

CHRIST COVENANT CHURCH

Sermon Transcript

Dr. Peter Williams

2 Timothy 1-19

Suffering to Spread the Word – Remembering William Tyndale

Date of Sermon: 03-02-2025 AM

Well good morning. It's a huge privilege to be among you. Let us pray.

Lord, we desperately need you. We need you to help us as we look at Your Word, to understand it, to be challenged by it, and to live by it. We want to thank you that you have graciously given us Your Word and we pray that you'll be with us by your Holy Spirit, and that you will speak to us, that every Word would be from you. In Christ's name. Amen.

Well it really is wonderful to be amongst you on this special occasion and to be able to share with you from God's Word from second Timothy and also we're going to be looking at the life of William Tyndale, looking under the title, Suffering to Spread the Word – Remembering William Tyndale, and we're going to be looking a little bit at the apostle Paul and how he suffered. We're going to be looking a little bit at how William Tyndale, the Bible translator, suffered and we're also going to be looking at the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring us salvation, and there will be three points. As we look at this firstly that God's servants are bound, secondly that God's Word is not bound, and thirdly that Christ was bound for our salvation and that we are saved. So let us look at this passage from second Timothy chapter 2 verses 8 through to 10 where we read that remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the offspring of David have preached in my Gospel for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal, but the Word of God is not bound. Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect so that they may obtain the salvation, it is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Now when you look at verse 9 there, you see that Paul says, "I am bound for the Word of God", and that could mean a couple of different things. It could mean it is because people react badly to the Word of God that I got bound. So, if you like people, didn't like the Gospel, and so that's why I got imprisoned and that's entirely correct, but it could also mean something else, namely that Paul has found himself bound in chains in order that the Word of God should spread more. I don't want to argue that that is also what this means and for that we are going to have to have a look at some other passages so hopefully you've got a Bible that you can look at and you'll be able to chase around, and we're gonna have a look at a few different texts.

So, let's go back one chapter to second Timothy and chapter 1. There Paul says to this younger Christian leader in verse 8, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord Jesus nor of me his prisoner." Hmm, that's interesting. Paul is saying that Jesus has prisoners. Hmm. Because you might well have thought that Paul was a prisoner of the Romans, but Paul is saying that he is Jesus Christ's prisoner. You might say, ah yeah but you're overreading it, because what really he is saying that he belongs to Jesus Christ and he is a prisoner. Ya know, he's in prison from the Romans and he belongs to Jesus Christ, and that is absolutely true. But that's not all he said in the phrase; he is saying that he is a prisoner because Jesus Christ has him in prison.

Now I want to argue that by looking at a few other texts and showing you so look over to the Book of Philemon, Philemon or whatever you want to call it, the shortest letter of

Paul and again look at the way that opens. The first verse is Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus literally of Christ Jesus or again in verse 9, well let's start at verse 8. He appeals to Philemon and says in verse 8, "Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required", that means to receive Onesimus the runaway slave as an equal and not as a slave, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you, I Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus. Or most particularly, let's look at Ephesians and I want us to have a deep dive in Ephesians in order to see this. Ephesians and chapter 3:1. For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus. You got that? It is clearly enough in ESV. "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you gentiles" and you wonder how the grammar of Ephesians chapter 3:1 works. Well, it works like this. He begins a sentence and then he interrupts himself. Okay, he interrupts himself for 13 whole verses before he comes back to, for this reason, I bow my knees before the father. So, we need to unpack that because what exactly is he saying when he's a prisoner of Christ Jesus?

Well this is where we need to think of the argument of all of Ephesians and in order to do that I want to start thinking about D-day, okay, I know we're thinking about William Tyndale later, but ya know D-day was when the allied forces liberated northern France and it was the most detailed logistical operation that I can think of because they had to go in and they had to take over these very, very heavily defended beaches with barbed wire and also they had to create landing craft, they had to create pontoons, they had to make a temporary harbor, they had to have things that would somehow deal with the barbed wire, they had to look at all the geology of all the different beaches and they had all of these waves and waves of people coming in over many different days and so on. Logistically it was massive and that's why many of us are very fascinated by it. We like to go to northern France and just try and understand the history and so on. That logistically is massive. Then you come to Ephesians and Ephesians is about the biggest logistical thing ever because it's all about God's plan as announced in chapter 1:10 to have Christ publically displayed as head of all things and to unite all things in heaven and things on earth and it's not just that it took a couple of years to plan and several countries. It's every resource in all of eternity planned to bring this thing together. Oh, and by the way, you who believe are adopted as sons and joint heirs with Christ as part of this big plan. And that's what Ephesians is all about, how God has been planning this with every resource from all eternity.

