

Life of Master John Bradford

by John Bradford

John Bradford was a devoted Christian minister who stood firm in his faith despite persecution and imprisonment, ultimately giving his life for the cause of Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Isaiah 55:6, Matthew 11:28, Romans 8:38, Philippians 1:21, 2 Timothy 4:7, Hebrews 12:1, James 5:16, 1 Peter 4:19, 1 John 5:4

Topics: "Christian Martyrdom", "Faith And Courage"

Description

John Bradford, a martyr in A.D. 1555, was a man of integrity and deep faith. He went from a successful career to dedicating his life to preaching the gospel after a powerful call from God. Bradford's zeal for repentance and prayer was evident in his daily life, as he constantly sought to deepen his relationship with God. His imprisonment was marked by his unwavering faith, compassion towards fellow prisoners, and fervent preaching. Despite facing death by burning, Bradford faced his fate with courage, forgiveness, and a steadfast trust in God's mercy and salvation.

Transcript

Some Account of the Rev. John Bradford, Prebendary of St.Paul's, and Martyr, A.D. 1555.

John Bradford was born at Manchester about the year 1510. His parents gave him a good education. He was a hard student from his youth, and his skill in accounts procured him employment under sir John Harrington, treasurer and paymaster of the English forces in France. The abilities he manifested in this situation obtained him considerable esteem, and, as Fox expresses, "he continued certain years in a right honest and good trade of life, after the course of this world, likely to have come forward, if his mind could have so liked, or had been given to the world as many others." His office he resigned, apparently not be willing to connive at some abuses by which the king was defrauded to a considerable amount.

The precise nature of the transaction, and Bradford's share in it are not clearly ascertained. His letters to father Traves show that it was some transaction effecting his employer, and that he used every means in his power to induce sir John Harrington to replace the amount. A letter from father Traves to Bradford confirms this view, that it was a matter effecting his master more than himself, although Bradford seems to have been concerned in the transaction, and therefore not free from blame. That it was no act for his own advantage further appears from his answer to Gardiner, when the latter asserted that Bradford had defrauded his master. In reply, he called upon anyone to prove this, and desired the lord chancellor, as chief justicer of England, to do justice upon them that slandered him.

But whatever were the circumstances, he could not rest satisfied till restitution was made; at one time he thought of making himself a bondman, and he seems to have sacrificed his patrimonial property towards attaining this object, which evidently worked most painfully on his mind. This transaction is generally supposed to be noticed in one of Latimer's searching sermons. The energetic appeals of that powerful preacher might have been the means of exciting a right feeling in Bradford, and it appears that he conferred with Latimer on the subject. It was not finally settled till after he had gone to Cambridge.

Bradford studies the law for a short period, but his heart was set upon a more spiritual calling. Fox says: "The Lord which had elected him unto a better function, and preordained him to preach the gospel of Christ, in that hour of grace, which in his secret council he had appointed, called him his chosen child to the understanding and partaking of the same gospel of life. In which call he was so truly taught, that forthwith his effectual call was perceived by the fruits. For then Bradford did forsake his worldly affairs and forwardness in worldly wealth, and after a just account given to his master of all his doings, he departed from him, and with marvellous favour to further the kingdom of God by the ministry of his holy word, he gave himself wholly to the study of the holy scriptures. The which his purpose to accomplish the better, he departed from the temple at London, where the temporal law is studied, and went to the University of Cambridge, to learn by God's law how to further the building of the Lord's temple. In Cambridge, his diligence in study, his profiting in knowledge, and godly conversation, so pleased all men, that within one whole year after he had been there, the university gave him a degree."

