

The First Baptist Church, Midland
August 14, 2011
II Timothy 3: 14-4:5

400 Years and Counting...
A Sermon by the Rev. John P. Dick
Theme: The Authorized KJV Bible

Have you noticed that these days it isn't unusual to hear people talking about King James? Well, I thought we might join that conversation this morning and I hope you don't get upset when you realize I'm not referring to the basketball player named LeBron. Rather, I'm thinking about a book called *The Bible*.

Did you know this is a very special year for this book? Yes, in this year of the Lord 2011 we are saying "Happy Birthday" to what has been called the most popular and powerful book in the English language. I'm talking about the Authorized King James Version of the Bible.

It was published for the first time on May 2, 1611 and its publishing history is not without a few blemishes along the way. For example, the 1631 edition made a slight editorial adjustment to one of the ten commandments when it said *Thou shalt commit adultery*. How about that. Instead of being forbidden adultery was suddenly compulsory. Of course it was just a typo and the printers were heavily fined. And it's interesting to note that this particular printing became known as "The Wicked Bible".

Another good one came along a bit later when 1 Corinthians 6:9 read *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall inherit the kingdom of God?* Well, I guess those unrighteous folks got pretty excited over this news until they found out that once again that little word "not" was excluded from the text.

But if all of this wasn't enough, those darn printers upped the ante when Mark's gospel (7:27) came out reading *Let the children first be killed*. Of course, it was supposed to say let the children first be filled, meaning fed.

Well, we may take note of these unfortunate blunders but the good news is these mistakes did not hamper our good news in the big picture. To the contrary, the King James Bible became the most influential scripture translation of all time. Not only has it impacted the faith of countless millions, but it has had an incredible impact upon English literature in general.

I think of a funeral experience I had when I was a very young pastor. I probably hadn't officiated at more than a dozen of them at that time. Following the service, an older gentleman came up to me and put his arm around me and asked, "are you open to a little advice?" I didn't know what was coming but I said, "sure, I'd be grateful for any insights you might have."

We took a couple steps and he stopped and turned and looked me squarely in the eye. “You did a wonderful service today and our family is very appreciative.” So far so good, but I was waiting for the other shoe to drop. “But,” he said, “you were using a newer translation of the bible, weren’t you?” The answer was yes, because I was using what at that time was the Revised Standard Version. “Well,” he went on, “those readings were lovely and easy to understand but somehow the 23rd Psalm just didn’t seem right. I think it would be more meaningful to people if you were to use the King James version for that reading because that’s what we all know the best and somehow it just feels more comforting. Anyway, that’s how I feel about it. Take it for what it’s worth.” You know, I’ve used that translation of the 23rd psalm at every funeral I’ve ever conducted since. Even though the words do not ring with our modern idiom, they still take hold of one’s heart and won’t let go...

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

It touches you, doesn’t it? Yet it’s interesting to note that these peaceful, gentle words were truly born in a time of conflict. History tells us that when King James took the throne of England in 1603, the country was embroiled in theological controversy. The establishment church which was of course the Anglican Church was feuding with a group of reformers called the Puritans, and King James decided to side with the Anglicans. He figured they posed the least threat to his authority. At the same time, he was a shrewd politician and he knew he needed to extend an olive branch to the Puritans. So, he agreed to commission a new translation of the Bible, one that took seriously the original languages of the scriptures. The result was what we know today as the Authorized King James Version. We call it authorized because it took place with the full authority of the king. And what a powerful word it has been through the years.

Now of course, times have changed rather dramatically over the past 400 years and the field of Biblical scholarship has grown remarkable. The vast expanse of knowledge has increased exponentially and the result has been many, many different translations which are more accurate renditions of the original languages. But it doesn’t negate the place of this major English work which shook the world in 1611 and which continues to resonate to this day.

Now having said this, let me conclude this little history lesson by spending a few minutes talking about what we might want to do with our sacred texts. These spiritual

stories of ours may not always be completely clear, but over and over again they remind us of the incredible relationship we hold with the One we call Creator, Sustainer and Savior. So in this spirit, consider three suggestions we might take directly from the apostle Paul as he speaks to us this morning... three suggestions we might embrace no matter which translation we choose to use.

First, listen to Paul when he says the Bible is our Word from God so **PURSUE IT!** Can't you hear that in verses 14-16 of chapter 3? **"...But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou has learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."**

If ever there was an invitation to pursue the word of God, this is it. *Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it well when he said, "the word of scripture should never stop sounding in your ears and working in you all day long, just like the words of someone you love. And just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the word of scripture and ponder it in your heart as Mary did."

Yes, unless we read the Bible regularly it is impossible to ponder its meaning... to pursue its truths... because this book is a living book which interacts with everyday experience. Martin Luther once said, "it is the cradle in which the Christ child lies, waiting for us to come and adore."

Next, listen to Paul when he says the Bible is our Word from God so – **PROCLAIM IT!** We are living in a dark world and people need light! But is it any different today than it was in Paul's day? To be sure, our sins may be different but they still separate us from the love of God. Hence, if we would improve our world we must proclaim the word of God.

Or as Paul put it, **"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."** (II Timothy 4:1-2)

I think we can safely say people today are just as hungry for truth as they were in the apostle's day. People are still searching for meaning, still dealing with pain and fear and disillusionment. In short, they need hope. And how will they receive that hope if we don't proclaim it? That's why Paul's admonition to Timothy is so timely: *I charge you.. preach the word... be urgent in season and out of season...*

John Wesley spoke for each of us when he said, "I want to know one thing, the way to heaven... God himself has condescended to teach the way... He has written it

down in a book. O give me that book: at any price give me the book of God” that I may proclaim it to the world. Now that will preach!

And that brings us to the final point. Listen when Paul says the Bible is our word from God so - *PROFIT BY IT!* It is one thing to study this book and share it with others but it is quite another to live by it ourselves. Take its riches and allow it to color the way you see and interact with the world. Allow its peace to settle in your heart and its good news to light your way. You are a treasure in the eyes of God and he has sent this book as his love letter written especially for you so *profit by it*.

And there you have it... three directives related to the Bible... ***Pursue it!*** ***Proclaim it!*** ***Profit by it!*** The truth is, it doesn't matter which translation you choose. I always encourage folks to simply find one which makes sense and with which you can identify. If you're not comfortable reading it or if you don't understand its stories, it won't be long before it simply sits on the table gathering dust. So yes, do find one you can understand and read it. For it really does have the power to change your life for good.

William White once put it like this. “The Bible is a harp with a thousand strings. Play on one to the exclusion of its relationship to the others, and you will develop discord. Play on all of them, keeping them in their places in the divine scale, and you will hear heavenly music all the time.”

May we all be so blessed... Amen and AMEN!

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