You then come to Ephesians chapter 2 and it talks about how we who are dead in trespasses and sins were made alive with Christ and then it talks about how there are two sorts of people. There are those who are Israel and those who are not Israel. There are those who have had the law and those who have not and you know when one group has things and the other doesn't that you get tensions and it talks about the enmity that there is between these two groups and then it tells how Christ has got rid of that by abolishing that as he died on the cross and that's the context for chapter 3:1. For this reason I, Paul, for this reason it's because of everything that proceeded in Ephesians chapter 1 and 2, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you gentiles, I'm a prisoner for you guys, okay. Assuming, he goes on, that you've heard of the stewardship, that means the job to do, of God's grace, in a sense a responsibility of God's grace that was given to me for you how the mystery, or let's say, secret plan, okay, they mystery that was made known to me by revelations. I've written briefly, when you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery, the secret plan of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of man in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy prophets and apostles and prophets by the spirits. There was a secret plan from ages past, before the world was made and it's now just got revealed. It got revealed to Paul and this is the mystery.

Verse 6, the mystery is this, the secret that the gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ through the Gospel. Now I want you to imagine you take that secret and you go back in time and you meet with the high priest Aaron from the Old Testament and you say, ya know Aaron, it's God's plan that the people of Israel are going to be one body with others who believe. And he's gonna say, I have a problem with that. We are spending all our time showing how distinct we are. You try and persuade Moses and it doesn't necessarily go very well because it was a secret plan, you see, that's been hidden even from such people as Aaron and Moses and has now been revealed that all along God was gonna make gentiles part of the same body as those of Israel and that they were gonna be joint heirs and that is just utterly stunning because God's done something bigger than anyone could have imagined. And then Paul goes on and explains about the variegated grace of God which really we might say multicolored grace of God. It's so rich it's a tapestry that's so interesting. That's in verse 10, the manifold wisdom of God. Then he goes on in verse 14 and picks up for this reason. Because of this reason God's eternal plan, making Christ head of all things, making those who are his children who come to him, adopted as sons. Because of all that, I, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, verse 14, bow my knees before the Father.

Now think about your earthly father, okay. When was the last time you knelt to him or maybe he's passed away, did you ever kneel down to him in except in humor? Kneel down before your earthly father. You don't normally do that. Who might you kneel before, I know you're not monarchies here, but you know, think about sort of a historical context, someone might have knelt before a monarch in the past but now we have Paul saying that he kneels before the father, and I want you to notice those two ideas together. Kneeling because he is the sovereign of all and has this grand plan, he is king of everything and he is your father because he's adopting you as his son. And it's that intimacy and that majesty that come together and then Paul says because of all this big stuff, that's why I pray such a big prayer and you get this big prayer report in Ephesians 3 verses 14 through to 21 and it ends with praying to the God who does more than you can ask or imagine.

Now, how does that relate to William Tyndale and Paul being a prisoner, it's like this, God's doing something bigger through Paul being a prisoner. That's the amazing thing, that God's got this extravaganza of a plan and as part of that Paul is a prisoner. Now let's think about William Tyndale. We don't know much about his life early on. He was single, not very tall, and was spare of body. That's an expression used then which I take to be somewhat thin, but he was a great student and he was a pioneer in Bible translation. Up until his time no one had translated the Bible into modern English. They had done a sort of middle English that was Wycliffe for that being translated from the Latin. Tyndale translated the New Testament from the Greek and is the first person to do so. He also translated Jonah and the first five books of the Old Testament as well as some other things, and then in 1536 he was a martyr and we'll hear more about that. But his New Testament edition came out in 1525 or 1526 depending on how you count it and the years were a bit different back then because they often would begin March the 25th, ya know, as in count nine months back from Christmas and think when Christ was conceived, right.

So, it gets a bit confusing, but it's around this sort of time that we are having a 500th anniversary of Tyndale's New Testament. He was someone who was born in Gloucestershire in the sort of west of England, think Cotswolds, educated in that terrible place called Oxford, but then he actually came over to the wonderful place of

