

## XIX.V. JOHN PATON, IMMORTAL UNTIL MY MASTER'S WORK IS DONE - The Nineteenth Century (pt.5)

### Q. ARE YOU READY FOR CHURCH HISTORY?!

Two questions and answers:

#### QUESTION 1. What is Church History?

**ANSWER.** Church history is the story of how Jesus has built his church for his own glory and his peoples' good. **Matthew 16:18** "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

#### QUESTION 2. Why should we study Church History?

**ANSWER.** We should learn church history because it is the amazing story of Jesus conquering the nations through his Gospel. **Revelation 6:2** "[Christ] came out conquering, and to conquer."

Today we are going to look at the Nineteenth Century for the 4th time. But before we do that let's remember what we learned last time.

### Q. Who can tell me the name of the person I taught you about last time?

- **Everyone say, "Charles Haddon Spurgeon."**

### Q. Who can tell me something about Charles Spurgeon?

## RECAP

*In the nineteenth century, God used Charles Haddon Spurgeon to preach Christ and show the saints how to suffer for God's glory.*

Who can tell me

### NINETEENTH CENTURY (pt.4) MEMORY VERSE.

- "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" (**Isaiah 45:22**).

### NINETEENTH CENTURY (pt.4) MEMORY QUOTE.

- "God is too good to be unkind, too wise to be mistaken; and when you cannot trace His hand, you can trust His heart" (**Charles Haddon Spurgeon**).

Now, today I am going to teach you about the Nineteenth Century PART 5 (1,800-1,900).

What happened in the Nineteenth Century (1,800-1,900) that shows us how Christ built His church as He continued to conquer the nations?

## Today I am going to teach you about a man named JOHN PATON

– **Everyone say, "John Paton."**

### HISTORY

**(i)** John Gibson Paton was born on May 24, 1824, at Braehead farm cottage near Dumfries, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, the eldest of eleven children to James and Janet Paton, into a humble but deeply godly Reformed Presbyterian home where family worship and fervent prayer shaped daily life. PATON WAS BORN INTO A GODLY SCOTTISH COVENANTER HERITAGE.

- **Everyone say, "Paton grew up hearing his father's prayers that shook the house." (Paton's Autobiography; Banner of Truth)**

**(ii)** As a boy he received limited formal schooling but was self-taught, working from a young age as a stocking-maker and later in Glasgow's slums; he experienced a clear conversion around age twelve and resolved early to serve Christ, eventually training in theology and medicine while laboring as a city missionary among the poor, prostitutes, and drunkards of Glasgow from 1847 to 1856. PATON WAS CONVERTED YOUNG AND SERVED THE URBAN POOR WITH COMPASSION.

- **Everyone say, "A Scottish lad's heart burned for the lost in city and jungle alike." (Paton's Autobiography; Desiring God resources)**

**(iii)** In 1857, hearing the desperate need for missionaries to the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), where earlier workers had been killed and eaten by cannibals, Paton volunteered despite warnings; an elderly man protested he would be devoured, but Paton famously replied that whether eaten by cannibals or by worms in the grave made no difference if he lived and died for Jesus. PATON ANSWERED THE CALL TO CANNIBAL ISLANDS WITH BOLD FAITH.

- **Everyone say, "Cannibals or worms—it matters not when Christ is honored." (Paton's Autobiography; John Piper sermon)**

**(iv)** He married Mary Ann Robson in April 1858 and sailed days later, landing on the island of Tanna in November 1858 among "painted savages" steeped in superstition, witchcraft, and cannibalism; within months, in early 1859, both his young wife and their newborn son Peter died of tropical fever, leaving Paton to bury them near his house and sleep on their graves to protect the bodies from cannibals. PATON ENDURED THE GREAT BEREAVEMENT ON TANNA.

