

John Knox

by Ian Murray

John Knox's life and legacy serve as a testament to the power of faith and the enduring impact of the Reformation on Scotland and beyond.

Duration: 1:02:56

Scripture: Isaiah 40:31, Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Romans 3:22, Romans 5:8, Hebrews 11:33-34

Topics: "Reformed Theology", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, John Knox emphasizes the power and importance of God's scriptures in revealing His wrath and our need for salvation through Jesus Christ. He warns the nobles of Scotland that his words may be sharp, but they are not his own, but rather the threatenings of God Himself. Knox reflects on the past ten years of victory in establishing a reformed church in Scotland, but acknowledges that the struggle of the church is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of darkness. He encourages his audience to understand the nature of their mission and the state of the people they are preaching to.

Transcript

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, as perhaps you know, there are a number of meetings in different parts of Britain today in commemoration of the death of John Knox. There are meetings in St. Andrews, in Scotland, in Edinburgh, and in other places, but I can say with the utmost sincerity that this is the meeting that I should have wished to come to before any of those other meetings. The Evangelical Library, through these many years, has done more, I believe, to propagate and to maintain the principles and the testimony of John Knox than any other agency of its kind, and we are conscious of that as we gather this evening.

I think we are giving testimony to that fact by our meeting, and we come together surely in the presence of God, remembering a man who was but an earthen vessel such as we, and yet in whose heart the Spirit of God burns, and we thus meet to thank God and to pray that that same fire may be kindled in us, even at this time. Now, as you know, we live in a day of very general ignorance of church history, and yet amidst all that ignorance, there is one thing that is commonly remembered about John Knox, and that is that his name has generally been treated with disfavor and with criticism. I suppose that there is no figure in the whole of British church history who has been accorded such enduring hostility as Knox.

It was true even in his own day. He was reviled, threatened, burned in effigy, exiled, nearly assassinated on more than one occasion. All manner of language was applied to him, that knave Knox, that crafty little fox, men said, that Puritan Knox, and so on.

On one occasion when his life was imperiled, he was compelled to leave Edinburgh, and as he was leaving, he was hooted and jeered by the people. He said the despiteful tongues of the wicked railed upon us, calling us traitors and heretics. We would never have believed that our natural countrymen and women could have wished our destruction so unmercifully.

And after his death, the enmity continued in that great conference at Hampton Court in the 1st of England, blamed all the troubles of Puritanism on John Knox. A hundred years after Knox's death, his books were prohibited by Parliament, one of them was solemnly burned in public. And even in the year 1739, people thought that it was sufficient condemnation of the preaching of George Whitefield to say that it was an echo of the doctrine of John Knox.

And in more recent times, the same phenomena has been seen. It's only a matter of a few years ago that the Edinburgh Corporation actually took up the gravestone of Knox, so that the site is now completely obliterated there in Parliament Square in Edinburgh. And as you know, even this year, John Knox was not considered a fit subject for a commemoration postage stamp.

So it has gone through the centuries. And in the face of so much criticism, it would be a natural reaction, would it not, for us to consider spending some time in defending the name of Knox. Well, that is not what we mean to do.

That would not even be in the spirit of John Knox himself. On one occasion, he wrote to a friend, the days are so wicked that I dare make special commendations to no man. John Knox believed that if there were to be any commendation, they must wait the day of Jesus Christ.

And that in the meantime, we have more urgent work to do. So I don't mention at the outset this common reaction to Knox. I don't mention it in order to go pass on to make any defense with him, not at all.

But I think we should, and we must, draw a lesson from it which will set our thoughts in the right direction. Bear in mind that this patron to Knox did not appear until he was more than 30 years of age. I suppose when he was 31 or 32.

Until that time, he was, as he would have said himself, a dumb dog, a priest in the church, and therefore one who ought to have stood for his master's honor, one who should have defended that truth when it was assailed, and yet who did not. When Knox, in his early 30s, was brought to a knowledge of the gospel of Christ, then he began to pray as he gives us his word. Oh Lord, eternal, move and govern my tongue to speak by truth.

And it was as that prayer was heard, that Knox's days of peace with the world were ended. You may recall that when he was called to the work of the ministry in the castle of St. Andrews in 1547, little congregation of men and women, they said one to another, Master George Wishart never spoke so plainly, and yet he was burned, even so will Knox be. Their prophecy of course was wrong, but the principle was right.

