

What The Bible Means To Us. (Wycliffe Bible Translators)

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[0 : 00] Well, this is a weekend of firsts for me. This is my first time on Lewis, which fulfills an ambition that I've had for a long time. And it's also my first time as a Wycliffe Bible Translators! volunteer speaker, which is similarly exciting, as I have the privilege of sharing about crucial work of this organization and the unmistakable work of the Lord in the various projects. And hopefully, the time we've finished, you will be inspired and motivated to support the work of Wycliffe in prayer and perhaps in other ways as well. Can I have the first slide up, please?

And the next one. Thank you. I want us to begin this evening with a small exercise. Close your eyes, if you would, just to shut out any distractions around you, and then take a moment to reflect on the role that the Bible played in you coming to know Jesus. Do you have a favorite verse that helps you make a final decision? Do you cherish a particular passage which grounds your Christian life and reminds you of that life-changing moment? Is it a verse that you hold dear and turn to in times of trial for encouragement and reassurance? Let's take a moment to think about that.

I continue this evening. I continue this evening. I continue this evening. I continue this evening. I continue this evening. I continue this evening. I continue this evening. I continue this evening.

I continue this evening. I continue this evening. I continue this evening. There's lots of nodding and smiling. That's a good sign, a really good sign.

Now, let me ask you to take another moment to reflect on who you would be right now without the Bible. How would you be different if the Bible wasn't a part of your life?

[2 : 23] What would your walk with Jesus look like? How might your reactions and your responses to challenges be different without the promises and revelations of God's Word to turn to? Let's think about that for a moment.

Our connection with the Bible and how God has used it in calling us to Him and bringing us to know Him and then to shape and influence our lives and our faith is often very personal and runs deep within us.

For me, I came to faith at 19. I was an undergraduate student at university studying a science subject and I was exposed to a multitude of worldviews and belief systems in that environment, many of them religious and many of them secular with that basis in the sciences I was studying.

And so an important text for me as I negotiated this unpredictable setting was John 14 verse 6, familiar words from the mouth of Jesus Himself.

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. These words not only allowed me to take hold of the truth of Jesus' divine identity and to have peace in rejecting other philosophies, but it also encouraged me and continues to encourage me to take my faith seriously, knowing who it is that I have surrendered to and the importance of walking as closely as possible with Him in every aspect of life and ministry, no matter what others may say or do.

[3 : 56] As a consequence, there are so many ways in which my life would be different and less in the past, right now, in the present, and likely also in the future, without having access to the Bible.

The impact of Scripture on my life then is significant and ongoing, and I can imagine that it's the same for most of you. You may have come to know Jesus through reading the Bible yourself or through someone telling you what the Word of God says, but the Bible not only tells us the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, it also tells us what these things mean for each one of us.

The Bible is foundational for our knowledge and our understanding of our Lord, and our understanding of the next slide, please. But not having the Bible is the reality for a great many people.

One in five of the population of the world, that is 1.5 billion people, do not have access to the Bible and the language that they understand best. That's 20% of the world's population, over 1.5 billion, without the opportunity to be challenged, changed, or commissioned through the written Word of God.

And that's not right. It's not fair, and it's not just. As one of the Bible translators that Wycliffe supports, and who works in a place that's very hostile to the Gospel in Western Asia, as he says, everyone has the right to know what God is saying to them.

[5 : 20] Everyone has the right to have the Bible. And this isn't just the opinion of a translator who has dedicated his life to this task. This is a truth that is made so clearly evident within the pages of Scripture themselves.

And so as we consider the work of Wycliffe Bible translators, I want us to turn our thoughts once again to John's Gospel, and chapter 6 this time. It begins with one of the most remarkable and well-known miracles in Scripture.

One that is recorded in all four Gospel accounts, proclaiming both Jesus' sovereignty over all creation, and his compassion for humankind. That miracle being the feeding of the 5,000. Now this was a very good thing to do.

It was a good solution to a problem that had arisen. People were hungry, and they needed nourishment, and in Jesus' power, they were fed. And we can see how this has inspired many of the ministries that are supported and equipped by our churches today to seek the sustenance and welfare of those who are made in the image of God.

Things like local food banks, and the digging of wells in the developing world, support for the homeless, rehabilitation for ex-offenders, etc., etc. These things provide good solutions to human problems.

