John Knox

1514-1572

The Scottish Reformation was the achievement of Knox. Uncompromisingly dogmatic, driven and courageous. At this time Scotland was dominated by the Catholic Church which owned more than ½ of the land mass of Scotland. Income to the Catholic Church in Ireland was 18x the cash flow of the national government of Ireland. Just as the German Reformation was largely the work of a single individual, Martin Luther, so the Scottish Reformation was the achievement of one man of heroic will and tireless energy -John Knox. Like Luther, Knox left an indelible mark on his national culture. Of him, scholar Arthur Herman writes, “Uncompromising, dogmatic, and driven, John Knox was….a preacher of truly terrifying power…a Protestant firebrand.”

**CATHOLIC YOUTH 1514-1540** Well educated at St Andrews University. Ardent student. Ordained a Catholic Priest in 1536. Since could not find a parish after graduation, he became a lawyer for the Catholic Church.

**PROTESTANT BELIEVER 1540** He served as a tutor to a gentry family of wealth. During this time, Knox devoted himself to the in-depth private study of the Scriptures, and God saved him out of Catholicism. Re his salvation, Knox wrote, “It pleased God to call me from the puddle of the papacy.”

**PERSONAL BODYGUARD:** **1545** He became a personal bodyguard for an itinerant preacher, George Wishart. Many threats were made upon Wishart’s life for preaching the gospel. As Wishart’s guard, Knox came under the influence of this powerful preacher who was touring the Louvian area, proclaiming the true saving gospel. Wishart became the mentor of Knox whose influence would shape his ministry for the rest of his days. Blaikie writes: “[T]heir meeting was like that of David and Jonathan. The soul of Knox was knit with the soul of Wishart, and he loved him as his own soul…. It seems to have been through Wishart’s preaching that the spark came that kindled his knowledge [of Reformed truth] into a living flame.”

To guard Wishart, Knox was armed with a large body sword. While preaching in St. Andrews, Wishart was surrounded by the Catholic Church. Knox came to his defense ready to take on the crowd. Wishart responded to Knox, “Return to your children, one is enough for a sacrifice.” Wishart was then martyred at 33 years of age in front of St. Andrews Castle. Wishart’s last words were these: “I beseech Thee Father of heaven! To forgive them that have any ignorance or else have any evil mind forged any lies upon me: I forgive them with all my heart. I beseech Christ to forgive them that have condemned me to death this day ignorantly.”

**A CASTLE PREACHER**: **1547** With Wishart’s martyrdom, the gospel torch was passed to John Knox, the younger man whom he so greatly impacted. Blaikie writes: “The chief result of this murder was to substitute John Knox for George Wishart, as the man of light and leading for the country.…If the life of Wishart had been spared, if he had been able to take the part of the leader of the Reformation, it is quite likely that we should have had a gentler type of religion than that with which Knox became identified. But Wishart might have been unable to cope w/the ensuing difficulties. Wishart was to Knox as Stephen had been to Paul.

Knox begins to minister to the persecuted who had gathered at the Castle for protection. Those present realized how knowledgeable, brilliant, and gifted Knox was, and that God was calling Knox into the ministry. While Knox listened to the preaching of another man, the preacher stopped his sermon and pointed at Knox, indicating that God had called Knox into the ministry. Knox was terrified. He burst into tears and ran out of the church service. After an intense soul-searching, Knox acknowledged he was inwardly compelled to answer the divine call to preach. Knox confessed: “It hath pleased God of His superabundant grace, to make me and appoint me most wretched of many thousands, a witness, minister, and preacher. For the rest of my life, I must be blowing my Master’s trumpet.” John Major, a scholar, heard his 1st sermon, and re Knox wrote, “Others lop off the branches of the papacy, but Knox strikes at the root to destroy the whole.” He was aggressive. He was manly. He was also confrontive. He was ministering in a day when bold preaching was so badly needed. He saw himself not as a gentle flute, but as a militant trumpet blast.

**GALLEY SLAVE (1547-1548)** France, under Catholic control, took warships to the Castle at St Andrews and attacked the castle. Arrested John Knox. He spent 14 months, as a slave in the French galley. Knox could occasionally row past St. Andrews in the open waters of the North Sea. He said: “I see the steeple of that place where God first opened my mouth in public to His glory; and I am fully persuaded, how weak so ever I now appear, that I shall not depart this life, till my tongue shall glorify His glorious name in the same place.” While on board, repeated efforts were made by the French naval officers to bring Knox back to Roman Catholicism. On one occasion, a statue of Mary was thrust into his face. He was commanded to kiss the icon. He hurled it into the sea, saying: “Trouble me not; such an idol is accursed and therefore I will not touch it…. Let our Lady now save herself; she is light enough; let her learn to swim.”

