

The Bible in My Heart Language

November 5-6, 2011

Andy Kumpel

Have you ever wondered what heaven will be like? We sometimes imagine the streets of gold, the angels surrounding us playing their harps and the eternal worship of Jesus. Imagine that you arrive at the **gates of heaven** and you are greeted there by the Angel Gabriel and Saint Peter, what language do you think they are speaking? Maybe you are like my friend who just got Rosetta Stone in Spanish, so you hope they say “Hola.” Perhaps you enjoy the romantic sounds of someone speaking in French or Italian, so that would be an appealing sound for heaven to be filled with. If you’ve been around Autumn Ridge for very long you might favor the Queen’s English as the proper speech in heaven. Jesus spoke in an ancient language called Aramaic, but he also knew Hebrew, which is the language of the Jewish people. The popular language of the people in the New Testament church was Greek. How can we decide which language will be spoken?

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible. You might imagine that heaven’s language bears some resemblance to British English of 400 years ago if you grew up learning the Bible in this beloved version that did much for the spread of God’s word among English speaking people.

Each year at the beginning of November we like to dedicate two weeks to what God is doing through missions. The theme of this year’s mission’s festival is “**Until the Whole World Knows**”. In honor of the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, today we will take a look at the importance of Bible translation. Translating the Bible into the heart

language of all people groups around the world is a necessity to fulfilling God's great commission. In Psalm 119 we are invited to turn our hearts toward God's word, the Bible, and God's teaching. Within the pages of scripture we can find real life. God's plan is to offer life to every tribe, nation and language. What exactly is our part in spreading God's word through Bible translation? I invite you to follow along in the outline provided in your bulletin.

I've entitled this message ***The Bible in My Heart Language***. So it will help us to first define what ***Heart Language*** means. My wife Cassie, who works in cardiac surgery, might think I'm talking about: **a hollow, pumplike organ of blood circulation, composed mainly of rhythmically contractile smooth muscle, located in the chest between the lungs and slightly to the left and consisting of four chambers**. But you know that even though that definition describes the physical human heart, I actually mean the definition of heart that means: **the center of the total personality, especially with reference to intuition, feeling, or emotion**. So heart language is: the language that communicates the deepest level of understanding. This is usually the language a person is born hearing and learns to speak first. This is what the Psalmist means when he says "**Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.**" **Psalm 119:34** So, while I've had four years of high school Spanish, I've tutored students who were learning Spanish, I spoke my best broken Spanish to the kitchen staff at the restaurant where I waited tables in Texas during college, and I've spent two weeks speaking my best Spanish in Mexico; I don't understand God's deepest truth when it is conveyed in Spanish. I prefer English.

I want to give some basic numbers to help us understand the big picture of Bible translation. **6800+:** is the number of known languages around the globe. **457:** is the number of language communities which have access to the Bible in the language that they understand best. **1,211:** is the number of language communities which have access to the New Testament in the language that they understand best. **1500+:** is the number of Bible translation projects that are currently underway. **2000+:** is the estimate of the number of languages that do not have any of the Bible. Roughly 340 million people do not have access to any of God's word in their heart language. Thousands of people groups around the world do not have the opportunity that we do to join the Psalmist in declaring "**I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.**" **Psalm 119:11.**

Today I want to first consider what are the **challenges of Bible Translation.** The first challenge is that **language is complex.** Rob Taylor, who is a translator of the Choctaw New Testament, gives an example of how the complexity of language makes Bible translation more difficult. In the Native American language of Choctaw the word for **world is translated as: earth, land and dirt.** It doesn't include the idea of people. So John 3:16, to the Choctaw people, could mean, "**For God so loved the dirt...**" This translator was able to find the right word for the idea of the world that is filled with people, but not all translators can do this because of the complexity of language.

If you have a healthy imagination it isn't too hard to imagine yourself in the shoes of a Bible translator. For instance, imagine you find yourself in a sub-Saharan African country where the two meteorological seasons are described as drought and flood. You are tasked with translating the

prophetic books of the Old Testament when you come across a well-known verse that helps us to understand God's forgiveness "**Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.**" **Isaiah 1:18.** You've discovered during your time in Africa that the indigenous people have never seen or heard of snow. So unlike us Minnesotans who have a first hand experience of a wintry day when white snow covers all the land, the African people who you serve will have a difficult time gaining this mental picture. You take the Hebrew word in Isaiah "**sheleg**" which English translators have rendered as snow or snowy to find out what it really means. You discover that while it means snow it can also be used to describe **the whiteness of a fair skinned person, the whiteness of leprosy, or the whiteness of the mountain peaks.** You would then have to search for a ubiquitous item in African culture that is always white to represent this theological idea of the scarlet or crimson color of my sin being made white. You've discovered that other tropical cultures that face a similar problem have solved it by translating the verse "**Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be made as white as coconut milk.**" This seems to work alright for coastal Africans who have an abundance of coconuts, but not for your chosen tribe that is landlocked and have never heard of a coconut. This is the kind of challenge that Bible translators face everyday because language is complex.