[6 : 27] And since our world has so many problems, the work of these ministries is important. But chapter 6 doesn't end there. And we're going to read from a chunk of it.

So if you have a Bible with you, please turn with me to John chapter 6. And we're going to read from verse 25 all the way through to verse 70. It's a long reading this evening, but we're better to be in the Lord's house than in his word.

We're in John 6, reading from verse 25. This is the word of God. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here?

Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.

For on him God the Father has set his seal. Then they said to him, What must we do to be doing the works of God? Jesus answered them, This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.

[7 : 34] So they said to him, Then what sign do you do that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat.

Jesus then said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

They said to him, Sir, give us this bread always. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

[8 : 41] So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven. They said, Not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I have come down from heaven?

Jesus answered them, Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, and they will all be taught by God.

Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God. He has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

[9 : 48] So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever. Jesus said these things in the synagogue as he taught at Capernaum.

Where many of his disciples heard it, they said, This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, Do you take offense at this?

Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.

[10 : 56] But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him. And he said, This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.

After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, Do you want to go away as well? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God. Jesus answered them, Did I not choose you, the twelve?

And yet one of you is a devil. Amen. May God add his blessing to this reading from his precious words. A multitude of followers have crossed the Sea of Galilee to catch up with Jesus because they've seen the parallels between the miraculous feeding in the wilderness in the book of Exodus and the miraculous feeding of the 5,000.

But the motive behind their pursuit is all wrong. These people are tactless and grasping. Their emphasis is on their own material gain. The important factor for them is a physical meal which satisfies the pangs of hunger in their stomachs for a short while.

[12 : 14] But they aren't on the same spiritual wavelength that the Lord is speaking from because manna from heaven withered and perished and the people who it sustained also perished because the needs of humankind are greater and deeper than even the calories required to fuel our bodily functions and systems.

And that's why compassion ministries and relief work while useful and noble will never satisfy our deepest need which is to know our creator and redeemer.

We heard Jesus make one of the seven I am statements in John's gospel in the verse that I shared earlier statements in which the Lord speaks of himself in Old Testament language associated with God the Father and proclaims his own divinity in the process.

And here in chapter 6 we read another the first of them that John records. Jesus says I am the bread of life whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

With this majestic statement the Lord exhorts his audience to turn their eyes away from the fleeting benefits of a free meal and fix them instead on the lasting proceeds of a right relationship with himself.

[13 : 27] with the true bread who will nourish their spiritual lives. The true bread that will bestow life itself. Coming to him satisfies our hunger and our thirst in the most fundamental and the most complete way.

Not our bodily request for food but our need for God. Look again at what Jesus says in verse 35 whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Now this doesn't mean that we only need one nibble and then we don't need to think about the Lord ever again. It doesn't mean that we don't have to be feeding from this bread for the rest of our lives both here on earth and beyond.

But what it does mean is that the yawning emptiness of our souls that we carried to the Lord in our first encounter with him will be filled. Our spiritual hunger is met when we come to Jesus in a way that it never needs to be met again because we will never be so empty again because we have the bread of life that satisfies us.

Have you come to the Lord or are you hungry this evening? Do you thirst for the grace and forgiveness that only Jesus has for you? Do you have a longing for a relationship with God that the Holy Spirit has awakened within you?

[14 : 46] Are you even aware that you have that need tonight? If the answer to any of these questions is yes then know that Jesus Christ the bread of life satisfies.

Without Jesus the sins that we have committed are our own to bear. The punishment of all of our rebellion against God lands on our own heads and we cannot bear that punishment for it is eternal spiritual death.

But when we come to Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour then we do not bear the penalty of all the things that we have done to displease God anymore. We are washed clean. We are sinless in the eyes of the Lord because our punishment has been served by Jesus on a cross of wood at Calvary.

Revelation 7 and verse 16 describes the multitude in heaven those who have come to faith in Jesus those whose robes have been washed and purified in the blood of the Lamb of God.

And what does that verse tell us about that multitude? They shall hunger no more neither thirst any more and all because Jesus is the answer to spiritual starvation to emptiness of the soul.

[15 : 57] Jesus is the bread of life. Well many of the people who are listening to Jesus speak here leave. They don't like the message and they don't believe the identity that Jesus is proclaiming appealing as they do to their familiarity with his human parents.

