

Persecutions in England (Book of Martyrs)

by John Foxe

This sermon recounts the persecution of Christians in England during the reign of Queen Mary, highlighting the unwavering faith and courage of martyrs who faced imprisonment and death for their beliefs. It focuses on the sacrifices made by individuals like Mr. Bradford, John Leith, William Minge, Reverend John Bland, Reverend John Frankish, Nicholas Shetterdon, Humphrey Middleton, Deric Carver, John Launder, James Abbes, and many others who chose to endure the flames rather than renounce their faith in Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 5:10, Hebrews 10:34, Acts 5:41, Revelation 2:10, 1 Peter 4:12

Topics: "Faith Under Persecution", "The Cost of Discipleship"

Description

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Transcript

Fox's Book of Martyrs, Volume 2, by John Fox, edited by William Byron Forbush. CHAPTER SIXTEEN Persecutions in England, during the reign of Queen Mary. Part Four.

The day after Mr. Bradford and John Leith suffered in Smithfield, William Minge, priest, died in prison at Maidstone. With as great constancy and boldness he yielded up his life in prison, as if it had pleased God to have called him to suffer by fire, as other godly men had done before at the stake, and as he himself was ready to do, had it pleased God to have him called to this trial. REVEREND JOHN BLAND, REVEREND JOHN FRANKISH, NICHOLAS SHETTERDON, HUMPHREY MIDDLETON These Christian persons were all burnt at Canterbury for the same cause.

Frankish and Bland were ministers and preachers of the word of God, the one being Parson of Addisham, the other vicar of Rolvenden. Mr. Bland was cited to answer for his opposition to anti-Christianism, and underwent several examinations before Dr. Harpsfield, Archdeacon of Canterbury, and finally on the 25th of June 1555, again withstanding the power of the Pope, he was condemned and delivered to the secular arm. On the same day were condemned John Frankish, Nicholas Shetterdon, Humphrey Middleton, Thacker and Crocker, of whom Thacker only recanted.

Being delivered to the secular power, Mr. Bland with the three former, were all burnt together at Canterbury, July 12th, 1555, at two several stakes, but in one fire, when they in the sight of God and His angels, and before men, like true soldiers of Jesus Christ, gave a constant testimony to the truth of His holy gospel. DERIC CARVER AND JOHN LAUNDER The 22nd of July, 1555, Deric Carver, brewer, of Brighthelmstone, aged forty, was burnt at Lewes, and the following day, John Launder, husbandman, aged twenty-five, of Godstone, Surrey, was burnt at Stinning. Deric Carver was a man whom the Lord had blessed, as well with temporal riches, as with his spiritual treasures.

At his coming into the town of Lewes to be burnt, the people called to him, beseeching God to strengthen him in the faith of Jesus Christ, and as he came to the stake, he knelt down and prayed earnestly. Then his book was thrown into the barrel, and when he had stripped himself, he too went into a barrel. As soon as he was in, he took the book and threw it among the people, upon which the sheriff commanded, in the name of the king and queen, on pain of death, to throw in the book again, and immediately the holy martyr began to address the people.

After he had prayed a while, he said, O Lord my God, thou hast written, He that will not forsake wife, children, house, and everything that he hath, and take up thy cross, and follow thee, is not worthy of thee. But thou, Lord, knowest that I have forsaken all to come unto thee. Lord, have mercy upon me, for unto thee I commend my spirit, and my soul doth rejoice in thee.

These were the last words of this faithful servant of Christ before enduring the fire. And when the fire came to him, he cried, O Lord, have mercy upon me, and sprang up in the fire, calling upon the name of Jesus, until he gave up the ghost. James Abbes This young man wandered about to escape apprehension, but was at last informed against, and brought before the bishop of Norwich, who influenced him to recant.

To secure him further in apostasy, the bishop afterward gave him a piece of money. But the interference of Providence is here remarkable. This bribe lay so heavily upon his conscience, that he returned, threw back the money, and repented of his conduct.