The more plainly truth is spoken in the world, the more enmity will be revealed against it, and that not because of any misunderstanding or any mere ignorance or superstition, but because in this fallen world, men have received the character of the God of this world, the first deceiver, and that character was summed up by our Lord in the words, he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Therefore let that truth be proclaimed abroad, and its ambassadors will receive the tribulation and the opposition of the world. What then is the lesson? The lesson my friends is surely this, that the struggle of the church is a

struggle not with flesh and blood, it is a struggle between light and darkness, against principalities and powers, a conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

There is an invisible conflict taking place, that is the whole meaning of the reformation. Up until the mid-16th century, Satan reigned as an angel of light, even in the professing church. It was his lies that were taught in the name of Christ.

It was he who was worshipped in the prevailing idolatry, and men were led blindfold to their ruin. And it was when that fact was singled out and identified, it was when men as not, pointed to the professing church as the synagogue of Satan, it was then that the phenomena that we read of in the book of Revelation chapter 12 and verse 12 was seen again. The devil is come down amongst you having great wrath for he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

I draw this lesson at the outset because I think it at once justifies what we are seeking to do in our meeting. If the reformation was just a stage in human history and development, if it was merely the result of the collision of political and religious and social thought, if it was simply a difference of opinion and even of belief, then it would be, surely it would be, a matter of historical interest, but it would be nothing more. But that is not what we believe.

With the word of God as our standpoint, we believe that the reformation was but part of that enduring conflict between these two kingdoms, between light and dark, and therefore the truths which then prevailed, the promises which then were depended upon, and promises which were vindicated, these have the same force and validity in our day as they did then. If it is a spiritual conflict, if it has not so much to do with men and with the mere scenery of this world, but it has to do with these spiritual demonic powers and the truth of God, then I say it is at once something which is contemporary with us. We have to take the same weapon and the same truth, and in doing so know that they are potent and have the same force as in Knox's day.

That surely is the way in which we must approach our subject. Now in the little while that we have, I want to try to split the remaining time between giving you an account of Knox's life, and then passing on to some main broad lessons to be deduced from it. Let us start in the year that I mentioned, the year 1547.

20 years before that date, the New Testament had first been introduced, the first English printed New Testament, into this country, into England and into Scotland, smuggled in from Flanders. It was of course William Tyndale's New Testament. That book brought into Scotland new light and power, and into England also.

There followed then bitter persecution in both realms. Now, we haven't time to stop on the state of Scotland before the Reformation. I believe that it will be familiar enough to many of you.

Suffice it to say that the church was dominated by covetous, fat, often immoral ecclesiastics, and the civil power was corrupt, and these two powers, ecclesiastical and civil, united their strength and power against the gospel of Christ. I speak now of Scotland. After 1542, Scotland was without a king.

James V died after the battle of Solway Moss. His wife, the Queen Mother Mary of Guise, a Frenchwoman of the great Catholic house of Guise, became then and thereafter the titular head of the realm. But there was great confusion, and Mary of Guise of course had at her elbow the whole power of France.

There was thus not simply the church and the government against the gospel, but the French nation also. Persecution then reigned. Patrick Hamilton went to his martyrdom, George Wishart followed, and many a score of other men and women.

In 1546, the year before the date I gave you of Knox's call to the ministry, in 1546 a little band of desperate Protestants broke into the castle of St. Andrews, secured it as a refuge, and put to death the cardinal Beaton. That monster as he was put him to death. It was then in the following year that Knox put refuge in that castle with two or three boys whom he was tutoring.

There he was called by these Protestants to begin the work of preaching the evangelism. It was a work that lasted but a few months at that time. He was seized by the French forces.

The French navy arrived, blockaded, the castle gave up. Knox then was taken for 19 months, chained to an oar in a galley, half naked, oftentimes half dead. As he later wrote, drinking the bitter cup of corporal death until 1549.

1549 by the intervention apparently of the English government, he was released and then it was that his true preaching work began. Now whatever else you remember, seek to remember this division of John Knox's life. From 1549, you have a period of 10 years.

From about the age in Knox's life of 35 to 45, 10 years. 1549 to 1559, the years of his exile. Then the second point, 1559 to 1561, the years of the great victory of the gospel in Scotland.

Then 1561 to his death, as you've been reminded on this very day, 1572, from the age of 47 to 57, the last great struggle to maintain what had been won in Scotland. Let me just say a few words on these three theories. These years of exile from 1549, he came to England.

