

The Story of William Wilberforce

Various Passages

October 15, 2023

Well, good morning. As I was walking up here, I was reminded to mention that today is Ian and Connie White's 58th wedding anniversary. Congratulations, guys. You can have two bowls of soup. Only one dessert, though, for your 58th wedding anniversary. Congratulations. That's wonderful. So that's really neat to hear about that.

Well, this morning, we are continuing our study that we started several months ago on the Christian and civil disobedience, where we have been discussing what the Bible says about the subject of disobedience and whether it's okay for a Christian to defy the government or not. And we've said that the answer is yes. It is okay for a believer to disobey the governing authorities if they asked him to sin or defy the conscience, there are conditions where he can do that. Having said that, you shouldn't disobey just because you want to. And you shouldn't defy just because you feel like it, that sort of thing. But if the government asks you to do something that's wrong in the eyes of God, that's where you draw the line. That's what we've been talking about for a couple of months here, as a church. And now this morning, we're bringing this to a close by asking the question, well, how can a Christian impact the government then? If you're saying the government and the church are separate, and they're not the same, and there is a time to defy, does that mean, a Christian should have nothing to do with the government at all anymore? Does that mean we should go bury our head in the sand and go live in a cave and hope everything blows over? And the answer to that is no.

Jesus said in Matthew five that you are the salt of the earth. And that means this is where your salt needs to be felt and that is on the earth. And He tells us, "You're the light of the world." And that means this is where your light shines brightest, and that is in the world, the crazy messed up world, the evil wicked world where the government is. You need to be a witness to them.

And there's probably nobody that's exemplified this more in church history than a man named William Wilberforce. Just out of curiosity, how many of you have heard of William Wilberforce before? Oh, yeah, everybody okay. How many of you saw the movie that was out years ago on him? There's a movie that came out about him. There's also a book, several books that are very helpful about his life, and our children have a colouring page about him too. So if you want more information, they've got a colouring page.

But he is the man who was responsible for ending the slave trade in England, in the 1700s. He almost single handedly put a stop to it. And he did it, get this, he did it as a member of the government. When he was saved, he had just been elected to Parliament in England, and he wanted to leave because it was so bad. Anybody relate to that? It was so wicked and evil and debauched that he wanted to quit because the environment was driving him nuts as a new believer until he talked to a man named John Newton.

John Newton is a man who wrote the hymn, "Amazing Grace." And he asked him what he should do. And John Newton said, "I think you should stay right where you are because we need Christians to change the government from within it. We need people who are in the halls of power to be a light for Christ. And so that's what he did.

Now, to be fair, it wasn't easy. It took William Wilberforce 20 years to end the slave trade. That means if he started right now, he wouldn't finish until 2043. And it cost him his health along with some friends and a lot of his money, but he did it anyway because he believed that was what God was calling him to do.

He said that a private faith that does not act is no faith at all. In other words, if people can't tell you're a Christian, and you don't do anything to prove that you have a problem, and that is that you may not be a Christian. You could be self-deceived. God has put us on this earth to make a difference in this world.

Oh, there we go. That's a picture of John Newton and William Wilberforce talking. John Newton is on the left. William Wilberforce, I believe is on the right. It's hard to tell because they all wear powdered wigs back then. You're gonna see a lot of wigs this morning. I'm just warning you.

I mentioned this because I wonder if there's anyone here who can relate to that story because you're thinking about doing what William Wilberforce did. You want to quit your job because it's so evil. Or maybe you want to walk away from your involvement in the community because it's so sinful. And if that's the case, I want to let you know, I understand. I mean, I really get that. But if this man's life teaches us anything, it's that your first response should not be to do that. As a Christian, your first response should be to act. That's how the nation changes. It doesn't change as everybody leaves. It happens as people stay and share the good news of Jesus Christ with a lost and dying world. Amen.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning; we're going to look at four periods of William Wilberforce's life. There's William Wilberforce there as an older man. Four periods of William Wilberforce's life if you just want to track along with this here, we're going to walk through from his birth all the way up until his death.

The first one is his early years. This covers the year 1759 to 1779, his birth right up through his time in college. And in order to talk about this, I need to back up a little bit and tell you what was going on in the world that William Wilberforce lived in so you can get a picture of what this was like. It was a very different world from where we live. It wasn't just the wigs. It was other things, too, that made it unusual. Because William Wilberforce lived during what has been now referred to as the Great Awakening. You remember that we talked about that several months ago in this series. It was a time when the Lord brought revival to everyone in the English-speaking world.

In Psalm 85:6 the Psalmist prays, “Will you not yourself, revive us again, oh, Lord, that your people may rejoice in you?” And this is a time when God did that for the people in England and the American colonies. He began to reinvigorate the church by bringing thousands of souls into it at once, through the work of a man named George Whitfield.

