

Communication and Language

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[0 : 00] All four passages. All four passages.! And the bit I want to look at is looking at what does communication mean?

! We have communication between people.! And sadly, what we tend to find with people when they communicate, communication is full of errors and blunders.

And we've seen this at the level of families. We've seen it at the level of nations. All sorts of human communication goes wrong.

It's said that World War One began because of a mistaken telegram sent by the Germans to the British.

It had to be translated from German into English. And the wrong word was put in English into that telegram. One that was harsh.

[1 : 02] When actually the original in German was actually very soft. So communication is what happens between us as beings and it's not perfect.

If we look at communication between God and man, things are on a completely different level. We have His Word.

He speaks to us through His Word. Everything here is measured, carefully thought out, carefully chosen, so that what we read here lands properly in our lives.

Now the scriptures were written by God using ordinary men, inspiring them by Him who is the Holy Spirit.

And the scriptures were written probably over a time of 1500 years or even longer.

[2 : 08] The originals, the originals that were written down. The Old Testament from Hebrew, with parts of it in Aramaic.

The New Testament in Greek, with a few tiny parts of it, again in Aramaic.

The thing is, unless you're a minister trained properly in these languages, we would struggle with Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.

So, God in His wisdom has encouraged that these scriptures are translated into the languages of every nation on earth.

And our benefit here, with both English and Gaelic Bibles, is that we've had them now for hundreds of years. Hundreds of years.

[3 : 11] Those who translate them do their work prayerfully, carefully. And they ask for the same guidance that the Holy Spirit gave to the original authors.

They ask for His guidance to help them as they translate Bibles into our languages now. Now, looking up as to how many languages the Bible has been translated into, Wycliffe Bible translators indicate that the full Bible is now available in about 700 languages.

The New Testament on its own is available in 1,700 languages. And for other languages where only a portion of the scriptures have been translated so far, If we add the full Bible, the New Testament, now the portions, about 4,000 languages, 4,000 languages have at least some part of the scriptures translated into them.

The thing is, when it comes to language, we often tend to think, Well, language is about words, and only words.

But there's much more to language. And if we go back to our school days, we were taught that it was important to get our punctuation right.

[4 : 54] So all the full stops and commas, and all those other marks that we have to put in. So punctuation has to be correct. Otherwise the meaning can be garbled.

Another thing about language, although we use words, especially with verbs, we need to get the tenses right. Now this is not just for English, but it's for all languages.

Now what I want to do now is go through the four passages we've read, and see how important punctuation or tenses are.

So looking at our first reading, which was in Genesis chapter 3, and I said we would look at verse 22.

From the beginning of verse 22. Then the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become like one of us, in knowing good and evil.

[6 : 08] Now lest he reach out his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. Therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden, to work the ground from which he was taken.

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

The punctuation to notice here, in verse 22. Do you see what it says? Now lest he reach out his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.

Then there's a dash. That dash is one of the most important dashes in the whole of history.

What the translators say is that that sentence should keep going. The context is such that God still has something to say, but he stops.

[7 : 24] He stops. And you wonder why. The thing is God explains it to us here. He's fearful of man eating from the tree of life.

Now let's put it into a context. And for those of you who remember Principal Ivor Martin's sermons at the August Communion last year, he made great play of this part of scripture.

And especially in setting the scene to realize that in the garden of Eden, right at the center there were two trees side by side. The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And as Ivor said in his sermon then, this was about choice. This was about choice. Did man choose life or did he choose death?

Sadly, he chose death. And what God is saying here is, now he's talking about man in a fallen state.

[8 : 40] He's talking about man in a fallen state and he is expressing concern that man would reach out and eat from the tree of life and live forever.

And the effect of that was that man would go on living in a fallen state for all eternity with no prospect of salvation.

So that dash highlights the most awful tragedy in human history. The translators also say, there's something in there whereby God is saying, I must act.

And God acts quickly. The awful horror of eternal loss, eternal death. God steps in.

And he drives Adam out of the garden. Away from the tree of life. Away. So that dash is vitally important.

[9 : 48] And the way to look at this is, this is God communicating with us, even though he doesn't speak. This is God communicating with us.

God is one of the key steps in God's rescue mission. God reaching out to save us and ultimately save us due to Jesus' finished work on the cross.