England now under the government of the young Edward VI, pious, earnest, well-instructed Christian, with a privy council that was concerned also to forward the Protestant religion. Knox was singled out to be sent to possibly the darkest part of the whole country, the northeast. Northumberland, Berwick, Newcastle, that area north of Newcastle, that was his area.

And in that area, the people that sat in dark saw a great light. He began to preach in Berwick, a wild border town, half English perhaps, half Scots. Brutal, backward, full of violence and immorality, the gospel of Christ was heard.

And it was heard with effectual power in many hearts. The wife of the governor of the nearby Norham castle, Elizabeth Bowes, was converted. So also was her daughter Marjorie, later to become Knox's wife.

These were the first fruits of Knox's ministry. But of course he made many bitter enemies. The mayor of Newcastle for one, and then the powerful Bishop of Durham, Cuthbert Tunstall, a man who had refused help to Tyndale more than 20 years earlier.

Thus Knox was summoned before the council of the north, April the 4th in 1550, to give an account of his doings and his preaching. You may read that in his works. I think it is one of the finest pieces of work that Knox ever did.

He defended himself by demonstrating that the mass is idolatry. And he based his proof upon the principle that nothing in his religion will God admit without his own words. It was a tremendous defense and a

burning charge even delivered to the men assembled before him.

Many of them bishops and ecclesiastes. At one point in this address, Knox was demonstrating the necessity of acting only upon God's word. He drew the illustration from Nadab and Abihu that we read of in the Old Testament.

Who instead of burning the true fire upon the altar of burnt sacrifice, burnt their strange fire to God and were judged. Knox then began to speak about the true fire. And turning to the bishops he said this to them.

Oh bishops, ye should have kept this fire. At morn and at evening ought ye to have laid faggots thereupon. Yourselves ought to have cleansed and carried away the ashes.

But God shall behold you. And a little later in this same address he cried out, Oh God eternal, hast thou laid none other burden upon our backs than Jesus Christ laid by his words? Then who hath burdened us with all these ceremonies, prescribed fasting, compelled chastity, unlawful vows, invocation of saints, and with the idolatry of the mass, the devil, the devil brethren, invented all these burdens to depress imprudent men to perdition. Knox was preserved, he had friends, including even the young king himself.

But it was not thought expedient to keep him in the north. In the early 1550s he came down to London. Many a time did he preach here in this city before the king, before the court.

Preaching often with tremendous effect and influence. There is that famous occasion in 1552 when the second book of common prayer was decided upon, passed, ratified, actually being printed. But to Knox it was not thorough.

There were points in it which were but relics of the old corrupt church, and therefore he specified one or two of these points. With such authority the printers were commanded to stop their work until the matter could be reviewed and certain alterations made. It was at this time that he was brought before even the Privy Council in London.

And of course there were many Protestants there, and professing evangelicals, and they said gravely to Knox how sorry they were that his mind was contrary to the common order, the common opinion. I am much more sorry, said Knox, that the common order should be contrary to the institution of Jesus Christ. He had refused, you remember the bishopric of Rochester, he had refused also a living in London.

On the grounds that ministers were not given authority to separate the leper from the sound, to separate the wheat and the chaff, which, said Knox, is a main part of the minister's office. Then the next year, 1553, came that great blow, the death of Edward VI. He was but 16, and he was taken home to glory.

Listen to Knox writing of it in his history of the Reformation in Scotland. After the death of this most virtuous prince, of whom the godless people of England for the most part were not worthy, Satan intended nothing less than that the light of Jesus Christ utterly to have been extinguished within this whole isle of Britain. For after him was raised up in God's hottest pleasure that idolatrous Jezebel, mischievous Mary of the Spaniards blood, a cruel persecutor of God's people.

And he goes on to describe the years that followed. The years that followed indeed were the hardest years in Knox's life. 1553 to 1559, he recrossed the English Channel, less than 10 groats in his pocket, he said, homeless, wandering exile, first in Frankfurt, then in Geneva.

And sorrows were multiplied to him, separated from the woman to whom he was betrothed, not to see her for more than three years, Marjorie Burns. Hearing the news of the fiery persecution in England, gradually those dreadful numbers accumulate, more than 280 burned to death in England and Wales, some of them, indeed many of them, Knox's personal friends. Then an even greater blow for him.

These were men who had died in faith, but up in Northumberland and Berwick and Newcastle, word came that before the threats of violence and death, many, it seemed almost all, had given way and returned to the old religion. These were tremendous temptations for Knox. He tells us that sometimes he touched the very bottom of hell.