He was considered to be the greatest itinerant evangelist the world has ever known. He crossed the Atlantic Ocean by ship 13 times to bring the Word of God from England to America, each time taking months and putting his life on the line. Ships often wrecked at the time due to storms. He was the son of a bar owner in England who was converted when he heard the gospel. And he started to preach. And by preach, I mean, this guy preached. He lit the world on fire. He gave us, some consider, 18,000 sermons. And when you add up the other follow up messages that he did, the number comes to about 30,000 messages in 30 years.

That's almost unheard of. Nobody had ever done anything like it because the way it worked is that George Whitfield would just show up in a field and start preaching. And he would just come into an area and start telling people about Jesus and the crowds would form. There wouldn't be music, there wouldn't be microphones, he certainly didn't have a PowerPoint. And life in England would just come to a standstill; people would close their bars. They would shut up their stores, they would leave the plows in the field and just go hear him, which made the poor people happy. Poor people liked him because he gave them grace and mercy in the kindness of Christ. And the rich people hated him because he told them they were no better than the poor. Imagine that. You can say that today. Everybody goes, “Yeah, I get that.” That's a big deal in the 1700's. You didn't talk like that back then.

And this is where William Wilberforce comes into the picture because he was rich. Which means that his family was at odds with what George Whitfield was doing. They found the whole thing offensive.

Just to introduce him to you. This is William Wilberforce as a child. He was born on August 24, 1759, in the city of Hull, England to a family of sea merchants. They made their living on the ocean. The city of Hull is located on the eastern side of England right next to the North Sea. So his father made a fortune buying and selling goods from the traffic that came through there off of the water. This is William as a little boy. And as you can see, he's a nice-looking kid with a thoughtful expression and he looks mischievous. Now maybe you don't see that, but I think every little boy looks mischievous personally. I'm looking at him thinking, “Okay, what did you break?” But maybe not. He did like practical jokes.

This is the house he grew up in in the city of Hull. It's a museum now. It doesn't look very nice, but it's rundown today. But in the 18th century it was a very opulent place that was used to entertain the most important people in the area because the home was located on the waterfront. A picture of the waterfront of Hull right now. And so people would come in and out of their own business; and every time they did, if they were a distinguished guest, they would stop by the Wilberforce home, and they would pay a visit and have a dinner party and they would meet little William. They put him into high society at a very

young age; he was constantly the center of attention, which seems like a nice thing. But the problem was, he never heard the gospel because the rich and his parents and those in high society despised the Great Awakening. They wouldn't have anything to do with it, which would have caused him to grow up with no awareness of his spiritual condition at all.

If it were not for the fact that in God's providence, one summer, his parents let him stay with his aunt and uncle, who unbeknownst to them had gotten converted through Whitfield's ministry and at the providence of God, they'd gotten saved. While he was there, they invited him to attend what has been referred to as Whitfield's parlor preaching, where he would show up in someone's home and preach to the people in the parlor. He would just walk through the door unannounced and start giving a sermon; I like this guy. It's a pretty radical thing to do because the parlor was used for other things back then, like gossip. It was the place where people would go into someone's home and talk about all the wicked secret stuff that happened in the town. But George Whitfield turned it on its head, and he started talking about Christ there to these people, which had a major impact on William. He had never seen anyone do something like that; he'd never heard someone talk about God and His wrath and the judgment that was to come, and His love and His mercy and His grace and His Son who went to the cross to pay for our sins and died and resurrected that the world could have new life in Him. And as he started hearing these things, it was changing his mind on the subject of religion.

And a letter to his brother that we still have. He explained the change in him this way. When he said,

“I have often accompanied my aunt and uncle to church. Under their influence my mind has been much impressed by the subject of religion because I cannot get it out of my thoughts. I do not know why mother and father are so hostile towards this way of thinking.”

They were so hostile, by the way that his grandfather said, if anybody converts to Whitfield, or Methodism, the Methodist movement was starting at the time, I will write them out of my will. He said,

These Christian people do not deserve to be treated this way as if they are second-class citizens. What they are telling me about Jesus is so important that I feel like I have never experienced anything like it before in my whole life. I truly love it because I feel like it is showing me what I was created for.”

Can we all say amen to that? Isn't it neat to hear those words from a young boy? I don't know about you, but I read something like this, and I get excited because it looks like he's about to get saved. And it sounds like William Wilberforce is on the cusp of conversion, and he probably was, in a sense, it seems like he was about to give his life to Christ. The issue is that his parents heard that he was talking like this, his brother took that letter and handed it to his mom and dad. And they immediately shut the whole thing down. They stepped in when they realize what his aunt and uncle were doing, putting him under

the influence of George Whitfield. And they wrote them a scathing letter in which they threatened them, and they came to their house and picked him up.

Whereby for the next 10 years of his life, he would follow a very different path. I wonder sometimes how many young people are being influenced by the gospel and they're getting ready to get their life to Christ until their worldly parents step in and do this. They want to go in the mission field, they want to go to Bible college, they want to serve the Lord some way, and their mom and dad says, "Knock it off."