The second challenge of Bible translation is that **translation is expensive.** Wycliffe Bible translators estimate that the cost to translate a single verse of scripture is **\$26.** Since there are over **31,000** verses and over **2000** languages and **quick calculation** reveals that the cost to translate the entire Bible into all of the languages of the world is roughly **1.6**

billion dollars. This is just the cost of translation and does not factor in costs related to teaching indigenous people to read, duplicating audio versions of the Bible for those who cannot read, travel expenses of missionaries, schooling for missionaries' children, and many other costs. I must admit that when I first did this calculation I thought that 1.6 billion dollars seemed like a staggering figure. I've never seen a million dollars, let alone a billion. But then I realized that the **annual Gross Domestic Product of the United States was 14.1 trillion dollars.** This is almost 9000 times larger than the cost of translation. This is how economist's measure the wealth of a country. Each year, the US alone produces 9000 times more wealth than the cost to translate the Bible into all of the world's languages. So the financial cost is great, but not insurmountable. God has always provided the necessary resources for his people to achieve his mission.

The third challenge of Bible translation is that **the workers are few.** Matthew's Gospel recounts "**Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'**"

Matthew 9:37-38. The tremendous financial cost of Bible translation would easily be met with the resources that God has given his people if there were workers to do the work. Most of us don't give money to Bible translation because we don't know where it is going. But if God raised up someone from your small group to go to an unreached people group in Asia, you would probably give money to their cause. To give us a sense of the work that Bible translators do, Kevin and Colleen Walters who are Autumn Ridge supported missionaries serving in Niger, Africa sent us a short video. Let's take a look. **Video.**

So, what can we do about this challenge of not enough workers for Bible translation? First, we must understand the problem. Most of us probably think “I’m lousy at learning languages so I couldn’t work on a Bible translation.” This is absolutely false. Bible translation work does require some people to do language work, but there is so much more involved than only that. Here is an email that I received just last week from Wycliffe. It says **translation work for 3 more languages is already funded and ready to start translation – all that is needed is a project manager.**

Specific job responsibilities include:

- **Overall planning and management of the projects with the translation teams**
- **Providing coordination, administration, budgeting, and team care**
- **Communicating with project stakeholders**

Later on the email says: **key qualifications for success in this role are: 1) a heart for people without God’s word, and 2) management experience.**

Now I don’t know anyone who spends their spare time learning obscure tribal languages, but I can think of dozens if not hundreds of people who share the skill set that Wycliffe is describing in this email. It is true that the workers are few, but Jesus gave us the answer to this problem **“Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”** Our challenge today is to ask the Lord of the harvest about how he wants to use the gifts that he has given us to achieve his mission. If you are interested in learning more about Bible translation or Autumn

Ridge supported missionaries, you can stop by the Ministry Center after the service to check out displays about Wycliffe and find information about how you can pray for missions.

We've spent a lot of time thinking about the challenges of Bible translation because it is a daunting task. We also want to consider **the benefits of having the Bible in your heart language.**

We observe the first benefit of Bible translation through the lens of **the King James story.** The King James Version of the Bible gave a gift to the English language with idiomatic phrases such as **“the apple of his eye,” “city set on a hill,” “a house divided,” “the quick and the dead,” and “two edged sword.”** We also gained popular use of very common words such as **adoption, advertise, beautiful, feel, fishermen, glory, horror, housetop, mortgaged, mystery, scrape, and suburbs.** Beyond the effect of the KJV on language, the language of the Bible infiltrated English speaking culture as Christians led in arenas such as politics and education. The KJV was so universal in the consciousness of the English speaking world that many leaders reached to it for famous speeches. **Abraham Lincoln** quoted Psalm 19:9 in his second inaugural address saying **“the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”** **Martin Luther King Jr.** in his “I have a dream” speech quoted from Amos out of the RSV – a similar version to the KJV when he said **“justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.”** Modern Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama have both turned to the words of scripture when addressing the nation after tragic events. These leaders recognize the eternal truth of scripture brings comfort to people. But none of this would be effective if the Bible had not been first translated into English and then made easily accessible to all of us. We are able to

hide God's word in our hearts because of great translations like the King James Version.

The second benefit of having the Bible in your heart language is demonstrated because **the “word” speaks in a unique way.** The Psalmist tells us about this in Psalm 119 when he says **“Preserve my life according to your word”** (v. 25b) and **“be gracious to me through your law”** (v. 29b) and **“Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I will find delight”** (v. 35). In the Gospel of John Jesus is described as the “word” made flesh. I love the depiction of this passage from The Message paraphrase of **John 1:14 “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.”** The truth that God wants to speak to us comes boldly through his written word in the Bible and through the word made flesh that is Jesus Christ. When we can understand God because he is speaking our language it moves our hearts and shapes our souls. This is why Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Bible called The Message has become popular in our contemporary society; because it speaks to people in a way they can understand. This is the same benefit that unreached people groups experience when a missionary spends years learning a new language and culture so they can translate God's word. Jesus moves into their neighborhood for the first time because they can hear God's word in their mother tongue.