"Immediately after, the master and fellows of Pembroke-hall gave him a fellowship in their college; yea, that man of God, Martin Bucer, so liked him, that he had him not only most dear unto him, but also oftentimes exhorted him to bestow his talent in preaching. Unto which Bradford answered always, that he was unable to serve in that office through want of learning. To the which Bucer was wont to reply, 'If thou have not fine manchet bread yet give the poor people barley bread, or whatsoever else the Lord has committed unto thee.' And while Bradford was thus persuaded to enter into the ministry, Dr. Ridley, that worthy bishop of London and glorious martyr of Christ, according to the order that then was in the church of England, called him to take the degree of a deacon. Which order because it was not without some abuse, to which Bradford would not consent, the bishop yet perceiving that Bradford was willing to enter into the ministry, was content to order him deacon without any abuse, even as he desired. This being done, he obtained for him a licence to preach, and gave him a prebend in his cathedral church of St. Paul's."

"In this preaching office, by the space of three years, how faithfully Bradford walked, how diligently he laboured, many parts of England can testify. Sharply he opened and reproved sin, sweetly he preached Christ crucified, pithily he impugned heresies and errors, earnestly he persuaded to godly life."

His earnestness in repentance.

Sampson, another contemporary, testified concerning Bradford, "After that God touched his heart with that effectual and holy calling, he sold his chains, rings, brooches, and jewels of gold, which before he used to wear, and bestowed the price of these, his former vanities, in the necessary relief of Christ's poor members, whom he could hear of, or find lying sick or pining in poverty." His earnestness in repentance is also noticed by Sampson, who speaks thus of his constant and practical piety, and his constant communion with God in prayer.

"Without an inward exercise in prayer, our Bradford did not pray to his full contentation, as appeared by this. He used in the morning to go to the common prayer in the college where he was, and after that he used to make some prayer with his pupils in his chamber. But not content with this, he then repaired to his own exercise in prayer by himself, as one that had not yet prayed to his own mind. For he was wont to say to his familiars, 'I have prayed with my pupils, but I have not yet prayed with myself.' Let those secure men mark this well, which pray without touch of breast, as the Pharisees did, and so that they have said an ordinary prayer, or heard a common course of prayer, they think they have prayed well, and as the term is, they have served God well. Though they never feel sting for sin, taste of groaning, or broken heart, nor of the sweet saving health of Christ, thereby to be moved to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, nor change or renewing of mind. But as they came secure in sin and senseless, so they do depart without any change or affecting of the heart. Which is even the cradle in which Satan rocks the sinners of this age asleep, who think they do serve God in these cursory prayers, made only of custom; when their heart is as far from God as was the heart of the Pharisee. Let us learn by Bradford's example to pray better, that is, with the heart, and not with the lips alone. As Cyprian says, 'Because God is the hearer of the heart, and not of the voice;' that is to say, not of the voice alone without the heart, for that is but lip-labour. This conscience of sin, and exercise in prayer had Bradford, clean contrary to that cursed custom of those graceless men, which do joy to make large and long accounts of their lewdness, and glory therein, so feeling their delight with their lives past, as the dogs returns to his vomit. Such as the prophet, Isa. 39, says, They declare their sins as Sodom, they hide them not, woe be to their souls! It goes with them as in the days of Jeremiah it went with those, Jer. 3. God give these men better grace, else let them be assured they shall find woe! woe! to their very souls."

"Another of his exercises was this. He used to make unto himself a journal, in which he used to write all such notable things, as either he did see or hear each day that passed. But whatsoever he did hear or see, he did so pen it, that a man might see in that book the signs of his smitten heart. For if he did see or hear any good in any man, by that sight he found and noted the want thereof in himself, and added a short prayer, craving mercy and grace to amend. If he did hear or see any plague or misery, he noted it as a thing procured by his own sins, and still added, 'Lord! Have mercy upon me.' He used in the same book to note such evil thoughts as did rise in him, as of envying the good of other men, thoughts of unthankfulness, of not considering God in his works, of hardness and insensibleness of heart, when he did see other moved and affected. And thus he made to himself, and of himself, a book of daily practices of repentance."