Cambridge, and after being educated he was preaching the Gospel in London and got kicked out in 1524, and so he fled to Germany. He got kicked out for heresy because he was preaching the Gospel. And there in Germany he was moving around from city to city, but he was translating the Bible, and he would translate Bibles and they were very small because they had to be smuggled back into England. Now a lot of the merchants, like businessmen, they could read and so they were hearing these reformation ideas, hearing the Gospel and they were excited by it and so they were helping him smuggle these Bibles often wrapped up in parcels or other things back into England and they were risking a lot. One of his supporters, his biggest sponsor if you like, his major donor Humphrey Monmouth spent time in the Tower of London for what he was doing. So, Tyndale was having a hard time, and his supporters were having a hard time. Every businessman who was smuggling these things back into London, they could be getting into big trouble, and he ended up going to Belgium, to Antwerp, and spent about seven years there, and again working, translating the Bible, but not just doing that. He also every week would reserve two days for himself, hallowed days as well as a Sunday, ya know was the day of worship, namely the Monday when he would go and visit poor men and women who had fled from his own country, England, because of the persecution there, and then on Saturdays he would walk randomly around town and find random people who were poor and he helped out them and, ya know, he lived very, very sparingly himself, but these businessmen were enforcing him and he was able to help these people. But then after being there for a number of years, he was betrayed and imprisoned for a year and a half and then he was executed. So, God's sovereign plan had Paul in prison. That's weird because wasn't Paul about the best guy at spreading Christianity early on, I mean, he was amazing, going round planting churches so why does God have Paul imprisoned for between four and seven years?

Tyndale was the great Bible translator, and he could have gone on to do so much more, why did God have him imprisoned for a year and a half and then cut short, his life cut short. Both Paul and Tyndale martyred, both Paul and Tyndale in prison because God's servants are sometimes bound and that applies to us today. You may be bound, you may be housebound, you may not be able to get out very much because of your health, you may be really limited in what you can do, you may be housebound because you're looking after old people or young people or any people. There are all sorts of reasons why we may not be as mobile as we would want to be. We may be limited in what we can do and that's all part of God's plan because God's in charge and he knows what he's doing. But even though point one God's servants abound, point two the Word of God is not bound. Second Timothy 2:9, "For which I am suffering bound with chains as a criminal, but the Word of God is not bound. There is nothing holding the Word of God back."

I think about a time a few years ago when, in Britain at least, we were very locked down in our houses because of the response to COVID and yet God's Word was spreading, people were coming to faith at that time because God's Word wasn't locked down. Look at Ephesians and look at the end where he describes what his job is. Ephesians chapter 6:20 he talks about the Gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains. What? How can you be an ambassador in chains? Doesn't an ambassador spend their time jetting round. Ambassador has lots of air miles, ya know, that's what an ambassador does. You go to different places, and you do diplomacy. How can you be an ambassador if you're actually chained in one place. It's like being a, like being a stay-at-home globe trotter, you can't do that, or I don't know, delivering delivery trucks online. Ya know, you just can't do that, they actually need to deliver things to actual places. How can Paul be an ambassador for Christ if he cannot get out? How can that happen because Christ knows what he is doing and even when people are constrained like that, he doesn't stop

his word. Look over a Philippians, this is a well-known example of this. Philippians chapter 1, verses 12 through to 14. Paul says, "I want you to know brothers that what has happened to me, being put in prison, has really served to advance the Gospel so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial God and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, have become more bold to preach the Word without fear because every few hours they're changing out the guard, a new set of people chained to Paul or standing near him and guess what, he's got a lot of captive audience and that's really working to get the Gospel out. It's very counterintuitive, isn't it? And then you get to the end of Philippians, and he sort of name drops. Okay, end of Philippians two verses, second to last verse, Ephesians 4:22, and he says, "Lots of people are sending their greetings, especially those of Cesar's household." Ya know, just like, oh yeah the people in the oval office are praying for your sick aunt, I mean, it's like that's what he is doing, okay. He's saying the Gospel is really getting out. Now maybe it wouldn't have got to Cesar's household so quickly if he hadn't been bound. Or think in the book of Acts. That's Paul probably prisoned in Rome writing to the Philippians, but when he had been in Phillipi, remember he and Salas were banged up in prison for a night and then there's an earthquake. They've been singing, praising God that they've been allowed to suffer for his Gospel, and everyone's been listening, then there's an earthquake and the jail keeper thinks that they've all escaped, and they say, no, don't kill yourself which he was planning to do, and he comes to faith and his household. What an amazing thing, it wouldn't have happened if they hadn't been locked up in prison. So, what's God doing having his best evangelist locked up in prison, he's doing evangelism. God knows what he's doing.

