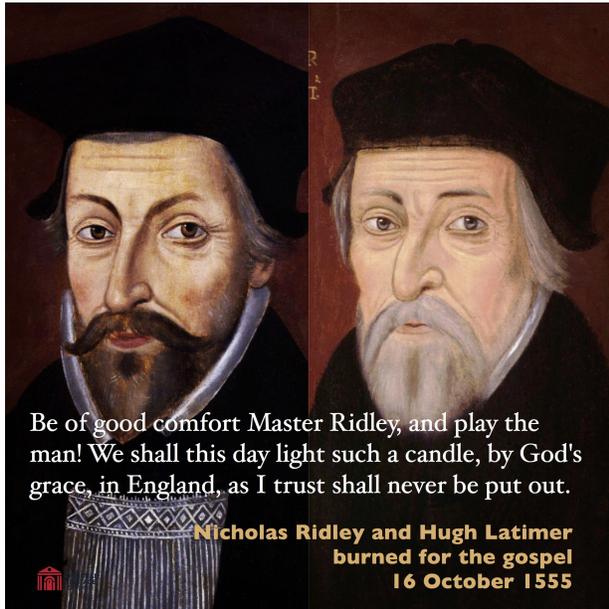


It's Happening Again

Dr. Richard J. Hill



As we face a new year, may we recommit ourselves to stand firm with the saints once-and-for-all committed to the faith. Recorded from a Roman prison, Paul's familiar words ring louder and clearer to me today than ever before. I have read and taught Paul's words often. His goal was that Christ be magnified in his body by life or by death. Because to him to live would be for Christ to live, and for him to die would be gain for him (Philippians 1:20-21). Many true believers today have parroted these words many times, never once thinking that we may actually have to live them.

Throughout all of human history, Satan's hatred has been unleashed upon those who preach a clear gospel of grace. At one time, the heat of his great deception of confusing the gospel was countered by the cool breeze of what is rightly

called the Great Reformation. The Reformation began in Germany in 1517 when a lawyer-turned-monk, Martin Luther, nailed his "Ninety-five Theses" to the door of a church in Wittenberg. As I write this article, many are winding down the celebration of the five-hundredth year anniversary of this amazing event.

Luther penned his famous theses to counter the selling of indulgences and other false practices of the Catholic Church. He was used by God to resurface the clear gospel of God's grace: justification before God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, by the Word of God alone. This produced a great Protestant movement. Once the gospel resurfaced and was unleashed again, the plain, simple, but incredibly powerful message of God's grace began to spread throughout Europe like fire in a hot wind.

England, a stronghold for the Catholic Church, had been exposed to Martin Luther's view of free grace, and it stirred a great controversy over the true gospel and Catholicism. Queen Mary, aka "Bloody Mary," was on a tirade in her stance, forcing her to stand against Luther's movement with vengeance.

Luther's notes on the book of Romans eventually found their way across the Irish Sea and into England. These papers ended up in a local pub on the campus at Cambridge University called the White Horse Inn, which became the meeting place for young English protestants. Two young men who were studying at Cambridge, Sir Thomas Bilney and Sir Nicholas Ridley, were exposed to Luther's teachings on Romans at the pub.

Bilney and Ridley, having been regenerated by faith in Christ, brought bits and pieces of the contents of Luther's commentary verbally into the classroom. This was done to the dismay of their professor, Hugh Latimer, a staunch professor and champion of Catholicism. Ridley and Bilney publicly debated this powerful grace gospel along with raising penetrating questions about the Catholic Church in Latimer's classroom.

Latimer was furious and verbally blasted them at every opportunity. The students were relentless, however. They began to pray for their professor. One cold, foggy night they persuaded the professor to accompany them to the White Horse Inn. While visiting England in the 1980's, I had the privilege to retrace the historical steps this little entourage took to the inn. It is said that when Professor Latimer held Luther's notes up to the lamp, his hands began to tremble. He began to read, line upon line and precept upon precept. Latimer was quickly and gloriously converted to the gospel of grace in 1555. The rest is history.

Latimer, like the apostle Paul, began to preach the faith that he once repudiated. For this, he was tried and condemned to death by burning. On October 16, 1555, he was burned at the stake near the campus of Oxford in Oxfordshire, England. In 1987, I was overwhelmed with respect and admiration for these martyrs as I stood at the very spot where they were put to death.

It is said that before the flames were ignited, Nicholas Ridley ran from the crowd and lashed himself to his old professor. He shouted, "Sir, I refuse to let you burn alone." Before the flames engulfed them, Latimer said to Ridley, "Play the man, Master Ridley. They are going to burn us today, but by God's grace our deaths will light such a torch in England for the gospel that no human being will be able to extinguish it."

His words proved to be prophetic. Those words, mixed with voices of other martyrs crying for freedom, motivated and encouraged the Pilgrims to overcome their fear of the unknown and the perils of ocean travel, and launch out to America. From here they become a part of arguably the greatest gospel sending effort in the entire world. It has been often repeated that even today the church of Jesus Christ in America stands on the strong shoulders of those who were martyred for their faith. People throughout the world are still today, probably at this hour, dying for their relationship to Jesus Christ.

History is repeating itself once again here in the land of the free and the home of the brave. The old serpent has found his way to our shores and is once again blurring the facts of the gospel, which is being stifled under the weight of rebellion.

The very first amendment to our Constitution declares our freedom to exercise religion coupled with the freedom of speech. It is an interesting fact that in 1964 the students on the University of California campus at Berkley protested in favor of free speech. They made a big issue underscoring the idea that our freedom as a nation is based on it. But now, just 50 years later, shockingly, speech is no longer free according to many university students. If words come from someone who disagrees with their idea of freedom or from someone who believes and teaches the Bible, or someone who has a personal relationship with Christ, then speech, any speech, is anything but free. It is quickly being categorized today as hate speech, racist speech, sexist speech, along with a number of other accusations.

Soon citizens here will probably be arrested for just mentioning the name of Jesus. It may not be long until we will be like England in the day of the martyrs. We may be called upon to give our lives for the faith. There are no more continents to sail to for safety, and there will be no place here to hide. When those perilous times come, may we summon the courage to stand with Paul, that Christ may be magnified in our bodies whether by life or by death. Remember the martyrs!

Dr. Hill is the President and co-founder of Glimpses of Grace.