That's what they were doing. Instead of letting them go to church, now they start letting him go to parties and drinking and gambling with them. That's what the wealthy people did in Victorian 18th century England. Instead of talking with them about God and His wrath and the cross. As he came of age, they started letting him stay up all night and dancing and playing cards and going to balls until the wee hours of the morning. That's how the world operated at this day and age and to the point that when he enters Cambridge at the age of 17, by his own words, he said he was spiritually ruined. He had become a reckless, thoughtless, foolish, irresponsible young man who wouldn't go to class. He didn't study. He spent all his time doing nothing but goofing off, which would have caused him to throw his life away. He was about to flunk out if it were not for several friends that he met at this time who encouraged him to get his act together.

Again, you're watching the providence of God work in this man's life. First it worked through his uncle and aunt, now it's going to work through some lost friends. But they were lost friends who just had their head on her shoulders a little better than he did. Let me introduce you to a few of them. We won't say a lot about these guys.

One of them is a man named William Pitt. He would later become the Prime Minister of England. In other words, he would lead the nation while William Wilberforce served in Parliament. This is how God is lining his life up here. The two of them were close, Wilberforce said they were thickest thieves. They were so close that William Wilberforce almost shot him one time when they were out hunting because he mistook him for some quail. Can you imagine almost shooting the future Prime Minister of England because you made that kind of mistake? William Pitt said the only thing that saved his life was that William Wilberforce couldn't hit a quail, even if it was as big as he was. He was an awful shot, very clumsy with a gun; he had terrible eyesight.

Another person he became close to was a man named Edward Christian. Edward Christian was a famous judge and law professor at the time. The significance to him is that when William Wilberforce starts fighting slavery, he's going to have men like this who can help him navigate the law. This is somebody he could go see anytime you had a question about that.

Also, Gerard Edwards was another friend of his who came from one of the wealthiest families in England. He would finance William Wilberforce his political endeavors.

But the point is that each of these people played a major part in the way he would turn out after college. They realized pretty quickly that William Wilberforce was born to be a politician. This is Wilberforce in college. I didn't say anything about this earlier. But he was not much to look at physically speaking. He was a very small man; he was five foot three and weighed less than 100 pounds soaking wet. On behalf of all short people, I want to say we're very proud of William Wilberforce. So he didn't make a good impression when you saw him. But when you talked to him, he changed your mind because there was something about his personality that would draw people in. And which he did at Cambridge and his friends saw that and they encouraged him to pursue a path in the government. The way the government worked back then was that it was led by the wealthier classes. So if you went to a school like Cambridge, you were expected to have some part to play in the future of the country. Whether you were drunk or not, didn't matter whether you went to class or not, they didn't care. The only thing they cared is that you came from the upper class of society, which is what Wilberforce did.

And so they all encouraged him to consider politics, which brings us to the next period of his life, and that is his entrance into politics. This is the next six years, from 1780 to 1786 right up to his conversion. William Wilberforce would be converted to faith in Christ, and he would come to know the Lord as his Savior, but it would take a little while.

Now, I got to explain what this next stage was like because it's important to see sort of what was going on here. We got to get technical for just a moment to talk about how the government was set up in England in the 1700's. But at the time William Wilberforce entered politics, England had become what is known as a limited monarchy. They were led by a king or a monarch, but he had limited powers. He couldn't just do whatever he wanted. He had to work alongside a body called parliament. You can see all this on one side of the chart; their parliament comes from a French word that means to talk, isn't that fitting? It's a group of men who were elected by the people to talk through the nation's problems along with the king and find a way to resolve them. And parliament was divided into two houses: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The Commons was elected by the common people. The Lords was elected by the king. And William Wilberforce served in the House of Commons. It doesn't mean he was common; he was not. He was a highbrow society, but he was voted in by them.

He used his amazing powers of persuasion to influence the normal guy in the street. In order to do this, he performed several political stunts, all of which culminated in a big ox roast that was held in honour of his 21st birthday when he cooked an 800 pound bull on an 18 foot spit, and he left it and then, here's the politician in him, he left it cooking for 29 hours out in the open in a town square of Hull so people could pass by and say, "What's that?" And someone would say, "Well, that's William Wilberforce. His bull is cooking for his 21st birthday." And they would say, "How nice. I like him. Let's vote for him." And it worked. Politics has not changed in 300 years. In fact, he received so many votes that he won by a landslide; nobody came close to him.

