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Narrator: Medieval England, 1336 to 1371, was a time of challenge and change, a time of struggle and turmoil. King Edward III was on the throne. England was embroiled in the midst of a hundred year war with France. The Bubonic Plague, black as death, claimed the lives of thousands of her citizens. And a young man by the name of John Wycliffe began asking questions and finding answers that would influence the lives of nobility, peasant, and churchman alike.

ACT I SCENE I

(Mood Music-Medieval Melody I)

Setting: Justin's & John's room at Oxford

Year: 1336

Bradwardine: So you see, the study of astronomy can lead one to a greater knowledge and appreciation of the power of God.

John: But, sir, wouldn't a meditation and understanding of the Scriptures lead to a superior recognition of God's omnipotence?

Bradwardine: By all means. The Scriptures are the Almighty's method of imparting His thoughts to mankind.

John: Why then are we not encouraged to read the Scriptures?

Justin: Is it really necessary to study the Scriptures when the church has already dictated the proper forms of worship?

Bradwardine: "Worship of mere external forms and ceremonies can never take the place of true worship of the heart."

(gathering up his papers) I must end our tutorial for today. *(hands charts to both boys)* I will meet with you, Master Wycliffe and Master Chamberlain, tomorrow afternoon. Please study the charts I have given you

and be prepared for a discussion. (*Justin holds the door as Bradwardine exits. After closing the door, he leans back against it and folds his arms.*)

Justin: (*sarcastically*) So, Master Wycliffe, I assume you are not in agreement with the rest of your fellow students here at Oxford who are studying for the priesthood? I have heard that many are of the opinion that it is beneath their dignity to learn from so elementary a book as the Scriptures. Are not the doctrines of the church all that is needed?

John: (*sincerely*) Are they, Justin? I wonder.

Justin: (*with a sneer*) Don't wonder too much, my friend. You already have the reputation of being rebellious to authority. Go too far, and you may find yourself in trouble, John. (*Justin exits and is grabbed by two monks and taken across the town to the other side.*)

Justin: (*struggling against them*) What are you doing? Where are you taking me?

Monk 1: The Holy Mother Church has decided you are to become a friar.

Justin: No! No! I don't want to be a monk! I am studying to be a lawyer!

Monk 2: Do not fear, brother Justin. In time you will come to accept your new assignment.

Justin: No! No! Let me go! (*Monks exit backstage with Justin*)

(*Lights Down*)

End Scene

SCENE 4

Setting: Interior of Justin's home

Year: 1348

(Jocelyn is seated in a chair doing needlepoint. The children are playing; Dereck with a toy soldier, Caitlin with a doll)

Justin: *(enters with a letter)* Jocelyn, I've received news from John!

Jocelyn: *(looks up, unimpressed)* That's interesting, Justin. And what trouble is the scholarly Professor Wycliffe in now?

Dereck: Is he in the same kind of trouble that I was in yesterday when I fed Caitlin's pet bird to the dog? *(Caitlin gives him a disgusted look.)*

Justin: *(trying not to laugh)* No, Dereck.. Run along upstairs, children. Tell Anna to prepare you for bed.

Dereck: *(to Caitlin, as they leave)* But Caitlin, Brutus was hungry. He was just sitting there looking at your bird. I could tell he wanted him— *(the children exit)*

Justin: *(takes the letter, reads some silently; the more he reads the more disturbed he looks; sits down slowly)*

Jocelyn: *(concerned now)* Justin—what is it?

Justin: *(shaking his head)* I warned him when we were roommates at Oxford that one day he would go too far.

Jocelyn: What do you mean?

Justin: Listen to this, "The Scriptures are the only law of the Church: the Church is not centered in the Pope and the cardinals, but is the whole company of the elect. The Bible is our final standard of appeal—not the Pope!" *(stands, angrily throws the letter down on a table)*

This is what he's teaching his students at Oxford! He says the students are thronging to his classes to hear his views. They call him, "The Gospel Doctor." *(shakes his head and paces)* If he's not careful, I fear one day he will be summoned before the Archbishop or even the Pope himself!

Jocelyn: Don't concern yourself about John. Not only is he a fool, he's a heretic. Maybe you would be wise to distance yourself from him, Justin,

lest one day you are also accused of believing his heresy. Besides, there are more important things to worry about than your unfortunate friend.

Justin: *(stops pacing, glances at her questioningly)* Why do you say that?