He was indeed a man who sowed in tears in these years. And it was in the depth of this sorrow that the burden for his own country, for Scotland, increased. The words of the Apostle Paul in the epistle to the Romans became his own experience, to be willing to be made a curse.

For my brethren's sake, he speaks to us of the, let me read you his words. I feel, he says, writing at this time, I feel a sob and a groan, willing that Christ Jesus might openly be preached in my native country, although it should be with the loss of my wretched life. He began to pray to God that he might be given but 40 days to preach in Scotland.

But 40 days liberty for the gospel to be heard in that land. I cannot stop on the sorrows of those dark years. But in the midst of them, there were two great encouragements.

The first was his own little congregation. As I mentioned, he went to Geneva. There in Geneva, there were between 100 and 150 English people, men, women and children, refugees, exiles.

Some of them, indeed most of them, eminent Christians. That little congregation became, as it were, the first reformed Puritan congregation, the leading congregation of the many that were to follow in England and Scotland. There it was that the Genevan Bible was worked upon, translated, produced in 1560.

The Genevan service book drawn up in this little congregation. You may read of this with great pleasure in Mr. Lupton's books, which I hope you have seen on this subject. There are now four volumes on the Genevan Bible.

This was one great encouragement in these years. The Genevan Bible, I need not remind you, I hope, was later the Bible of England and the Bible of Scotland until well into the next century. The second encouragement, he had a brief, hurried visit to his own land, to Scotland, as a fugitive, a price on his head, persecuted and hunted if they could but lay their hands on him, but sheltered in the castles of certain of the Protestant nobility, the Earl of Argyll and others who had been converted.

And Knox saw what he had not seen before in Scotland, the thirst for the gospel, the power of the spirit evidently awakening the people so that they were willing at the imperil of their lives to assemble in little villages and hamlets and in the open air to hear the word of God. There were several conversions, perhaps indeed very many, we do not know the numbers, one of them to give you a characteristic instance, one of them was the wife of an Edinburgh Burgess, Elizabeth Adamson, an old lady apparently, came to hear Knox preaching in East Lothian, set at liberty, filled with praise and but shortly afterwards called to her account. Dying in Edinburgh, visited of course as usual by the priests, carrying their sacraments and so on.

Go forth, she said, ye sergeants of Satan, and began to speak to them of the gospel that she enjoyed and told them that the pains that wracked her body were nothing to the pains of conscience that had been quelled by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, Knox says, they went out saying that she raved. Knox, you may read it in Knox's history of the reformation, they departed alleging that she raved and whispered not what she said and she short thereafter slept in the Lord Jesus, to no small comfort of those that saw her blessed departing, this we could not omit, he says, of this worthy woman. Here then were these two great encouragements in the midst of those terrible years.

We must pass on then quickly. On May the 2nd, 1569, Knox came back to Scotland and came to remain. The very day that he arrived in Scotland, the day he arrived in Edinburgh, was the day that the bishops and other priests had assembled in that same city, in the monastery of the Blackfriars, to discuss certain reformation of the church.

They also were getting a little uneasy. You may judge what kind of reformation they intended from the following. These were certain things that they decided upon.

That none should enjoy benefits, ecclesiastical, except he be a priest. That if any priest were found in open adultery, for the first fault he should lose a third of his benefits. None should put his own son in his own benefits.

These men weren't supposed to have any sons. Cardinal Beaton had eight. These were their morals, this was their reformation.

They were in the very midst of these discussions when a messenger came in that Knox was back in Scotland. We read that they rose hastily from their table and discontinued their meeting. There was a remarkable providence in the very date of Knox's arrival, May the 2nd.

Eight days later the Protestant preachers had been commanded to appear at Stirling before the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise. Knox had come back to lead. A congregation had been formed, it was really a band, a church, a united body of men and women who now took up arms to defend themselves against the murderous persecution which had gone on.

They determined that they would not send their preachers to Stirling but they would go with them. The message went to the Queen. She did not want to see the whole congregation.

There began then this great collision. It went on for over a year. The Queen had more than 4,000 French troops to back her besides many Catholic nobility in Scotland.

The summer of 1559 was the most extraordinary summer in Scotland. I suppose there was none other ever like it. It reminds me of a statement that a man made in Ulster in the year 1859, the year of the great revival in Ulster.

