

William Tyndale 1 05 22 St Michaels 9.30am

If someone asked you who you thought was the greatest Britain, I wonder who you would name?

In 2002 in the BBC's poll of the hundred greatest Britons the top five were: -

1. Winston Churchill
2. Isambard Kingdom Brunel
3. Diana, Princess of Wales
4. Charles Darwin
5. William Shakespeare

Placed 26th was William Tyndale who we are thinking about this morning.

William Tyndale was born in 1494 in Gloucestershire and studied at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. He was a keen biblical scholar and linguist who became a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation. It is thought he aligned himself with the Lollards, a pro-protestant movement which had a stanch following in Gloucestershire.

At the time Tyndale was born, the Scriptures were read in Latin, and in an era when many of the people were illiterate and only a small minority of the people, mainly the gentry and those in religious orders, could read and understand Latin, it meant that few would understand the Bible or what was being said in the church services.

Tyndale was eager to translate the scriptures into English but was prevented from doing so by the then Bishop of London.

His work "The Obedience of the Christian Man" appeared to argue in favour of the ruler of a country being the head of its church in place of the Pope. This came to the attention of Henry V111, and it is suggested that this influenced the argument for the Church of England splitting for the church of Rome. However, 2 years later Tyndale wrote "The Practice of Prelates" which opposed Henry's annulment of his own marriage on the grounds that it contravened scripture. Which the King was not so happy with!

A controversial figure Tyndale fled to the continent staying first in Belgium and eventually settling in Hamburg. While he never returned to England, he began translation of the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew texts into English, first of the New Testament and then the Old Testament.

When the translations arrived in England there was bitter opposition from the Ecclesiastical Authorities who considered it to be subversive.

In 1535, Tyndale was arrested, and jailed in the castle of Vilvoorde_outside Brussels for over a year. In 1536, he was convicted of heresy and executed by strangulation, after which his body was burnt at the stake.

During his lifetime Tyndale continued to make revisions to his English translations, and after his death his translation of the Bible became the foundation for subsequent English versions, including the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible, authorised by the Church of England.

There are two important facts which are worth noting

1. Tyndale's translation was the first English Bible to be translated directly from Hebrew and Greek texts
2. Tyndale's was the first English translation to take advantage of the invention of the printing press.

In England in 1611, after seven years of work, 47 scholars produced the King James Version of the Bible which drew extensively from Tyndale's original work. One estimate suggests that the New Testament in the King James Version is 83% Tyndale's words and the Old Testament 76% of his words.

The King James, Authorised version, remained relatively unchanged except for some minor alterations until 1885.

The importance of Tyndale's work is inestimable. For he initiated the revolution which was to allow every English person to hear the words of scripture in their own language.

Our Old Testament reading from Nehemiah tells of the Hebrew people had returned from exile in Babylon. Ezra summoned the people together so that they could all listen to the reading of the Torah and hear the Law of Moses and we are told that all the people were attentive to the book of the law and listened as it was explained to them as they listened to it in their own language.

Speaking of the bible the great preacher John Chrysostom maintained that "To get the full flavour of a herb, it must be pressed between the fingers", so it is the same with the Scriptures; the more familiar they become, the more they reveal their hidden treasures and yield their indescribable riches.

Today we have the privilege of reading, studying, and listening to Holy Scripture in our mother tongue and are fortunate to have at our disposal many different translations. However, whichever translation we prefer use, unless we read it in the original Hebrew and Greek, we have to be aware that we are relying on the translator to abide by certain criteria, in that, it is not only the literal translation which is of importance but the interpretation of the original meaning which needs to be conveyed.

Bible translation consists of three steps and in all translation the translator must ask:

1. What does the source text say?
2. What does it mean?
3. How do we best express that meaning in the language into which we are translating?

Even once the true meaning is translated the reader then needs to understand the message the text is trying to convey and the personal significance the Holy Spirit is communicating to the individual.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to William Tyndale's original English translation work which began it all.

Charles Colson, who nearly 30 years ago was awarded the Templeton Prize for his exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension said this:-

"The Bible -- banned, burned, beloved. More widely read, more frequently attacked than any other book in history.

Generations of intellectuals have attempted to discredit it, dictators of every age have outlawed it and executed those who read it.

Yet soldiers carry it into battle believing it more powerful than their weapons. Fragments of it smuggled into solitary prison cells have transformed ruthless killers into gentle saints"

Whichever translation of the Bible you choose to use - read it regularly, read it prayerfully, and with openness to what God is saying to you.

For it is Holy Scripture and it holds a truth which is still as relevant to each one of us today as it was the day it was written down and the day when Tyndale first translated it into English.