"Besides this, they which were familiar with him might see, how he, being in their company, used to fall often into a sudden and deep meditation, in which he would sit with fixed countenance and spirit moved, yet speaking nothing a good space. And sometimes in this silent sitting, plenty of tears would trickle down his cheeks. Sometimes he would sit in it, and come out of it, with a smiling countenance. Oftentimes have I sat at dinner and supper with him in the house of that godly harbourer of many preachers and servants of the Lord Jesus, master Elsyng, when, either by occasion of talk had, or of some view of God's benefits present, or some inward cogitation and thought of his own, he has fallen into these deep cogitations, and he would tell me in the end such discourses of them, that I did perceive that sometimes his tears trickled out of his eyes, as well for joy as for sorrow. Neither was he only such a practiser or repentance in himself, but a continual provoker of others thereunto; not only in public preaching, but also in private conference and company. For, in all companies where he did come, he would freely reprove any sin and misbehaviour which appeared in any person, especially swearers, filthy talkers, and popish praters. Such never departed out of his company unreprieved. And this he did with such a divine grace and Christian majesty,

that ever he stopped the mouths of the gainsayers. For he spake with power, and yet so sweetly, that they might see their evil to be evil, and hurtful to them, and understand that it was good indeed to the which he laboured to draw them in God."

Bradford's zeal and activity as a preacher of the gospel rendered him very obnoxious to the papists, and his popularity in the city of London, though he was always most faithful in reproofing sin, made them the more anxious to silence and remove him. To accomplish this, as Fox well observes, because they had no just cause, they took occasion to do him injury, for such an act as, among Turks and infidels, would have been with thankfulness rewarded, and with great favour accepted as it deserved.

The act was this. Immediately after the accession of queen Mary, Bourne, afterwards bishop of Bath, a papist, preached at Paul's cross, when he spoke so reproachfully of the late king, so justified Bonner, and said so much in favour of popery, that the people were indignant, and a tumult ensued. A dagger was hurled at the preacher, who shrunk back, and entreated Bradford, who stood near him, to come forward and speak to the people. Bradford addressed them, and sharply reproofing their conduct, prevailed upon them to desist. Having obtained a respite, he and Rogers assisted the mayor and sheriffs in conducting the trembling preacher into the grammar school, Bradford following Bourne, and sheltering him with his own person. Many pressed after them, loudly expressing their regrets that such a character should be so protected. One gentleman who had made a direct attack upon Bourne, told Bradford, "You save him that will help to burn you!" The same Sunday afternoon, Bradford preached at Bow church, and sharply reproofed the people for their proceedings.

Such conduct ought to have procured Bradford countenance or favour from the queen, but he was one of the most eminent of the protestant divines, and against them every opportunity was to be taken! Three days after, on August 16, 1553, Bradford was summoned before the council, and committed to the Tower on a charge of seditious conduct, shown while protecting Bourne! The people's having listened to his rebukes, was alleged as a proof that he had excited them to tumult!

Fox thus speaks of Bradford's imprisonment, "He was committed first to the Tower, then unto other prisons, out of the which neither his innocence, godliness, nor charitable dealing could purchase him liberty of body, till by death, which he suffered for Christ's cause, he obtained the heavenly liberty of which neither pope nor papist shall ever deprive him. From the Tower he came to the King's Bench in Southwark. And after his condemnation, he was sent to the Compter, in the Poultry, in London, in the which two places, for the time he did remain prisoner, he preached twice a day continually, unless sickness hindered him. Where also the sacrament was often ministered, and through his means, the keepers did so well bear with him, such resort of good folks was daily to his lecture, and to the ministration of the sacrament, that commonly his chamber was well nigh filled. Preaching, reading, and praying was all his whole life. He did not eat above one meal a day, which was but very little when he took it, and his continual study was upon his knees. In the midst of dinner, he used often to muse with himself, having his hat over his eyes, from whence came commonly plenty of tears dropping on his trencher. Very gentle he was to man and child, and in so good credit with his keepers, that at his desire, in an evening, when prisoner in the King's Bench in Southwark, he had licence, upon his promise to return again that night, to go into London without any keeper, to visit one that was sick, lying by the steel-yard. Neither did he fail his promise, but returned unto his prison again, rather being before his hour, than breaking his fidelity. So constant was he in word and in deed."