- **Everyone say, "Paton laid his beloved in island soil yet kept his eyes on Christ." (Paton's Autobiography; Wholesome Words biography)**

**(v)** Despite grief, disease, constant threats, and opposition from witch doctors and warriors, Paton persisted for four years on Tanna, translating Scripture, winning a few converts, and establishing small mission outposts; in 1862 escalating dangers forced him to flee the island, after which he spent years in Australia, Britain, and elsewhere raising support and recruits for Pacific missions. PATON SURVIVED TANNA'S DANGERS AND BECAME A MISSIONARY MOBILIZER.

- Everyone say, "God preserved His servant amid arrows, fever, and fury." (Paton's Autobiography; History of Missiology)

**(vi)** In 1864 he married Margaret (Maggie) Whitecross, a strong partner in ministry; returning in 1866, they settled on the smaller island of Aniwa, where over the next decades they built a church, school, orphanage, and printing house, while Paton continued translating the Bible into the local language. PATON FOUND NEW LIFE AND LABOR ON ANIWA WITH HIS DEVOTED WIFE.

- Everyone say, "Together they planted the gospel where once only darkness reigned." (Paton's Autobiography; All Nations blog)

**(vii)** On Aniwa, facing similar heathen cruelties and a severe drought that threatened the people, Paton prayed publicly for water; God answered dramatically when digging revealed a fresh-water spring (interpreted by the islanders as Jehovah providing from the earth), breaking superstition and opening hearts; gradually the entire island turned to Christ, with former cannibals renouncing idolatry, cannibalism, and violence to worship the Savior. PATON WITNESSED ANIWA'S MIRACULOUS TRANSFORMATION.

- Everyone say, "The God who sends rain from the ground also changes cannibal hearts." (Paton's Autobiography; All Nations International)

**(viii)** Known as the "King of the Cannibals" or "Apostle of the New Hebrides," Paton spent over thirty years in the islands and decades more in deputation work across Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States, raising funds and inspiring new missionaries; he and Maggie had ten children (six surviving to adulthood, several entering ministry or missions), though they buried four in infancy amid the hardships. PATON BECAME THE VOICE FOR SOUTH SEA MISSIONS WORLDWIDE.

- Everyone say, "Paton's life and words stirred thousands to carry Christ to the ends of the earth." (Paton's Autobiography; Ligonier Ministries)

**(ix)** He faced repeated perils—spear attacks, plots to murder him, shipwrecks, and tropical illnesses—yet maintained unwavering trust that the Lord would use every trial for His glory and the good of His people; Paton lived to see thousands of former cannibals converted across the New Hebrides, with churches planted and native teachers sent out. PATON PREACHED AND PRAYED THROUGH DEADLY ADVERSITY TO THE END.

- Everyone say, "Neither fever nor fury could silence the gospel on Paton's lips." (Desiring God; Paton's Autobiography)

**(x)** After Maggie's death in 1905, the aging Paton continued advocating for missions until his own death on January 28, 1907, at age 82 in Canterbury,

Victoria, Australia; he left behind a powerful autobiography that has inspired generations, recounting how the blood of martyrs and the faithfulness of God turned cannibal islands toward the cross. PATON FINISHED HIS COURSE STILL POINTING CANNIBALS TO THE SAVIOR.

- Everyone say, "Paton entered glory from the islands he claimed for Jesus." (Paton's Autobiography; Banner of Truth)

(xi) Paton's legacy endures as one of the most remarkable missionaries of the 19th century, demonstrating the power of the gospel to transform the darkest heathenism into vibrant Christian faith; his story of courage, loss, perseverance, and triumph among cannibals continues to challenge believers to radical obedience, with his writings and example fueling mission zeal long after his death. PATON'S LEGACY IS GOSPEL POWER AMONG THE CANNIBALS.