Jocelyn: Haven't you heard of the plague that's sweeping through Spain? Everyone has been talking about it.

Justin: Everyone—such as Penelope and Minerva?

Jocelyn: Now Justin—

Justin: *(ignoring her)* Those two talk all the time about everything and everyone at any occasion and for any reason. I don't know why you even associate with two gossipy old ladies from such a low social standing.

Jocelyn: *(defensively)* Justin, this is serious. There is alarm even among the town leaders that it will spread to England. What if it does, Justin? I'm worried about the children.

Justin: *(comfortingly)* There's no need to fear. There are hundreds of miles of water between Spain and England. It can't reach us here.

(Lights Down)

End Scene

ACT I
SCENE 5

(Mood Music-Medieval Melody II)

Setting: Shifts between the streets of London and the interior of Justin's house

Time: 1348

Old Lady: *(crossing the stage as she speaks slowly to the audience)*

Black is the night o'er London's streets.

Black is the plague which through it sweeps.
Bet'er beware of tell-tale signs,
Else you might be the next to die!
Ring around the rosie,
A pocket full of posies,
Ashes, ashes,
All fall down!

Beggar boy: (*coming towards her from the opposite end of the stage; he is coughing.*) Please, mum, 'elp me! 'Elp me!

Old Lady: (*shrieking*) Ge' away from me! You ge' away from me! (*says to others on street.*) 'E's go' the plague, 'e 'as! Stay away from 'im! 'E's go' the plague, I tell yer!

Boy: (*goes towards a rich gentleman and daughter who are walking down the street*) Please, 'elp me, sir! (*coughs*)

Daughter: Oh, Father, get him away from me!

Man: Begone with you, boy! (*pushes him away*)

Boy: Please, (*falls to his knees*) someone 'elp me! (*dies*)

(*Scene switches to the interior of Justin's home*)

Jocelyn: (*holding Caitlin, crying softly. Justin is standing by the fireplace.*) Oh Justin, her fever is so high. Do you think she has the plague? Isn't there anything we can do?

Justin: (*sighs*) I don't know. The physicians can't keep up with the thousands of people in London alone who have contracted the disease. It's all over Europe. There's nothing anyone can do.

Jocelyn: Perhaps the priest could help.

Justin: I've tried that. He has no more hope than the rest of us. (*shakes his head*) If only I could pray like John.

Jocelyn: How would the prayers of a heretic help?

Justin: I don't know. John's faith is so strong. It's as if God were his friend, as if he knew Him personally. Perhaps I should go see him.

Jocelyn: *(noticing a spot on Caitlin's arm)* Justin! Justin, don't leave me now! It's a red spot with a ring around it! She does have it, Justin. She has the plague!

(town scene: Minerva and Penelope are walking down the street together, sound effects of a horse and cart)

Penelope: *(listening)* 'Ear that, Minerva? *(gasps dramatically)* That's the death cart.

Minerva: I 'ope it ain't 'eadin' this way. I feel faint just at the sight of it!

Penelope: Ain't it dreadful?! They say thousands of Londoners 'ave lost their lives already!

Minerva: Speakin' of thousands of people, I wonder 'ow Alice is doin'? *(goes over to a house and peeks in the window)*

Penelope: *(slaps her friend on the shoulder)* Minerva, fer shame!

Minerva: We ain't goin' to find out 'ow she's doin' if we don't snoop. *(As Minerva begins to walk away, Penelope sneaks a peak in the window then joins Minerva..)*

Penelope: True, *(They circle around the boy in the street.)* but if we snoop too much 'round those wot's go' it, we're liable to ge' it ourselves, we are!

(Justin's house)

Jocelyn: *(holding and rocking Caitlin, talks to herself)* She's got it. She's got it. My poor little Caitlin! She—she's—Justin! *(The lights go out quickly on the house as Jocelyn weeps over her dead child.)*

Old Lady: *(coming back across the stage, coughing, struggling to walk)*

Black is the night o'er London's streets.
Black is the plague which through it sweeps.
Bet'er beware of telltale signs,
(slowly) Else you might be the next to die.
(looks at arm) Ring around the rosie,
(flowers) Pocket full of posies,
Ashes, ashes,
All—fall—down *(collapses-dead)*

(Mood Music - Medieval Melody II)
(Change the street scene to the castle during the musical interlude.)