"Of person he was somewhat tall and slender, spare of body, of a faint sanguine colour, with an auburn beard. He slept not commonly above four hours in the night. And in his bed till sleep came his book went not out of his hand. His chief recreation was in no gaming or other pastime, but only in honest company, and comely talk, wherein he would spend a little time after dinner at the board, and so to prayer and his book again. He counted that hour not well spent, wherein he did not some good, either with his pen, study, or in exhorting of others. He was no niggard of his purse, but would liberally participate what he had to his fellow prisoners. And commonly once a week he visited the thieves, pick-purses, and such others that were with him in prison where he lay, on the other side. Unto whom he would give godly exhortation to learn the amendment of their lives by their troubles, and after that so done, distribute among them some portion of money to their comfort."

"While he was in the King's Bench, and M. Saunders in the Marshalsea, both prisoners, at the back of those two prisons they met many times, and conferred together when they would, so mercifully did the Lord work for them, even in the midst of their troubles. And the said Bradford was so trusted with his keeper, and had such liberty, that there was no day but that he might have easily escaped away, if he would, but that the Lord had another work to do for him. In the summer time, while he was in the said King's Bench, he had liberty of his keeper to ride into Oxfordshire, to a merchant's house of his acquaintance, and a horse, and all things prepared for him for that journey, and the party in readiness that should ride with him, but God prevented him by sickness that he went not at all."

"One of his old friends and acquaintance came unto him while he was prisoner, and asked him, if he sued to get him out, what then he would do, or whither he would go? Unto whom Bradford made answer, as not caring whether he went out or no; but if he did, he said he would marry, and abide still in England secretly, teaching the people as the time would suffer him, and occupy himself that way. He was had in so great reverence and admiration with all good men, that a multitude which never knew him but by fame, greatly lamented his death. Yea, and a number also of the papists themselves, wished heartily his life. There were few days in which he was thought not to spend some tears before he went to bed, neither was there ever any prisoner with him, but by his company he greatly profited, as all they will yet witness, and have confessed of him no less, to the glory of God, whose society he frequented. Among many, one special thing I thought to note, which is this."

"Bishop Farrar being prisoner in the King's Bench, was travailed withal of the papists in the end of Lent, to receive the sacrament at Easter in one kind, who after much persuading, yielded to them, and promised so to do. Then, so it happened by God's providence, on the Easter even, the day before he should have done it, was Bradford brought to the King's Bench, prisoner. Where the Lord making him his instrument, Bradford only was the mean that the said bishop Farrar revoked his promise and word, and would never after yield to be spotted with that papistical pitch. So effectually the Lord wrought by this worthy servant of his. Such an instrument was he in God's church, that few or none there were that knew him, but esteemed him as a precious jewel, and God's true messenger."

A few other particulars relative to Bradford's imprisonment may be added. When in the Tower, it was so full of prisoners, that Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, and Bradford were all thrust into one chamber. They gladly endured the inconvenience on account of the opportunity it afforded of enjoying sweet intercourse together; thus establishing one another. There they read over the New Testament together, with great deliberation, studying too see if there were any passages which savoured the popish doctrine of the corporeal presence. But, as Strype observes, after all, they could find no presence but a spiritual, nor that the mass was any sacrifice for sin. But they found in that book, that the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross

was perfect, holy, and good, and that God did require no other, nor that it should ever be done again.

After his removal to the King's Bench, he long enjoyed the liberty related by Fox, but towards the close of the time he was more strictly imprisoned, chiefly at the instance of Dr. Story, and the keeper was threatened with death if he allowed any to speak with Bradford.