This minister said it would have been worth living 10,000 years in obscurity to have been permitted to see the last six months of 1859 in Ulster. That was equally true of 1559 in Scotland. Knox was given his 40 days and more preaching in Perth, preaching through Fife, preaching in St Andrews, the very citadel, the bastion of Roman power, preaching though the Archbishop threatened he would be shot on sight.

That great scene painted by Sir David Wilkie with Knox leaning out of the pulpit of the Duchess of Argyll in front of the pulpit of baby in her arms. You know the picture I'm sure. He was preaching in the very centre

of the forces and the powers of darkness.

And there it was at that time. Before the reformation was established in Scotland that 14 priests made confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The word of God grew mightily and prevailed.

Knox came to Edinburgh, was called to the charge of St Giles and so it went on. There was only one great setback. It occurred late in the November or early I should say in November of 1559.

The Queen Regent now had retired to Leith, which is now a suburb of Edinburgh. Then it was a separate fortress. She had her army in Leith, her last garrison, powerful as they were.

Early in November they sallied forth out of Leith and attacked the Protestant forces and people, putting several to death. This little defeat, for it was only that, was sufficient to break the spirit of a number of these Protestants. Indeed the whole Protestant armed congregation withdrew out of Edinburgh to Stirling.

It was at this time that those words were spoken, which I mentioned at the outset, when the people who were still largely Catholic cheered at Knox. Knox went after the congregation to Stirling. And it said that he continued with the text, following the text of his previous Sunday's ministry.

It was in the 80th Psalm. And he so preached to the congregation in Stirling. They were filled with resolution and confidence and faith.

Listen to Knox's closing words in that sermon. Yea, he said, whatsoever shall become of us and of our mortal carcasses, I doubt not, but this cause in despite of Satan shall prevail in the realm of Scotland. For as it is the eternal truth of the eternal God, so shall it once prevail howsoever for a time it may be denied.

And with such words as these, the Protestant congregation was rallied. They went back. The following year the French forces were utterly defeated, withdrew forever from Scotland.

English aid was sent. The Scottish Parliament was convened. The Pope was forever rejected in all his rule and government in this realm.

National confession of faith was drawn up by six men. Indeed there were only six Reformed preachers then in the whole land, but six of them drew up that great national confession and then the book of discipline. It was, as John Calvin himself wrote from Geneva to Knox, it was an incredible success.

We wonder, says Calvin, at success incredible in so short a time. And Knox writing his history of the Reformation explains that success. He begins by quoting a verse from the Geneva Bible.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall lift up the wings as the eagles. They shall run and not be weary.

They shall walk and not faint. This promise has been performed for us, professors of Christ Jesus within this realm of Scotland. For what was our force or strength? What was our number? Yea, what wisdom or worldly policy was unto us to have brought to a good end so great an enterprise? To what confusion, he says, and fear were idolaters, adulterers, and all public transgressors of God's commandments within so short a time brought? For what adulterer, what fornicator, what known mass mongerer, doth have been seen in public within any reformed town within this realm? These were the years of victory.

A church founded, reformed according to God's word on new foundations and a land cleansed as it was by this mighty power of the Spirit of God. The last ten years, just a word on that. Forty-seven years of age, ten more years to live.

The greatest struggle in many ways had knocked his life. Just when it seemed that victory had been wholly achieved, then of course it was. But the forces of darkness regathered themselves.

Right across Europe, a reaction had set in. The papal power was refurbishing its weapons and all eyes were turned upon Britain. If the Protestant faith could be crushed in Britain, it could be crushed surely in the whole of Europe.

And it was upon Scotland in particular that their eyes were turned. For here at last was a Catholic sovereign, Mary Queen of Scots, came back from France to Scotland in 1561, full of guile, subtlety, beauty, able to flatter, to bribe, to mislead, wielding great power and wielding it with one end in view, that this reformed church in Scotland should be brought to an end. That the altars and the mass and the whole religion of the former years should be restored and re-established in Scotland.

And not only in Scotland, but then Mary might take her rightful place over the throne of England. And this whole island once again be reunited with the papacy. That was the purpose.

Indeed undisguised as we now see it from the correspondence and the literature which exists, but at that time cunningly disguised. And so much so that many of the Protestant leaders and the nobility were deceived by it, taken in by Mary's astuteness and particularly by her flattery and the way in which she won them. And how often Knox had to stand alone, dragged as he was even from his bed to give an account of his preaching.

