

# For Such a Time as This

by the Reverend Steve Sheppard

After we had said our final goodbyes to our friends at the GloryFires Roundtable held in Chester UK in February, both Sylvain\* and I headed to London to visit the Cabinet War rooms and the Houses of Parliament.

## Winston Churchill

We were in the once secret wartime bunker, the place where Winston Churchill, his Government Ministers and Military Command gathered together to discuss the War effort. This maze of undisturbed underground rooms was once filled with people who planned and plotted strategies 'around the clock' during this dark period of World History.

As we walked around these narrow darkened passageways we noticed that each room had been left unchanged since the last door had been closed at the end of the Second World War. As I gazed upon the empty chairs and observed the well-worn Naval war charts I started to think about all of those people that served and shared in Winston Churchill's dream to see Europe free from the grasp of Hitler's evil tyranny.

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Winston Churchill was 65 years of age when he was made Prime Minister and was immediately given the daunting task of leading our Nation from near defeat. Even though this was an immense task and responsibility to undertake he said:

**"I felt as if I were walking with destiny and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial... I was sure I should not fail."**

His speeches during those difficult days were inspiring and powerful and for most of the British people Winston Churchill became a symbol of hope in the Nation's struggle for freedom. His commitment to see Europe liberated from the 'axis of evil' is seen in his relentless work ethic. He regularly worked 18 hour days, travelled abroad many times a year to attend key strategic conferences and constantly placed his life in danger whilst standing with his soldiers on the aggressive battlefronts. Hostilities in Europe ended officially at midnight, May 8th 1945 and Winston Churchill's dream of victory became a reality when Germany finally surrendered. In his Victory speech to the Nation he acknowledged and praised the courage of all and declared how 'the whole world was combined against the evil-doers who are now prostrate before us.' Churchill then concluded his speech by asking everyone to follow him to Church.

**'That this House do now attend at the Church of St. Margaret, Westminster, to give humble and reverent thanks to Almighty God for our deliverance from the threat of German domination.'**\*\*

\*\* Germany of course has her own war heroes: Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, Oskar Schindler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer to name but a few (editor)

## William Wilberforce

The next historic theatre of dreams which stands overlooking the Cabinet War Rooms is the Houses of Parliament. As we walked up the steps of the Great Hall of Westminster we then entered St Stephens Hall. This is the site of the Royal Chapel of St Stephen's where the House of Commons sat until the Chapel was destroyed by the fire of 1834.

In this narrow hall every dignitary, every member of the Royal household, every politician had to walk through the main lobby to take their place in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords. Etched in Latin within the fabric of the mosaic floor that their feet had walked upon are the words **Psalm 127:1 'Unless the Lord Builds the House the Labour's Work is in vain.'**

The words of this Psalm have a more compelling impact when you realise that sittings in both respective Houses begin with Christian prayers. The practice of prayers is believed to have started in about 1558, and was common practice by 1567. The Parliamentary Prayer that is recited today dates back from the reign of Charles II in 1630 and still carries a timeless prophetic utterance which links both kingdoms.

**"Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our Queen and her government, to Members of Parliament and all in positions of responsibility, the guidance of your Spirit. May they never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals but laying aside all private interests and**



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**prejudices keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind; so may your kingdom come and your name be hallowed. Amen."**

Members of Parliament and Peers stand and recite the Parliamentary Prayer facing the wall behind them. It is thought this practice developed due to the difficulty Members would historically have faced kneeling to pray whilst wearing a sword.

As we stood in St Stephen's hall we were reminded how Royalty had worshipped there, how Politicians had prayed there and great men like William Wilberforce had voiced their dream there.

Along the walls of St Stephen's Chapel there are eight paintings that depict eight important events in the History of Great Britain.

One of these Wall Paintings shows a small group of men and woman gathered together in a rural setting listening to the Bible being read. Within the brass frame of this mural it reads:

**'Despite the persecutions the people gather to listen to the Wycliffe Translation of the bible being read out loud.'**

In this place we were reminded of another great Leader, William Wilberforce, launching his dream for the abolition of slavery in 1787:

**"The grand object of my parliamentary existence... If it pleases God to be the instrument of stopping such a course of wickedness and cruelty as never before disgraced a Christian country."**

But for every God inspired dream there will always be those who will try and derail it.

Painting: 'William Wilberforce' by Karl Anton Hickle 1789



For the first 20 years of his Parliamentary struggles Wilberforce suffered nothing but defeats, insults, rejection from his friends, slander from his enemies and threats to his life.

The outside pressures to drop his campaign were formidable and there were Political hostilities to William Wilberforce which on many occasions erupted into personal hatred.

His bills to abolish the slave trade that he presented to Parliament over a period of 20 years were voted down no less than eleven times but on the 12th attempt in February 1807 history shows us

**'While William Wilberforce sat, head bowed, tears streaming down his face the Bill for Abolition was carried and approved in the House of Commons.'**

Of course the battle to abolish slavery throughout the British Empire wasn't over and Wilberforce pursued his dream for a further 26 years.

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On July 26, 1833, only 3 days before he died, slavery itself was outlawed in the British colonies and William Wilberforce realised his dream.

His friend and Pastor William Jay wrote a tribute to William Wilberforce's relentless 46 year dream to see slavery abolished within the British colonies with this accurate prophecy:

**"His disinterested, self-denying, laborious, undeclining efforts in this cause of justice and humanity... will call down the blessings of millions and ages to come will glory in his memory."**

### God Dreams

Our nation has a rich Christian Heritage that testifies of people whose courage and conviction allowed them to follow their dream and show the World what God really looked like.

These two dreams of these two different leaders Winston Churchill and William Wilberforce are examples of a God type of dream that went far beyond them.

By speaking the way they did, they inspired, led, educated, delivered and left a legacy for succeeding generations to come.

Their dream seemed impossible to accomplish, but because it had destiny written all over it; all of heaven was waiting to back it up. God is excited by people who dream His dreams because He is able to manifest His purposes through them; He is able to release the full potential encapsulated within the dream.

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John Wesley's last letter was written to William Wilberforce, who had been converted under Wesley's ministry. He expressed his opposition to slavery and encouraged Wilberforce to take action.

*Balam, February 24, 1791*

*Dear Sir,*

*Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius contra mundum, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.*

*There is a saying 'cometh the hour cometh the man.'*

*I would like to say 'cometh the hour cometh the Church.'*

When your dream becomes His dream then you have the opportunity to reflect His Glory to a Fatherless generation, to promote His purpose to a world which is full of self-promotion and self-belief and preach His salvation to a world which is dying and broken.

**Esther 4:14 'Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'**



*Steve has been married to Lizzie for 28 years and they have one daughter named Abi. He was an 'Iron Worker' for many years and for the last decade Steve and Lizzie planted the Water's*

*Edge Church and founded a Bus Ministry called Street Level which provides care and support for the vulnerable on the streets of their home town of Poole.*

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