Like Peter, he was contrite, steadfast in the faith, and sealed it with his blood at Bury, August the second, 1555, praising and glorifying God, John Dinley, John Newman, and Patrick Peckingham. Mr. Dinley and Newman were returning one day to Maidstone, the place of their abode, when they were met by E. Tyrell Esquire, a bigoted justice of the peace in Essex, and a cruel persecutor of the Protestants. He apprehended them merely on suspicion.

On the fifth of July, 1555, they were condemned, and consigned to the sheriffs, who sent Mr. Dinley to Uxbridge, where he perished, August eighth, 1555. While suffering in agony and singing a psalm, Dr. Storey inhumanly ordered one of the tormentors to throw a faggot at him, which cut his face severely, caused him to cease singing, and to raise his hands to his face. Just as Dr. Storey was remarking in jest that he had spoiled a good song, the pious martyr again changed, spread his hands abroad in the flames, and, through Christ Jesus, resigned his soul into the hands of his Maker.

Mr. Peckingham suffered at the same town on the twenty-eighth of the same month. Mr. Newman, puturer, was burnt at Saffron Walden, in Essex, August thirty-first, for the same cause, and Richard Hook about the same time perished at Chichester. W. Coker, W. Hooper, W. Lawrence, R. Collier, R. Wright, and W. Steer.

These persons, all of Kent, were examined at the same time with Mr. Bland and Shetterden, by Thornton, Bishop of Dover, Dr. Harpsfield, and others. These six martyrs, and witnesses of the truth, were consigned to the flames in Canterbury. At the end of August, fifteen-fifty-five.

Elizabeth Warren, widow of John Warren, upholsterer, martyr, was burnt at Stratford-le-Beau, near London, at the end of August, fifteen-fifty-five. George Tankerfield, of London, Cook, born at York, aged twenty-seven, in the reign of Edward the Sixth, had been a Papist, but the cruelty of Bloody Mary made him suspect the truth of those doctrines, which were enforced by fire and torture. Tankerfield was imprisoned in Newgate, about the end of February, fifteen-fifty-five, and on August twenty-sixth, at St. Albans, he braved the excruciating fire, and joyfully died for the glory of his Redeemer.

Rev. Robert Smith was first in the service of Sir T. Smith, Provost of Eton, and was afterward removed to Windsor, where he had a clerkship of ten pounds a year. He was condemned July twelfth, fifteen-fifty-five, and suffered August eighth, at Uxbridge. He doubted not but that God would give the spectators some token in support of his own cause.

This actually happened, for when he was nearly half burnt, and supposed to be dead, he suddenly rose up, moved the remaining parts of his arms, and praised God. Then, hanging over the fire, he sweetly slept in the Lord Jesus. Mr. Stephen Harwood and Mr. Thomas Fust suffered about the same time with Smith and Tankerfield, with whom they were condemned.

Mr. William Hale, also of Thorpe in Essex, was sent to Barnet, where about the same time he joined the ever-blessed company of martyrs. George King, Thomas Leys, and John Wade, falling sick in Lollard's Tower, were removed to different houses, and died. Their bodies were thrown out in the common fields as unworthy of burial, and lay until the faithful conveyed them away at night.

Mr. William Andrew, of Horsley, Essex, was imprisoned in Newgate for heresy, but God chose to call him to himself by the severe treatment he endured in Newgate, and thus to mock the sanguinary expectations of his Catholic persecutors. His body was thrown into the open air, but his soul was received into the everlasting mansions of his Heavenly Creator, the Reverend Robert Samuel. This gentleman was minister of Bradford, Suffolk, where he industriously taught the flock committed to his charge, while he was openly permitted to discharge his duty.

He was first persecuted by Mr. Foster, of Coptock, near Ipswich, a severe and bigoted persecutor of the followers of Christ, according to the truth in the Gospel. Notwithstanding Mr. Samuel was ejected from his living, he continued to exhort and instruct privately. Nor would he obey the order for putting away his wife, whom he had married in King Edward's reign, but kept her at Ipswich, where Foster by warrant surprised him by night with her.

