

The Power of a Fearless Life

A few years ago my wife and I went to Scotland. One of my chief desires was to connect with the legacy of the “Thundering Scot,” John Knox. At his funeral, Earl Morton pointed to his grave and said, “There lies a man who never feared the face of any man.” When my wife and I were in Scotland we stopped off at the church where he most famously pastored, St. Giles, where the “Ruffian of the Reformation” (as referred to by Samuel Johnson) served Christ. We saw a statue of the man of God in the church, however the main stained glass window was in tribute to the poet laureate of Scotland, Robert Burns. I asked one of the tour guides where the grave of Knox was. At first he acted as though he didn’t hear me. Persistently, I enquired and finally he answered, “I’ll show you, but you won’t like what you see.” He then took us outside to the parking lot. And there on parking stall number 23 was a small gold marker in the asphalt. The day we saw it, a small Renault was parked over his grave, leaking oil. While kneeling there, I found myself in disbelief that Charles Darwin would be buried with honor in Westminster Abbey while Knox got parking space number 23!

Thirty years ago, Dr. Edward Panosian wrote, “A post card pictures a simple stone set in the ground of a square in Edinburgh, Scotland, commemorating the traditional spot of an uncertain grave. Inscribed on the stone is only ‘I.K. 1572’ (for Ioannes [John] Knox). I found the post card between the pages of one of the well-used books in the library of Dr. Charles D. Brokenshire, a saintly scholar and revered teacher. On the opposite side of the card he had written to a nephew this message: ‘Scotland has erected no monument on the grave of John Knox, for Scotland is his monument. He was courageous and true. Dear nephew, may you be such a man.’ The truth of that message has been remembered profitably by one for whom it was never intended.”

The prayer of John Knox has echoed down the halls of time, “Lord, give me Scotland or I die.” In truth, these generations of Christians who were the answers to this prayer not only influenced the British Empire, but helped blaze a trail of the true evangelical faith in the American colonies that became the backbone of our new republic. Knox’s life illustrates the power of a fearless life.

When Knox was addressing Mary, Queen of Scots, and debating with her, it was said to him that his language was discourteous, and that he shouldn’t argue with the Queen. His response was, “It is no more privilege of the rich and the powerful, than of the common people, to offend God’s majesty.” When she burst out into tears during one of their debates and her courtiers remonstrated with Knox to cease pressing home the Gospel of Christ upon her, to cease calling on her to flee from her idols, and when the tears of Mary, Queen of Scots were brought before him as an argument to this end, he said, “I cannot let the tears of the honourable lady suppress the voice of my conscience, or silence me to the hurt of my nation.” Mary, Queen of Scots said of John Knox’s imprecatory prayers (prayers that call down the curses of God on false religion and the promoters of it), “I fear these prayers more than all the assembled armies of Europe.”

The French Catholics captured John Knox at the Castle at St. Andrews. He had outraged Rome with his preaching for salvation by faith alone, against popery, purgatory and the mass as blasphemous idolatry. After being consigned for 19 months as a galley slave, beaten, cursed and abused, a picture of the Virgin Mary was brought on board while the galley was in port, to be kissed by the slaves. When Knox refused, the picture was thrust into his face. Outraged, he flung the "accursed idol" into the river, saying "Let our Lady learn to swim." Two of his fellow believers had already suffered a martyr's death and he was next in line after this episode. Miraculously, not only did he live - he stood before the queen and on five occasions presented the true faith to her majesty, Queen Mary. Although he had been exiled from his beloved Scotland for 13 years, he had finally come back for good. During 1560 and 1561, the Scottish Parliament accepted the reformed confession of faith drawn up by Knox and others. What a testament of a man who feared not the face of man because he feared God alone!

Time would fail to tell all of Knox's heroic deeds of faith. Suffice it to say, the same God that gave this man courage is the same Who will give us courage when needed. Allow me to give four truths about empowerment over fear:

1. We are commanded not to fear man or circumstances.

"Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Deuteronomy 31:6). Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." Fearing man will bring you into a trap. "Fear not: for I am with thee..." (Isaiah 43:5). Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

2. When presented with fear, we may opt to be exempt.

"Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh" (Proverbs 3:25). "Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me" (Psalm 56: 2-4).

3. God's greatest display of power on our behalf comes during the greatest crisis.

Psalm 146:1-3: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah." Psalm 27:1 tells us, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Some years ago, I came across this concise truth: NO GOD = KNOW FEAR. KNOW GOD = NO FEAR!

4. Power over fear is not achieved; it is received.

Fear is bondage. In Christ we are free. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear..." (Romans 8:15). Therefore: "...freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). If you are looking for the faith and courage to stand the trials against the foe, look no further, for our Lord said, "...for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

- Pastor Pope-