His letters show that he had discussions with some of his fellow prisoners in the King's Bench, who adopted Pelagian or free-will doctrines, but though painful, they by no means proceeded to the lengths which the papists at the time misrepresented, and some modern writers have willingly repeated. Many particulars relative to these discussions and other circumstances of his imprisonment are mentioned in his letters, and will be read with interest.

During king Edward's reign, many professed to be attached to the doctrines of the reformation, whose lives were not consistent with their profession. It is no new thing for persons to talk of the doctrines of truth, while in their lives they deny them. Most of these turned at once to popery when queen Mary came to the throne, but a few were so obnoxious to the ruling powers, as to be included in the general proscription, and were reckoned with the Reformers, although their conduct in prison was very different. Such persons, Bradford and others seriously admonished, warning them of their danger, nor should they ever be confounded with the real sufferers for conscience sake.

During this imprisonment, an intention was formed of sending Bradford and others to Cambridge, to be publicly disputed with by the papists. But this design was laid aside.

The prisoners made a declaration, in which they plainly set forth the proceedings which had been urged forward against the reformation, and offered to maintain publicly the doctrines they had professed. This declaration is printed by Strype, from a manuscript containing several pieces written by Bradford, and it appears to have been the supplication referred to in his letter 49 below. It is as follows.

"To the king and queen's most excellent majesties, with their most honourable high court of parliament."

"We, poor prisoners for Christ's religion, require your honours, in our dear Saviour Christ's name, earnestly now to repent, for that you have consented of late to the unplacing of so many godly laws, before set forth, touching the true religion of Christ, by two most noble kings, being father and brother to the queen's highness, and agreed upon by all your consents; not without your great and many deliberation, free and open disputations, costs, and pains-taking in that behalf, neither without great consultation and conclusions, had by the greatest learned men in the realm, at Windsor, Cambridge, and Oxford, neither without the most willing consent, and allowing the same by the whole realm thoroughly. So that there was not one parish in all England that ever desired again to have the Romish superstitious and vain service, which is now by the popish, proud, covetous clergy, placed again, in contempt not only of God, all heaven, and all the lessons of the Holy Ghost in the blessed bible; but also against the honour of the said two noble kings, against your own country, fore-agreements, and against all the godly consciences within this realm of England, and elsewhere. By reason whereof, God's great plagues must needs follow, and great unquietness of conscience, besides all other persecutions and vexations of bodies and goods must ensue. Moreover, we certify your honours, that since your said unplacing of Christ's true religion and true service, and placing in the room thereof antichrist's Romish superstition, heresy, and idolatry, all the true preachers have been removed and punished. And that with such open robbery and cruelty, as in Turkey was never used, either to their own countrymen, or to their mortal enemies."

"This therefore, our humble suit, is now to your honourable estates, to desire the same, for all the mercies' sake of our dear and only Saviour Jesus Christ, and for the duty you owe to your native country, and to your own souls, earnestly to consider from what light, to what darkness this realm is now brought, and that in the weightiest, chief, and principal matter of salvation, of all our souls and bodies, everlasting and for evermore. And even so we desire you, at this your assembly, to seek some effectual reformation for the before written most horrible deformation in this church of England. And touching yourselves, we desire you in like manner, that we may be called before your honours. And if we are not able to prove and approve, by the catholic and canonical rules of Christ's true religion, the church homilies and service set forth in the most innocent king Edward's days, and also to disallow and reprove, by the same authorities, the service now set forth since his departing, then we offer our bodies, either to be immediately burned, or else to suffer whatsoever other painful and shameful death it shall please the king and queen's majesties to appoint. And we think this trial and probation may be now best, either in the plain English tongue by writing, or otherwise by disputation in the same tongue. Our Lord, for his great mercy sake, grant unto you all, the continual assistance of his good and holy Spirit. Amen."