(Lights Down)

End Scene

ACT 1
SCENE 7

Setting: Justin's home
Time: *(same day)* 1365

Justin: *(enters excitedly)*

Jocelyn: *(seated, doing needlework)* From the look on your face, the King must have appointed you to be an earl.

Justin: Better!

Dereck: *(standing by the hearth)* Better than an earl, Father? What could be better than more power and wealth.

Justin: The King drew up a proclamation stating we would no longer pay tribute to Rome.

Dereck: *(uninterested)* Is that all?

Jocelyn: *(disgustedly)* No doubt your friend, Wycliffe, had some say in it.

Justin: He had much to say, and much more he could have said.

Jocelyn: *(under her breath)* No doubt.

Dereck: What would a heretic have to say that would influence a king?

Justin: *(angrily)* I will not have my son speak of my life-long friend in such a manner!

Jocelyn: *(defending Dereck)* Justin, he speaks the truth. John Wycliffe has turned the hearts of too many Englishmen from the Holy Church. He will have us all excommunicated, and then what hope have we of eternal life?

Justin: Our hope does not lie in the church, Jocelyn, but in the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Jocelyn: What's happened to you, Justin?

Justin: I remained after Parliament had been dismissed and spoke with John, at great length, about spiritual matters. He showed me, from God's own Words, answers to the questions which I have so long sought.

Dereck: *(sits down)* What questions, Father?

Justin: Since I was a young man at the university, I wondered at the difference I saw in the life of John Wycliffe. He and Professor Bradwardine would discuss the reality of true religion as found in the Scriptures. I will never forget something the Professor said, "Worship of mere external forms and ceremonies can never take the place of true worship of the heart." That is what I've sought after—worship of the heart. John always seemed to have that.

(pauses, turns away) When Cailtin—died, I realized how much I desired the personal relationship with God that John possessed. *(pauses, turns back)* Today, I finally discovered that closeness when I received Christ!

Jocelyn: *(shocked)* You receive Christ when you partake of the sacrament of the mass!

Justin: (*shaking his head*) This was different. I have a peace now I never had before. It was so simple. I only needed to pray and admit to God that I was a sinner, asking His forgiveness.

Jocelyn: (*disturbed*) You prayed directly to God without the mediation of a priest?!

Justin: John showed me today where it says in the Scriptures, “There is one mediator between God and man, the man, Christ Jesus.”

Dereck: (*stands up*) Has my father become a heretic as well?

Justin: There is no heresy in believing the truth.

(Mood Music - Medieval Melody III)

(Lights Down)

End Scene

ACT I SCENE 9

Setting: Outside at Oxford

Year: 1368

(Dereck is seated on a bench reading a book. Professor Wycliffe walks out of the building, notices Dereck’s troubled look, and stops.)

Wycliffe: Is something troubling you, Master Chamberlain?

Dereck: (*looking up from his studies; hesitatingly*) I’m not certain you would understand, Professor Wycliffe.

Wycliffe: I noticed the same disturbed expression on your face while I was teaching this morning. (*sits down*) You don’t agree with much of what I’ve said, do you?

Dereck: No, sir, I don’t.

Wycliffe: Your father didn’t agree at first either.

Dereck: (*gets up, walks away from Wycliffe, remarks sarcastically*) But, thanks to you, he— (*chokes up*) died a heretic.

Wycliffe: (*walks over to Dereck and puts his hand on the boy's shoulder, speaks sympathetically*) Is that what you think I am, a heretic?

Dereck: (*softly*) Yes, sir.

Wycliffe: (*thoughtfully*) I see. (*pauses, sits down again, sighs*) What is it you don't agree with?

Dereck: I'm not sure I can explain it, sir. There are so many of your beliefs that I don't understand.

Wycliffe: Just a moment, Master Chamberlain. First of all, I want you to realize that these are not my opinions; these are the teachings of the Word of God.

Dereck: But the church teaches the Word of God.

Wycliffe: (*abruptly*) Does it? Why is it that the common people are not permitted to read the Scriptures for themselves?

Dereck: They do not possess the Scriptures in the common tongue.

Wycliffe: And why don't they? (*Dereck is speechless; he turns away from Wycliffe with a distressed look on his face.*) Search the Word for yourself, Dereck. You know the Latin. Read, study, compare. Draw your own conclusions.

