

1. Intro who is Richard Baxter

So good to connect with you this morning and I am honoured to share the word of the lord with you. We are currently in a **series of Heros of Faith**. Last week Susie spoke about Catherine Booth. When I looked up, what is the definition of a hero the dictionary defined a hero as:

- a person who is admired for their courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities.

The reason we are looking into heros of faith is because we can learn from them. We can adapt from them. The person I am going share about ticks all these boxes.

- He was the most prominent English churchman of the 1600s.
- He was a peacemaker who sought unity among Protestants, and yet he was a highly independent thinker.
- He is best remembered as a peacemaker and uncompromising voice of reason in the politically and theologically turbulent 17-century England.
- His legacy remains until today and his influence on the city of Kidderminster is an example, we all can learn from. In fact J. I. Packer considers him 'the most outstanding pastor, evangelist, and writer on practical and devotional themes.

The Hero of faith I am going to share today is **Richard Baxter**.

What did Richard Baxter say or do, that over 400 years later we still remember him and taking him as an example of a Hero of Faith? As a matter of fact, he isn't a hero who lived far away, most of his life he lived and ministered in a **40 miles radius from Wolverhampton**. He is even a local hero of faith who ministered in Bridgenorth or Kiddeminister.

Before we go in, let me pray:

- Help us to learn from our ancestors
- Open our eyes and ears and speak Holy Spirit through the life of Richard Baxter to us

2. A very quick recap

Richard Baxter was born in **1615 in Rowton, Shropshire**, the home of his Grandfather and he lived there **until he was 9 years old**. His father struggled with gambling, so that is why Baxter lived with his grandfather. But then a transformation took place in Baxters dad. He started to read the bible and his father was changed and Baxter **moved to his father's house in 1626**. Baxter's father had no other book than the Bible to instruct Baxter and **Baxter began to love the whole Bible**.

He tried different schools and moved to Oxford and back home. In 1633 to 1638 Baxter studied at home although at 21 he suffered badly with **Tuberculosis** for two years. From this point he was to suffer many different illnesses that kept him in pain for much of his life.

I find it remarkable, he had an illness, but never complained and still fulfilled his calling for life. I want to encourage you, that maybe you are facing with some opposition and thinking, can I still fulfil my call from God, the answer is simple: Yes you can! **If God called you to a mission, ministry or some calling he will provide the way and the ability for you to fulfil it!**

In 1640 he was at Bridgnorth but then moved to Kidderminster. I will talk in a little bit about his fruitful time in Kidderminster and what we can learn from it later on in the sermon. Soon after Baxter moved to Kidderminster the Civil War began and he spent a few years away from his parish because he joined the **army as a chaplain for the last two years of the war.** **Baxter is recognized peacemaker during the English Civil Wars**

1647 found him back in Kidderminster.

So from 1662 Baxter stopped preaching and concentrated on his writing. At this time he met a woman called Margaret, they fell in love and got married. **They had a good marriage until she died in 1681.**

In the last part of his life it was marked from persecution and imprisonment.

- 1674 Baxter was arrested by the authorities even if he couldn't be found guilty of anything.
- 1682 Baxter was arrested again for being in a city and for preaching. In fact Baxter's trial is famous in legal history for its injustice.
- The same in 1684 were he had another trial. He was so sick they had to carry him to court.

Richard Baxter died on the 8th of December 1691.

Richard Baxter was a giant of his day, not without faults, but a man who made a significant impact on this nation. More than 400 years later there is much we can learn from him through his writings, standing firm against persecution, his love of unity and through giftedness as a pastor and evangelist.

3. What can we learn from him:

a. Kidderminster – transforming the whole city

I want to highlight 3 things, we can learn from Richard Baxter. The first is, that everyone you and I through Jesus have the power to transform a whole city.

Richard Baxter spent about 19 years in Kidderminster. He was a wonderful pastor, preacher, and evangelist. **He was a servant to his flock, and this was seen in his attitude towards money.** Although he did not earn very much Baxter was often giving money away to those in his town, whether they were believers or not. **He had concern for the poor all his life.**

Baxter saw the need within his town and he cared for it. My question to you is: "What need do you see in your street or community and can step into the gap?"