But note the response of Simon Peter from verse 68 he says Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Peter knows that what satisfies our deepest needs is not found in an item or a program or an ideology he identifies it in a person.

He doesn't ask which philosophy they can turn to he doesn't ask which plan of action they should follow he is looking for who they must turn to. and he finds the answer in the Lord because it is in Jesus that we find life and life to the full life as it was meant to be in communion and fellowship with the God who made us and all as a result of his own plan to deliver us from the chaos of a life without him.

How often do human beings believe that if we follow the right practical steps we can make the world a better place? but these are not sufficient they're not enough the solution to our pain and our brokenness is found in Christ alone the solution to sin and death is in Jesus so people need Jesus and so as believers we must be invested in introducing Christ to the world we must take the instructions of the great commission seriously and make disciples of all nations so that others may find life in his name and truly enjoy the help that only he can get as part of that same commission we must also teach and encourage those with whom we walk our Christian walk to observe all that the Lord has commanded so how do we do that?

how can we help people today to discover Jesus for the first time and to grow in knowledge and experience of him day by day because nobody will have an encounter with Jesus today in the same way as this crowd of people in John 6 have but what does Jesus tell us in verse 63 he says it is the spirit who gives life the flesh is no help at all the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life it is the Holy Spirit that tears away the veil of confusion as to who Jesus is it is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sinful status before a just and holy God and since that same Holy Spirit has inspired and protected his scriptures that are recorded in our Bibles that reveal who Jesus is and what he has done it is therefore the spirit who enables people to know Christ through his divine words so that when we read the Bible the spirit filled life giving word of almighty God we can meet Jesus and find life in him now I don't know what your personal convictions are on the Bible

[19 : 00] I know that the free church as a denomination has a reputation of having a high view of scripture and that's something that I would share but personally speaking as individuals it can be easy for us to become desensitised or even simply forget just how magnificent and vital the Bible is the contents of these pages have their origins in heaven God who is the designer and manufacturer of all that exists in our universe speaks through them and he speaks to you and to me through them and as we read them and absorb them and ponder them and as we discuss them together and as we accept them and believe them as we take them to our heart and live our lives according to them then we recognise the life giving qualities that it has as they serve as a conduit that connects us to the one who laid down his life for our sakes and when we understand this then we can neither ignore nor deny the inherent priority that we have in reaching out and mission the necessity that exists and the urgency that we must show in taking these same words into every dark corner of our world if we have come to know and believe that Jesus is the Holy One of God the anointed Messiah in whom are words of eternal life if we have benefited from his accomplishments on the cross and if his Holy Spirit has begun his work in transforming us into the likeness of Jesus then the next step for us is assuredly to share the words that have been used to such powerful effect in us with others so that those who are trapped in a well of helplessness and hopelessness may experience the liberation from fear and despair and death and hell that can only be found in the Lord Jesus Christ our lives and the mission of our churches locally nationally and globally must be active and deliberate in our intention to see others come to life by making

Christ known by making his words known by ensuring that the word of God is available and accessible to as many people as we can so that everybody can hear about Jesus so that souls can take Christ into their inmost being to take hold of the gift of everlasting life and glory that he has so that they can feed on the bread of life can I have the next slide please during some evangelism training in Wachimia a profound moment unfolded that demonstrated the life changing power of hearing those life giving words of Jesus in our own language as part of the training of these evangelists participants were assigned at a practical outreach task where they were to apply what they learned in their lectures by engaging with members of the community using scripture audio devices one group of participants came across an elderly man who had spent his entire life in Wachimia but had never heard the gospel in his heart language his experiences with Christianity had been limited to sermons and teachings and languages that he didn't understand fully leaving him ultimately disconnected from the message of salvation and so curious but cautious the man invited the group to share what they had brought so they used this scripture audio device and they played the man a portion of the gospel of Luke and as the familiar sounds of his native tongue carried the words of Jesus to the ears of this man he sat quietly and then his expression changed from curiosity to astonishment when the audio concluded tears were streaming down his face and with a trembling voice he exclaimed now I finally understand what God is saying to me for the first time the gospel message became clear and real and personal to this man the evangelist went on to gently explain the message of salvation emphasizing the love and grace of the Lord