After being imprisoned in Ipswich jail, he was taken before Dr. Hopton, Bishop of Norwich, and Dr. Dunning, his Chancellor, two of the most sanguinary among the bigots of those days. To intimidate the worthy pastor, he was in prison chained to a post in such a manner that the weight of his body was supported by the points of his toes. Added to this his allowance of provision was reduced to a quantity so insufficient to sustain nature, that he was almost ready to devour his own flesh.

From this dreadful extremity there was even a degree of mercy in ordering him to the fire. Mr. Samuel suffered August 31, 1555, Bishop Ridley and Bishop Latimer. These reverend prelates suffered October 17, 1555 at Oxford, on the same day Wolsey and Pygat perished at Ely.

Pillars of the church and accomplished ornaments of human nature, they were the admiration of the realm, amiably conspicuous in their lives and glorious in their deaths. Dr. Ridley was born in Northumberland, was first taught grammar at Newcastle, and afterward removed to Cambridge, where his aptitude in education raised him gradually until he came to be the head of Pembroke College, where he received the title of Doctor of Divinity. Having returned from a trip to Paris, he was appointed chaplain by Henry VIII and Bishop of Rochester, and was afterward translated to the See of London in the time of Edward VI.

To his sermons the people resorted, swarming about him like bees, coveting the sweet flowers and wholesome juice of the fruitful doctrine, which he did not only preach, but showed the same by his life, as a glittering lantern to the eyes and senses of the blind, in such pure order that his very enemies could not reprove him in any one jot. His tender treatment of Dr. Heath, who was a prisoner with him during one year in Edward's reign, evidently proves that he had no Catholic cruelty in his disposition. In person he was erect and well proportioned, in temper forgiving, in self-mortification severe.

His first duty in the morning was private prayer. He remained in his study until ten o'clock, and then attended the daily prayer used in his house. Dinner being done, he sat about an hour, conversing pleasantly, or playing at chess.

His study next engaged his attention, unless business or visits occurred. About five o'clock prayers followed, and after he would recreate himself at chess for about an hour, then retire to his study until eleven o'clock, and pray on his knees as in the morning. In brief, he was a pattern of godliness and virtue, and such he endeavored to make men wherever he came.

His attentive kindness was displayed particularly to old Mrs. Bonner, mother of Dr. Bonner, the cruel Bishop of London. Dr. Ridley, when at his manor at Fulham, always invited her to his house, placed her at the head of his table, and treated her like his own mother. He did the same by Bonner's sister and other relatives.

But when Dr. Ridley was under persecution, Bonner pursued a conduct diametrically opposite, and would have sacrificed Dr. Ridley's sister and her husband, Mr. George Shipside, had not providence delivered him by the means of Dr. Heath, Bishop of Worcester. Dr. Ridley was first in part converted by reading Bertram's book on the sacrament, and by his conferences with Archbishop Cranmer and Peter Martyr. When Edward VI was removed from the throne, and the Bloody Mary succeeded, Bishop Ridley was immediately marked as an object of slaughter.

He was first sent to the Tower, and afterward at Oxford, was consigned to the common prison of Boccardo, with Archbishop Cranmer and Mr. Latimer. Being separated from them, he was placed in the house of one Irish, where he remained until the day of his martyrdom, from 1554 until October 16, 1555. It will easily be supposed that the conversations of these chiefs of the martyrs were elaborate, learned, and instructive.

Such indeed they were, and equally beneficial to all their spiritual comforts. Bishop Ridley's letters to various Christian brethren in Bonds, in all parts, and his disputations with the Mitred enemies of Christ, alike proved the clearness of his head and the integrity of his heart. In a letter to Mr. Grindle, afterward Bishop of Canterbury, he mentions with affection those who had preceded him in dying for the faith, and those who were expected to suffer.