Look at Tyndale's life. So, there he is, he's on the continent in Germany and Belgium and he's getting these Bibles smuggled back in and he's got opponents and particularly the Bishop of London. Now he doesn't like these New Testaments coming back in, so guess what he does, he starts buying them up and burning them, but that's no good, is it, except it really did provide a lot of capital to print some more so there was the Bishop of London opposing the New Testament being made and actually providing finance so that more could be printed, you see. So that was something that seemed to go against but actually went for. But one of the most difficult things for Tyndale was that he had finished his translation of the Pentateuch, that first five books of the Bible. He had finished each one of them and he wanted to take them to Hamburg in Germany to get printed and he's on a ship and it gets shipwrecked, and he's got all his papers, everything, it all goes down. Wow, what's that about? Think how hard that must have been for him. They've been laboring under such difficult circumstances and he's like, I don't know what he prayed, but ya know, God why, why have you allowed this to happen, it seems so wrong. We from our perspective now can't know why that happened and that's why when a lot of things happen you can't see a reason, you say oh that's because Cesar's household were coming to faith. But it's interesting that our Bibles that we have today, you've got ESVs in pews, these are sort of a descendant of William Tyndale's Bible. He translated the New Testament and those first five books and some other things and that lead onto other Bibles and it lead onto the King James Bible which lead over a number of years to this Bible we have. And so, I speculate, you know sometimes when you do something for the first time, you don't do it as well as when you do it a repeated time. So even when you lose your work, if you have to recreate that thing, it doesn't necessarily take as long, and given that this was the first time he had been translating the Old Testament and was working from Hebrew which he didn't know as much as some of the other things, maybe God was working something out so that we would have an even better translation now through that. I don't know, but God had his purposes.

But then you come to the end of Tyndale's life. He was betrayed. A man called Henry Phillips who was a good-looking man, courteous, learned, stylish befriended him. Tyndale's host, Thomas Poyntz was a bit suspicious of this man and once warned him that about him, but Tyndale didn't take the warning, he was very trusting guy Tyndale was. He was, ya know, maybe a bit naïve, so naïve in fact that the very day that he was betrayed this guy Phillips conned him out of money. He said he lost his purse and, ya know, can you give me some money and he gave him 40 shillings. Ya know, three weeks wages or so, and in *Foxes Book of Martyrs* it comments this, for it was easy enough to be had of him, it was easy enough to get money from him, for in the wylie subtleness of this world he was simple and unexpert. That's not quite the way we speak nowadays but you get the idea that maybe William Tyndale, great scholar, great translator, made a lot of sacrifices, but a bit naïve. Why did God have this great translator be naïve and he spends over a year and a half in prison, and it was awful. We have only one letter surviving in Tyndale's handwriting. He writes to the big boss over the prison, and he says this, "I entreat your Lordship that by the Lord Jesus if I am to remain here during the winter, you request the procurer, the supplier, to be kind enough to send me from my goods, which he has in his possession, one, a warmer cap. For I suffer extremely from cold in the head being afflicted by a perpetual catarrh which is considerably increased in this cell. Two, a warmer coat also for that which I have is very thin. Three, also, he doesn't use the numbers, I'm giving you the numbers okay, also a piece of cloth to patch my leggings, my overcoat is worn out. Four, my shirts have also worn out. He has a woolen shirt of mine, if you would be kind enough to send it. Five, I also have with him leggings of thicker cloth for putting on above. Six, he also has warmer caps for wearing at night". So, there's daytime caps and nighttime caps. You get the message, he was freezing cold. Now, you know, in the Latin original it is a lot politer than the way I read it now. But that's what he needs. There is God's servant shivering constantly in his prison cell. He then goes on and says, "I wish also for his permission to have a candle in the evening for it's wearisome to sit alone in the dark." So, there you are, you're in Belgium, it's getting towards the winter, the days aren't long. He doesn't have a lot of daylight in which he can work. The man of God is sitting there in the evening on his own and he's bored. You ever been bored? This man of God is bored. He's sitting there and it's just dark, that's it. And then he goes on to his biggest request. "But above all I entreat and beseech your clemency to be urgent with a procurer that he would kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary that I might spend my time with study." Well, every seminarian's heart leaps at that point, doesn't it? But you see this poor man, he doesn't even have the Bible in Hebrew so he can be getting on with translation. You might say, what a waste, but then we find out Foxe's Book of Martyrs that he so preached to those in the prison that the prison ward had reported that if he were not a good Christian, they didn't know who was. Oh, the prison keeper came to faith. The prison keeper's daughter came to faith. Other members of the household came to faith so what looked like a defeat wasn't. Paul in prison looked like a defeat, Tyndale in prison looked a defeat, and the word of the Gospel was spreading.

