

Hebrews 10: 32-39 (Part 2); "But you recall the former days", the second of two sermons for Reformation Sunday, October 29th, 2006, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall in the Afternoon Worship Service.

It is good for us, on occasion to recall the former days, not only of our own life, but the former days of our collective faith; in this case, the Reformation. We have been looking at the days of darkness in England before the Reformation. We looked first at the faith of the Waldenses and the Albigenses, and then also the faith of John Wickliffe, the first English reformer. This afternoon I would like to turn our attention to Scotland and to one who paved the way for the Reformation there; George Wishart. It should be apparent to us by now that the Reformation was very slow in getting started because there was so much deception and blindness that existed in this time period of 1100-1500 A.D. This was because the Roman Catholic church had convinced the majority of people that their false way of salvation through religious ceremonial works was true. Many of the priesthood, the bishops, and certainly the pope used their spiritual authority over the people in a political way. And with them there was no separation of church and state. Many kings and kingdoms were told what they should and shouldn't do in relation to their religion and their politics; and they had a difficult time getting out from under this tyranny because many of them considered themselves Christians. They wanted to do the will of God, but in many cases it was hard to know what the will of God was because the Word of God was so scarce in the language of the people. This was one of the real contributions of John Wickliffe. The Roman Catholic Church asserted itself to be the only true Church. Therefore, not to submit to the authority of the pope and the priesthood was tantamount to heresy. To question that hierarchy was to question everything Christian and godly. Such was the blindness of that day. But John Wickliffe questioned the right of the pope and the priests to twist and suppress the truth. This is the basis of the Reformation, and it is the basis of all true reformation. If the Bible is not our authority in all matters of faith and practice, then any man's authority that goes against Biblical truth or adds to it, is false and dangerous. We will see how dangerous this afternoon.

After John Wickliffe translated the Bible from Latin into English, copies of it were widely distributed throughout England. This was in spite of the fact that all of these copies had to be hand written with a pen, because the printing press had not yet been invented. In Foxe's Book of Martyrs it says that "the cost of written books was so great that only the wealthier class of people could afford to buy a Bible; but such as did so, permitted others less fortunate to read in it; or portions were learned by heart and recited to eager listeners, so that a knowledge of the Scriptures began to enter like a ray of light in to the dark ignorance concerning spiritual things which, until then, prevailed among the mass of the people." Foxe says, "It is touching to read such incidents as that of one learned Alice Collins, who was sent for to come to one of these little congregations 'to recite the ten commandments and parts of the epistles of St. Paul which she knew by heart.'" "But it was at a terrible risk that such meetings were held." "The appearance of Wickliffe's Bible aroused at once a bitter opposition from the upholders of the ancient church." "A bill was brought into Parliament to forbid the circulation of the Scriptures in English, but this was opposed by John of Gaunt, who

vigorously upheld the right of the people to have the word of God in their own tongue." "However, the rulers of the church grew more and more alarmed at the increased circulation of the book. The archbishop of Arundel complained to the pope of that 'pestilent wretch, John Wickliffe, who had invented a new translation of the Scriptures,' and shortly after, the convocation of Canterbury forbade the use of such translations, under penalty of excommunication." "In a great council held by the heads of the church at Rome, measures were taken to crush the rising heresy." "Magistrates of every Christian country whatsoever were called upon to condemn to death such persons as were brought to trial, proved guilty, and refused to abjure the doctrines of Wickliffe and his followers." The decree of the council held at Rome being receive in England, the prosecution of the so-called heretics became a part of the common law. Many Wickliffites and others were burned at the stake, and for more than one hundred years no further effort at Bible translation was made.

In Scotland, George Wishart led the charge against the false doctrine of Rome. He was born in 1513 and not much is known of his earlier life. He graduated M.A. from King's College in Aberdeen, and taught as a schoolmaster at Montrose. He was accused of heresy in 1538 and fled to England where a similar charge was brought against him the next year. John Gilles says, "His career as a preacher began in 1544 where he first preached in Ross, and then in Dundee, where, with great admiration of all that heard him he expounded Paul's epistle to the Romans. At the instigation of the Cardinal, a certain man named Robert Mill tried to stop his preaching. He said to Wishart, in a public place, that he should not trouble their town any longer, that he would not suffer it to continue. Wishart thought about this for a little with his eyes raised up to heaven, and then looking sorrowfully upon the speaker and people, he said, "God is my witness that I never intended your trouble, but your comfort; your trouble is more dolorous to me than it is to yourselves; but I am assured that, to refuse God's word, and to chase me from you, his messenger, shall not preserve you from trouble, but shall bring you into it: for God shall send you ministers that shall neither fear burning or banishment." "I have offered you the word of salvation; with the hazard of my life I have remained among you: now ye yourselves refuse me, and I must leave my innocency to be declared by my God; if it be long prosperous with you, then I am not led by the spirit of truth; but if unlooked for trouble comes upon you, acknowledge the cause, and turn to God, who is gracious and merciful; but if you turn not at the first warning, he will visit you with fire and sword." Then he went into the west country, where he made offers of God's Word, which was gladly received by many, until the Bishop of Glasgow, by the instigation of the Cardinal, came with his train to the town of Ayr to resist Wishart. Some of Wishart's supporters, the Earl of Glencairn, and some other gentlemen hearing of it, came to him to lend him help. When they were all come together, the bishop wanted to have the church to preach in, and some opposed him. But Wishart said, "let him alone, his sermon will not do much hurt, let us go to the market-cross;" and so they did. Here, Wishart preached such a sermon, that his very enemies were confounded. After that, he remained with the gentlemen in Kyle, preaching sometimes in one place, sometimes in another; but, coming to Mauchlin, he was kept out of the church by force. Some of those with him wanted to break into the church but he said to one of them, 'Brother, Jesus Christ is as mighty in the fields as in the church, and He Himself often preached in the desert, at the sea-side, and other places: 'tis the word of peace God sends by me, the blood of none shall be shed this day for the preaching of it. And so, going into the fields,