And when he did, it catapulted him into a different sphere of society. This is when his life changes in a professional way because he started working in a place like this. This is a picture of the palace of Westminster where the government of England meets in London. It's a picture of today, but can you imagine starting to work in a building like that when you're 21 years old? Right out of college? I think most people would have a nervous breakdown. If they did that. It would be too much, but not William Wilberforce. The whole thing was right up his alley; he loved it. The inside was no less impressive, because this is a painting of Parliament, the House of Commons anyway. And as you can tell on the portrait, they're trying to show you that the who's who of England is there. This is the cream of the crop. Some of the men in this picture would have been personal friends of the king. Others of them would have been related to him by birth. So they would have titles like "Lord this" and "Lord that" and "Duke this" and "Duke that," and "Sir this" and "Sir that." And they would bow to each other, and so forth and so on. Some of them had been knighted for services to the country, others were receiving military honors, because the Revolutionary War with America was underway. And some of them in a parliament were out on the battlefield, winning victory and glory for themselves, which would have again been daunting for a normal person to enter into this. But William Wilberforce just wasn't normal. As a five-foot three little shrimp of a man, he enters into this place. He was called a shrimp who talked like a whale.

He took to it all very well, which is why when you study the history books, this period of his life doesn't get much notoriety. Because biographers say that he didn't stick out. On the contrary, he acted just like everybody else did. So this is a very quiet period of his life for a little while. They partied, so he partied. This is a picture of a party from this time. They socialized, so he socialized. And they drank and gambled and frittered their time away, going to balls late into the night, and so forth; and so he does that too.

Until something starts to change in him. He couldn't really explain it all his life, he couldn't really put his finger on what it was other than just the work of the Holy Spirit. But all of a sudden, out of nowhere, he begins to lose interest in these things. You guys have done that before, haven't you? All the partying started getting old. And as time goes on all the balls and gambling and dancing, just made him nauseous. He would start to go to one of these events, and he would recoil at what he saw there. And he would enter into some of these places where they're doing these things, and he would leave early because it started making him sick, which caused problems in his career. Because at this time, the way to get ahead in politics was to go to the parties. If you didn't do that you didn't move forward in your role in the government. But the issue was the Lord was getting a hold of him, He was coming under conviction of sin. He said this, he says,

"It is not so much the fear of punishment that I was affected by although that is part of it as much as the sense of wasting my life because I was pursuing a course of madness. What was it all for? Why was I working so hard? To win another vote? I already had those. To gain another supporter? I had plenty of them too. To find another friend? I had lots of friends, but it wasn't

helping me because, I knew that if I were to die in that state, I would go to the place of eternal torment because I was in torment then. Hell would be a very suitable place for me to go to because I already belonged there and I knew it.”

This event punched him into a depression. For the next several months of his life, he was bedridden in a state of despair until someone reached out and gave him a copy of a book called *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. It's amazing how just a little book can change your life. It was written by a man named Philip Doddridge. He was an English pastor who lived a few years before Wilberforce and the point of the book is simple. It's just that no one is saved by being a good person. You remember that? He heard that already under George Whitfield. You don't go to heaven just because you're English, or British, or from the high society; you have to trust in Christ, put your faith in the cross, you need to be born again. He had listened to that at his aunt and uncle's house years before, but he'd forgotten it. He'd gotten distracted by other things. And now the Lord was bringing it back to him in His grace and mercy?

Isn't it amazing God does that for us? There's times where the Lord in His kindness, He doesn't just tell you something once. He tells you again. And He doesn't just do it when you're a young man at the age of 10, or 11, or 12, He circles back around, and He tells you when you're 26. Because God is this kind of God. He is slow to anger, abounding in love and mercy. He's gracious. And all this had a major impact on him.

Another thing that helped him get through this time was the conversation that he had with John Newton. I mentioned that a moment ago. But I do want to say some more about this. John Newton was the leading Christian figure in London at the time. And he's important in this whole story because he was a sailor who got in trouble when he abandoned ship on an island somewhere in the Atlantic. And when he was caught by his captain, he was punished by forcing to work on a vessel that sold slaves. In other words, he became a slave trader. The author of *Amazing Grace* was a converted slave trader. Talking about *Amazing Grace*. It bothered him so much at what happened on the ship. He said the slaves were treated horribly. But he said, even the sailors themselves became demonic in order to punish them like they did. And it threw him into a depression. He was almost suicidal until someone told him the gospel when he got to shore. And he believed, which eventually led him to become a pastor in the Church of England. And that's where William Wilberforce runs into him.

He sought him out to help him with his predicament, and John Newton told him, he said, “It's a blessing to meet someone,” he was kind of amazed. He said, “It's a blessing to meet someone who is becoming a Christian and a member of parliament because the two things almost never go together. But when they do, it's amazing because a man like that can change the world.” So he said, “I would encourage you, William Wilberforce to do that. Go change the world.”

In fact, John Newton would tell him, “If you want to know where to change the world, I would tell you to do it in a slave trade because who else is going to do it? Because I can't do it. I'm a pastor; they won't

listen to me in Parliament. The slaves can't do it; they're slaves. The guy in the street can't help them; those rich and powerful rulers of government, they're not going to give them their ear. But you can. God has put you in a place where you can help the helpless and be a voice for those who have no voice. Will you do it?" And the rest is history, because William Wilberforce said yes.