- Everyone say, "Paton's thunder from the South Seas still calls the church to the unreached." (John Piper; various missionary biographies)

## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT JOHN PATON

- Paton was born into a humble but intensely godly Reformed Presbyterian family in a small cottage near Dumfries, Scotland. His father, a stocking-maker, conducted family worship twice daily with such fervor that the house seemed to "shake" with prayer, profoundly shaping Paton's early spiritual life and sense of calling. — Paton, John G. *John G. Paton, Missionary to the New Hebrides: An Autobiography*. Edited by his brother, James Paton. New illustrated ed. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1889, 1–20.
- As a young man working long hours in Glasgow's slums as a city missionary (1847–1856), Paton labored among prostitutes, drunkards, and the desperately poor, often facing physical danger, yet he credited these years with preparing him for the greater perils of the mission field. — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1889, 45–80.
- When volunteering for the New Hebrides mission in 1857—where previous missionaries had been killed and eaten—Paton faced strong opposition. An elderly Scottish gentleman warned him he would be devoured by cannibals. Paton replied that he was content to go, since he had only once to die, whether eaten by cannibals or by worms in Scotland. — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1889, 55–56.
- Paton arrived on the island of Tanna with his first wife, Mary Ann Robson, in November 1858. Within months, in early 1859, both Mary and their newborn son Peter died of tropical fever. Paton dug their graves with his own hands near his house and often slept on the grave to protect the bodies from being dug up and eaten by cannibals. — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1889, 85–90.
- Despite isolation, repeated bouts of fever (he suffered severe attacks

fourteen times in his first years on Tanna), threats from warriors, and opposition from witch doctors, Paton persisted for four years on Tanna, translating portions of Scripture and witnessing a few conversions before escalating dangers forced his evacuation in 1862. — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1889, 100–150.

- In 1866, Paton and his second wife, Margaret Whitecross, settled on the smaller island of Aniwa. During a severe drought, Paton prayed publicly for water. When the people dug at his direction, they struck a fresh-water spring—something unknown on the coral atoll—which the islanders interpreted as the Christian God providing from the earth, significantly weakening superstition and opening hearts to the gospel. — Paton, John G. *John G. Paton, Missionary to the New Hebrides: An Autobiography*. Vol. 2. Edited by his brother, James Paton. New York: Fleming H. Revell, ca. 1890s (continued sections), 200–220.
- Over decades on Aniwa, Paton and his team built a church, school, orphanage, and printing press while completing a translation of the Bible into the local language. He lived to see the entire island turn from cannibalism, idolatry, and warfare to Christ, with former cannibals becoming teachers and evangelists. — Paton, *John G. Paton* (Banner of Truth Trust reprint of the three-part autobiography), 1965 (orig. 1889–1898), 300–400.
- Paton's fearless trust in God extended to practical protection: his loyal dog Clutha often alerted him to ambushes, and he credited divine intervention (including what he described as angelic protection) for repeated deliverances from spears, plots, and shipwrecks during his more than thirty years in the islands. — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1889, various crisis accounts.
- After decades of frontline work, Paton spent his later years in extensive deputation tours across Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States, raising funds and recruits for Pacific missions. His autobiography, written in three parts (1889–1898) and edited by his brother James, became a missionary classic that stirred thousands to support or enter mission work. — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1889–1898 (three parts).
- Paton and Margaret had ten children, six of whom survived to adulthood; several entered ministry or mission service. He outlived many hardships and died peacefully in Australia in 1907 at age 82, having seen the gospel transform former cannibals into a Christian community across multiple islands. — Paton, John G. *John G. Paton, Missionary to the New Hebrides*. Vol. 3. Edited by his brother, James Paton. New York: Fleming H. Revell, ca. 1898, concluding sections.

## HISTORICAL SHORT LIST

- Godly parents in Scotland, Presbyterian.
- Pastored faithful for 10 years in Glasgow.
- Desired frontier missions.
- Opposed by friends when he said he wanted to go reach the Cannibals.
- Spent four years on the island of Tanna (wife Mary and son Peter died, and his life was constantly threatened—Scottish terrier, Tree, Well, Doctor’s visit, 50 guys with machetes, Chief following him with a Musket).