You know when Baxter arrived in Kidderminster, he said that on a Sunday, **'There was about one family in a street that worshipped God and called on His name.'** When he left he said **'You might hear an hundred families singing psalms and repeating sermons as you passed through the streets.'** There were about 800 families in Kidderminster at that time and it appears that most of them became believers. The entire town of 2,000 people converted, most of whom were not previously pursuing the Christian faith. **A full city sold out for Jesus, because of one man!**

Because of the immense growth of believers, they had to extend the church multiple times and records show that each Sunday and Thursday evening meeting it was full. Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said **'Surely we must agree that in England in the case of Baxter at Kidderminster we are entitled to speak of revival.'** **Revival in Kidderminster!**

Baxter's success as an Evangelist was in part due to his manner of **preaching that was full of urgency,** which was due to the fact that he often thought that he had but only a short time to live and so when he preached it was, **'As a dying man to dying men,'** telling the people boldly what they were facing if they did not give their lives to Jesus.

- Psalm 139,16 "all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

Let me tell you the secret nobody wants to address, but we are all going to die. **Don't live in a self-complacent way that you think my death is far away** and I have time to get everything sorted. Live with an urgency. **As a dying man to dying men - As a dying women to dying women. Share the good news**

At the end of his ministry in Kidderminster he believed that **the vast majority of believers were very solid in their faith.** How did he do it. Did he preach amazing sermons on a Sunday or had amazing worship? No, the records show, **that the reason for this was his discipleship programme, involving** his assistant and himself teaching 14 families between them two days every week.

He invested in people, he got close to people and discipled them. This is the journey we as All Nations are on to become **disciples of Jesus to make disciples of Jesus.** How are we doing it, well we do it the same way as Richard Baxter, we go into the homes. We have home-churches! Can I be honest, when we started the journey for our own home-church, I was really nervous. I wasn't sure what to expect and if it would work out.

Over the last 6 months, I have to tell you it is the best thing! *Coming together worshipping Jesus in your kitchen, reading and discovering the bible together, praying, sharing, eating, laughing, being real with one another. It has been wonderful.*

Also what I noticed, that disciples are being made. People challenging themselves to learn more bible verses, groups of the home church having walks and **sharing openly about their struggles**, being able to share frustration and fear of situation or simple encouraging and sharing praise reports. No Home church looks the same for us. The roots in Jesus are going deeper.

So if you want to have your Kiddeminster, your community, your street transformed, then start a home church or join one, if you are not sure. Don't hold back and say I am ok behind the screen, no we are called to fellowship and community.

"Baxter's method of thorough house-to-house visitation, discipleship, catechizing, and pastoral counseling transformed an unconverted town into a vibrant Christian community."

b. Unity in the Body of Christ + Illustration

This brings me to my 2nd point:

Baxter was a strong advocate for unity in the Body of Christ. Not only must he have had in mind what Jesus said in

- John 17:21 "21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Baxter grew up and lived in a time of great division both politically and within the Church.

In 1652 he called together the ministers in county, of whatever denomination, to meet so that they could **work together for the benefit of the people**. Many of the ministers in the county came together once a month and even ministers from surrounding counties would join them. **Baxter also worked tirelessly for unity in the nation.**

We are members of the body and temple of Christ; we become unified when we pray together, study God's word together and work together to share the gospel. **We not just have a commitment to christ but to each other**. .. The only way that we can truly be in unity with others is by asking God to humble us. Let us work together; let there be unity in the body of Christ.

Let me illustrate unity. I have here a lego piece:

- This is what so many people did or doing in their life and just want to stand out by themselves. Like- look at me: Can you see how colourful I am. Can you see my edges are probably a littler sharper than most the legos. The circles are rounder- look how wonderful I am.

- We trying to draw attention to ourself. Often with very good intentions, but let's be honest – who wants to look at **one lego piece**. It is limited. It is small piece on the bigger scale. So what is the purpose of this lego piece? Of your life?