He regrets that Popery is re-established in its full abomination, which he attributes to the wrath of God, made manifest in return for the lukewarmness of the clergy and the people in justly appreciating the blessed light of the Reformation. This old practiced soldier of Christ, Master Hugh Latimer, was the son of one Hugh Latimer of Thurgeson, in the county of Leicester, a husbandman of a good and wealthy estimation, where also he was born and brought up until he was four years of age, or thereabout, at which time his parents, having him as then left for their only son with six daughters, seeing his ready prompt and sharp wit, proposed to train him up in erudition, and knowing a good literature, wherein he so profited in his youth at the common schools of his own country, that at the age of fourteen years he was sent to the University of Cambridge, where he entered into the study of the school divinity of that day, and was from principle a zealous observer of the Romish superstitions of the time. In his oration, when he commenced Bachelor of Divinity, he invaded against the reformer Melancthon, and openly declaimed against good Mr. Stafford, divinity lecturer in Cambridge.

Mr. Thomas Bilney, moved by a brotherly pity towards Mr. Latimer, begged to wait upon him in his study, and to explain to him the groundwork of his, Mr. Bilney's, faith. This blessed interview affected his conversion. The persecutor of Christ became his zealous advocate, and before Dr. Stafford died he became reconciled to him.

Once converted, he became eager for the conversion of others, and commenced to be public preacher and private instructor in the university. His sermons were so pointed against the absurdity of praying in the Latin tongue, and withholding the oracles of salvation from the people who were to be saved by belief in them, that he drew upon himself the pulpit animate versions of several of the resident friars and heads of house, whom he subsequently silenced by his severe criticisms and eloquent arguments. This was at Christmas, 1529.

At length, Dr. West preached against Mr. Latimer at Barwell Abbey, and prohibited him from preaching again in the churches of the university, notwithstanding which, he continued during three years to advocate openly the cause of Christ, and even his enemies confessed the power of those talents he possessed. Mr. Bilney remained here some time with Mr. Latimer, and thus the place where they frequently walked together obtained the name of Heretic's Hill. Mr. Latimer at this time traced out the innocence of a poor woman, accused by her husband of the murder of her child.

Having preached before King Henry VIII at Windsor, he obtained the unfortunate mother's pardon. This, with many other benevolent acts, served only to excite the spleen of his adversaries. He was summoned before Cardinal Wolsey for heresy, but being a strenuous supporter of the King's supremacy, in opposition to the Pope's, by favour of Lord Cromwell and Dr. Butts, the King's physician, he obtained the living of West Kingston in Wiltshire.

For his sermons here against Purgatory, the Immaculacy of the Virgin, and the Worship of Images, he was cited to appear before Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, and John, Bishop of London. He was required to subscribe certain articles, expressive of his conformity to the accustomed usages, and there is reason to think, after repeated weekly examinations, that he did subscribe, as they did not seem to involve any important article of belief. Guided by Providence, he escaped the subtle nets of his persecutors, and at length, through the powerful friends before mentioned, became Bishop of Worcester, in which function he qualified or explained away most of the papal ceremonies he was for form's sake, under the necessity of complying with.

He continued in this active and dignified employment some years. Beginning afresh to set forth his plough, he laboured in the Lord's harvest most fruitfully, discharging his talents as well in diverse places of this realm, as before the King at court. In the same place of the inward garden, which was before applied to lascivious and courtly pastimes, there he dispensed the fruitful word of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, preaching there before the King and his whole court, to the edification of many.

He remained a prisoner in the Tower until the coronation of Edward VI., when he was again called to the Lord's harvest in Stamford, and many other places. He also preached at London, in the Convocation House, and before the young King. Indeed, he lectured twice every Sunday, regardless of his great age, then above sixty-seven years, and his weakness through a bruise receded from the fall of a tree.

Indefatigable in his private studies, he rose to them in winter and in summer, at two o'clock in the morning. By the strength of his own mind, or of some inward light from above, he had a prophetic view of what was to happen to the Church in Mary's reign, asserting that he was doomed to suffer for the truth, and that Winchester, then in the Tower, was preserved for that purpose. Soon after Queen Mary was proclaimed, a messenger was sent to summon Mr. Latimer to town, and there is reason to believe it was wished that he should make his escape.