And that takes you to another period of his life, and if I get a little motional, here, please forgive me, but some of this stuff is going to be really sad. Not sad because of the outcome, just sad because of the state of the world at the time. But the next period of his life was his fight in the slave trade. This battle that he agreed to undertake would last for 20 years, from 1786 until 1806. That's how long it took them to outlaw slavery in the British Empire: two decades.

And this is another part of the outline we've got to explain some because you can't really follow what William Wilberforce was doing in this department until you understand what slavery was like at this point in history because the English did not have slaves on British soil. Now the people in the American colonies did; if you were to visit an American colony in the 1700s, you could go to a plantation, and you would see slaves there. But if you went to England, London, Birmingham City of Hall, you would not find them there. They never had them living amongst them because they thought they were too civilized for that. So what they would do is they would keep the slaves in another part of the world that was known as the West Indies. Today, it's called the Caribbean. It's a group of islands that are located somewhere out in the Atlantic between the continents of North and South America. This is where the countries of Jamaica and Haiti and the Dominican Republic are today. The reason the area was so important to the British is because it was used to grow sugar, which had become very popular among the British. It was so popular that it was estimated that they exported over a million tons of sugar during this era all on ships. And they took no less than half a million slaves to do it.

And in order to get these people, they created what has been referred to as the Transatlantic slave route. It was a triangular route that stretched for thousands of miles from England to Africa, to the West Indies and back again. And the way it was set up on the first leg of the journey, the English merchants would take goods to Africa in order to exchange them for slaves. And then they would take these people and carry them across the Atlantic Ocean to the West Indies, where they were sold for goods like sugar, cotton, tobacco, that type of thing. And all that was loaded onto the ships, and they would sail back to England and drop them off and then repeat the whole process again, which was very profitable. The slave traders made a lot of money. I read somewhere that said that a typical slave could be sold for something like \$25,000 in a modern currency.

But it was also a very ugly business because the average life of a slave was very short. If they made it off the ship, they were expected to live for about five or six years before they died because they were worked to death. But sometimes as many as one third of them never made it off the ship. They would die on the voyage because the ship's conditions were barbaric.

And the problem was the people of England never saw any of it. This is the issue. They had no idea. Whenever they talked to a slave owner in England, they were told the slaves are doing fine. And then when they would meet one of these people, a lot of them worked in Parliament, they were told they did the slaves could not be happier. They have three meals a day, they have clothes, they have medical attention, and so forth, which is just a lie.

And so to fight this, William Wilberforce and several friends step in and try to stop it. They did several things.

One thing they did was to begin a major public relations campaign to expose what was happening on the ships. They used the press. Christians can use the press for good things. Oftentimes, the Press Television, newspapers, social media is used for bad things. It can be used for good. They believed that if the English people knew what was happening, they would stop this and so they started printing eyewitness accounts of the slave ships in newspapers. This one came from a man named Alexander Falconbridge. He served as a doctor on one of these vessels in 1788. And he said that this is what he saw on board a slave vessel. He said,

The male slaves on being brought aboard the ship are immediately fastened together, two and two, by handcuffs on their wrists and irons riveted on their legs. They are frequently stowed so close as to admit no other position than lying on their sides. Nor will the height between decks, unless directly under the grating, permit the indulgence of erect postures.

Also, in this part of the ship are placed three or four large buckets of a conical form nearly two feet in diameter which the slaves can use as a lavatory. It often happens that those who are placed at a distance from the buckets, in endeavoring to get to them, tumble over their companions, in consequence of their being shackled together ... In this distressed situation, unable to proceed and prevented from getting to the buckets, they desist from the attempt which causes fresh boils to break out on their skin and tends to render the condition of the wretches still more uncomfortable.

However, all of this might be tolerable if the slaves would have access to fresh air once the voyage begins but they are not since their position is below deck where the ocean breeze cannot get to them... The fresh air being thus excluded, the rooms soon grow intolerably hot. The confined air, rendered noxious by the sweat from their bodies soon produces fevers which generally carry off a great number of them to the grave...

But the excessive heat was still not the only thing that rendered their situation intolerable because the floor of their rooms was so covered with the blood and mucus which had proceeded from their misery that it resembled a slaughter-house. It is not in the power of the human imagination to picture a situation more dreadful or disgusting.

Once while visiting them, in a quarter of an hour I was so overcome with the heat, stench and foul air that I nearly fainted and it was only with assistance that I could get back onto the main deck. The consequence was that I soon fell sick of the same disorder that they had from which I did not recover for several months.

Now, when you read that, let me just ask you the question, what kind of effect does that have on you? It makes you mad, doesn't it? How do you feel when you hear that? It should make you angry. If you have a heart, you should be irate. And what kind of effect do you think it had on the English people who were being told that the slaves could not be happier? They were fine. They've got three meals a day and medical attention. They couldn't stand it. That's why William Wilberforce did it. It was so the people would be snapped out of their apathy. And they would start to resist what was happening along the same lines.

