

### A Matter of History

The words that echoed were, “Give me truth or give me death.” If these words were not spoken, they sure were the passion of Jan Hus (1369 – 1415). He was born to peasant parents in Husinec, Bohemia, in today’s Czech Republic. He acquired his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in theology at the University of Prague.

Because he had been an excellent student and was known for his godly character, he was hired after graduation to fill a teaching post at the university. He may not have been the thinker of men before him, but his student body loved his lectures.

In 1400, Hus was ordained a priest and appointed to the Bethlehem Church in Prague. Then in 1402, he was promoted to become rector of the university. From pulpit and lectern, the ever pushing Hus changed the world by popularizing Wycliffe’s radical ideas, which he had learned as a student in college. But Church authorities were listening very closely.

Wycliffe believed that everyone should be able to read the Bible in his or her native tongue. Therefore, Hus incorporated Wycliffe’s ideas in his own sermons and writings, causing a passion for God’s Word in his students.

This did not set well with the Church, nor the two popes at that time. It didn’t set well at all. Because Wycliffe had been condemned as a heretic by the Church of Rome. Unknown or known to Hus at the time, one thing is clear, he was making powerful enemies – even though he was highly thought of, and a public figure, Rome would not stand idly by.

News of his message and his defiance spread across Europe like wild-fire. Hus preached, and believed that Christ, not the pope, was the head of the Church. That doctrines not found in the Bible weren’t true, even if Roman clergy said they were, and Hus refused to teach them. A showdown was inescapable.

Hus was granted safe passage to Constance to defend his words before Church authorities. But, once he was there, the promise was revoked. Revoked, because the Church said it didn’t need to keep its word to a heretic. Hus was immediately imprisoned for eight months, and on July 6, 1415, at the age of 46, Hus was condemned and sentenced to be burned at the stake.

When given a final chance to recant before the fire was lit, his last words were that he would gladly die for the truth of the gospel. Hus believed that our relationship to Christ is a matter of life and death, and not something to be taken lightly.

He believed that the Church of his day was much like Israel in Paul’s day. When Paul wrote to Rome he said, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own

righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Roman 10:1-4).

Israel did not understand that the law could not provide righteousness based on merit – much like the church-world today. The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, all have sinned. And as sinners, we all have missed God’s standard of obtaining eternal life – perfection! Perfection, such a high mark. Yet, that is all that God will accept – perfection. Some believe that their good works will secure this eternal life. But are our good works better than God’s law? God’s law was righteous and holy, yet it could not save. Therefore, why do men feel that their good works will secure eternal life for them? I will never be able to understand this.

The law had a twofold purpose. As our schoolmaster it was to show us that we are sinners and guilty as charged – this it did. Also, working as our schoolmaster it was “to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24-25).

If man is to have eternal life he must understand, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and that men are saved by Christ alone altogether apart from any works of merit.

Jerry W. Arnold  
(All Rights Reserved)