When we are considering mission and those who are supported, it's possible that we have fixed ideas of success, and we could even put pressure on people who are involved in these ministries to report success along the criteria that we set for them. Yet God can have really unusual ways of getting his Word to go forth. Here we have this man of God ill, in pain, unable to move and God uses his weakness to show his glory. And then at Tyndale's death they tied him to the stake and with fervent zeal and a loud voice, he cried Lord open the eyes of the King of England, then he was strangled by the hangman and burnt after his death at the stake. Three years later the King of England,

Henry VIII, ya know him don't you, ya know, big guy, six wives, not all at the same time, colorful character gives the instruction that Bibles basically based on Tyndale's work, had to be put in every church in England. Oh and, ya know, he also broke up with the Church of Rome because he wanted a divorce. Henry VIII motives weren't exactly very high, they weren't exactly very spiritual, but as a result of that you've got the Anglican church. Now I guess most of you are Presbyterians and I'm an Anglican, but think along the spreading of the Gospel, and this happened through the Anglican church, we had a guy from southern Madagascar with us at Tyndale House a few years ago who is involved in the Anglican church, that he and a friend to baptise 2000 people in one week, okay. There in the Gospel, you think of all the Gospel that has gone out through the Anglican church over time and yet it started because of Henry VIII's selfish motives. Okay. And what happened with that Bible translation, it was called the Great Bible. That fed into the King James Bible which became the most influential Bible translation of all time, which fed into the ESV today.

So, there's Tyndale freezing in his jail with catarrh, I want you to keep that image of him, and then he dies calling with a prayer that the King of England's eyes would be opened and from his sufferings comes Bible translation, the most influential Bible translation eve of Bible translations today. God knew what he was doing. The pain was absolutely real. I can't imagine how awful it would have been for Tyndale in prison, but the pain was temporary and it went on to lead to so much greater things because the Word of God is not bound and even when the King James version was made, it wasn't exactly that King James was a really pious person himself, he was literally trying to do a da yung, to steal the phrase. Yet between this lot, the puritan on the one side and other people in his realm and he wanted to get them together and from that you get this amazing translation because God's Word isn't gonna be derailed by whatever goes on in geopolitics, whatever's going on national level, international level is not gonna be derailed because God knows what he is doing because he's the God of Ephesians, the big eternal plan that brings everything together to make Christ publically head of all things, that those who come to Christ will be adopted as his sons.

And that leads us onto the third point, finally. Christ, that Christ was bound to free us. He who made the heavens, who is infinite, there is no one greater who is omnipresent yet traveled a greater distance from heaven to earth to Bethlehem to take on flesh, that traveled, Paul did or Tyndale did pales in significance compared with the incarnation. Christ in his earthly ministry didn't travel that far, as far as Tyre and Sidon in the north and just a little bit east to the capitalist and down to Egypt, but the word incarnate was even more bound when he allowed himself in Gethsemane to be bound. He didn't resist and when he's accused, he didn't try and answer back and get himself off the charges, he surrendered himself to Roman soldiers who nailed him to the cross. And on the cross he could hardly move and yet he could move, he could have come down, but he didn't, but at a physical level the few inches between the pain on your wrists and the asphyxiation, he was nailed there, but at any moment he could come down because he was the one who had commanded the very tree he was attached to to grow in the first place. He had invented the idea that there would be trees and he was nailed with Roman nails were made of iron with a bit of carbon, he had invented iron, he had invented carbon, everything had come from him, he sustained them, and yet he allowed himself to suffer that and so much more, the spiritual sufferings being cut off from his father, deeper than we can imagine and death when he died could not hold him, he couldn't be bound. He broke forth alive to live forever and so that Word, the Gospel, as he died for our sins suffering so that we could be made right with God and how we have that word to spread. Nothing was going wrong, even when it seemed to be going wrong and all the disciples were ready to abandon him, it was going just according to God's

plan, but you see how the plan was, that Christ would suffer and he said to his followers, take up your cross and follow me. Paul chose suffering. Tyndale chose so much suffering he chose difficulties in life. But whereas both Christ and William Tyndale were betrayed, Tyndale was tricked, Christ was not. He chose, he prayed those 12 disciples knowing full well which one would betray him. So, whereas many of our sufferings in life are not chosen, the amazing thing about our savior Jesus Christ is that he chose them knowing full well what it would be on our behalf, out of love, that we might be reconciled to God. What an amazing thing. So, as we are inspired by William Tyndale and inspired by the example of the apostle Paul, let us be so much more inspired by Christ who did everything for us. Not that we imitate him to get closer to him to earn our way to him, but he has worked all salvation for us.

I'm going to close with the words of a doxology which come from William Tyndale himself, a bit unusual, but I pray it will be a blessing.

The mighty God of Jacob be with you to supplant his enemies and give you the favor of Joseph and the wisdom and spirit of Steven, be with your heart and with your mouth and teach your lips what they shall say and how to answer all things. He is our God, if we despair in ourselves and trust in Him and his is a glory. Amen.

CCCHURCH/pti:ja