

Thoughts From Other Minds:

Certainly Renwick shares his forerunner's [Samuel Rutherford] limitless enthusiasm for Christ. "Though I had ten thousand times ten thousand years," he says in the March of 1684, "yea, the faculty of angels, I could in no ways lay out mine obligations to free grace; but behaved, when I had babbled my fill, to seal up all with this, *Christ is matchless*." ... "They that have been most ravished with His love, and most eloquent in the praise of His comeliness, will see that they have been but, at best, babes learning to speak. O, what shall I say? He is the wonderful, glorious, and inestimable Jewel; the incomparable Pearl of price. O, who would not choose Him? Who would not give away themselves to Him? Let a man look through heaven and earth, and seek a portion where he will, he shall not find the like of Christ." For a Master so supremely good, in a service so desirable, one may greet difficulty and hardship and hostility with smiling face. "O precious Kingdom!" exclaims our pilgrim along the highroad of the Cross; "and O noble way that He is taking this day to enlarge it by stretching out the borders thereof with blood! His house is a costly house, and it is well worthy of costly cementing." Borne for Him, reproaches become "badges of honour," and is it not "more sweet to be swimming in the swellings of Jordan for Christ than to swelter in the pleasures of sin"? "Love," Renwick declares, his prose assuming the melodies of poetry, "love is a resolute soldier; love is an undaunted champion; love's eye is so much taken up with contemplating the Beloved that it cannot see dangers in the way, but runs blindly upon them, and yet not blindly, because it knoweth for whom and for what it so ventureth:" ...

The race is beset with toils, as he can testify who maintains it "through many damps and deeps"; but nothing will persuade him and his brothers to forsake it for the path of dalliance and ease. "Our natures would have the way so squared as we might travel without a rub; but it lieth through many a rencounter. We would have it through a valley of roses; but it lieth through a valley of tears. We would have it so as to be travelled sleeping; but it must be travelled waking and watching and fighting. We would have it to be travelled with laughing; but it must be travelled with weeping. But, whatever folks do think, the way is pleasant to the believer, and a sight of the recompense of reward maketh bold to pass through every opposition. If they were possible, ten thousand deaths, ten thousand hells, would seem nothing to a soul who gets a sight of Christ at the other side." The world's most splendid boons cease to satisfy a hungering spirit; "the earth is round and the heart of man three-nooked, and therefore this cannot be filled by that." But the poor man who walks with God, even when shadows and tempests are round about Him, fares, summer and winter, through a good land and large: "Away with scrimpit sense, which constructs aye God's heart to be as His face ! Faith is a noble thing; it soars high; it can read love in God's heart when His face frowns."

Alexander Smellie, *Men of the Covenant*, pp. 486-88.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Pastoral Charge

30 October 2016

Sermon: "James Renwick — Godly Jealousy for the Crown Rights of Christ the King"

Scripture: Ephesians 1:1-23

Sermon Notes

Introduction: Martin Luther's Ninety Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences (31 Oct 1517) challenged the authority of the Pope and the Church.

In Roman Catholic teaching, Indulgences rest on the belief that sinners must bear some of the punishment due for their sins, and that this punishment can be lessened by our own works of merit or the merit of others by an Indulgence.

Indulgences were then being sold to pay for St Peters in Rome. Against Indulgences, Luther said that salvation is by grace, through faith, not by our works; against the authority of the Church, Luther said that scripture is over the Pope.

In England the Reformation set the church free from the Pope, but left it subject to the Crown, but in Scotland the Reformation also gave the church independence from the Crown.

The Scots, threatened by the claims of the Stuart kings, rejected them as against the Crown Rights of Jesus Christ in his Church. The struggle began in 1578, when James VI) made plain his intention to be supreme in both the State and the Church.

In 1580 the Scots proclaimed their determination to maintain their Protestant heritage by a National Covenant (renewed in 1596). This resolve was severely tested when James' anti-Presbyterian policies were continued by his son Charles 1, and after the Restoration (1660) by Charles II.