I have to confess that this has been a difficult sermon for me to prepare. When Pastor John asked me to preach on the importance of Bible translation for unreached people groups I was a bit overwhelmed because I wasn't sure how this topic could be practical for the average

person sitting in the congregation. When I considered my convictions about how God wants to spread his word I realized that I do believe that God wants to raise up people from this congregation who will boldly go to the ends of the earth, they will learn linguistics, they will eat strange foods, they will live in mud huts, and they will do the hard work of translating God's word. But I also know that most of us are not going to be called by God to do all those things. So, I'm left with this struggle of what does God want us to do about the need to translate his word into so many languages?

This is **our practical challenge**. First, God wants you and me to **be a missionary**. We may not travel the globe, but God does want us to open our eyes to see the spiritual poverty that surrounds us. God does want us to look to our neighbors, friends and family members to discover who needs spiritual truth. God does want us to make a disciple as we are going along in life. One very practical way that you and I can be missionaries is to **give a Bible away**. This is my challenge to you. We've ordered some inexpensive but **attractive New Testaments**. We are making them available to purchase for just **\$3**. They are just outside the sanctuary doors on either side of the lobby near the café and in the Ministry Center. Will you give one Bible away? This is what Bible translators do once they have finally done the hard work of translating the Bible. They start with the New Testament, and then they give it away. Missionaries don't set up a book store to sell Bibles; they give them away free of charge. We want you to do the same thing. Frankly we didn't know how many Bibles to order because we knew there would be about 1700 of you in church this weekend. I'll tell you that our confidence wasn't very high, we only ordered 100 Bibles. So, my challenge to you is to exceed our expectations. If you go to the Bible

table and we are out of Bibles; then give us your name and we'll order more. You can be a missionary by investing \$3 into someone you know who needs to have God's word in their heart language.

As I was preparing for this sermon I decided it would be helpful if I got a head start on the give a Bible away project. I didn't want to ask you to do anything that I wasn't willing to do myself. So I bought five Bibles to give away. I want to tell you about my experience. All of my coworkers are Christians so I have to be creative about where my mission field is. I've discovered that my most natural mission field is at the gym. I try to play tennis once a week and run, bike or lift weights another two days a week. Since I'm at the gym about the same time every week I have been able to build relationships with people I see regularly. I asked one of my tennis pals if he's ever read the Bible and if he wanted a New Testament that I was giving away. He accepted the New Testament and the conversation hasn't gone any further. I know I'll see this guy almost every week and maybe a spiritual conversation will come from me giving him a Bible. But not every encounter has had initial success. I want to tell you about another guy who I offered a Bible to and he rejected it. This is another man that I know well. I asked him if he wanted a Bible and he said "No thanks, my wife just gave me one and its sitting on my nightstand. We are gong to try to read it together." Even though he rejected my offer of a Bible, we had a ten minute conversation about reading the Bible. I showed him the app that is on my smart phone that I use to keep up with my Bible reading. I've known these two guys for at least 8 years and I see them both regularly. We've never had a spiritual conversation before I offered them a Bible.

There is something else that happens to us when we are challenged to give a Bible away. I found myself praying for these men in a way that I

never have before. I was asking God for courage and faith and the right opening to allow me to follow through on my desire to share my faith with them. I don't know what is going to come of my experience of giving a Bible away. I still have some more Bibles to give, but I know that God has already blessed me through the experience of giving his word to someone else. So, I want you to write down **one name** in your sermon notes. I've provided you a space there. Who is it in your life that you want to pray for and step out in faith to give the gift of God's word. We can't all be Bible translators, but we can all be missionaries and spread God's message to the world around us.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your word and how you use it to speak to us. We pray for the many missionaries who are translating the Bible into languages that have never had access to the Bible before. We pray that you would make their efforts effective and that spiritual fruit would grow because of it. Lord, we ask for your favor for the many missionaries and mission projects that we support. Give them wisdom and energy to know how to best follow your lead in their lives. Father, we ask for your blessing on Bob Stanhope as he travels to Honduras for a medical mission trip. We pray for Phil Fischer, Mark Topazian, and Joel Michelson who are speaking at a medical missions conference next week. Use their experience to raise up new missionaries and encourage experienced missionaries in their work. Lord, we praise you for the gift of life you've given to Travis and Allison Vail on the birth of their son Timothy James. We pray that this little boy would grow to love you. Lord, we intercede on behalf of those who are sick, struggling, unemployed, disheartened, or broken in spirit. We pray from Sharon Love

who is having foot surgery later this week and Bill Cofey and Richard Bischke who both have ongoing kidney dialysis. We ask that you would bring them comfort, peace, and joy today. As we worship you by giving our offerings now Lord, we ask that you would multiply these gifts to be used around the world to reach unreached people groups. We thank you for the partnerships in missions that have blessed our local congregation over many years. We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.