

## SESSION FOUR

# JOHN KNOX

AND

— THE SCOTTISH REFORMATION —

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. Uncompromising, dogmatic, and driven, John Knox was....a preacher of truly terrifying power...a Protestant firebrand.<sup>1</sup>

ARTHUR HERMAN

### **CATHOLIC YOUTH (1514-1540)**

### **PROTESTANT BELIEVER (1540)**

### **PERSONAL BODYGUARD (1545-1546)**

- In December 1545, Knox next came under the influence of a powerful preacher who was touring the Lothians area, proclaiming the true saving gospel. This man was George Wishart. 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.<sup>2</sup>

- As the truth was preached, the times became more provocative and dangerous. The threats upon Wishart's life escalated significantly. Knox courageously stepped

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland*, 54.

forward to become his personal bodyguard. He took up a broadsword and was ready to defend his mentor to death. Blaikie writes:

Knox loved and honoured him as his spiritual father; accompanied him in his tour in East Lothian, carrying a two-handed sword to defend him, and would have been with him when he was apprehended at the House of Ormiston.<sup>3</sup>

- The dangers were becoming greater, and Wishart was, at last, arrested. When Knox stepped forward to defend him. But the preacher insisted that his young disciple go back to Longniddry. Wishart famously said:

Return to your bairns (children, or pupils) and God bless you. One is enough for a sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

- On March 1, 1546, Wishart was burned at the stake at St. Andrews. The religious leader in charge was the nephew of the same Archbishop who had earlier martyred Patrick Hamilton in 1528, David Beaton. Wishart's last words were these:

I beseech Thee Father of heaven! To forgive them that have any ignorance or else have of 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.<sup>5</sup>

- With Wishart martyred, the gospel torch was passed to the younger man whom he so greatly impacted, John Knox.<sup>6</sup> 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 with the difficulties of the situation. Wishart was to Knox as Stephen had been to Paul.<sup>7</sup>

### **CASTLE PREACHER (1547)**

- After intense soul-searching, Knox acknowledged he was inwardly compelled to step forward and answer the divine call to preach. He was installed by the leaders in the

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<sup>3</sup> Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland*, 54.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted by David Campbell in *Travel with John Knox: In the footsteps of Scotland's great Reformer* (Leominster, England: Day One Publications, 2003), 14.

<sup>5</sup> D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation in Europe*, Vol. 6, 244.

<sup>6</sup> Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland*, 54.

<sup>7</sup> William G. Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland*, 52-3.

castle to the office of preacher. 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.<sup>8</sup>

- For the remainder of his life and ministry, Knox asserted:

I must be blowing my Master's trumpet.<sup>9</sup>

### **GALLEY SLAVE (1547-1548)**

- 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 soever I now appear, that I shall not depart this life, till my tongue shall glorify His godly name in the same place.<sup>10</sup>

- 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.<sup>11</sup>

### **ENGLISH PASTOR (1549)**

### **ROYAL CHAPLIN (1551-1553)**

### **EUROPEAN EXILE (1553)**

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<sup>8</sup> John Knox, *The Works of John Knox, Vol. 4* (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1854), p. 467.

<sup>9</sup> John Knox as quoted by Richard G. Kyle, *The Ministry of John Knox: Pastor, Preacher, and Prophet* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p. 79.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Wilson, *For Kirk & Covenant: The Stalwart Courage of John Knox* (Nashville, TN: Highland Books, 2000), 191.

<sup>11</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, repr.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 95.

- 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 feint-hearted and feeble soldier (the cause I remit to God), yet my prayer is, that I may be restored to the battle again.<sup>12</sup>

### **FRANKFURT PASTOR (1554-1555)**

#### **ITINERATE PREACHER (1555)**

- In Scotland, a ban had been issued against owning or reading Tyndale's New Testament. The English Bible had been ordered to be a closed book. Upon his return, Knox discovered the truth of Scripture nevertheless, had spread underground:

Notwithstanding this their tyranny, the knowledge of God did wonderously increase within this Realm, partly by reading, partly by brotherly conference, which in those dangerous days was used to the comfort of many.<sup>13</sup>

#### **GENEVA PASTOR (1556-1559)**

- While there, Knox also sat under John Calvin's lecturing in the Auditorium across the street from St. Pierre's Cathedral. 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, but manners and religion so truly reformed, I have not yet seen in any other place.<sup>14</sup>

#### **SCOTTISH REFORMER (1559-1560)**

- Upon his return, Knox discovered that the knowledge of the Scripture, nevertheless, had grown at the grassroots level in Scotland. He noted:

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<sup>12</sup> Iain H. Murray, *A Scottish Christian Heritage* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2006), 12.

<sup>13</sup> John Knox, *The History of The Reformation of Religion Within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, repr.; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2010), 17.

<sup>14</sup> S. M. Houghton, *Sketches From Church History* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 126.