He also put pictures in the newspaper that looks like this one. This is an artist's rendition of a slave ship that he saw in the 18th century. It was created by a man named Thomas Clarkson who had really bought into Wilberforce's idea of abolition, and he took it upon himself to personally investigate what was happening on the vessels. The slave owners did not want English people getting on the ships. They tried to keep them sort of out of the picture. But Thomas Clarkson found a way to get on and he recorded what he saw, and he confirmed what Alexander Falconbridge said, that the slaves were crammed together, all those dots are human bodies. If you zoom in closer, they look like this. This is what caused the deaths to occur. They were put on board the vessel tighter than any animal would be.

And it served the cause of abolition as well because it was said this drawing, more than anything else, helped to capture the nation's attention and start mobilizing them into action. Our PowerPoints acting up a little bit here; these pictures are supposed to be a little darker. Wilberforce didn't stop there either. After printing these pictures in the paper, putting out the eyewitness accounts, he knew that would not be enough to stop the slave trade. You can't just change a law by going to the press; you've got to speak out in Parliament.

And so that's what he does next. He had to go slowly at first, because he knew there were a lot of men in government who were favourable to the idea of slavery. In fact, they were making a lot of money off of slavery. So he had to be smart about it. So before he even makes one speech, he puts together an 850-page report to give to his fellow politicians. It had things like these pictures and accounts and whatnot. And when he was ready on April of 1789, he presents a bill before Parliament to put an end to the institution of slavery. And they reject it. They don't approve of it. So he comes back the next year and does it again and gets rejected again. Then he comes back the next year and does it again. Then he comes back the next year and does it again. Then he comes back the next year and does it again for 20 years. I don't know about you guys, but it takes some kind of stubbornness to do that. He presented more than 30 bills before the House of Commons, all of them were turned down. Not one of them was passed.

But here's his take on it. This is what he said about why he acted this way. He said “You may choose to look the other way, but you can no longer say you did not know because I won't let you. Great indeed are our opportunities for good in the British Empire, but also great as our responsibility to use them. And with this in mind, we have to stop the practice of buying and selling human flesh.”

It takes you to another thing he did to fight the slave trade, and that was to maintain a long-term perspective. He had to be in it for the long haul because he knew that the leaders of government were not going to give this up easily. And they were not going to overturn this wicked enterprise overnight. He had to be patient, he had to be diligent, he had to just keep chipping away because he saw this as a war and not a battle. This was not going to be defeated in one conversation, one bill, one law. It was going to take law after law after law.

It caused him to get very creative. He began to think if I can't get the government's attention one way, maybe I can do it another way. And if I can't get them to stop like this, maybe I can get him to stop like that. So when he realized his speeches were not getting through, he began to do some interesting things. One thing he did was to hold a dinner party for several prominent politicians and their families by the waterfront, and he arranged for a slave ship to sail by. It didn't have slaves in it from my understanding. But just the condition of the vessel made these people nauseous. It interrupted their fancy dinner party. But he did that, so the next time they would vote, it would be in their minds. He also arranged for a group of freed slaves to set up their own colony in Sierra Leone, Africa. So they could report on it and tell the nation about the progress. Because the people of England were being told the slaves could not govern themselves there; they weren't able to do that. And Wilberforce showed them that's not true. These people are perfectly capable of taking care of their own lives if we would leave them alone. He also introduced them to some former slaves or in high society, so that people could talk to them and get to know them and see them as real people instead of their personal property, which began to work because over time, the tide of opinion began to change in England. Because he resolved he was not going to get discouraged and quit at the first sign of trouble.

I was talking to someone the other day, a Christian who's involved in local politics here in Chilliwack. And he told me, you have to do the same thing now. You can't go into every meeting with the LGBTQ community, saying, “I'm going to quit at the first sign of trouble.” And you can't go into every conversation with the transgender movement, telling yourself, “I'm gonna give up the first time I'm rejected. You have to be willing to hang in there. And if it doesn't work this way, you try it this way. And if it's not gonna, they're not gonna listen to you like this, maybe you do it like that. But you persevere.”

I think if the church is failing in anything today in Canada, in the area of its impact on the government, it's this area, we just give up too easily. We come across one problem and we quit. We face one issue with one of these groups, and we throw our hands up in the air and say, “Oh, no, it's over.” Can you imagine if William Wilberforce did that? I mean, for all we know, there could still be slaves in England.

People could still be buying and selling them. Thankfully, he was more resilient. He's a good example for us to follow. There is a time to be stubborn as a Christian. And there are moments in history when God calls us to put our foot down and say like Martin Luther, "Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me, Amen."

