

“WHAT DID YOU BIBLE COST YOU?”

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Text for the Sermon: II Peter 1:16-21

Introduction.

Have you ever heard God’s voice? Peter, James and John heard it. What must it have been like up there on that Mount of Transfiguration to hear the booming voice of God? What did it sound like? Deep baritone or bass? Did it have an accent? Did it sound like Charlton Heston or Morgan Freeman or Liam Neeson?

Was it terrifying, did it bring them to their knees? Have you ever heard God’s voice? I have, just this morning in fact, here in our text, the very words of God brought by the Holy Spirit from heaven to the apostle Peter and written down and given to us. God wrote a book.

God wrote a Book.

Think about it, the God who revealed His glory in creation and in our redemption through Jesus Christ wrote a book, a literal actual book made with pen and ink and paper, using letters and words and sentences with grammar and punctuation, in human language. God wrote a book in which He put His Words, His thoughts, His truth.

God condescended to communicate with us creatures using our form of communication. God caused certain men to be carried along by God’s Holy Spirit to speak and write His words to us. “Thus saith the Lord.” Through prophets God gave us the OT and through the apostles and those close to the apostles God gave us the NT.

Then God miraculously caused those divinely inspired books to be preserved and protected and collected into one book, the Holy Bible. It is a truly remarkable book, utterly unique, there is no other book like it. Let me show why God’s book is different.

of.

This one book contains 66 books written over a period of 1600 years in 3 languages by 40 authors of different cultures, backgrounds, education, and occupations, such as kings, peasants, shepherds, doctors, fishermen, tax collectors, and scholars. They wrote all different kinds genres, laws, history, personal testimony, poetry, gospels, letters, prophecy and fantastic revelations and dreams and visions, from a wide variety of locations: wilderness and mountains, deserts and dungeons, palaces and prisons, in exile on islands and in comfort at home.

It was written in different situations, times of war and peace, poverty and prosperity, freedom and slavery. It was written in different moods from heights of joy to the depths of despair.

It has been miraculously preserved for 3500 years from the time of Moses to today, despite countless attempts to destroy it. It has had a worldwide reception and is the world's best seller, translated into more languages than any other book. Nothing else even comes close.

Given this vast variety in its composition it is staggering to consider the complete consistency, unity, harmony, and clarity of so diverse a book. The harmonious agreement of so many different authors on such a widely diverse range of subjects and doctrines is nothing short of mind-boggling. God wrote a book.

It has powerfully transformed lives, and whole communities and nations where Word has been preached. You can actually tell which nations have been influenced by the Bible.

This book is not cleverly devised myths or human inventions, it's nothing short of supernatural. There is no other way to explain what has happened here but that it's a miracle.

If God wrote a book you would expect it to reflect its author and it does, on every page. You would expect it to be a window into the very heart and mind of God. Here it is pages and pages of God, of God's thoughts and God's heart. Over a thousand pages, nearly eight hundred thousand words, every one of them God's words.

The same words that spoke creation into existence, written here breathing life into existence, the power of God for salvation and eternal life.

This is a window through which we can see God, hear God, understand something about God. Its message is a window into the heart and mind of our truly awesome God. No other window opens us up to so much wonder and life-giving truth.

What value would you put on it? What is it worth to you? What does our use of it say about what its value is to us? Do we realize what a treasure we have been given?

What did your Bible cost you?

How is it that we have in our hands so great a treasure? At what cost has this Bible come to us?

Let me give just a brief glimpse of what God has done to get this book into our hands. For over three thousand years it was painstakingly hand-copied. The scribes that copied the Scriptures were perfectionists. If one mistake was made they would destroy the entire parchment and start over.

Because it was the Word of God and because accuracy was taken with utmost seriousness scholars who spend their lives studying ancient manuscripts can testify to the remarkable accuracy of the manuscripts. Errors are rare and minor.

Around 382 AD the early church father Jerome translated the Bible into Latin which is called the Vulgate Bible. It was also translated into other languages over the next couple of hundred years.

But around 600 AD Latin was the only language the church allowed for copies of the Bible. Only priests were educated in Latin and only the church could control translation and interpretation. No one could question doctrine or interpretation because the church through the priests controlled what the people would know. To possess a Bible in any other language was punishable by death.

That was the situation until the time of the Reformation, so almost a thousand years. The common person did not have a Bible of any kind, and certainly not one in their mother tongue. The priests were the only ones with access to a Bible and then only in Latin. Furthermore, the copies were very large, more like the one on the communion table.

In the late 1300's an Englishman, *John Wycliffe*, did the unthinkable and started translating the Bible into English. But he had a handicap, the only Bibles he could translate from were in Latin. He didn't have access to manuscripts in Hebrew and Greek.

With the help of friends he managed to hand copy dozens of English language Bibles. He died before the Pope found out. But one of Wycliffe's followers, John Hus, who actively advocated for the Bible in English, was burned at the stake with Wycliffe's Bibles used as kindling for the fire.

John Foxe's Book of Martyrs records that in 1517, seven people were burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church for the crime of teaching their children to say the Lord's Prayer in English rather than Latin.

About that time God raised up a remarkable young Englishman with an aptitude for languages and a love for the Word of God and a passion to translate the Bible for his own country.

