to come to a knowledge of the truth and so in 1525 tyndale he leaves the city of wittenberg and he travels to the city of cologne and the reason tyndale stopped in cologne was because it was this densely populated city and it would make it easier for him to blend in nobody would know that he's there he'd go unnoticed and it would also be easier for him to find a publisher to print his work and of course as a fugitive from england if tyndale was caught meant capital punishment he'd be burned at the stake and if those publishing his work got caught well it would be the same for them as well and so in 1525 printing begins on tyndale's translation of the english bible and you know it was an exciting time for tim tyndale but it didn't take long for something to go horribly wrong one night the printers who were working in the print shop they go out in the town and they get drunk and as you know when someone has had a few too many the tongue becomes loose and that's what happened with the the printers the printers began to talk about this top secret project that they were working on and as you can expect the word got round and it got round to the authorities and there was this raid on the print shop in the middle of the night but astonishingly tyndale was tipped he's tipped about what's happened in the pub and he runs to the back of the print shop and he gathers all of his life's work and he escapes into the night one step ahead of the authorities and tyndale he he travels down the rhine river in germany and he comes to the city of worms so he leaves he leaves cologne and he comes down to the city of worms and worms it should be a familiar city to us because it was in worms that martin luther stood before the emperor and made his great statement his defense of the faith and it was because of martin luther and his stand in worms and his influence that the city of worms it became sympathetic to the reformation and so tyndale he he traveled to worms under the cover of darkness in order to complete his life's work of printing the bible into english his sole desire was that his people

would have the word of god but you know we have to take into account that the reason tyndale went to worms of all cities to go to it's not only because there was this sympathy towards the reformation because having struggled in cologne tyndale knew that his choice of city was integral to his plan succeeding because the city of choice it had to be near a sea flowing river in order to ship all these bibles out towards england and firms while it was on the rhine river the city also had to be near this supply of paper and have all the facilities for printing which firms had and the city also had to be large enough just like it was in cologne it had to be large enough so that he could remain

anonymous whilst he carried out all his work and worms fitted the criteria and you know what's remarkable is that it didn't take long it didn't take long for tyndale's work to be finished a year later 1526 for the first time in history the new testament had been translated into english out of the original greek three thousand copies were published and they were hidden in bales of cloth and then they were put onto ships and then they were smuggled up the rhine river out into the north sea and the ships they came across the north sea and they landed on the east coast of england and the southeast coast of scotland and you know it's hard to believe that at one time in our nation's history that bibles had to be smuggled into our country just so people could read the word of god and yet as i said we take our bible for granted we don't read it like we should we don't meditate upon it like we should we don't spend time with it like we should and yet we're seeing here tyndale risked life and limb just so we could read the bible in our language but of course tyndale he wasn't working on his own there were many wealthy merchants in england who financed and they smuggled and they distributed tyndale's translation when it came into the country it was a coordinated work and under the hand of god it was very very successful and it was successful because like tyndale these men in england and scotland they loved god and they loved god's word and they loved god's people and they longed for reformation and for their own people to read the word of god in their own language you know it's amazing the nation we're in today it's ignorant of the bible just like it was in tyndale's day and you know we have to be like these people we have to love god we have to love the word and we have to love the people so that we'll bring the word of god to them to those who are completely ignorant of the bible and so we've considered the childhood the conversion the calling the congregation of william tyndale but last of all i'd like us to consider the contribution the contribution of william tyndale after the first dispatch of the first dispatch dispatch is a good word the dispatch of english bibles to britain that was in 1526 then william tyndale he would continue to edit his work for the next 10 years and in that time he would make some 3 000 improvements his second edition of the new testament it was published in 1534 and it included the books from genesis to second chronicles and also the book of the prophet jonah so he had finished the new testament and then he had started translating the new testament in greek and then he had started translating the hebrew into english as well and he went from genesis to chronicles and also the book of jonah that was the interesting part tyndale translated the book of jonah because he wanted every preacher in england to preach from the book of jonah and he wanted them to preach from the words of jonah chapter 3 verse 4 40 days and nineveh will be destroyed and with that tyndale he longed for every preacher to remind the people in his home country to remind the bishops and the priests and all the cardinals to remind them that england will be destroyed if it does not repent in sackcloth and ashes and humble itself and come to the foot of the cross in submission to jesus christ that's what tyndale longed for his people to come to jesus now the 1534 edition of the tyndale bible it's often been described as the glory of his life's work because it said that 90 percent 90 percent of tyndale's work can actually be found in the authorized version the king james version and when king the king james version when that was produced and authorized by king james in 1611 tyndale's work was so good it couldn't be improved upon tyndale was a master not only of the english bible but you could say he was also the father of modern the modern english language because with every verse that tyndale translated he was standardizing the english language there wouldn't be an english dictionary for at least another 150 years but tyndale's translation of the bible it became the english dictionary and we owe many of our english phrases to tyndale phrases like let there be light or am i am i my brother's keeper or the signs of the times or a law unto themselves we've all said these things or the phrase in him we live and move and have our being or fight the good fight they're all tyndale phrases and the list is endless but what's remarkable is that 500 500 years after his great work was first published we are still quoting tyndale and from what we've discovered this evening we can say that without doubt tyndale's work that was the spark which ignited the reformation in britain that was the spark that ignited it all but sadly as we know all good things have to come to an end and after being a fugitive on the run for over 10 years the wrath of the church of england finally caught up with tyndale in 1535 after translating the new testament from the original greek and most of the old testament from the original hebrew translating them both into english and after smuggling by that time 16 000 copies of the bible into britain tyndale was finally captured and he was imprisoned in a castle outside brussels for about 18 months but then on the 6th of october 1536 tyndale he was degraded from the priesthood he was condemned to death as a heretic he was tied to the stake he was strangled by a steel chain and then he was burned but you know the church hated tyndale so much for what he