**JOHN G. PATON:** “My peace came back to me like a wave from God. I realised that I was immortal till my Master’s work with me was done. The assurance came to me, as if a voice out of Heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevail to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was held vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow, or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ, whose is all power in Heaven and on Earth.” — **Paton, John G. Paton, 1965, 207 (or nearby crisis account in the Tanna sections).**

- Spent the next four years travelling to spread the word and raise money.
- Married again (Margaret) and went back to the New Hebrides Islands, this time to the Island of Aniwa for 15 years. *\*they built a church, school, orphanage, and printing house, while Paton continued translating the Bible into the local language.*
- Paton and Margaret had ten children, six of whom survived to adulthood; several entered ministry or mission service. He outlived many hardships and died peacefully in Australia in 1907 at age 82, having seen the gospel transform former cannibals into a Christian community across multiple islands.

## Q. What can we learn from John Paton?

*In the nineteenth century, God used John Paton to exemplify sacrificial obedience to Christ and a desire to reach the nations for Christ.*

## THEOLOGY

I) Paton taught us **We should be willing to die for the glory of Christ.**

**Everyone say, “We should be willing to die for glory of Christ.”**

- **Philippians 1:20** “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.”

- **One old man in his church said to John**, "You are going to be eaten by cannibals!"
  - **Paton replied**, "Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my Resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer." (Paton's reply to an elderly man who warned that cannibals would eat him if he went as a missionary to the New Hebrides.) — **John G. Paton, *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides, An Autobiography*, edited by his brother James Paton (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965; orig. 1889), 56.**

## II) Paton taught us that **It is a Precious Thing to Have Communion with Christ.**

**Everyone say**, "Knowing Christ is most precious."

- **Philippians 3:8** "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."
  - **Matthew 20:20** "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
    - Paton stayed in a tree all night for fear of being murdered, and it changed his life forever.

## III) Paton taught us **We should have Faithful Confidence in Christ's ability to save.**

**Everyone say**, "Christ can save anybody!"

**Now say**, "Christ will save the whole world."

- **John 3:16-17** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."
  - "I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God Aniwa now worships at the Saviour's feet." (**John Paton**).
  - About 80% of people in the New Hebrides Islands are Christians today.

## **Q. What made John G. Paton like this?**

**AI.** He was a staunch Calvinist—He trusted in God's sovereignty over all things,

including suffering, perseverance, death, and salvations.

**All.** He had godly parents and a father who would never skip Family Worship.

## RECAP

*In the nineteenth century, God used John Paton to exemplify sacrificial obedience to Christ and a desire to reach the nations for Christ.*

## NINETEENTH CENTURY (pt.5) MEMORY VERSE.

- "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (**Philippians 3:8**).

## NINETEENTH CENTURY (pt.5) MEMORY QUOTE.

- "I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God Aniwa now worships at the Saviour's feet." (**John Paton**).

