
A CLOUD OF WITNESSES: JOHN G. PATON (1824-1907)

TIMELINE OF HIS LIFE:

- 1824 – Paton born in Scotland on May 24
- 1847 – Paton becomes a City Missionary in Glasgow.
- 1858 – Paton and his pregnant wife Mary arrive on the island of Tanna. His wife and newborn son die of malaria within 5 months.
- 1859 – Mary and their month old son die of malaria.
- 1862 – All missionaries are driven off the island. Paton goes through Australia and Great Britain raising support for the mission.
- 1866 – Paton and his second wife Margaret travel arrive on the island of Aniwa.
- 1873 – Poor health forces the Patons to leave, but not before the entire island turns to Christ.
- 1874-1897 They travel through Australia, Great Britain and Canada raising support for the mission, translating Scripture, hymns and catechisms.
- 1907 – Paton dies in Australia, 83 years old. Margaret had died two years earlier.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM JOHN PATON?

1. Pour yourself into labour, trusting God

In the long preparation of school: "...we found it killing work, and had to grind away incessantly, late and early... I struggled patiently on through ten years... I yet had much of the blessed Master's presence in all my efforts, which many better scholars sorely lacked; and I was sustained by the lofty aim which burned all these years bright within my soul, namely, to be qualified as a preacher of the Gospel of Christ, to be owned and used by Him for the salvation of perishing men."

In city-work longing to be a foreign missionary: "We were expected to spend four hours daily in visiting from house to house, holding kitchen prayer-meetings amongst those visited, calling them together also in the evenings for worship or instruction... We instituted a Bible Class, a Singing Class, a Communicants' Class, and a Total Abstinence Society; and ... we opened two prayer-meetings ... My work now occupied every evening in the week; and I had two meetings every Sabbath...5-600 people in weekly attendance..."

Labouring amongst violent cannibals: "After the Sabbath Morning Service we used to walk many miles, visiting all the villages within reach, even before we had got so much of their language as to be able to speak freely ... ten or twelve miles away and as many back again."

Raising awareness of South Seas missions: "I addressed three or four meetings every Sabbath, and one or more every week-day; and thus travelled over the length and breadth of Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia ... Of the money which I had raised, £ 3,000 were sent to Nova Scotia, to pay for the building of our new Mission Ship... The remainder was set apart to pay for ... additional Missionaries for the field, and I was commissioned to return home to Scotland in quest of them."

Performing paperwork: "I had indeed to make all my own arrangements, and correspond regarding all engagements and details, to me, always a slow and laborious writer, a very burdensome task. But it was all necessary in order to the fulfillment of the Lord's purposes; and, to one who realizes that he is a fellow-labourer with Jesus, every yoke that He lays on becomes easy and every burden light."

2. Stand firm in suffering, trusting God

Being treated unjustly: "Once more I committed my future to the Lord God of my father, assured that in my very heart I was willing and anxious to serve Him and to follow the blessed Saviour, yet feeling keenly that intense darkness had again enclosed my path."

Plans frustrated: "To me personally, this delay is confessedly a keen and deep disappointment. ...In this, as in many a harder trouble of my chequered life, I calmly roll all my burden upon the Lord. I await with quietness and confidence His wise disposal of events. His hand is on the helm; and whither He steers us, all shall be well."

Lethal physical threats: “Life in such circumstances led me to cling very near to the Lord Jesus; I knew not, for one brief hour, when or how attack might be made; and yet, with my trembling hand clasped in the Hand once nailed on Calvary, and now swaying the sceptre of the Universe, calmness and peace and resignation abode in my soul. ... Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus, I left all in His hands, and felt immortal till my work was done. ... Yet I never could say that on such occasions I was entirely without fear. Nay, I have felt my reason reeling, my sight coming and going, and my knees smiting together when thus brought close to a violent death, but mostly under the solemn thought of being ushered into Eternity and appearing before God.”

Death of his wife and son: “The ever-merciful Lord sustained me, to lay the precious dust of my beloved Ones in the same quiet grave ... But for Jesus, and the fellowship He vouchsafed me there, I must have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave! ...but feeling immovably assured that my God and Father was too wise and loving to err in anything that He does ... I do not pretend to see through the mystery of such visitations ... but this I do know ... it becomes us all to love and serve our blessed Lord Jesus so that we may be ready at His call for death and Eternity.”

3. Fuel your passion with joy

“My delight in that Bible Class was among the purest joys in all my life, and the results were amongst the most certain and precious of all my Ministry.”

“At the moment I put the bread and wine into those dark hands, once stained with the blood of Cannibalism, but now stretched out to receive and partake the emblems and seals of the Redeemer's love, I had a foretaste of the joy of Glory that well nigh broke my heart to pieces. I shall never taste a deeper bliss, till I gaze on the glorified face of Jesus Himself.”

“...renounce their shallow frivolities, and go to live amongst the poor ... and the lost, and write their eternal fame on the souls by them blessed and brought to the Saviour? Those who have tasted this highest joy, “the joy of the Lord,” will never again ask – Is Life worth living?”

4. Pass on your passion to your children

“Never, in temple or cathedral, on mountain or in glen, can I hope to feel that the Lord God is more near, ... than under that humble cottage roof ... Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory ... my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once again in that Sanctuary Closet ... and ... would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal, 'He walked with God, why may not I?'”

“...we praise God for the decision to which you have been led. Your father's heart was set upon being a Minister ... your father and mother laid you upon the altar ... to be consecrated, if God saw fit, as a Missionary of the Cross; and it has been their constant prayer that you might be prepared, qualified, and led to this very decision' ... From that moment on, every doubt as to my path of duty for ever vanished.”

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JOHN PATON?

- *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu)* by John G. Paton. Published by Banner of Truth, 1965. ISBN 0 85151 667 X
- *Filling Up the Afflictions of Christ: The Cost of Bringing the Gospel to the Nations in the Lives of William Tyndale, Adoniram Judson, and John Paton* by John Piper. Published by Crossway, 2009. ISBN 978-1433510465