Your purpose in life is to be part of something bigger. **If you see your life in isolation you will never fulfill the greater purpose you have been created for.**

1. Peter 2, 5 says: " you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house[a] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Your life is one stone, like this one lego piece and we need to attach ourselves to the body or temple of Christ, **to something bigger. Connecting in!** You say, ok, I get that. I connect in, but I want to have the top, the place of prominence. I still want that people see I am part of the body/temple, but I am visible. **I want the person in the front, that everyone can see.**

But we should have the attitude that It is an honour to be part of Christ. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of that temple and it is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. **It is such an honour to be part of that. I am part of the legacy Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, Peter – and I can be another piece of this.**

When you remember the story of **2. Chronicles 7**, when the temple was finally built and straight in verse 1:

- **"When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven" and the glory of the lord fills the temple and everyone is on their faces.**

That's why I want to be part of the body/temple, because these are the people who get to **see the glory of God and get to see the fire come down.** **People who are isolated and just say look at me, they not gonna see it.**

And we should have the attitude I am one block in this bigger construct, and **I don't care if I am in the back and nobody sees me, because I simply want to see the glory of God.** If you isolate yourself or trying to shine attention, glory to your little lego piece you will miss out. Get connected to the temple!

This is unity to lay down any pride, differences, opinions towards other people, denominations, churches, nations and simply humbling ourselves and say: Let's be "one in Christ Jesus". Let's not fight about different viewpoints, but let's focus on the cornerstone in Jesus.

4. Legacy in writing

My last point which I really be amazed about Richard Baxter and this: His legacy. Over 400 years later we are still reading his books. **Although Baxter had an unsatisfactory education**

he was an avid reader and he consumed an extraordinary number of theological and other books. He loved books.

Baxter had no intention of writing books but during one of his bouts of sickness he had nothing else to do and being told by the doctors that he was going to die he decided to write about the heaven that he was going to go to shortly. **This book proved to have a considerable affect on people's lives.** An 11 year old boy, knowing he was dying said, 'I pray, let me have Mr. Baxter's book, that I may read a little more of eternity before I go into it.

I love this, God has used Baxter illness for him to be able to write between 150-200 books in his life-time. The sources vary between these two numbers.

- He wrote on the topics of Ethics, Politics, Poetry, Biographies, education of God's word, preaching God's word). One of his most known books are "The Reformed Pastor" and he wrote a counterpart to the Anglican book of common prayer.

I understand that not everyone is a writer and I am not saying the only legacy we leave behind is in print form, but my challenge for us is, are you intentionally think about your legacy you leave behind We all are going to die and one day we won't be on this earth anymore, as we can't take anything with us, what are we leaving behind?

What are we leaving behind in people which we love? What marks or history do we want to mark **the earth before departure?** I know they are uncomfortable questions, but if we live with a sense of eternity. We need to get intentional about the call God has for our life's.

Here are few examples how you can leave a legacy:

- You can write a book as Richard Baxter
- Or you can make disciples
- You can share the gospel and changes people life's through Jesus
- You can be the hands and feet of Jesus and serve your community
- You can be a Mentor
- You can support via your finance Kingdom work
- **1 Peter 4.10: Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.**

Whatever it might be, let's be intentional about it and don't come to the end of our life's and realize we have been chasing our whole life after the wrong things.

5. Application (500)

This brings me to the end of my reflections on Richard Baxters life and again being humbled that over 400 years later, we are still talking and learning from this hero of faith. If I am remembered 40 years after my death, I would be pleased.

So what should we do about it all? Let's use Richard Baxter life as an example and maybe commit:

1. **I will pray for my community**, if it is not Kidderminster, then it is Wolverhampton, Perton, Penn or name your city. **I will believe for disciple-making revival in my community and my city and I will be prepared to engage/connect and share the good news of Jesus, wherever I am.**
2. **I join into the unity of the body of Christ?** I make peace with everyone I can and resolve any conflict or issues. **I will humble myself and want to be part of the whole body and not being isolated or trying to push my own agenda.** If I am in the corner or if I am seen, I am simply blessed to be connected. I will protect unity and honour my fellow believers.
3. **I will be intentionally about leaving a legacy behind, which will outlast my life's. If it is in physical legacy, emotional or spiritual legacy to my physical or spiritual children and the world.**

I believe if we commit to these 3 things, we will not only see incredible transformation in your own life, but also in the life's around us.

Let me pray:

- Father as we closing this message and reflecting on the life of Richard Baxter, we ask for your help.
- Let us be intentional in our communities and pray, help and serve the people next to us.
- I ask for a unity in the body of Christ. Across demonisation's, ethnicities, backgrounds, culture, colour and ask that we simply unit to workship and praise Jesus.
- And lastly, let us live with purpose and focus, that we are not wasting a single moment here on this earth but living with an eternal perspective.

Amen