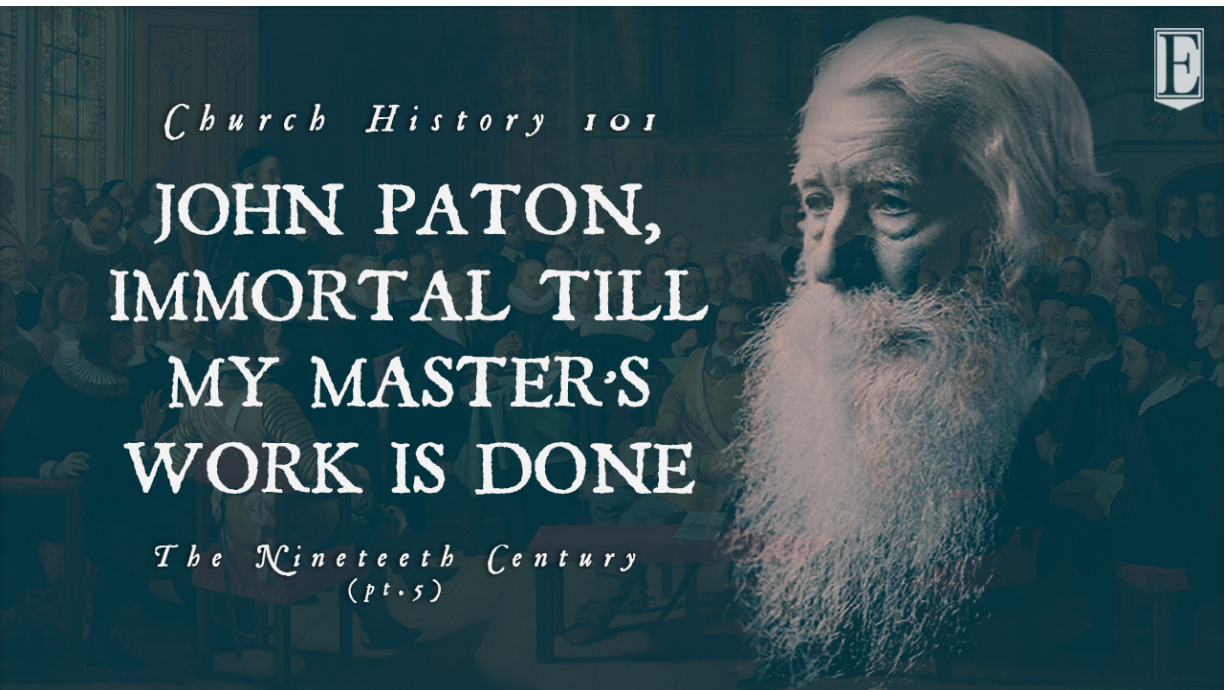
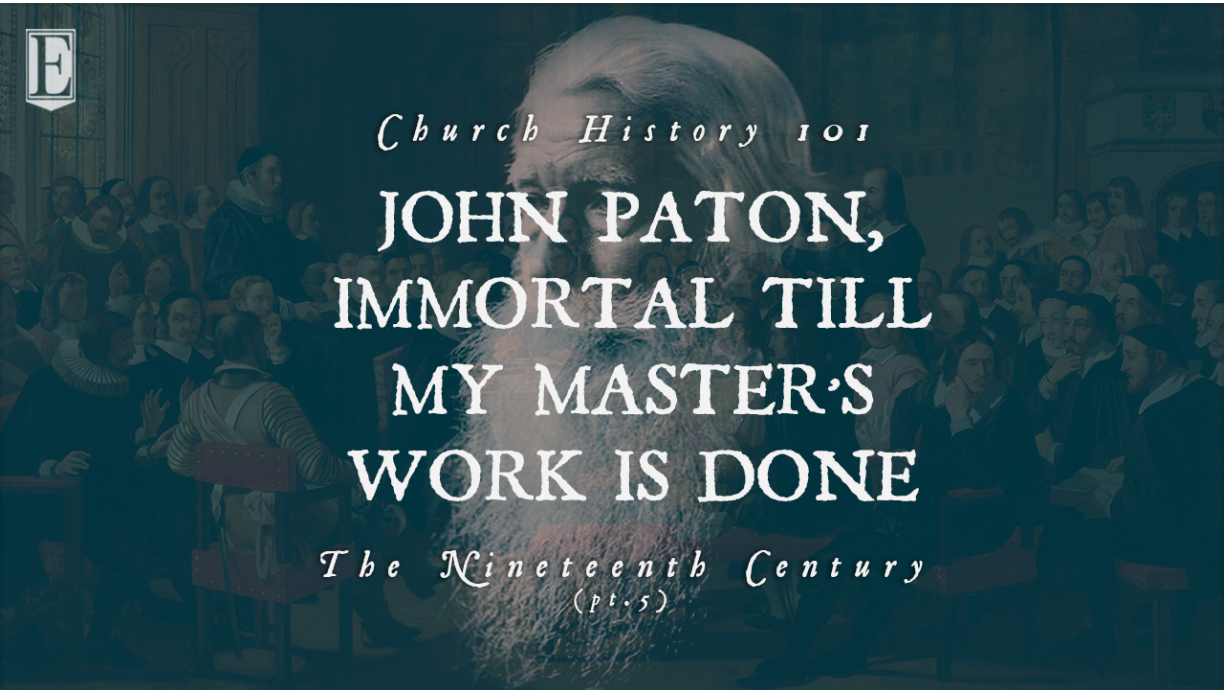
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## FOR FURTHER STUDY