(*Lights Down*)

End Scene

ACT I
SCENE 10

Setting: Outside of Oxford-night
Year: 1368-two weeks later

(Dereck is alone, reading by moonlight. Occasionally he paces, looks up, thinks, etc. Suddenly, his face brightens as he reads aloud.)

Dereck: *(slowly)* “For by GRACE are ye saved through FAITH, and that NOT OF YOURSELVES, it is the GIFT OF God; NOT of WORKS, lest any man should boast.” *(He clutches the book to himself and falls on his knees.)* Oh, Lord, now I understand. You are the ONLY way to heaven. It’s so simple. Why didn’t I see it before? *(bows his head)* Forgive me, Father! I’ve been so wrong about so many things. Forgive me for my pride, for trusting in my own good works. Salvation is not in a church or creed, but in YOU. I accept your free gift. Please, cleanse my heart and save my soul!

(stands up slowly; says with much emotion) Father wasn’t a heretic. He is in heaven. I will see him again!

(Lights Down)

End Scene

Narration: In the year 1377, Richard II, grandson of the late King Edward III, ascended England’s throne at the age of ten. Political, social, and spiritual unrest tore at the foundations of feudal society. England’s peasants, led by Watt Tyler, revolted against tyrannical nobles. The government began to side with the church against the teachings and followers of one of its best known Oxford professors, John Wycliffe.

ACT II SCENE 1

(Mood Music - Medieval Melody I - Bishops, John of Gaunt, Dereck, and Wycliffe enter while music is playing.)

Setting: Interior of a cathedral
Year: 1377

Courtenay: (*all are standing*) As bishop of London I now proclaim this tribunal to be officially in session. (*all bishops, etc. sit*) Step forward, John Wycliffe. (*Wycliffe steps forward; Courtenay reaches for a paper from Knyghton.*)

The following accusation has been brought against you which states: “John Wycliffe has, by translating the Scriptures into English and laying it thus open to the laity and to women who can read, cast the Gospel pearl under the feet of swine. We, as holy men of God, have reached the conclusion that it be “heresy to speak of the Holy Scriptures in English.”

What say you to this charge?

Wycliffe: “You say it is heresy to speak of the Holy Scriptures in English. You call me a heretic because I have translated the Bible into the common tongue of the people. Do you know Whom you blaspheme? Did not the Holy Ghost give the Word of God at first in the mother tongue of the nations to whom it was addressed? Why do you speak against the Holy Ghost? You say that the church of God is in danger of this book. How can that be? Is it not the Bible that gives all her authority to the church? Is it not from the Bible that we learn Who is the Builder and Sovereign of the church, what are the laws by which she is to be governed, and the rights and privileges of her members? Without the Bible what charter has the church to show for all these? It is you who place the church in jeopardy by hiding the Divine warrant, the missive royal of her King, for the authority she wields and the faith she enjoys.” (*Bishops mumble angrily to each other*)

Knyghton: (*stands and shouts*) Heresy!

Wycliffe: The Scriptures are “to be the property of the people, and one which no party should be allowed to wrest from them.”

Bishops: (*shout intermittently*) Heresy! Heresy! He ought to be arrested!

John of Gaunt: Arrest is subject to government authority. I, John of Gaunt, was commissioned by the King of England, his majesty, Richard II, to assure the protection of John Wycliffe. (*Sir Richard Clifford brings a parchment to Gaunt. Gaunt reads over paper; dismisses the messenger*)

I have just received word from Queen Joan, as well as King Richard, himself, that Professor Wycliffe is to return to his parish in Lutterworth. All of London is in an uproar about this council which has now been

proclaimed, by the crown, to be terminated. (*Gaunt, Wycliffe, and Dereck walk out.*)

(Mood Music - Medieval Melody I)

(Lights Down)

End Scene

ACT II
SCENE 4

(Mood Music- Medieval Melodies V, VI - played by musicians who are seated in the musicians gallery)

Setting: interior of banquet room in palace

Year: 1385

(A jester is juggling. A servant girl is serving food to the noblemen and women who are standing around or sitting in groups, talking and laughing. King Richard II and Queen Anne are seated. Dereck and Gwen are in attendance. Garrett, a fellow parliamentarian, and his wife, Candace, are speaking in stage whispers to each other.)

Candace: *(glances jealously at Dereck and Gwen)* Garrett, don't forget, this is your opportunity.

Garrett: I don't know, Candace. I feel uneasy about this. Dereck is a close friend of the king and extremely popular in the court.