**ENGLISH PASTOR (1549)** Henry VIII died. The teenage King, Edward, assumes the throne. He was Protestant. This was a sudden, drastic switch from Catholicism to Protestantism in England. John Knox is released. For next 5 years, he becomes a preacher. He was a thundering voice of God. Transferred to New Castle. Asked to preach in London & then appointed by King Edward to be a the Royal Chaplin.

**ROYAL CHAPLIN (1551-1553)** Knox refused to be made a bishop. He insisted on remaining a preacher rather than serve as an administrative overseer. Sought to purify the insides of the Church like a Puritan, but Knox was way ahead of his time. Prince Edward dies, and is replaced by Queen “bloody” Mary.

**EUROPEAN EXILE (1553)** Due to these extenuating circumstances, Knox was forced to leave behind his future young wife. He would not be able to return to her for several years. This departure would begin six hard years of exile from Scotland. Knox’s departure troubled him. He felt he was like a soldier fleeing the battlefield, though he believed his withdrawal was necessary: “I have in the beginning of this battle appeared to play the faint-hearted and feeble soldier (this cause I remit to God), yet my prayer is, that I may be restored to the battle again. Calvin says, I perceive you should invest your life as a Pastor in Frankfurt.

**FRANKFURT PASTOR (1554-1555)** Knox ministered to200 refugees from England to Frankfurt which included John Foxe who wrote Foxe’s Book Of Martyrs. Kneeling issue before communion tables is raised – leading to Church division. John Knox opposes this. Knox told to leave. He leaves a very defeated man.

**ITINERATE PREACHER (1555)** Knox feels compelled to return to England at night in order to marry the young lady, Margorie, he had met earlier in Berwick, England. Travels through Scotland and discovers underground Bible Studies while hiding from Queen Mary gathering to hear the Scriptures. Queen Mary had banned the reading of Tyndale’s English Bible. Upon his return, Knox discovered that the truth of Scripture nevertheless had spread underground: Notwithstanding this their tyranny, the knowledge of God did wondrously increase within this Realm, partly by reading, partly by brotherly conference, which in those dangerous days was used to the comfort of many.

**GENEVA PASTOR (1556-1559)** Received request from English speaking congregation for him to return to Geneva and pastor their Church. These will be the happiest years of his life. While there, Knox also sat under John Calvin’s lecturing in the Auditorium across the street from St. Pierre’s Cathedral. Knox helped with the footnotes of the Geneva Bible. He would eventually carry the teaching of the Genevan Reformer back to Scotland. He found Calvin’s church in Geneva to be the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles. In other places, I confess Christ to be truly preached, with manners and religion so truly reformed, I have not yet seen in any other place.

Knox writes a book against three Catholic Queen’s, entitled, First Blast of The Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Woman. Knox was so candid, he actually went too far in his criticism. In Scotland, He was tried as a heretic, and, in his absence his effigy was burned. In **1559** Bloody Mary is removed from her throne and replaced by her sister Elizabeth.

**EDINBURGH PASTOR (1559-1560)** His sermons in Scotland led to strong reactions from the congregation including the immediate destruction of Catholic icons. Knox was the man for this imposing challenge. God had made the man for the moment, and the moment for the man. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones notes that Knox was: “a man for his age; a man for his times. Special men are needed for special times; and God always produces such men. A mild man would have been useless in the Scotland of the sixteenth century, and in many other parts of this country. A strong man was needed, a stern man, a courageous man; and such a man was John Knox. . . . In those times a heroic rugged character was needed; and God produced the man.”S. M. Houghton echoed these very words, likening Knox in Scotland to the prophet Jeremiah’s commissioning. He describes him as: “a man called of God to root out, to pull down and to destroy, to throw down, to build and to plant, a work which he did right nobly.”

Knox’s goal was indeed to uproot Roman Catholicism from Scottish soil and to plant Biblical Christianity in its place. As he contemplated the conflict that lay ahead in Scotland, he courageously wrote: “[It is] uncertain as yet what God shall further work in this country, except I see the battle shall be great for Satan rages even to the uttermost.” Knox planned to return and preach at St Andrew’s Church, but others advised him not to do this. However, this Protestant firebrand could not be extinguished and responded fearlessly: “My life is in the custody of Him whose glory I seek. Therefore, I cannot so fear their boast nor tyranny, that I will cease from doing my duty, when of His mercy He offers me the occasion. I desire the hand or weapon of no man to defend me.” He felt invincible within the will of God. Preached at St. Andrews on Jesus Cleansing the Temple with clear implication against Catholic Church. Preached for 3 days – 21 priests left Catholic Church, and the tide was turning in favor of the Reformed cause. Nineteenth-century historian William Blaikie observes, “The vigorous force brought into play by such convictions in a vehement nature like Knox’s is beyond calculation.”