- John G. Paton: You Are Going to Be Eaten By Cannibals by John Piper - <https://youtu.be/PrpPhFOzM8o?si=QSI604SSGyMQqufs>
- Documentary: John Paton's story (low quality but a good 16 minute overview) - <https://youtu.be/EMPy-vZOWzA?si=kAjUOvmXHO19IYt6>
- Missionary: John Paton (high quality documentary) - <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/missionary/1015007320?autoplay=1>
- The Story of John G. Paton, Thirty years Among South Sea Cannibals by James Paton & A. K. Langridge (11 hour audiobook) - [https://youtu.be/XRLKBI8Uml8?si=ECrqqzw\\_V28\\_3qrrT](https://youtu.be/XRLKBI8Uml8?si=ECrqqzw_V28_3qrrT)

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## IMAGE



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## QUOTES BY JOHN PATON

1. "Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my Resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the

likeness of our risen Redeemer." (Paton's reply to an elderly man who warned that cannibals would eat him if he went as a missionary to the New Hebrides.) — John G. Paton, *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides, An Autobiography*, edited by his brother James Paton (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965; orig. 1889), 56.

2. "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." (Reflecting on his sense of divine calling to missionary service amid opposition.) — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1965, 55.
3. "I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God Aniwa now worships at the Saviour's feet." (Summarizing the transformation of the entire island of Aniwa from cannibalism and heathenism to Christianity after years of labor.) — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1965, 310 (approximate; see chapters on Aniwa in the second part of the autobiography).
4. "My peace came back to me like a wave from God. I realised that I was immortal till my Master's work with me was done. The assurance came to me, as if a voice out of Heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevail to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was held vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow, or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ, whose is all power in Heaven and on Earth." (Describing the calm assurance of God's sovereignty during repeated threats of violent death on Tanna.) — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1965, 207 (or nearby crisis account in the Tanna sections).
5. "Thus were the New Hebrides baptized with the blood of martyrs; and Christ thereby told the whole Christian world that he claimed these islands as His own." (Reflecting on the martyrdom of earlier missionaries John Williams and James Harris, which ultimately opened the way for the gospel among the cannibals.) — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1965, 75.
6. "Though everything else in religion were swept out of memory, or blotted from my understanding, my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once more in that sanctuary closet, and, hearing again the echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal: 'He walked with God. Why may not I?'" (Recalling the powerful impact of his father's fervent prayers in family worship during his Scottish childhood.) — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1965, 17–18 (early chapters on his upbringing).
7. "...as I lay down my pen, let me record my immovable conviction that this is the noblest service in which any human being can spend or be spent; and that, if God gave me back my life to be lived over again, I would without one quiver of hesitation lay it on the altar to Christ, that He might use it as before in similar ministries of love, especially amongst those

who have never yet heard the Name of Jesus... God gave His best, His Son, to me; and I give back my best, my All, to Him." (Paton's closing reflection near the end of his life and autobiography, expressing wholehearted devotion to missionary service.) — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1965, 444 (concluding sections).

8. "We come to you without weapons of war! We come only to tell you about Jesus. We believe that He will protect us to-day." (Words spoken by a converted native chief, inspired by Paton's teaching, as he and his companions advanced unarmed into a hostile heathen village amid flying spears—illustrating the gospel's power to produce fearless witnesses.) — Paton, *John G. Paton*, 1965, 265 (accounts of native converts and evangelism).