Notwithstanding this their tyranny, the knowledge of God did wonderously increase within this Realm, partly by reading, partly by brotherly conference, which in those dangerous days was used to the comfort of many.<sup>15</sup>

- Knox was the man for this imposing challenge. God had made the man for the moment, and the moment for the man. 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 an heroic rugged character was needed; and God produced the man.<sup>16</sup>

- 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.<sup>17</sup>

- 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 rageth even to the uttermost.<sup>18</sup>

- 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 offereth me the occasion. I desire the hand or weapon of no man to defend me.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, repr.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 58.

<sup>16</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "John Knox—The Founder of Puritanism," *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (1987, repr.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 279.

<sup>17</sup> S. M. Houghton, "John Knox," *Puritan Papers, Vol. 4 1965-1967*, edited by J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 59.

<sup>18</sup> John Knox, *The Works of John Knox, Vol. 6* (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), 21.

<sup>19</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion Within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, repr.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), pp. 175-7.

- Knox traveled throughout the region, preaching forcibly. Wherever he went, he was met with the same encouraging results:

The trumpet soundeth all over. We do nothing but go about Jericho, blowing with trumpets as God giveth strength, hoping victory by his power alone.”<sup>20</sup>

- Nineteenth-century historian William Blaikie observes,

The degree of force brought into play by such convictions in a vehement nature like Knox’s is beyond calculation.<sup>21</sup>

### **EDINBURGH PASTOR (1559-1560)**

### **STAUNCH DEFENDER (1561-1566)**

- In response to this blistering sermon, the English ambassador Thomas Randolph, wrote a week later in a letter to the Secretary of State, William Cecil:

I assure you, the voice of one man [Knox] is able in one hour to put more life in us that five hundred trumpets continually blustering in our ears.<sup>22</sup>

- News of Knox’s rebukes soon reached the Queen’s ears. She immediately summoned the preacher to appear before her in the royal palace. When he appeared, Mary declared that she would defend her Church at all costs. To this, Knox boldly replied:

Wonder not, Madam, that I call Rome an harlot; for that Church is altogether polluted with all kind of spiritual fornication, as well in doctrine as in manners.<sup>23</sup>

- The Queen challenged him, “You interpret the Scriptures in one manner, and they interpret in another. Whom shall I believe? Who shall be judge?”<sup>24</sup> This was Knox’s confident response:

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,

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<sup>20</sup> John Knox, *The Works of John Knox, Vol. 6* (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> William Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland* (1888, repr.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 62.

<sup>22</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, repr.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), quoting Randolph to Cecil 7 October 1561, 283.

<sup>23</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, repr.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 279-80.

<sup>24</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, repr.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 280.

the Holy Ghost, which is never contrary to Himself, explains the same more clearly in other places.<sup>25</sup>

- 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.<sup>26</sup>

- Again, on Sunday, December 15, 1562, Knox preached a scathing sermon regarding the vanity of rulers and "the pleasure they take in the displeasure of God's people."<sup>27</sup>
- Two days later, the Queen summoned the preacher to appear before her. She stated that, if she did something in the future of which he disapproved, then he must come to her in private rather than rebuke her in public. Knox retorted:

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 labour were infinite. If your Grace please 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.<sup>28</sup>

## **NATIONAL FIGURE (1567-1570)**

### **ST. ANDREWS PASTOR (1570-1572)**

- 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:

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<sup>25</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, rep.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 280.

<sup>26</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, rep.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 281.

<sup>27</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, rep.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 304.

<sup>28</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland* (1898, rep.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 305.

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 the space of half an hour; but when he entered to application, he made me so to grew (shudder) and tremble, that I could not hold a pen to write. He was very weak. I saw him, every day of his doctrine, 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, where he behoved to lean at his first entry, but before he had done with his sermon, he was so active and vigorous, that he was like to ding [hit] the pulpit in blads [pieces], and fly out of it.<sup>29</sup>

### ST. GILES PASTOR (1572)

- 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.<sup>30</sup>

- Knox charged his successor:

My brother Lawson, fight the good fight of faith, and do the work of the Lord joyfully and resolutely.<sup>31</sup>

- Knox told his wife to read to him Calvin's sermons on Ephesians. Then she was instructed to read John 17:

Go read where I have first cast my anchor.<sup>32</sup>

- Knox died in Edinburgh, November 24, 1572. As he was buried in Edinburgh, the Regent of Scotland spoke these long remembered words:

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<sup>29</sup> John Knox, *The Works of John Knox, Vol. 6* (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), xlvi.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas M'Crie, *The Life of John Knox* (1811, repr.; Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1960), 196.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas M'Crie, *The Life of John Knox* (1811, repr.; Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1960), 196.

<sup>32</sup> Knox, *The Works of John Knox, Vol. 6*, 643.

There lies one who neither feared no man nor flattered any flesh.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power, Vol. III*, 426.