William Tyndale was the first person to get the Bible printed in English. He was fluent in eight languages including Hebrew and Greek and he had access to original manuscripts in those languages so his translations were much closer to the originals.

But to do the work Tyndale had to flee England in 1524 which was Roman Catholic at the time. There was a bounty on his head when the word got out what he was doing. So he went to Germany and stayed with Martin Luther. The first Tyndale NT came out in 1530 and as copies were printed they were confiscated and burned and anyone in possession of one was burned at the stake.

Tyndale's translation was revolutionary in two ways. First it was the first English translation straight from the Greek and Hebrew. Second, it was the first English Bible printed by printing press allowing for much wider distribution.

And for both of these reasons it was considered especially dangerous by the Catholic Church. Because it was straight from the original languages it corrected many errors that had crept into the Latin Vulgate, errors about purgatory, about indulgences, about confessing to a priest and doing penance.

What it meant is that the Catholic Church would lose control over the people and what they were taught and told to do. All of a sudden the common man could read for himself and see what Scripture said as opposed to what church tradition said. People would be able to read for themselves what the Bible said and be able to test what was being taught. They would become like the Bereans in Acts 17:

Acts 17:11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

The driving passion of his life was to see the Bible in English available to every person in England. He told one church official who criticized his efforts, "If God spare my life, I will see to it that the boy who drives the plowshare knows more of the scripture than you, Sir!"

Tyndale's passion was the truth, and that the truth was being obscured and leading people into bondage drove him to translate. The Gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by grace alone through faith alone was why he labored so hard and sacrifice so much and ultimately paid with his life.

The personal cost was great. He wrote in a letter:

"... my pains . . . my poverty . . . my exile out of mine natural country, and bitter absence from my friends . . . my hunger, my thirst, my cold, the great danger wherewith I am everywhere encompassed" (From Piper's biography of William Tyndale).

Perhaps the worst thing of all was being betrayed by a close friend which led to his capture and his spending his last 18 months imprisoned in a miserable cold prison before being burned at the stake.

True friends of his finished the OT by 1535 and most of them were eventually burned at the stake. Richard Bayfield who ran the ships that took copies of Tyndale's Bible to England hidden in bales of cloth, was betrayed by someone and burned.

Many people came to a saving faith in Jesus reading Tyndale's Bible and many of them were burned. As you can imagine the more something was banned the more people wanted it and copies were secretly distributed.

People were hungry to read the Bible in their own language for the first time ever. People were willing to get their hands on copies even if it was against the law and could cost them their life.

His Bible was the kindling for the great fire of the Reformation and the reawaking and revival of Biblical faith and doctrine.

Some years later, King James I, commissioned the production of the famous King James Bible in a size accessible to everyone. William Tyndale translated the Bible so well that about 80% of the King James Bible is his work.

"If God spare my life, I will see to it that the boy who drives the plowshare knows more of the scripture than you, Sir!"

Implications and application.

How much did your Bible cost? The sacrifices and blood of countless martyrs, laying down their life for the lives of people they didn't even know, dying so we could have life.

Our English Bible has its beginning in blood, in the cost of human lives, people who valued the Word of God more than life and breath.

Tyndale died to give us these words in a language we can understand.

We are so spoiled, we have almost no appreciation for this book and how we got it. It is a miracle on so many levels, in how it came to be written in the first place and then in how it came to be translated so we could read and understand it.

Christ died to confirm the truth of these words and "make it possible for sinners to understand them and embrace them. And thousands have died to preserve them for us to this day" (Piper).

They pulled back the veil of centuries of error so we could know the truth. Our own lives are veiled in error, in sin, in faulty thinking and living. We all need a reformation in our own hearts and minds and attitudes and actions. We need the Word of God to transform us, to impact us, to convict us, to teach us, to help us.

Read it.

So I plead with you this morning, consider the cost of the gift that has been given to you and treasure this gift. Read your Bible. But don't just read it to advance your bookmark. Don't read to complete a task.

Read to know God. Read to find eternal life. Read it to shine this lamp into the dark places of our hearts and of our lives. God's Word is truth and God's Word is life. God wrote a book. Begin each reading with a simple prayer.

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

Don't just read it, expect to see great things in it. Don't just read it, love it by loving the one who wrote it and who opened your eyes and heart to value it. Read it to fan the flames and kindle your love for God and His Word. Read it to start another Reformation.

God wrote a book so we could know Him.

My prayer is that 2017 may be the most spiritually faithful and fruitful year in your life and in the life of First Christian Reformed Church. And the greatest hope for that lies in our regularly reading, memorizing, and praying the Word of God. I have done all I know how to provide an easy way for you to do that. As a shepherd of your souls, for the sake of your souls, please take up the book God wrote and read it.

Prayer: Our Holy Father in Heaven, we beseech you this morning to bless our seeking of you. Bless us with a deep and lasting hunger and thirst for righteousness, fan the flame of our zeal for the truth of your word. Help our unbelief, forgive our wandering affections and short attention. Deliver us from our small desires and our foolish pursuits. I pray for your Fatherly blessing to be upon this flock. Above all, dear Father, grant that our lives will increasingly bring glory to your dear Son, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, in whose precious name we pray. Amen.