Thus Master Latimer coming up to London through Smithfield, where merrily he said that Smithfield had long groaned for him, was brought before the Council, where he patiently bore all the mocks and taunts given him by the scornful Papists. He was cast into the Tower, where he, being assisted with the heavenly grace of Christ, sustained imprisonment a long time, notwithstanding the cruel and unmerciful handling of the lordly Papists, which thought then their kingdom would never fall. He showed himself not only patient, but also cheerful in and above all that which they could or would work against him.

Yea, such a valiant spirit of the Lord gave him, that he was able not only to despise the terribleness of prisons and torments, but also to laugh to scorn the doings of his enemies. Mr. Latimer, after remaining a long time in the Tower, was transported to Oxford, with Cranmer and Ridley, the disputations at which place have been already mentioned in a former part of this work. He remained imprisoned until October, and the principal objects of all his prayers were three, that he might stand faithful to the doctrine he had professed, that God would restore his gospel to England once again, and preserve the Lady Elizabeth to be Queen, all of which happened.

When he stood at the stake without the Bacardo Gate, Oxford, with Dr. Ridley, and fire was putting to the pile of faggots, he raised his eyes benignly toward heaven, and said, God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able. His body was forcibly penetrated by the fire, and the blood flowed abundantly from the heart, as if to verify his constant desire that his heart's blood might be shed in defense of the gospel. His polemical and friendly letters are lasting monuments of his integrity and talents.

It has been before said that the public disputation took place in April, 1554. New examinations took place in October, 1555, previous to the degradation and condemnation of Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer. We now draw to the conclusion of the lives of the two last.

Dr. Ridley, the night before execution, was very facetious, had himself shaved, and called his supper a marriage feast. He remarked upon seeing Mrs. Irish, the keeper's wife, weep. Though my breakfast will be somewhat sharp, my supper will be more pleasant and sweet.

The place of death was on the north side of the town, opposite Balliol College. Dr. Ridley was dressed in a black gown furred, and Mr. Latimer had a long shroud on, hanging down to his feet. Dr. Ridley, as he passed Picardo, looked up to see Dr. Cranmer, but the latter was then engaged in disputation with a friar.

When they came to the stake, Mr. Ridley embraced Latimer fervently, and bid him, Be of good heart, brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame, or else strengthen us to abide it. He then knelt by the stake, and after earnestly praying together, they had a short private conversation. Dr. Smith then preached a short sermon against the martyrs, who would have answered him, but were prevented by Dr. Marshall, the vice-chancellor.

Dr. Ridley then took off his gown and tippet, and gave them to his brother-in-law, Mr. Shipside. He gave away also many trifles to his weeping friends, and the populace were anxious to get even a fragment of his garments. Mr. Latimer gave nothing, and from the poverty of his garb, was soon stripped to his shroud, and stood venerable and erect, fearless of death.

Dr. Ridley being unclothed to his shirt, the Smith placed an iron chain about their waists, and Dr. Ridley bid him fasten it securely. His brother, having tied a bag of gunpowder about his neck, gave some also to Mr. Latimer. Dr. Ridley then requested of Lord Williams, of fame, to advocate with the Queen the cause of some poor men to whom he had, when bishop, granted leases, but which the present bishop had refused to confirm.

A lighted faggot was now laid at Dr. Ridley's feet, which caused Mr. Latimer to say, Be of good cheer, Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day, by God's grace, light up such a candle in England as, I trust, will never be put out. When Dr. Ridley saw the fire flaming up towards him, he cried with a wonderful loud voice, Lord, Lord, receive my spirit.

Master Latimer, crying as vehemently on the other side, O Father of Heaven, receive my soul, received the flame as it were embracing of it. After that he had stroked his face with his hands, and, as it were, bathed them a little in the fire, he soon died, as it appeareth, with very little pain, nor none. Well, dead they are, and the reward of this world they have already.

What reward remaineth for them in Heaven, the day of the Lord's glory, when he cometh with his saints, shall declare. CHAPTER XVI PART IV OF FOXE'S BOOK OF MARTYRS VOLUME II

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