Fettered and yet to the end, faithful to the word of God and holding the common people to the gospel. And the people under the leadership of Knox held the day. Much more indeed could be said of those last years of struggle, but you must read the books that were given out earlier in the meeting.

Let us come then to this second part and indeed perhaps the most important part of all. What lessons are we to draw from Knox, his ministry and history? Well I think in the first place we ought to ask the question. What was the content of the preaching of Knox and of his colleagues? It was first of all a proclamation of the evangel, as they called it, of the glad tidings that God through Jesus Christ saved sinners and he saved sinners by reckoning to them, though they be ungodly, the righteousness of his Son, the Immaculate Lamb of God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, says Knox, is the only sacrifice acceptable in the sight of God the Father for the offenses of all believers. This was the note of their preaching, first of all, the words of George Wishart, which he translated from the Helvetic Confession. God is friendly minded towards sinners.

Friendly minded. John Knox, as he describes his preaching in that visit in 1555, he says according to the grace given unto him, he opened more fully the fountain of God's mercies. And again, speaking of this gospel of grace, he says, so tender was God's care over them, who shamefully put to death Christ Jesus upon a cross, that before their polluted and wicked hands were externally almost washed from his blood, he sent unto them the message of reconciliation.

And yet with this gospel preaching, there was another emphasis bound up with it. And for this emphasis, Knox has been so often criticized and condemned. It is said that he was too much of an Old Testament

prophet.

That he dwelt too much upon the judgment and the severity of God. What are we to say to that charge? We are to understand, my friends, that Knox rightly discerned the nature of the mission to which he had been called. And knew that that truth was essential to the furtherance of the gospel in that day.

Bear in mind the state of the people to whom he preached. They had been subjected through countless years to error. Their consciences were drugged.

Drugged by that whole man-made system of ceremony, of works, of penances, of all those sacraments which were supposed to shield them from any peril and spiritual danger. They were lulled to sleep in self-righteousness, in self-dependence, in a refuge of lies, with no consciousness of the reality of their position exposed as they were to the wrath and to the judgment of God. It was then necessary, as Knox saw, to preach to men that outside of Christ there is nothing but wrath.

And that he did preach. And Knox saw and believed that there is nothing more cruel in the world than a religion which betrays the souls of men. He has been accused of blind and narrow hate.

The charge is true. He hated that which destroyed precious souls. He hated that system which had blinded people to the necessity of faith and salvation by the blood of Jesus Christ.

A. Hodge of Princeton wrote these words and I think they are relevant at this point. He said, Is it not the last refinement of cruelty to administer to bewildered sinners moral anesthetics, assuring them of an eternal hope only that they may meet the vengeance of God's eternal fire? That was what religion had done before the reformation. It had given men moral anesthetics which drugged them in the face of eternity.

And Knox knew that the only way for men to be delivered from that was for them to see themselves in the burning light of God's holiness, that they might fly to the Lamb of God. So it was that he announced again in this land, as Paul had announced before, that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Let me give you but a few words.

Knox says, By the brightness of God's scriptures, we are brought to the feeling of God's wrath and anger which by our manifold offenses we have justly provoked against ourselves. Which revelation and conviction God sends not of a purpose to confound us, but of very love by which he has concluded our salvation to stand in Jesus Christ. Or take this that he addressed to the nobles of Scotland, having spoken to them of the gospel and of their responsibility to obey it.

He went on, My words are sharp, but consider, my lords, that they are not mine, but that they are the threatenings of the omnipotent, who assuredly will perform the voices of his prophets, howsoever carnal men despise his admonitions. The sword of God's wrath is already drawn, which of necessity must need strike, when grace offered is obstinately refused. You have been long in bondage of the devil, blindness, error, and idolatry prevailing against the simple truth of God in your realm, in which God has made you princes and rulers.

But now doth God of his great mercy call you to repentance, before he pour forth the uttermost of his vengeance. He crieth to your ears that your religion is nothing but idolatry. He accuses you of the blood of his saints, which hath been shed by your permission, assistance, and power.

Of these horrible crimes doth now God accuse you, not of purpose to condemn you, but mercifully to absolve you and pardon you, as sometime he did those whom Peter accused to have killed the Son of God. I think that is representative of John Knox's preaching. My second lesson in a few words.

The policy of Knox's reformation, it can be stated very simply. What was his vision? What were the foundational truths upon which he worked? There were just two. The first, the principle of entire universal obedience to the word of God, no matter what the cost, no matter what the consequences.

