

Windows of Witness
(The Life of John G. Paton)
Quotes From Autobiography (Banner of Truth)

“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:20

We continue our look into testimonies of individuals who have surrendered their lives in service to God. It is my prayer that, in doing so, our Lord will both warm and challenge our hearts, drawing us closer to Him.

John G. Paton (1824-1907), was born in Dumfries, Scotland in 1824 in a small, humble cottage. Almost fifty years later, Charles Spurgeon introduced him, to the congregation of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, as “*the king of the savages*”.

John G. Paton was called by God to Aniwa, one of the islands of Vanuatu. This region was inhabited by savages who had already taken the lives of two missionaries sent prior to Paton. They were people who worshipped idols and practiced sorcery. Many discouraged John Paton from going, warning him, “The cannibals! You will be eaten by cannibals!!!”. However in the words recorded in Paton’s journal, he calmly asserted “Nothing so clears the vision and lifts up the life, as a decision to move forward in what you know to be entirely the will of the Lord.”

Paton was driven by the will of God. Although he lost dear loved ones and found himself in constant danger, John Paton knew his divine assignment was to minister to these people. Along with his wife, he settled in the island of Aniwa in November, 1866. Paton admits that at times his heart wavered as he contemplated whether the people there could really be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. His life was constantly under threat and his belongings were stolen many times. He recounts the following encounter in his personal journal:

“A wild chief followed me around for four hours with his loaded musket, and, though often directed towards me, God restrained his hand. I spoke kindly to him, and attended to my work as if he had not been there, fully persuaded that my God had placed me there, and would protect me till my allotted task was finished. Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus, I left all in His hands, and felt immortal till my work was done.”

In the midst of continuous danger, Paton built orphanages, trained teachers, translated, printed and expounded scripture into the language of the people of Aniwa. He ministered to the sick and dying. He dispensed medicines. He conducted worship services every Lord’s day.

Over the next fifteen years, Paton witnessed the entire island of Aniwa turned to Christ. Years afterward he penned in his journal, “...by the grace of God Aniwa now worships at the Savior’s feet”. Today (2017), more than 91% of the Vanuatu islands identify themselves as Christian. It is amazing to see what God accomplishes through individuals devoted to surrendered service to our Lord. I pray He might find such vessels among us.

~ Pastor Tim Hodge