**EDINBURGH PASTOR (1559-1560)** Appointed pastor of the greatest, largest, strongest Church in Scotland, St. Giles. Preached to as many as 3000 people. The Queen Regent in Scotland wanted to subdue Scotland to the Catholic rule in France and to crush Knox’ ministry. Protestants took up arms against the queen entering into military battle and they suffered defeat. They withdrew to Sterling. Looked like things were in reverse gear. Knox hears of this. Goes to Sterling Church, opens the Bible, and preaches on Psalm 80:4-8 putting steel into their backbone. Historians call this the turning point of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. Word traveled all the way to Geneva. Calvin writes back to Knox, “I am not ignorant of how strenuous are your stirrings up of others and what abilities and energies God has endowed you with for going through with this task of preaching.” It is the powerful voice of John Knox that is turning the tide for the entire nation.

**STAUNCH DEFENDER (1561-1566)** The queen dies in 1560, and the Scottish Parliament turns to Knox and asks him to write for them a national confession of faith. The Scottish Confession became the doctrinal confession of the Nation until the 1640s when The Westminster Confession would be written in London. Knox enlisted five other men for this task. They produced a document rooted and grounded on the authority of the Word of God. Its preface reads as follows: “If any man will note in this confession an article or any sentence repugnant to God’s holy Word, that it should please him of his gentleness to admonish us of the same in writing and we promise him satisfaction from the Scriptures.” Parliament declared it to be the law of the Land. It ended the rule of the Pope over the Scottish Church. Mass was declared to be illegal. All statutes against heretics were repealed. Roman Catholic teaching and practice was forbidden in the entire nation.

A new queen, Mary Queen of Scotts, assumes the Scottish throne. On her 1st Sunday in Scotland, she brings her priest and has a private mass held in the Royal Palace. John Knox takes the pulpit and announces Mary’s mass as idolatry, and that it will bring the judgment of God down upon the entire Nation. Mary hears of this blistering sermon, and she orders Knox to come to the Royal Palace. Knox comes alone, and he stands before Mary who declares to him that she has the right to worship with the mass. Knox responds, “Wonder not, Madam, that I call Rome a harlot; for that Church is altogether polluted with all kinds of spiritual fornication, as well in doctrine as in manners. The queen challenged Knox, “You interpret Scripture in one manner, and they [referring to the Catholic Church] in another. Whom am I to believe? Whom am I to be judge?” Knox then states, “Madam, you shall believe God, [Who] plainly speaks in His Word…The Word of God is plain in itself. If there appear any obscurity in one place, the Holy Ghost, which is never contrary to Himself, explains the same more clearly in other places.” Frustrated with Knox’s reply, Queen Mary expressed that she wished certain learned Catholic teachers were present to challenge his reasoning. Knox remained undeterred, “Madam, would to God that the most learned Papist in Europe … were present with Your Grace to sustain the argument…. I doubt not, Madam, but you should hear the vanity of the papistical religion, and how small ground it has within the Word of God.”

There were a series of these confrontations between Mary and Knox. We have record of at least 5 or 6. Mary challenges Knox that if he is going to say anything about her that he is to say it in her presence. Knox responds, “I am called, Madam, to a public function within the Church of God, and am appointed by God to rebuke the sins and vices of all. I am not appointed to come to every man in particular to show him his offence; for that labor were infinite. If your Grace is pleased to frequent the public sermons, then doubt I not but that you shall fully understand both what I like and dislike, as well in your Majesty as in all others.”

Mary said, “I am more afraid of Knox’ prayers, than of an army of ten thousand men.” Spurgeon said, “When Knox went upstairs to plead with God for Scotland, it was the greatest event in Scottish history.” He was a force for God. Regarding his confrontation with Mary, Queen of Scotts, Knox said, “My life is in the custody of Him whose glory I seek therefore I cannot fear their boast or tyranny that I will cease from my duty. I am not master of myself but must obey Him who commands me to speak plain and to flatter no flesh on the face of the earth.”