That was the first platform of his reformation. That the rule of God's word in doctrine, in worship, in practice should be laid to everything. The second, that the church above all must see that she offends not her God and her Saviour.

These were his two principles. And upon these master principles, that great work of reformation proceeded. We haven't time to linger on them.

Perhaps you may give me a moment as I say just perhaps a word on these two. Entire obedience to the word of God, there is no exemption for any party. Thus though Knox preached to Mary of Guise, or to Mary Queen of Scots, or though he wrote to Elizabeth Queen of England, it was always in the same terms.

They were accountable to God. They were not given leave as he told Mary Queen of Scots. They were not given leave to offend God's majesty.

You remember how on one occasion the Queen's secretary stopped Knox as he was standing before the Queen defending himself on charges. Stop he said. You forget yourself.

You are not now in your pulpit. I answered Knox in the place where duty requires me to speak the truth. Deny it who will.

This was Knox. The truth is to be heard. It is to be preached.

No matter who may deny it. Take this sentence in a letter that he wrote to Queen Elizabeth of England. If I should flatter your grace, I were no friend but a deceivable traitor.

And therefore of conscience I am compelled to say that neither the consent of people, the process of time, nor multitude of men can establish a law which God shall approve. But whatsoever he approves by his eternal word, that shall be approved. And whatsoever he condemns shall be condemned.

No all men in the earth should hazard a justification of the same. And it was through John Knox and the English Puritans that there was built into the constitution of our nation. The truth that there can be no neutrality for civil magistrates in the light of God's word.

We still have in our statute books a Protestant constitution. Greatly though it is despised. Why is it there? It is there because men like Knox preached that Jesus Christ is the prince of the kings of the earth.

And that therefore that governments have sacred authority. They also must bow before the scepter of Christ. And that lands that do not obey that word will be brought to law.

They preached that. Men believed it. And it needs my friends preaching today in the words of Abraham Kuyper of the Netherlands.

Words which are very reminiscent of Knox. God, said Kuyper, is not to be treated by governments merely as one who is to be dragged to their help in the hour of national need. On the contrary, God in his majesty must flame before the eyes of every nation.

For God created the nations. They exist for him. They are his own.

And therefore all these nations and in them all humanity must exist for his glory. That was the Puritan vision for this island. It was that which led them in their pioneering into education, into schooling, into many other realms.

It was the vision of the truth of the word of God in its entirety must dominate and subdue our society under the scepter of Jesus Christ. A word then on the second principle of reform. If the church seeks the honor of God, if she seeks to avoid offending him, then there is no human aid that she requires.

And there is no human opposition that will overcome her. If she is but faithful to God, if she honors him, then indeed her work will be done. Listen to Knox, dear brethren, consider with me that the things which to men seem most impossible are easy to our God to bring to pass.

If we will refuse ourselves and only give obedience to his command. When John Knox spoke of discipline as the mark of the church, it was in this context. When John Knox said that it is better to have no ministers than to have ministers who compromise the truth or are worldly men.

He spoke in this context that the church is the place where God's glory dwells. And it is there that his honor has to be held precious. It is not a sanctuary for the worldly.

And if it becomes that, then it becomes an offense in the sight of almighty God. As that old Roman church had become, a very Ichabod in which God's glory had departed. That, Knox would say, could be true of us, can be true of any.

If we fail in obedience and faithfulness to his word, then there is nothing in this world and nor all the aid of men that can maintain that church. This was his great principle of reformation. Well, as we close my last point now, just a few briefest words on Knox's character.

What can be said in a few words, but let me just sketch just a few things and then we'll end. What is it that impresses you about Knox as you read of him, as you hear of him? I am struck by his long continued suffering. And in the midst of that suffering, that diligence, that energy, that sense of exhilaration which came from his faith.

We must not suppose he was a strong man. He never recovered from those years in the galley. He had stone in the kidney before he was 40 years of age.

Suffered desperately from sleeplessness at night. Then we have heard of his loneliness, of those years when friends were taken from him by death, separated from his wife. Then she was taken at the early age of 25 or perhaps it was 26.

Incredible were his sufferings. Enormous was the hatred that was rigged upon him. And in the midst of it all, he was given as one old Scots minister put it, a divine and a heroic spirit.

Much could be said of his humility. He was a man that was nothing in his own eyes. It hath pleased God he says of his super abundant grace to make me most wretched of many thousands of witness, minister

and preacher.