had done they hated him so much that they covered tyndale's body in gunpowder and they set him alight and as you can expect tyndale's body was blown into so many pieces that there was nothing left to bury him

but you know what's remarkable is that prior to his death tyndale's final words were the words of a prayer oh god open the eyes of the king of england that was his dying prayer oh god open the eyes of the king of england and amazingly only two years after tyndale's execution that prayer was answered and i'll explain how it was answered just prior to tyndale's death and when tyndale was in prison when he was in brussels awaiting his death there was this man called miles coverdale and miles coverdale he picked up where tyndale left off he took up the mantle and he completed what tyndale didn't manage to finish and before tyndale was executed miles coverdale he published the first complete old and new testament bible bible bible into english and then in 1537 that's after tyndale's death he died in 1536 in 1537 having successfully then separated from the roman catholic church henry the eighth sanctioned the printing he sanctioned the printing of the english bible in england and then a year later in 1538 the king of england's eyes were open henry the eighth's prime minister who was then thomas crumwell he commanded that every parish church in england own an english bible for all to read isn't that amazing two years after tyndale's death everything changed in his home nation and you know it's humbling to think that what tyndale did for the english speaking world he never got to see it he never got to see it but you know we thank the lord for him we don't venerate him but we thank the lord for him and how the lord used him to produce the bible we know and love today and you know considering the life of william tyndale it should cause us to see how precious the bible is and how privileged we are to own a bible and that we're able to read the bible because as we know the bible it's the only rule to direct us the bible is the only book to help us to comfort us to speak to us to guide us to direct us so my friend let's not neglect our bible because as we've heard tonight it costs so much for us to have it but you know that's not the end of the reformation story because as the english reformer william tyndale as he stepped off the stage of history in 1536 the swiss reformer john calvin he was then arriving in geneva and you could say that as one man steps off the stage the lord was raising up another the lord always raises up the next man waiting to move him into position to carry on his work and so well we'll consider john calvin next time when we come to look at the swiss reformation so may the lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh lord our gracious god we give thanks to thee for thy word and we thank the lord that we are able to read it to meditate upon it and to know that it speaks to us in our own language we thank thee lord and we praise thee that each and every one of us could say with a psalmist that how sweet unto my taste o lord are all thy words of truth yea i do find them sweeter far than honey to my mouth we thank thee lord for

thy servants over the years who have translated thy word and we thank thee lord for those who are still translating it who are still changing it into different languages to continue to spread it to different nations the nations of the unreached peoples those who are still ignorant ignorant of god and ignorant of salvation but we bless thee and we praise thee for the revelation of thy word and the revelation of god that's found within it and oh lord that thou art the one who desires to make thyself known that all people will come to thee that whosoever believeth will not perish but have eternal life lord bless us then we pray remember us we ask remember us lord as a congregation and remember especially the smith family we pray for them and we ask lord that thy word would be a comfort to them that it would encourage them lord that they would be reminded of the jesus who never leaves and who never forsakes the one who is our constant that although our life is ebbing and flowing and all the times of change are coming in we thank the lord that thou art the one who remains the same yesterday today and forever cleanse us then we pray go before us for jesus sake amen we shall conclude by singing the words of psalm 19 psalm 19 that's page 223 it's in the scottish psalter we're singing from verse 7 down to the verse mark 10 and these words they speak about god's law god's word and he says god's law is perfect and converts the soul and sin that lies god's testimony is most sure and makes the simple wise and then down in verse 10 it says they more than gold ye much fine gold to be desired are than honey honey from the comb that droppeth sweeter far god so we're singing psalm 19 these verses to god's praise god's love is perfect and converts the soul and sin that lies god's testimony is more than to keep the soul and honesty out
■ wisch and to rejoice the heart.

[39 : 36] The Lord's command is pure and a light to the eyes impart.

Unspotted is the fear of God and doth endure forever.

The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
More than gold, yea, much fine gold, to be decided are.
Than honey, honey from the comb that dropeth sweeter fire.
[40 : 48] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.