he stood upon a bank, where he continued in preaching to the people for about 3 hours. And God worked so wonderfully by that sermon, that one of the wickedest men in all the country, the Laird of Sheld, was converted by it, and his eyes ran down with such abundance of tears, that all the people wondered at it.

Shortly after this he was prohibited from preaching at Dundee and 4 days later a plague broke out there. The plague raged so extremely, that it almost passed credibility to realize how many died in a 24 hour period of time. When this was related to him, his friends sought to keep him from going there. But he said to them, "They are now in trouble, and need comfort; perhaps this hand of God will make them now to magnify and reverence the Word of God, which they so lightly esteemed before." When he came to Dundee the joy of the faithful was exceeding great, and without delay, he signified that the next day he would preach; and because most of the inhabitants were either sick, or employed about the sick, he chose the East-gate for the place of his preaching, so that everyone who was not sick was within that area, and the sick were outside the gate. His text was Psalm 107 - "He sent His word, and healed them," wherein he treated of the profit and comfort of God's word, the punishment that comes by the contempt of it, the readiness of God's mercy to such as truly turn to him, and the happiness of those who God takes from this misery. By this sermon, he so raised up the hearts of those that heard him, that they regarded not death, but judged themselves more happy if they should then depart, rather than if they remained behind. He did not spare visiting those that lay in the greatest extremity of sickness, and to comfort them he provided all things necessary for those that could take food; the town being very bountiful to them, because he asked them to be so.

But while he was helping in this way, the devil stirred up Cardinal Beaton, who corrupted a desperate Popish priest, named John Weighton, to slay Wishart. And shortly after this, his sermon being ended, and the people having departed; suspecting no danger, the priest stood waiting at the bottom of the stairs, with a naked dagger under his gown; but Mr. Wishart, being of a sharp piercing eye, seeing the priest as he came down, said to him, 'My friend, what would you have?' And then clapping his hand upon the dagger, he took it from him. The priest being terrified, fell down upon his knees, confessing his intention, and begging pardon. When this plot became known to those sick who remained, they cried out, "Deliver the traitor to us, or we will take him by force; and so they burst in at the gate: but Wishart, taking him in his arms said, 'Whosoever hurts him, shall hurt me; for he hath done me no hurt, but much good, by teaching me more heedfulness for the time to come; and so he appeased them, and saved the priest's life. Afterwards Wishart preached in various other places, the people flocking to hear him.

In February of 1546, Mr. Wishart was sent for by Cardinal Beaton, to give him an account of his seditious and heretical doctrine, as they called it; the Cardinal called all his retinue, those loyal to the Roman Catholic cause which were his priestly men and associates, to come armed to the place of their sittings which was the abbey church. When Mr. Wishart was brought, there was a poor man lying at the door that asked his alms, to whom he flung his purse. When he came before the Cardinal, there was a dean appointed to preach; whose sermon being ended, Wishart was put up into the pulpit to hear his charge; and a man named Lawder, a priest, stood over against him, and read a scroll full of bitter accusation and curses, so that the ignorant people thought that the earth would have opened and swallowed up Wishart quick: but he stood with great

patience, without moving, or once changing the expression on his face. The priest having ended his curses, spit at Mr. Wishart's face, saying, "What do you answer?" "You runnagate, traitor, thief, and etc." Then did Mr. Wishart fall upon his knees, making his prayer unto God; after which he said, "Many and horrible things have been said unto me, a Christian man, many words abominable for me to hear, have ye spoken here this day, which I have not taught or even dare to think." He then gave them an account of his doctrine, answering to every article as they would give him leave to speak; but they, without having any regard for his sober and godly answers, presently condemned him to be burnt. When he heard his sentence, he fell upon his knees and said, "O immortal God, how long wilt thou suffer the ungodly to exercise their fury upon thy servants, which do further thy word in this world, whereas they, on the contrary, seek to destroy the truth, whereby thou hast revealed thyself to the world." "O Lord, we know certainly that thy true servants must needs suffer, for thy name's sake, persecutions, afflictions, and troubles; yet we desire that thou wouldst preserve and defend thy church, which thou hast chosen before the foundations of the world, and give thy people grace to hear thy word, and to be thy true servants in this present life." Then were the common people put out, the bishops not desiring that they should hear the innocent man speak, and so they sent him again to the castle, till the fire should be made ready.