**NATIONAL FIGURE (1567-1570)** When Knox 1st arrived in Scotland in 1560, it was estimated that in all of Scotland there were only 12 Reformed ministers. By 1567, just 7 years later, there were 250 ministers of Reformed conviction and 150 exhorters [laymen who preach], and 450 lay leaders. When one man is courageously strong in the Word of God, he becomes surrounded by other bold men. This was the case in Scotland.

**ST. ANDREWS PASTOR (1570-1572)** There were those who wanted Mary back on the throne, and it became clear that Knox would need to relocate, or he would be killed. So, he retreats to St. Andrews Church. He is now approaching old age. He was during that last year of his life endowed with much strength from the Lord. James Melville (1556-1614), a teenage student, heard Knox’s preaching at St. Andrews in 1571 and was enthralled by his energetic delivery. Years later, Melville described the great Reformer’s preaching as follows: “Of all the benefits that year [1571], was the coming of that most notable prophet and apostle of our nation, Mr. John Knox, to St. Andrews … I heard him teach there the prophecy of Daniel, that summer and the winter following. I had my pen and my little book and took away such things as I could comprehend. In the opening up of his text, he was moderate in the space of half an hour; but when he entered to application, he made me so shudder and tremble, that I could not hold a pen to write. He was very weak. I saw him, every day of his teaching, go slowly and warily, with a fur…about his neck, a staff in one hand, and good, godly Richard Ballantyne, his servant, holding up the other, from the abbey to the parish kirk and, by the same Richard and another servant, lifted up to the pulpit, but before he had done w/his sermon, he was so active & vigorous, that he was like to ding [hit] the pulpit in blads [pieces], and fly out of it.

**ST. GILES PASTOR (1572)** It became safe for him to return to his Church at St. Gilles. He calls for his successor. He commissioned James Lawson. A week before he died, Knox gathered his elders and deacons into his room, along with Lawson and a minister in Leith, David Lindsay, and solemnly testified: “Whatever influenced me to utter whatever the Lord put into my mouth so boldly, and without respect of persons, was a reverential fear of my God, who called and of His grace appointed me to be a steward of divine mysteries, and a belief that He will demand an account of the manner in which I have discharged the trust committed to me, when I shall stand at last before His tribunal.”Knox charged his successor: “My brother Lawson, fight the good fight of faith, and do the work of the Lord joyfully and resolutely.”

Knox told his wife to read to him Calvin’s sermons on Ephesians. Then she was instructed to read John 17 - “where I have first cast my anchor.” When dying, he had his wife read to him John Calvin’s sermons. Knox died in Edinburgh, November 24, 1572. As he was buried in Edinburgh, the Regent of Scotland spoke these long-remembered words: “There lies one who neither feared no man nor flattered any flesh.”

**APPLICATION**:

1. What impacted you the most about John Knox’s life and why?
2. George Wishart’s life and death powerfully influenced Knox. Has the Lord used others in the body to powerfully impact you by their life and their death? How so?
3. How is the mercy Wishart extended toward his executioners an encouragement for us to be merciful to others including those who may have been anything but a blessing to us?
4. In what ways does Knox demonstrate the grace of God to suffer well for the name of Christ?
5. The call into the ministry terrified Knox even though by nature he was courageous. Are there things the Lord would have you do for Him this year that are personally daunting to you? How can you find comfort in the life example of George Knox and/or promises from God’s Word?
6. How did Knox demonstrate a keen awareness of his own sin?
7. In what ways did Knox illustrate what it means to wrestle against the powers of darkness?
8. How did Knox illustrate God given faith during great hardship and disappointment?
9. How did Knox exemplify a steadfast commitment to the will of God for his life despite influences from others that might have removed him from God’s specific plan for John’s life?
10. How is Knox an illustration of putting Jesus Christ ahead of his own personal desires to get married?
11. During the lifetime of John Knox, in what ways did we see the Word of God spread in Scotland despite great persecution?
12. How is Calvin’s encouragement to Knox a great example of how we should encourage one another? What texts of Scripture reinforce the principle of using our words to build up one another?
13. How does Knox demonstrate that our spiritual weapons are divinely powerful?
14. What protected Knox from the fear of man? Texts which come to mind?
15. In what way was Knox willing to submit to the authority the Word w/regard to his own teaching?
16. How did Knox wisely confront Mary Queen of Scott’s when she to sought to place Catholicism over Scripture?
17. In what ways did Knox impact the Church re spiritual leadership? Texts which come to mind?
18. How is Knox an example of the importance of intercession? Texts which come to mind?
19. How conscious was Knox of the accountability he one day would give to the Lord for his life & ministry?