

## 400 years of the King James Bible

The powers that be.  
All things to all men.  
The root of the matter.  
The writing's on the wall.  
A leopard can't change its spots.

Yes, the King James Bible has been so much a part of the life of our nation for the last four centuries that many of the phrases that trip so lightly off our tongues and are part of the way we think and speak are actually direct quotes from this most amazing of books.

The book we are celebrating and giving thanks to God for today.

How we came, as a nation, to possess this book in the first place is the most amazing of miracles.

Appalled with the abuses of a Church that twisted religion for its own ends and with an unshakable conviction that the Word of God should be available to all people in their own language, translators and reformers worked tirelessly to make the Bible available in English.

Beginning with Wycliffe who so infuriated the Pope that even after his death his body was exhumed and his bones crushed and scattered,

Continuing with Tyndale, Coverdale and countless others who risked life and limb in a world that often saw people burned at the stake for possessing an English translation of the Bible,

This process of producing an English language bible culminated in the Authorised Version, officially sanctioned by King James, and placed in every parish church in the land with someone to read it to the common people.

As I think of, for example, William Tyndale, hunched over his books in a dark room in Germany, exiled from his native England for fear of those seeking his life and to burn his works, I can't help but be thankful for these great men who risked so much that we might be able to freely read God's word in a language we can understand.

What was it that drove them on; that kept them going despite all the threats and intimidation?

After all, these were learned men, who were quite capable of reading the bible in Latin, or even the original Greek and Hebrew?

Perhaps in part it was a sense of duty; that they had a responsibility to share with others what they had been fortunate to receive.

But surely even more than that, it was that they had discovered that in the Scriptures we find life itself; that they burned with a passion for others to discover the treasure that was so precious to them.

So perhaps we might remind ourselves again, just what it is about the Scriptures that make them valuable above all other things.

Three metaphors that the Bible itself uses to describe its importance:

Psalm 119.105:

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

Since moving from the town of Wrexham, with all its street lights, to Eynsford, I have discovered the value of a lamp, or torch.

Without a light, it is so easy to lose our way, to trip on an obstacle, or to be scared by the noises and shadows around.

So as we travel through life, as we make choices about the path we might travel, as we face difficulties, as things trouble us, God’s Word can keep us on the right track, help us avoid falling into error and comfort us amidst life’s troubles.

Ephesians 6.17:

“Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Military language is now rather frowned upon in many parts of the church today; but St Paul is very clear that if we are Christians we are engaged in a battle; a war...

Not a physical war, but a spiritual one.

Last week in the castle, Kevin reminded us that as William the Conqueror took control of Britain by setting up castles across the land, so God is establishing his kingdom by building communities of Christian peoples who will live and work for him.

Our opposition doesn't come from the people around whom God calls us to love and serve, but from the evil spiritual forces at large around us,  
And we fight them with the Word of God,  
As we read the Scriptures,  
As we pray the Scriptures,  
As we claim the promises of the Scriptures,  
As we live the scriptures,  
As we declare the words of God the Scriptures proclaim,  
And as we invite people into a relationship with the One whom the Scriptures are all about.

Psalm 119.103

"How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth."

The Scriptures are the most wonderful thing, the place where we find sustenance and pleasure, for it is in the Word of God that we meet with the Lord himself and hear him speak to us.

Can there be anything better than the thrill of reading a bible passage and hearing through it God speak to our heart?

How amazing it is, that the God who creates and sustains the whole universe bothers to stoop and whisper in our ear, and how often he does it through the words he inspired all those thousands of years ago.

All this being said, a recent survey showed that only about 50% of Christians read the bible regularly.

Perhaps this is understandable when so many of us have such busy lives, but the excuses are becoming less as the bible is so readily available to read on our mobile phones or to listen to on our ipods.

Maybe part of the reason is that we have bought the Devil's lie that the bible is boring, irrelevant, too hard to understand , or even untrue.

I can't help feeling that many of our national church's troubles would disappear if we recovered a healthy respect for God's Word and did what it said;

That our own lives might speak more of the Saviour we follow if we knew our Scriptures and put them into practice,

And that our mission to our parishes might be more effective if we recovered a confidence in the power of God to transform lives through the words he has inspired.

The battle fought by translators to bring the bible to the people of this land has been won,  
But it is a battle that others in other parts of the world are still fighting;  
Many people still crave the Word of God in their own language,  
And many more risk imprisonment, torture and death for even owning a copy of the Bible.

Through the work of the Bible Society, Open Doors and others we need to support them.

But let me encourage you today,  
The Bible sitting on your shelf at home was bought with a great price,  
It is the most valuable of all your possessions,  
Don't through familiarity despise it and allow it to gather dust, unread and unloved, but read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it; put it into practice; and most importantly, through it meet with Jesus.

John 6.63. Jesus says:

"It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life!"

Amen.