And that brings it to one more period in his life, and this is just his final days. These are the years 1807 to 1833 when he dies. William Wilberforce would pass away in Hull England at the age of 73, surrounded by family and friends. But before he does, slavery was finally outlawed in the British Empire. It happened at a time when his body was about broken down due to all the stress he was under. Even though he was in his 40s when the slave trade was outlawed, the battle had taken its toll on him. He was partially deaf in one ear. His vision had degenerated so badly in his eyes that somebody had to read to him at night; he couldn't read by candlelight. And he had developed ulcers in his stomach to the point that he had to take opium for them, which he was not addicted to, fortunately, but it made him groggy. But he thought that the whole thing was worth it in the end. He also had some condition of his spine that made his head stoop into his shoulder. So not only was he five foot three, but he probably walked at about five foot one.

But he thought it was worth it because on January 2nd, 1807, in the first meeting of the new year, a bill was read to the House of Commons that was simply entitled "For the Abolition of the Slave Trade." That was just the title of the bill. It came with a picture of a man on it who was on his knees and chains, and a slogan hanging over it that said, "Am I not a man and a brother?" It was not an unusual bill. It was just like all the other ones he had passed before. The only difference is at this time, it was read by the new prime minister named William Grenville instead of William Wilberforce to show his support. He was close friends with William Pitt; for whatever reason, William Pitt would never read the bills.

But when he came out of office, William Grenville stepped in, and he could not have come off stronger on this. He was very passionate about the horrors of slavery. And he said this before the House of Commons. William Grenville said, "Should we endure this detestable traffic to be continued? I say no, because by this one bill, we can diffuse a measure of happiness among millions now in existence. And we can bring about a degree of joy to millions not yet born. So why would we not do this? How can we call ourselves the leaders of the civilized world while we allow this uncivilized practice to take place? I call upon you the Members of this House to put an end to the institution of slavery once and for all and without delay." And when he said those words in true parliamentary fashion, the House of Commons said, "Okay, let's talk about it." So they did, they talked from the House floor from eight o'clock at night to five o'clock in the morning for nine hours, at which time the bill passed, 100 votes to 36.

And the House of Commons did something they've rarely ever done in their history. These are very formal people. They don't get excited over much in public not supposed to anyway, but they stood up on their feet, and they burst into applause for this tiny little man named William Wilberforce. This stubborn, obstinate, rich, proud, greedy, vain to face politicians gave three cheers for this broken-down

little guy. Which shocked him so much that he in his turn broke down and wept. Because it was like all the years of pain just came out of him. He put his head into his hands, and he started crying and he couldn't stop for several minutes. And when he got home in typical Wilberforce fashion, he sarcastically said to a friend. "Well, Henry, that's that. What do you want to abolish now." But joking aside, it was a historic moment for the country.

One historian said, "It was one of the few times in history when a government voluntarily gave up something that made them millions of dollars for nothing but the sheer virtue of it. They just did it because it was the right thing to do." And Wilberforce was the person who made it happen.

He never let them forget about the horrors of slavery. Even though they pushed it aside, and they tried to ignore it. And they said it's happening way over there. He said, "It doesn't matter where it's happening. It's happening under your flag. You need to stop it." It's because of this that the people started referring to him as the conscience of the nation, which might be the greatest compliment he ever received. Isn't that what a Christian is supposed to be? The conscience of the nation? Didn't Christ call us to do this? To remind people of what is right and wrong according to the law of God so we can preach the gospel to them. That's what he did more than any man in his generation.

He wrote a book about this; you can get a copy of it. The title is there at this bottom of the middle of the screen there. And he said this in the book, he said, "Let it never be said I was silent when people needed me. Is it not the great end of the Christian religion to make us more compassionate toward the suffering of others? That's all I sought to do by fighting the slave trade. I just wanted to show mercy to my fellow man and do unto him as I would want him to do unto me."

For the rest of his days, William Wilberforce never thought he did anything special when he achieved this major victory and the nation of England, never bragged about it, never boasted because he just thought he was doing what every Christian is supposed to do, just practicing the golden rule.

He did this in other ways as well by the way. Slavery was not the only thing he tried to change in the British Empire. At the time of his death, it was found there were 10 other charities he was actively involved in all the way up until the moment he passed away. Let me just read them to you. I want you to see these titles, this is how they would name things in the 18th century. You wouldn't call them this today. They're very long. But here's the ministries that he started.

- The Society for the Support of the Deaf and Dumb Children of the Poor
- The Society for Increasing the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor
- The Institution for the Relief of the Poor City of London and the Parts Adjacent
- The Society for the Relief of the Industrious Poor
- The British National Endeavour for the Orphans of Soldiers and Sailors

- The Naval Asylum for the Support of the Orphans and Children of British Sailors and Marines (remember, he lives on the water in Hull)
- The Asylum House of Refuge for the Reception of Orphaned Girls the Locations of Whose Parents Cannot be Found
- The Institution for the Protection of Young Girls
- The Friendly Female Society for the Relief of Poor, Infirm, Aged Widows and Single Women of Good Character Who have Seen Better Days

Now, I don't know who named that last one, but I think they need to have a long talking to. I tried to abbreviate that; there's no way to put that in any other way.

