Reformation Sunday Vespers 2019

*John Knox* (1514-1572)

*Historical Context*

1. Scotland in the 16th century was a separate kingdom from England and the two did not like each other very much.
2. At this time, Scotland was similar to a third world country. There was not much wealth and both the nobility and commoners were wild folk. Life was cheap and times were brutal with clans warring with one another.
3. King James V died in battle in 1542, leaving behind a week old daughter, Mary who would be known as Mary, Queen of Scots (not Bloody Mary).
4. It was merchants and mariners who first brought the teachings and ideas of the Reformation to Scotland through books, then preachers began to arrive and preach Reformed Theology, many of whom were martyred.
5. Political machinations also were going on at this time as England, France, and Scotland were all trying to marry their sons and daughters to one another for political gain and alliances. Henry the VIII wanted his son Edward to marry Mary, Queen of Scots, but Mary’s mother was French and sent Mary away to France. Mary’s mother “ruled” Scotland in her place and treated Scotland as though it were a part of France.

*Life*

1. John Knox was born in Haddington in the region of Scotland known as East Lothian.
2. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1536 and became a church lawyer, aka “apostolic notary” which he held from 1540-1543.
3. It was in 1543 that Knox first heard a Protestant minister preach and as Knox puts it, “it pleased God to call me from the puddle of Papistry.” For the next 3 years, Knox devoted himself to the study of Scripture.
4. Knox became an associate of the Reformed preacher George Wishart and part of Knox’s duties were to guard Rev. Wishart with a 2-handed sword against would be assassins.
5. After Wishart was martyred, Knox took refuge in St. Andrews castle in 1547 and there all the refugees compelled him to take up the public teaching of the Scriptures.
6. 4 months later the French attacked St. Andrews and Knox and those taking refuge there were taken to France as prisoners. Knox spent 19 months as a slave on a French ship.
7. Knox was released (or escaped) and reached England in 1549, where eventually he wound up as chaplain to the Duke of Northumberland.
8. Knox married the daughter of an influential northern Scottish family sometime in 1552. She would die in 1560, still in her 20s. He would remarry 3 years later and have 3 girls with his second wife.
9. When Bloody Mary ascended to the English crown in 1553, she outlawed Protestantism and made Roman Catholicism the religion of England. Knox fled to the continent and spent time in Frankfurt and Geneva, where he eventually settled. It was there in Geneva under John Calvin’s leadership that Knox said, “Since the days of the apostles there has never been a purer Christian community than what I find in Geneva.”
10. After Bloody Mary died in 1559, Protestantism was restored in England and Knox returned to Scotland on May 2, 1559. Tired of French influence, the minor nobility and common people readily received Gospel, Reformed preaching and the Scottish government quickly outlawed the mass and approved of Protestantism as the official religion of Scotland. In 1560 the Scots Parliament approved a Confession of Faith that was written by Knox and some of his colleagues, but refused to ratify the Book of Discipline they had written.
11. In 1561, Mary Queen of Scots returned from France at the age of 19 and took the throne of Scotland. Some of Knox’s own supporters began to support the right of the Queen to have the Catholic mass and observe her own religion within the confines of her palace.
12. In 1568, Protestants rose up in arms against Mary and her army was beaten and she fled to England where she was eventually executed.
13. Knox died in 1572 with the majority of the Scottish nobility against him but the Gospel being preached across the land.
14. Knox always saw himself as a preacher rather than writer. He says, “I consider myself rather called of my God to instruct the ignorant, comfort the sorrowful, confirm the weak, and rebuke the proud by the tongue and lively voice in these corrupt days rather than compose books for ages to come.”