Jesus Christ and moved by the truth that he just heard this elderly man expressed his desire to surrender his life to Jesus the group prayed with him they guided him in a prayer of repentance and commitment and his transformation was immediate and undeniable the man's joy was evident as he shared how he had always felt distanced from God because he thought the message of the Bible wasn't meant for someone like him hearing it in his own language broke down that barrier making him realize that God's love was for him as well he heard God he met Jesus and all through the life-giving word of God and this is not an isolated incident Jesus is alive today he is building his church as he promised in Matthew 16 verse 18 he is drawing people to himself from every tribe every language every people group and every nation so we must make his word available to all people from every tribe and language and people group and nation so that everyone can understand what the Lord is saying and can respond to his summons with repentance and faith that they may come to know him deeply and intimately and grow in the relationship that they were created for as we consider then what Jesus is proclaiming in John 6 and the impact that we see his breathed outward having across the world this evening then the fact that one in five people still don't have the Bible in their language can only be seen as a tremendous injustice it cannot be right we cannot be comfortable with this reality why should we have this book and not others elsewhere how many souls are mistaken in their belief that the gospel is not for them because they only get to hear it in the languages of larger nations and populations and not in their own if we accept that these are the words of eternal life through which we meet Jesus and if we have seen the power of these words in our own lives in our own communities then it should break our hearts to know that other Christians are missing and it should motivate us to act

Wycliffe Bible Translators was set up 70 years ago by mission organisations who realised that they needed the Bible in local languages in order to reach the lost but you won't find Wycliffe Bible Translators mentioned in the Bible you will however find your church God has much to say about what his people must believe what our priorities must be how we must behave and the importance of reaching out with the good news of the gospel the great commission was not issued to a few organisations and individuals to undertake it is the task of every disciple to make more disciples and to make Jesus known which means that Bible translation is the responsibility of the whole church is the responsibility of all of us this has to be a concern for each and every child of God to do all that we can to make the word of God available to everyone in their first language to do all that we can to unlock God's word for every heart so that they can hear God and know

Jesus just as John Wycliffe and William Tyndale did for English speakers of the world and just as James and John Stuart did for speakers of Gaelic the Tyndale Bible translation which provided the basis for the King James version was only made possible because of a businessman called Humphrey Munneth I wonder if you've ever heard of him hands up who's heard of Humphrey Munneth just like me I confess that I had never heard of him before preparing for this service tonight which is a shame because his contribution to what we are holding in our hands was crucially important because Humphrey Munneth sponsored Tyndale to carry out his translation work he paid for it today we can assume the role of that man for new translations of the Bible elsewhere in the world British Scottish and even Hebridean cash can be used to sponsor mission workers and Bible translators across the globe who need financial support you can do that by becoming a monthly giver by signing up to give the word a very generous and anonymous supporter has offered to double every person's monthly giving for a year and that includes gift aid so if you're a UK taxpayer and can give £20 a month then by the end of the year £600 will go to translation projects and Ruth has much more information about that if you want to speak to her after the service and would like to know more but we don't just want people to pay for this work we also want you to pray for it because we simply will not be able to accomplish anything for the kingdom of God without the activity of the Holy Spirit who inspired every word of this book so please if you do nothing else tonight please write the name of

[28 : 07] Wycliffe in your prayer diaries and bring this vital work before the Lord when Christians like us and churches like this one partner with and prayerfully support translation teams or church planting teams or other evangelistic initiatives then we can make so much more rapid progress with that backing not just in Bible translation but in every ministry that makes God known and as God's word becomes available to ordinary people as church leaders increasingly use their new language Bibles and their preaching and their ministry then what we see is Christian believers our brothers and sisters in Christ growing stronger in their faith we see people coming to know him for the first time we see churches growing and we see the kingdom of God advancing as these believers can now discover for themselves the words of Jesus that bring eternal life and an eternal solution to their spiritual hunger and their spiritual thirst and the last slide

Simon Peter answered him Lord to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life we have come we have believed we have eaten and we have drunk and we have everlasting life because the bread of life has promised it to us will we keep this truth to ourselves or will we help others discover these words and involve ourselves in the work of God as he calls his future children let's consider our responses to these challenges this Lord's day and let us act in accordance with what he lays upon our hearts Amen Let's Amen