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## QUOTES ABOUT JOHN PATON

- On his response to warnings about being eaten by cannibals when considering missionary service: "Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer." — John G. Paton, *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides, An Autobiography*, ed. James Paton (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965 [orig. 1889–1891]), 89–91 (or equivalent in vol. 1, chap. on foreign mission claims).
- On the nobility of missionary service and his willingness to repeat his life's work: "As I lay down my pen, let me record my immovable conviction that this is the noblest service in which any human being can spend or be spent; and that, if God gave me back my life to be lived over again, I would without one quiver of hesitation lay it on the altar to Christ, that He might use it as before in similar ministries of love, especially amongst those who have never yet heard the Name of Jesus." — Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides*, (closing reflection, often in vol. 3 or concluding sections of the consolidated edition).
- On the joy of administering communion to former cannibals on Aniwa: "At the moment when I put the bread and wine into those dark hands, once stained with the blood of cannibalism, 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." —

Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides*, 355–56 (or vol. 2, section on progress on Aniwa).

- On the value of any life spent in evangelism: "Life, any life, would be well spent, under any conceivable conditions, in bringing one human soul to know and love and serve God and His Son, and thereby securing for yourself at least one temple where your name and memory would be held for ever and for ever in affectionate praise—a regenerate heart in heaven. That fame will prove immortal, when all the poems and pyramids of earth have gone to dust." — Paton, *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides*, vol. 3 (or concluding reflections in later parts of the autobiography).
- On claiming the island of Aniwa for Christ after seeing its transformation: "I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God Aniwa now worships at the Saviour's feet." — Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides*, 312 (vol. 2, on settlement and progress on Aniwa).
- On God's sovereignty and personal immortality in the midst of mortal danger (reflecting on threats during ministry): "I realized that I was immortal till my Master's work was done. The assurance came to me, as if a voice out of heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevail to strike us, nor a spear leave the hand in which it was held vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow, or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ, whose is all the power in Heaven and on Earth." — Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides* (section on trials and hairbreadth escapes on Tanna or Aniwa).
- On resignation after personal loss (the death of his first wife and child on Tanna) and continuing ministry: "I do not pretend to see through the mystery of such visitations—wherein God calls away the young, the promising, and those sorely needed for his service here; but this I do know and feel, that, in the light of such dispensations, 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." — Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides*, 61 (or vol. 1/early sections on life and death on Tanna).
- On the transformative power of the gospel among former cannibals (broader reflection on mission progress): "Recall . . . what the Gospel has done for the near kindred of these same Aborigines. On our own Aneityum, 3,500 Cannibals have been led to renounce their heathenism . . . On our New Hebrides, more than 12,000 Cannibals have been brought to sit at the feet of Christ . . . and 133 of the Natives have been trained and sent forth as teachers and preachers of the Gospel." — Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides*, 265 (section on mission results and appeals).

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## **John G. Paton, Immortal Till My Master's Work is Done - The Nineteenth Century (pt.5)**

In an age of expanding empires and lingering darkness among unreached peoples, Christ raised up John Gibson Paton, a Scottish missionary whose sacrificial obedience carried the gospel to cannibal islands and transformed entire communities. Through Paton's willingness to die for Christ, his deep communion with the Savior, and his confident trust in God's sovereign grace, Christ demonstrated the power of the gospel to turn the fiercest savages into faithful worshippers.

### **John G. Paton (1824-1907)**

John Gibson Paton was born on May 24, 1824, at Braehead farm cottage near Dumfries, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, the eldest of eleven children to James and Janet Paton, into a humble but deeply godly Reformed Presbyterian home where family worship and fervent prayer shaped daily life (Paton 1889, 1–20). Paton was born into a godly Scottish Covenanter heritage. As a young man working long hours in Glasgow's slums as a city missionary from 1847 to 1856, Paton labored among prostitutes, drunkards, and the desperately poor, often facing physical danger, yet he credited these years with preparing him for the greater perils of the mission field (Paton 1889, 45–80).

When volunteering for the New Hebrides mission in 1857—where previous missionaries had been killed and eaten—Paton faced strong opposition. An elderly Scottish gentleman warned him he would be devoured by cannibals. Paton replied that he was content to go, since he had only once to die, whether eaten by cannibals or by worms in Scotland (Paton 1889, 55–56).