God's rescue mission. God's rescue mission. We've seen God here create clothes out of skins for Adam and Eve.

He also then, out of kindness, actually drives them out of Eden to protect them from eternal death that could never be saved from.

So that's why punctuation is important, especially when we are reading God's Word.

[10 : 57] Let's move on now to Mark. The issue here is a different one. It's to do with tenses.

At its simplest in our languages, the tenses we use are either the past tense, the present tense or the future tense.

Now that might seem a bit too much like going back to school. But at its simplest, tenses are about past, present and future.

The thing is other languages behave differently when it comes to tenses. So our first tense, the first passage we're going to look at, and the same issue appears in every single passage.

But it's not obvious in our English Bibles. I'd appreciate it if a Gaelic speaker could maybe just tell me how Gaelic expresses this.

[12 : 07] Each of the passages we read, if you look closely, they're all in the past tense. They're all in the past tense.

Because that sounds easiest on our ears in English. But in the original Greek, they weren't in the past tense, or they're not in the past tense.

They're in something called, they're called historical presence. Historical presence.

This happens again and again in the scriptures, but especially in Mark's Gospel. You get this very interesting tense.

Historical present means the incident happened in the past, but it's told to you in the present tense. Now what happens in Greek when that's happening is that the Greek historical presence has a way of seizing the imagination and making what's been described to you extremely vivid and with a lot of emotion.

[13 : 25] Something that you don't get when you read things in the past tense. So the ones I've chosen, I'll highlight where this historical present is used.

If you look at verse 29 of Mark 8, it's where Jesus asks, but who do you say that I am?

It then says, Peter answered him. That's the past tense. You are the Christ. Anyone reading an authorised version will know there are actually two verbs there.

It says in the authorised version, Peter answered him and said, you are the Christ. But in the Greek, both of those verbs are historical presence.

And the idea there is that instead of this being something just told to you, that your imagination is seized and you are taken right back to that incident and you're actually watching it and you're hearing what's said.

[14 : 35] And it's the difference as large as in modern life between listening to a radio and then switching to a high definition TV with perfect sound.

It's almost that you're in the scene yourself. So that's what's happening here. You are the Christ. You are almost a witness yourself.

You're pulled into the story. The same happens with the transfiguration.

When Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain, where it says, after six days, Jesus took with him, so that's past tense, Peter and James and John and led, that's past tense, up a high mountain.

Those in Greek, although the bit before was in the past tense, this flips to present tense. Again, your imagination is being taken and it's as if you're flying there yourself and in your imagination, it's not just that someone else is telling you this, you're actually there.

[15 : 52] And then our last reading, the resurrection. If we look at verse 6, verse 6 and 7, the setting here is that the women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome, they have gone to the tomb.

Everything's in the past tense there. They're desperately sad. They do something unusual. They actually go into the tomb and then are startled to find a young man dressed in white.

When he speaks, the tense switches, past tense to present tense, and again with that heightened vividness and that emotion.

And then would read where he says, and he said to them. What it actually says is, and he says to them, do not be alarmed.

Do seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen. He's not here. See the place where they laid him.

[17 : 18] But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he's going before you to Galilee. There you will see him just as he told you.

Now, if you want an easy way to try and work out where these tenses are, I suggest go to the Christian Bookshop on Kenneth Street and ask if you can buy a new American Standard Bible. And what they do is, all through the Gospels, but especially Mark, wherever something has been translated in the past tense, they put little asterisks so that you know that actually the original Greek is in the present tense.

And then if we take our sequence we've had just now, we've read through, if we go from Genesis 3, the punctuation there told us in God's silence about the awful horror of a lost eternity forever.

The awful horror. The awful horror. That dash is one of the most important dashes in all history.

[18 : 37] And then when we came to the New Testament, instead of reading these things in the past tense with almost too slow a pace to them, Mark's Gospel is high energy.

It's vivid. It's full of emotion. Each of the passages we read, Peter's declaration of Christ, the transfiguration, and then the resurrection, all are in the present tense to make it vivid before each of

us.

Vivid. I hope that there is something that you can take away from today. And if by Saturday, you're still thinking of something from this sermon, even if it was one thing, then that's precious, precious to you.

Thank you very much for listening. And we'll close. desde desde