He also founded several Bible studies, Bible translation groups. He tried to free people in the nation of Haiti, he tried to give regulations on what was happening in India at the time because the British were in India, and they were abusing people there just as much maybe in other places.

But I mentioned all this to go back to the question we started with at the beginning of the sermon here, and that is can a Christian have an impact on the government? Absolutely. Can we do anything to change it? Yes, you can.

Even though the church and state are supposed to be separate, even though you render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's, that doesn't mean you have no influence at all on the lost and dying world. You have to. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." That means that the world has no other light; you're it. And He said, "You're the salt of the earth." You're not becoming salt, you already are salt. You just need to act that way and start being salty.

You may say, "Well, I'd like to do that Pastor Jeremy, but I don't know how. I don't have the gifts that William Wilberforce had." And that's true. I'm guessing most of you do not have the political connections he had or the money, but you are taller than him. You have that going for you. I say that a little tongue in cheek, but you have better health; he had his struggles too. The point is you want to take what God has given you whatever gifts they are, and just use it. That's all he did.

You may say, "Well, you don't understand, you know, I'd like to do that, but this world is so much darker than his world was." I don't know about that. I mean, this world is dark and it's awful, but we're not putting people on slave ships and transporting them now from India to England or England or wherever and back and forth. Their world was terribly wicked. His life serve as a reminder that what's ever going on in the world, no matter what it is, you go be a light for the gospel. That's how the world changes. It doesn't change as everyone leaves; it changes as we stay and make a difference.

Next week, Kevin Laser is going to be preaching for us. We'll be talking about Psalm 86. And the week after that, I'm going to start a series that will take us right up into Christmas, on the return of Christ. I've

had several people tell me during the series that some of this material, this material on government is helpful but it can be discouraging at times. Because it makes you wonder, "is there any hope? Will it ever get better than this in this world?" And the answer is a yes, it will. It'll get better when Christ returns. The Bible says when He returns, He will set up a perfect government with a perfect King and a perfect system of laws and He will rule over himself. And we'll talk about that the next time or two weeks when we start this new series. So please come back and join us for that.

For this week. I really can't end without telling you one more story about William Wilberforce. I've really enjoyed studying his life. I could talk about him all day long. But in one of his biographies, the story was told at the time, he was very discouraged in the flight fight over slavery. And he wondered if there was any hope. There's actually a famous statue that was supposed to depict this phase of his life. It's located outside of his home in Hull England. It looks like this. If you look close enough, you can even Google this and see it online, but you can see the marks of exhaustion on his face, and the sorrow that he's experiencing. So he reached out to John Wesley, who was a friend of his and he asked for his advice. And John Wesley wrote back, and he said, "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out with anxiety. But if God before you, who can be against you. Do not be discouraged for the opposite opposition you're facing. Are all these men stronger than God? No. So press on William Wilberforce."

Friends, I will tell you the same thing today. This world is wicked. And as you can all tell, North America is plunging more and more into chaos and darkness. But if God is for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? Watch the news. Tell me if the horrible things happening in Israel. Is that stronger than God? Watch parliament, listen to them talk, hear the crazy things that they say. Is that stronger than God? It's not. So press on. And you can use William Wilberforce as an example to encourage you along the way.

Let's go to the Lord in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we are humbled at what we've studied this morning. At least I feel that way because when I look at a life like this, I think what have I ever done for you? Father, thank You that throughout church history, you given us people who've run the race before us, they've fought the good fight. And as they've done that, they've shown us the kind of powerful, amazing God that you are. Before this man was born, the civilized world, quote, unquote, sold human slaves. When he died, they had stopped because of your work through his life.

Father, I don't know what all You're calling all of us to this morning, but I know You're calling all of us to make a difference in whatever way that we can, in our jobs, in our homes, in our families, in our neighborhood. Lord, maybe You're calling some people here to make a difference in government, I don't know. But Father, I pray that all these things would be an encouragement for us. To do something for Your name. We need to act. You've called us to do that, Lord.

And we do pray for what we see happening in the nation of Canada today. We pray for our leaders, many of them are so lost that the things they talk about are just insane. But we know that there are believers there as well; we lift them up to You this morning. We pray that their light would shine brightly in the halls of parliament, in Ottawa, wherever they are.

For those who are lost, we pray that they would come to saving faith in Christ, and they would begin to repent of what they're doing. But in all these things, Father, we don't want to close this series on any kind of note of despair. The church is a triumphant church, and it is victorious. And You've said that the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. She will always stand. We want to close thinking those thoughts.

So Father, as we go from this place, Lord, would You be glorified as we enjoy our fellowship next door, having a meal together. But would the fellowship be tinged with a note of joy and victory at what You've called us to be, at what You've done in our lives and Lord, as we look forward to the future at the victory that is to come and Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.