

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Tyndale: “always singing one note”

(Jerry Fite)

King Henry the VIII’s advisor, Thomas Cromwell sent a merchant, Stephen Vaughn, to find the exiled William Tyndale. Vaughn sent a letter to Cromwell, dated June 19, 1531 about Tyndale. He wrote, “*I find him always singing one note*” (David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, Yale University Press, 1994, p. 217). The one note was: “*Will the King of England give his official endorsement to a vernacular Bible for all his English subjects? If so, Tyndale will give himself up to the king and never write another book*” (John Piper, *Always Singing One Note – A Vernacular Bible*, Desiring God, January 31, 2006). Defying the Pope and his laws, Tyndale said to a Catholic scholar at dinner, “*If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow, to know more of the Scripture than thou dost.*”

While John Wycliff translated the Latin Vulgate into English in 1382, William Tyndale, in 1526, was the first to translate the New Testament into the English vernacular from the original Greek text. While Wycliff’s translation was hand-written, Tyndale’s translation was the first printed English translation. Finishing his translating work in Worms, Germany, Tyndale began

to smuggle at least three thousand copies into England by placing the printed pages in bails of cloth, which were sown together upon safe arrival.

In 1534, William Tyndale published his revised New Testament. Daniell calls William Tyndale’s revision of 1534 “*the glory of his life’s work.*” John Piper makes the musical connection: “*If Tyndale was ‘always singing one note,’ this was the crescendo of the song of his life – the finished and refined New Testament in English.*”

Erasmus’ work had an impact upon the Reformation not only by compiling the original Greek text of the New Testament, but also upon the richness of the English language. Erasmus’ book, *De copia*, was used by students at Oxford. When Tyndale attended Oxford, there is no doubt he studied the book which was designed to “exploit the “copious” potential of language. One practice lesson was to give “**no fewer than one hundred fifty ways of saying**, ‘*your letter has delighted me very much.*’” Do we have to wonder why we have a Shakespeare who was born in 1564? Richness of language was being fostered during this time. Erasmus, Tyndale, and Shakespeare

were putting in the hard work to give variety to expression. After 500 years, Tyndale’s words are still impacting our Bible reading. Tyndale’s phrases, such a “Let there be light” (*Gen. 1:3*), “Our Father, which art in heaven” (*Matt. 6:9*) and “He went out...and wept bitterly” (*Matt. 26:75*) are still current among the various translations. Compare the fullness of Tyndale’s expression, characterizing Peter’s reaction when facing Jesus’ silent stare, with a modern translation: He “cried hard” (*Contemporary English Version*).

Tyndale spent the last twelve years of his life exiled from his own country. He not only translated the New Testament, but also the Pentateuch, Joshua to 2 Chronicles and Jonah. We can only imagine the richness of the Psalms if he could have lived longer. King Henry VIII refused the “one note” in Tyndale’s lifetime. Instead, on October 6, 1536, William Tyndale was executed at Vilvoorde Castle, six miles north of Brussels. He was condemned as a heretic and cast from the priesthood. Because he had been a Catholic priest, he was first strangled while tied to the stake and then his body was burned to ashes, never to be buried.