He was a man of strong feeling. When he preached he could say as he did say on more than one occasion, I quake, I fear, I tremble. He preached as Bunyan who smartingly did feel and the people felt.

He yearned, he wept, he was swept with indignation of the outrage done to men sold by that system which stood against him. Yes indeed he had the spirit of his master who on that occasion of which we read in John 2 drove those money changers out of his father's temple who had made a house of prayer a den of thieves. This spirit was in John Knox, a man of burning love and devotion, a man of far-sighted vision.

You ought to rejoice that if you are fortunate enough to be able to procure one of John Knox's volumes from the Evangelical Library, you ought to rejoice that you'll be able to read it because you shouldn't simply assume that. Knox was a Scotsman as I don't need to tell you, but he did not write in Scots. That is the point for which we should be grateful.

If he had written in the old Scots, well then it would have hardly mattered whether they were in the library or not, neither you nor I would have read them. But he wrote in English and the Geneva Bible was written in English and he did that because he had a vision of future years and future centuries. John Knox spoke of the unflamed love and unity among all those that yearn for the reign of Christ in Britain.

Patriot though he was, there was something far more important than patriotism. John Knox was no Scottish nationalist or anything like it. He was a Christian with a vision of a unity of the whole Reformed Churches and that affected his work.

It affected even the way he wrote and the language in which he wrote. We should thank God that he was given such far-sighted vision and we should take up that same vision and prayer ourselves in this day for the unity of the one Church. What then is the last point on Knox's character? It is simply this.

To me the most outstanding thing of all is the faith, the invincible faith he had in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. When you bear in mind the utter corruption of the church of that day, its power, its wealth, how long it had prevailed, how deep its roots went, no wonder they were staggered at the immensity of the work they had to do. I stood this morning in Westminster Cathedral.

Take a look at that. Then remember a day when such buildings and incense and all that goes with it were all over the land. How did those Christians believe that all that could be brought down? Only in one way, through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church.

This is the heart of Knox. This is what he speaks of again and again. He did nothing.

He did nothing. He did, he said, but distribute the bread which Jesus Christ gave to him. And it was because Christ blessed the bread of life that souls were saved and the church advanced.

I did but distribute the bread as of Jesus Christ. I sought neither preeminence, glory, nor riches. My honor was that Jesus Christ should reign.

O brethren, these words were addressed to the Christians in London in the midst of the persecution of Mary Tudor. O brethren, he says to them, is not the devil, the prince of this world, vanquished and cast out? Has not Christ Jesus, for whom we suffer, made conquest of him? Has he not, in despite of Satan's malice, carried our flesh up to glory and shall not our champion return? We know that he shall stand then

with Christ Jesus in this day of his battle which shall be short and the victory everlasting. For the Lord himself shall come in our defense with his mighty power.

He shall give us the victory when the battle is most strong against us. These and many other words you will find in Knox. He believed that Christ was personally engaged to defend his cause to promote his own glory.

I cannot end without but reminding you of that story which we find in John Bunyan and which I think sums it all up so well. Christian and hopeful were traveling on their way but fall asleep on the ground of giant despair. Awaking they find that they are in the hands of this giant.

So they are taken to Doubting Castle, put, says Bunyan, in a stinking dungeon. What misery and lamentation! What fears possess their hearts! Would it be they think one to another? Would it be that perhaps one day giant despair will die in one of his fits? Or perhaps he will fail to lock one of those horrid doors that bar the way? These were their thoughts. Then they were taken out into the yard of the castle, shown the bones of men who had been torn to pieces, said the giant by his power.

That would be their end too. So they went back shaking and quivering to their dungeon. And Bunyan says about midnight on the Saturday evening, Christian and hopeful began to pray and continued till near the break of day.

And a little while before it was dawn, says Bunyan, Christian got up as a man half amazed and he said, oh what a fool I've been! Still I here in this stinking dungeon when I might as well have my liberty. For, he says, I have in my bosom a key called promise which is able to open every lock in Doubting Castle. I said hopeful, that's good news my brother, pull it out of thy bosom and try.

And they did. And is not that just what we read in Hebrews chapter 11? Of that great company who through faith subdued kingdoms and wrought righteousness and obtained promises and quenched the violence of the fire and out of weakness were made strong. They were but using the key called promise.

And that key opened every lock. It was the key that John Knox used. It is the key which is handed down to us.

It is because that key exists that the evangelical library by God's grace continues in its work. May God bless that work. May he bless us in our several lives and in our churches and revive his work in this our day.

Amen.

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