*Writings*

1. *What True Prayer Is, How We Should Pray, and For What We Should Pray* – Written in 1554 when persecution broke out against Protestants where he defines prayer as “an earnest and familiar talking with God.”
2. *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous* [Unnatural] *Regiment* [Government] *of Women* – Knox was depressed by the state of Europe in 1558. Scotland was ruled by the Catholic Mary, mother of Mary Queen of Scots. France was ruled by the Catholic Catherine Di Medici. England was ruled by Bloody Mary. In all 3 places, Protestants were being martyred by Catholic women who were ruling their respective countries.
3. *History of the Reformation in Scotland* – Perhaps Knox’s most important writing and his own account of the Reformation coming to Scotland.
4. *The Scots Confession of 1560* – written by Knox and some associates. It is a confession of faith divided into chapters, much like the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and served as the basis for Scotland’s confession and national church until the Westminster Assembly.
5. *First Book of Discipline* – This document outlined important doctrinal issues as well as established regulations for church government, including the creation of 10 church districts which later were called presbyteries. It also called for programs for universal education for children and relief for the poor.

*Theology*

1. The heartbeat of Knox’s theology was the glory of God. We exist for the glory of God and therefore true devotion and piety is to be zealous for God’s glory. Consequently, to despise God and offend Him is the darkest form of human depravity.
2. Knox was staunchly anti-Roman Catholic and saw the entire system as giving to man and idols what belongs to God alone. He called the mass “idolatry” in that they worship and bow down to bread actually becoming Christ.
3. Knox also had a high view of Scripture. Nothing was lawful in the church unless it was found in Scripture. Christians are bound to obey all of God’s word no matter the cost or consequences. Knox wrote to Queen Elizabeth saying, “Whatsoever He approves by His eternal word, that shall be approved, and what He damneth, shall be condemned, though all men in the earth should hazard the justification of the same.”
4. Knox also had a high view of the Church. Christ is the living Head of the Church and the Church hears His voice and follows Him. The Church is to be kept separate from the world through the exercise of church discipline so that reproach will not be brought upon God by the character of church members. Church discipline is also to correct those in error so they can be restored.
5. The main themes that Knox emphasized in his preaching was “justification by faith alone” and “fleeing idolatry.” Knox saw the Roman Catholic church as especially idolatrous and he wanted God’s people to know and enjoy the peace that we have with God through Jesus by faith alone.

*Quotes*

1. “Although I never lack the presence and plain image of my own wretched infirmity, yet seeing sin so manifestly abound in all estates I am compelled to thunder out the threatenings of God against obstinate rebels. In doing that, I sometimes am wounded, knowing myself criminal and guilty in many, yea, in all things, that in others I reprehend.”
2. “I know how hard is the battle between the spirit and the flesh, under the heavy cross of affliction, where no worldly defense but present death does appear. I know the grudging and murmuring complaints of the flesh…calling all His promises in doubt, and being ready every hour utterly to fall from God. Against which rests only faith, provoking us to call earnestly and pray for assistance of God’s Spirit; wherein, if we continue, our most desperate calamities shall be turned to gladness, and to a prosperous end. To thee alone, O Lord, be praise, for with experience I write this and speak.”
3. Writing to his mother-in-law: “Your imperfection shall have no power to damn you, for Christ’s perfection is reputed to be yours by faith, which you have in His blood.”
4. To those facing martyrdom: “Be not moved from the sure foundation of your faith. For albeit Christ Jesus be absent from you (as He was from His disciples in that great storm) by His bodily presence, yet He is present by His mighty power and grace…and yet He is full of pity and compassion. Stand with Christ Jesus in this day of His battles, 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; and He shall turn our tears into everlasting joy.”
5. Some words he spoke 2 days before his death while saying his goodbyes: “Live in Christ. Live in Christ, and then flesh need not fear death. Lord, grant true pastors to thy Church, that purity of doctrine may be maintained.”

*Lasting Influence*

1. Knox’s resolute stand against monarchs helped establish the freedom of the church from political meddling so that the Gospel could be freely preached. The Church is free from any meddling of a worldly government or ruler. The Church is ruled by Christ and His Word.
2. Knox is widely recognized as a powerful preacher and Knox attributed it to the fact that preaching the Word of God was God’s work of getting His message to the world and that His Spirit would honor it. “God gave His Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance.”
3. The Regulative Principle of Worship – Knox brought Psalm-only singing to the Scottish church as well as doing away with pipe organs and not celebrating special holidays such as Christmas.
4. Presbyterianism!

**Knox’s Burial Spot at St. Giles in Edinburgh**