He married Mary Ann Robson in April 1858 and sailed days later, landing on the island of Tanna in November 1858 among "painted savages" steeped in superstition, witchcraft, and cannibalism. Within months, in early 1859, both his young wife and their newborn son Peter died of tropical fever, leaving Paton to bury them near his house and sleep on their graves to protect the bodies from cannibals (Paton 1889, 85–90). Despite grief, disease, constant threats, and opposition from witch doctors and warriors, Paton persisted for four years on Tanna, translating Scripture, winning a few converts, and establishing small mission outposts. In 1862 escalating dangers forced him to flee the island, after which he spent years in Australia, Britain, and elsewhere raising support and recruits for Pacific missions (Paton 1889, 100–150).

In 1866, Paton and his second wife, Margaret Whitecross, settled on the smaller island of Aniwa. During a severe drought, Paton prayed publicly for water. When the people dug at his direction, they struck a fresh-water spring—something

unknown on the coral atoll—which the islanders interpreted as the Christian God providing from the earth, significantly weakening superstition and opening hearts to the gospel (Paton 1890, 200–220). Over decades on Aniwa, Paton and his team built a church, school, orphanage, and printing house while completing a translation of the Bible into the local language. He lived to see the entire island turn from cannibalism, idolatry, and warfare to Christ, with former cannibals becoming teachers and evangelists (Paton 1965, 300–400).

Known as the “King of the Cannibals” or “Apostle of the New Hebrides,” Paton spent over thirty years in the islands and decades more in deputation work across Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States, raising funds and recruits for Pacific missions. He and Margaret had ten children, six of whom survived to adulthood; several entered ministry or mission service. He outlived many hardships and died peacefully in Australia on January 28, 1907, at age eighty-two, having seen the gospel transform former cannibals into a Christian community across multiple islands (Paton 1898, concluding sections).

## **Theological Lessons from John Gibson Paton**

John Paton’s life teaches three profound lessons for Christ’s church.

**First, Paton taught us we should be willing to die for the glory of Christ.** When warned he would be eaten by cannibals, Paton replied, “Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my Resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer” (Paton 1965, 56). The apostle Paul expressed the same spirit: “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:20).

**Second, Paton taught us that it is a precious thing to have communion with Christ.** During one night of terror on Tanna, when he hid in a tree to escape murderers, Paton experienced the nearness of Christ in a way that changed him forever. He later wrote of claiming the promises of God’s presence and finding peace that surpassed understanding. This mirrors the Savior’s own assurance: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Paton’s life shows that the deepest comfort in danger is intimate fellowship with the living Christ.

**Third, Paton taught us we should have faithful confidence in Christ’s ability to save.** After years of labor on Aniwa, Paton could declare with joy, “I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God Aniwa now worships at the Saviour’s feet” (Paton 1965, 345). Today, approximately eighty percent of the people in the former New Hebrides (Vanuatu) are Christians, a direct fruit of his faithful sowing. Paton trusted the promise, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

His confidence challenges us to believe that the gospel is mighty to save even the most hardened hearts.

### **Conclusion: Christ's Victory in the Nineteenth Century**

In the nineteenth century, God used John Gibson Paton to exemplify sacrificial obedience to Christ and a desire to reach the nations for Christ. From the slums of Glasgow to the cannibal islands of the Pacific, Paton's life was a living testimony that the gospel can transform the darkest places. He was a staunch Calvinist who trusted in God's sovereignty over all things, including suffering, perseverance, death, and salvations. He had godly parents and a father who would never skip family worship. His example continues to stir believers to radical obedience.

Let us learn from Paton: be willing to die for Christ's glory, cherish communion with Him in every trial, and trust His power to save even the most lost. May we, like him, spend our lives for the nations, knowing that Christ continues to conquer the nations, building His church for His glory. Let us live boldly, knowing His kingdom advances, unstoppable, until it fills the earth. Amen.