In 1662, 400 ministers were evicted from their parishes for upholding their Covenanted obligation to maintain the Protestant faith; they are 'the Covenanters'. Refusing to recognise any king in the church but Christ, they and theirs were cruelly persecuted by the authorities.

In 1669 an Act of Indulgence gave relief to those who would accept the royal supremacy—but the field meetings of those who refused to do so were declared treasonable, and the cruelty and killing increased until in the Killing Times (1664-65) soldiers could shoot suspected covenant sympathisers without trial.

1. A young man of old Knox's principles

The leader of the few who stood firm for the Crown Rights of King Jesus in those terrible times was James Renwick (born 15 February 1662 at Moniaive, in the parish of Glencairn, Dumfriesshire). His father was a weaver, and an earnest Christian, his mother had prayed for a son, that she might dedicate him to the Lord.

In our times the noble calling of mother and home-maker has been given a bad name, but James' mother did more good by her prayers and his early training in the

Lord than she ever could have by a career. Those who follow in her steps will never regret it; their children will be a blessing, and future generations will bless them.

James learned to pray as he learned to speak; by the age of 6 he loved to read the Bible, and to submit to its authority. With the help of friends impressed with his character he was kept at school, and sent to university, where he was convinced of his salvation and that the claims of the Stuart kings robbed Christ of his glory.

At the age of 19 and convinced that only the stricter Covenanters, the followers of Donald Cargill and Richard Cameron, were truly faithful to the National Covenants, he witnessed the martyrdom of Cargill for resisting the king for taking Christ's power, and resolved that he would maintain the same principles, even to death.

With the death of Cargill and Cameron the Society People had no ministers, so they sent James Renwick and two others to Holland to study to be ordained to the ministry. In 1683 Renwick returned to Scotland, where he conducted a vigorous gospel ministry which only ended with his arrest, trial and execution some 5 years later.

The main reason the Covenanters opposed the tyranny that oppressed them was loyalty to Christ as king of his Church—and this meant a Church free under the authority of Christ and his word. And so they sought the overthrow of the tyranny of Satan, and the expulsion of the love of sin by love for the Lord Jesus.

After 5 years of ministry as a hunted man with a price on his head he was arrested, tried and condemned at Edinburgh for rejecting the royal authority of James, Duke of York, etc., and, on the 17th of February 1688 aged 26 he was hanged in the Grassmarket, unmovable in his convictions; he was 'of old Knox's principles'.

2. Continuing in old Knox's principles

Of the four men we have considered, James Renwick is especially relevant to us. While the gospel truths that Hamilton, Wishart, Knox and others stood for are absolutely vital, we are far more likely to face persecution from the State than from another church or religion.

Where Same Sex Marriage has been legalised governmental persecution of Christian dissenters has swiftly followed. Our State parliament has before it a bill that if passed will give the State the right to decide whether conformity with the religious doctrine or practice of the organisation is necessary in employment.

In making such laws the civil power intrudes into God's place by assuming the right to decide upon matters of Christian faith and practice. This is what drove the Covenanters into rebellion, and why James Renwick died; no king but Christ, no authority but his word.

Should the State tell us what to believe or how to practice the Faith, then may God grant us grace like that of James Renwick to be of old Knox's principles, and to suffer if we must. God raised our Lord Jesus from the dead; he is our King and the only King and head of his church. May we, like Renwick, be jealous for his glory.

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why did Luther's 95 Theses trigger the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century? (for Catholic teaching on indulgences, you could see <http://www.catholic.com/tracts/primer-on-indulgences>; for Protestant teaching you could see <https://www.gotquestions.org/plenary-indulgences.html>)
2. What model of monarchy are we most familiar with? How does this model differ from the monarchy as it existed under the Stuart kings of Scotland and England? What sort of monarch is Jesus? Why did this bring the church in Scotland into conflict with the royal power, a conflict which cost many lives, including that of James Renwick?
3. Read and reflect upon Matthew 22:15-22, also Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. What is the relationship of the Christian to the governing authorities, and why? When are we at liberty to disobey 'the powers that be'? Consider also the apostle Peter's instructions to slaves (1 Peter 2:18-25) and to wives (3:1-6); what unspoken limit is there to the submission he commands?