



Pastor David's Weekly Devotional

On April 16, 1858, John G. Paton, at the age of thirty-three, sailed for the New Hebrides Islands of the South Pacific with his newlywed wife, Mary, who was pregnant with their first child. Paton had an unyielding belief in the sovereignty of God, coupled with an evangelistic resolve to fulfill the Lord's Great Commission. This conviction and calling led him and his wife to the Cannibalistic and savage tribes on the Island of Tanna. They arrived on the island on November 5, 1858, and Mary gave birth to their newborn son, Peter, on February 12, 1859. Their "island-exile thrilled with joy" was soon cut short when both Mary and Peter contracted the tropical fever and died just nineteen days later. After digging two graves with his own hands, Paton buried his wife and son near the house he had built for them. Of that dreadful experience he wrote these incredible words of hope and courage:

I felt her loss beyond all conception or description, in that dark land. It was very difficult to be resigned, left alone, and in sorrowful circumstances; ***but feeling immovably assured that my God and father was too wise and loving to err in anything that he does or permits, I looked up to the Lord for help, and struggled on in His work.****

In the midst of devastating loss and unspeakable grief, Paton forged on to continue his missionary work on the island despite incredible and constant suffering (including life-threatening illnesses and persecutions). Through it all, his faith in Christ sustained him and he clung to his belief in God's sovereignty. This is not to say that his heart never weakened or wavered under such trials, but that through it all he continued to re-grip the reality of God's sovereign plan and divine call on his life.

My enemies seldom slackened their hateful designs against my life. . . . 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. Trials and hairbreadth escapes strengthened my faith...*

Similarly, Paton wrote about another occasion when he was surrounded by savage natives:

My heart rose up to the Lord Jesus; I saw Him watching all the scene. My peace came back to me like a wave from God. ***I realized 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. He rules all Nature, animate and inanimate, and restrains even the Savage of the South Seas.*

For John Paton, the sovereignty of God was not some impersonal doctrine relegated to the conversations of theologians and scholars. Rather, it was the spiritual food that nourished him, and the spiritual air that enabled him to breathe in times of great difficulty. Interestingly, the truth of God's sovereignty was planted in Paton's heart and mind at an early age by his mother who, when their potato crop had failed, said, "O my children, love your Heavenly Father, tell Him in faith and prayer all your needs, and ***He will supply your wants so far as it shall be for your good and His glory.***"*

Together in and for Christ,
Pastor David
(4/6/26)

Scripture Readings for the Week (Monday – Sunday ~ Week #14):

Exodus 1-4; 1 Samuel 16-20; Psalm 39-41; Job 27-28; Jeremiah 7-11; Mark 7-8; 1 Corinthians 11-12

Recommended Reading:

*"Filling up the Afflictions of Christ" by John Piper** (all quotations taken from this book; emphasis added)