Candace: But you are the one who deserves the recognition, not him! It could be you receiving the appointment today!

Jester: *(coming over to them)* Care to see me juggle these balls?

Garrett: *(annoyed)* No. Go away.

Jester: Stand on my head?

Garrett: No!!

Jester: *(as he pulls Garrett's sword from its sheath)* Swallow a sword?

Garrett: *(as he angrily grabs the sword back)* You WILL be swallowing a sword, my good man, if you don't leave us alone!

Jester: *(backing up as he bows apologetically)* Pardon me. Pardon me. Just trying to lighten the mood; no need to be rude!

Candace: *(disgustedly)* What an annoying little man!

Garrett: Never mind him.

Candace: You must not waste any more time, Garrett. The King will, no doubt, be announcing Dereck's appointment soon.

Garrett: *(hesitates)* Do you realize, Candace, that if the king doesn't believe me, we could suffer for it?

Candace: There are others here who could testify to the truth of your words. Besides, Garrett, you will be doing the king a favor by exposing Dereck's heresy.

Garrett: Perhaps you're right. *(sees the king talking with John of Gaunt.)* My guess is, I've not much time. *(He begins making his way towards the king's throne. The jester is constantly, inadvertently, blocking his way. Finally, Garrett pushes him aside.)*

John of Gaunt: *(Before Garrett can get to the throne, Gaunt stands in the middle of the room and raises his hands for silence. Everyone quiets down and turns their attention towards him.)* May I have your attention! His majesty, King Richard II of England, is about to make a pronouncement! *(Garrett glances over at Candace who gives him a very disgruntled look.)* Dereck Chamberlain, step forward.

Richard II: *(stands)* Due to your outstanding service to the crown, I am pleased to award you the title of Earl of Stafford.

Garrett: *(steps forward boldly)* Your Majesty, I must protest. This man is guilty of heresy! *(people react with shock)* He is a follower of the late John Wycliffe.

Richard II: This is a serious allegation. Have you any proof ?

John of Gaunt: Your majesty, I, myself, can attest to the fact that Master Chamberlain was, indeed, a close friend of John Wycliffe's, though I know nothing of his present promulgation of Wycliffe's heresies.

Nobleman I: *(comes forward and bows to the king)* Your majesty, might I speak a word in behalf of this man? *(pointing to Dereck; the King nods his approval)* Dereck Chamberlain is a man of noble character and integrity. He is guilty of no crime.

Garrett: Your majesty, I personally have seen this man preaching Wycliffe's doctrines.

Richard II: Master Chamberlain—the truth. Are you one of these Lollards? *(The room is silent.)*

Dereck: *(boldly, but respectfully)* Even when John Wycliffe was on his deathbed, the church sent priests and friars to try to make him retract his teachings. I am no more a heretic than he was. I, as he, believe and preach only the truth of God's Word.

Richard II: Answer the question as it was stated! Are you one of these Lollards, who, by my own decree, have been declared outlaws?!

Dereck: *(quietly)* Yes, your Majesty, I am.

John of Gaunt: Seize him! *(two guards rush towards him. Sir Richard stands in front of him with sword drawn. Another friend of Dereck's takes him by the arm and ushers him quickly out of the room. A sword fight ensues. Ladies scream and exit. Lights out.)*

(Mood Music - Medieval Melodies V, VI - offstage)

(Lights Down)

End Scene

ACT II SCENE 6

Setting: interior of room

Time: 1385

(Dereck is seated at a desk, writing. A voice is heard over the sound system.)

Narrator: John Wycliffe was the first to translate the Bible into English. His followers continued to faithfully copy, distribute, and proclaim the Word of God. They were unmercifully persecuted, imprisoned, and often put to death for their trust in the finished work of Christ.

Forty-four years after his death, the Catholic church ordered Wycliffe's bones to be dug up, burned, and scattered into a brook whose waters would eventually flow into the ocean. Thomas Fuller, a seventeenth century church historian wrote, "Thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which is now dispersed all the world over." *(soft mood music, Medieval Theme I, begins)*

Often called The Morning Star of the Reformation, John Wycliffe's influence lives on. Were it not for him, and people like him, who were willing to risk all so that we of today might possess the Scriptures in our own language, we would not have the knowledge of Christ, the Morning Star of Truth. *(mood music builds to a triumphant finale)*

(Lights Down)

The End