The captain of the castle with some friends, coming to Mr. Wishart, asked him if he would break his fast with them. "Yea," he said, "very willingly, for I know you be honest men." In the meantime he desired them to hear him a little; and so he discoursed to them about the Lord's Supper, his suffering and death for us, exhorting them to love one another, laying aside all rancour and malice as becomes the members of Jesus Christ, who continually intercedes for us to his Father. Afterwards, he gave thanks, and blessing the bread and wine, he took the bread and broke it, giving it to every one, saying eat this, remember that Christ died for us, and feed on it spiritually; so taking the cup, he bade them remember that Christ's blood was shed for them. Then he gave thanks and prayed for them, and so retired into his chamber. Presently two executioners came to him from the cardinal, one put upon him a black line coat, the other brought him bags of powder, which they tied about several parts of his body, and so they brought him forth to the place of execution; over against which place, the castle windows were hung with rich hangings, and velvet cushions laid for the cardinal and prelates, who from thence fed their eyes with the torments of this innocent man. On the way to his execution, two friars met him, who tried to persuade him to pray to the Virgin Mary to mediate for him, to which he meekly said, "Cease, tempt me not, I entreat you;" and so with a rope about his neck and a chain about his middle, he was led to the fire; where falling upon his knees, he three times repeated, "O thou Saviour of the World have mercy upon me; Father of heaven, I commend my spirit into thy holy hands;" then turning the people he said, "Christian brethren and sisters, I beseech you be not offended at the word of God for the torments which you see prepared for me: but I exhort you that you love the word of God for your salvation, and suffer patiently, and with a comfortable heart, for the word's sake, which is your undoubted salvation and everlasting comfort; I pray you also show my brethren and sisters which have often heard me, that they cease not to learn the word of God which I taught them, according to the measure of grace given to me, for no persecution or trouble in this in this world; and show them that the doctrine was no old wives' fables, but the truth of God; for if I had taught men's doctrine, I had had greater thanks from men; but for the Word of

God's sake I now suffer, not sorrowfully, but with a glad heart and mind; for this cause I was sent into the world that I should suffer this fire for Christ's sake. Behold my face; you shall not see me change my countenance; I fear not the fire; and if persecution come to you for the word's sake, I pray you fear not them that can kill the body, and have no power to kill the soul. Then he prayed for them who accused him saying "I beseech thee, Father of heaven, forgive them that have of ignorance, or of an evil mind, forged lies of me." "I forgive them with all my heart: I beseech Christ to forgive them that have condemned me this day ignorantly." Then turning to the people again, he said, "I beseech you brethren, exhort your prelates to learn the word of God that they may be ashamed to do evil, and learn to do good, or else there shall come upon them the wrath of God which they shall not escape. Then the executioner fell on his knees before him and said, "Sir, I pray you forgive me, for I am not the cause of your death," and he calling him to him kissed his cheeks saying, "lo here is a token that I forgive thee, my heart, do thine office;" and so he was tied to the stake, and the fire kindled. The captain of the castle coming near him, bade him be of good courage, and to beg for the pardon of his sin, to whom Mr. Wishart said, "This fire torments my body, but not one whit abates my spirit." Then looking towards the cardinal, he said, "He who in such state from that high place feeds his eyes with my torments, shall be hanged out at the same window to be seen with as much ignominy, as he now leans there with pride." And so his breath being stopped, he was consumed by the fire. His last words were very remarkably fulfilled, for after the cardinal was slain, the provost raising the town, came to the castle gates, crying " what have you done to my lord cardinal?" "Where is lord cardinal?" Then those who were within answered, "Return to your houses, for he hath received his reward, and will trouble the world no more;" but they still cried, "We will never depart till we see him." Then did the Leslies hang him out at that window to show that he was dead, and so the people departed." It is said that John Knox was converted under Wishart's ministry and would never have become a reformer had he not witnessed Wishart's life and death. But God does have his ways of raising up men up to do His work.

I hope that my reading these accounts of George Wishart's life have shown you that God's grace really does make us more and more like Jesus Christ if we are not receiving it in vain. These accounts of George Wishart's life remind me very much of our Savior; the way that He spoke and acted, the way that He lived His blessed and perfect life. Certainly it was the grace of Christ that enabled Wishart to live and to die like His Master and ours. May you and I resolve by that same grace to live for the truth, to oppose all error and falsehood, and to love the brethren and all men like this holy man of God did. Let us recall the importance and significance of the Reformation to the progress of Christianity in our day and live in like manner.