

Patrick Hamilton

Patrick Hamilton was the first martyr of the Scottish Reformation – the first person to die for his faith. He was born 1504 into a rich family who were related to the king. At the age of about fourteen he went to university in Paris. While he was there he heard about the teachings of Martin Luther. Luther had been a priest but now he was teaching and writing about the corruption and false teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther was shocking everyone by declaring that men and women could only get to Heaven by putting their faith in Jesus Christ, and not by their good works. He said that people should be allowed to read the Bible for themselves to see if what he was saying was true.

After finishing university in France, Hamilton came home and in 1524 became a Professor at the University of St Andrews. Luther's books were banned in 1525 but many copies of them were still available, along with the first translation of the Bible from Greek into English by William Tyndale in 1526. Hamilton became convinced that Luther's teachings were from the Bible and was converted. However St Andrews was the centre of Roman Catholicism in Scotland at this time and his new beliefs attracted the attention of Archbishop James Beaton in 1527. Twenty-three year old Hamilton was not yet ready to take on the Roman Catholic Church, so he fled to Germany.

In Germany, Hamilton wrote a book called *Patrick's Places*. The main point of the book was that people can only be saved through faith in Christ and not by good works. At the centre of everything Patrick Hamilton believed and taught was Jesus Christ and what He had done. He became determined to go back to Scotland to preach the good news, even though he knew it would be to risk his life.

Patrick therefore returned home and devoted himself to preaching. His brother and sister both became believers through his preaching and many others followed. Archbishop Beaton quickly became aware of his return however and summoned Patrick to appear before him. His accusers allowed him to preach openly in the university for about a month, hoping that he would give them more evidence against him. However instead many important people were converted.

On the 29th of February Hamilton was summoned for trial. He refused to deny his beliefs and was sentenced to be burnt at the stake the same day for being a heretic (accepting false doctrines). His death was slow and painful because the fire kept going out, and it took him six hours to die. His death was a turning point however. Archbishop Beaton was advised that if he had to burn any more heretics, he should do it in deep cellars so that no-one would know, because 'the reek of Mister Patrick Hamilton has infected as many as it blew upon'. His courage, brilliance and gentleness inspired

many. Throughout Scotland, as people heard of his death, they began to ask why it had happened. The teaching of God's Word, instead of dying, spread.

Application

The life of Patrick Hamilton shows us how important it is that we don't just accept what we're taught, but we check that it's from the Bible. It also shows us the importance of preaching. It is so important that Patrick Hamilton was prepared to die rather than stop doing it. This reminds us how important it is that we, our families and our friends hear the preaching of God's word.