While Bradford was in prison, he did much service to the cause of Christ, especially by his letters. The importance and value of these writings was proved by a complaint made against them in the parliament house. The effect produced by them in Lancashire was described as very considerable.

When the plans of the papist were sufficiently matured, Bradford was one of the first brought forward for judgement. He was examined before Gardiner, Bonner, and others, in January, 1555, and condemned to the stake. His examinations are preserved by Fox, and exhibit the unshrinking fidelity of the martyr to the truth. But the artifices of the papists confined them almost wholly to the subjects of the pope's supremacy, and the sacrament of the altar, so that they have little interest for the general reader. During these examinations, another testimony to the effects of Bradford's writings was given. Secretary Bourne said, "Yea, it was reported this parliament time, by the earl of Derby, that he has done more hurt by letters, and by exhorting those that have come to him in religion, than ever he did, when he was abroad, by preaching." It is added, "All which divers of the council affirmed." At the close of the first examination, being urged to submit himself and receive mercy, he answered, "Mercy, with God's mercy, should be welcome, but otherwise he would none." In the course of these examinations, Bradford's conduct at Paul's cross was adverted to when he appealed to bishop Bourne who sat among his judges! In these examinations he conducted himself with meekness, yet firmness.

Fuller well says, "All men observed the malice and cruelty of his enemies, how they had first committed him without law, and then, after a year and half imprisonment, made one that took away his life. He denied, indeed, the pope's authority over the church of England, and so had his judges done but the year before."

After receiving sentence of condemnation, Bradford was conducted to the Poultry Compter. His conduct in that prison has been already described. There he remained till the beginning of July, during which time he was harassed by repeated disputations with the Romanists. Bonner, bishop of London, the bishop of Chichester, the archbishop of York, two Spanish friars, one of whom was the king's confessor, with Harpsfield, Weston, Harding, Pendleton and others, came to him from day to day. The substance of their disputations is preserved by Fox. In answer to an observation of the bishop of Chichester, "He is a heretic, and so none of the church, that does hold any doctrine against the definition of the church," Bradford emphatically said, "O my lord, will you condemn to the devil any man that believes truly the twelve articles of the faith, (wherein I take the unity of Christ's church to consist,) although in some points he believe not

the definition of that which you call the church? I doubt not but that he which holds firmly the articles of our belief, though in other things he dissent from your definition, yet he shall be saved." "Yea", exclaimed the bishops, "is this your divinity?" The substance of these disputations show that Bradford was well grounded in the argumentative learning then necessary, as well as in scriptural knowledge.

At the latter end of the month of June, the hour of suffering drew near. The particulars are thus related by Fox.

"The night before Bradford was had to Newgate, which was the Saturday night, he was troubled divers times in his sleep by dreams, how the chain for his burning was brought to the Compter-gate, and how the next day, being Sunday, he should be had to Newgate, and on the Monday after burned in Smithfield, as indeed it came to pass accordingly. Now he, being vexed so often with these dreams, about three of the clock in the morning, waked him that lay with him, and told him his unquiet sleep, and what he was troubled withal. Then, after a little talk, master Bradford rose out of the bed, and gave himself to his old exercise of reading and prayer, as always he had used before. And at dinner, according to his accustomed manner, he did eat his meat, and was very merry, nobody being with him from morning till night, but he that lay with him, with whom he had many times on that day communication, of death, of the kingdom of heaven, and of the ripeness of sin in that time."

"In the afternoon, they two walking together in the keeper's chamber, suddenly the keeper's wife came up, as one half amazed, and seeming much troubled, being almost breathless, said, 'Oh, M. Bradford, I come to bring you heavy news.' 'What is that?' said he. 'Marry,' said she, 'tomorrow you must be burned, and your chain is now a buying, and soon you must go to Newgate.' With that M. Bradford put off his cap, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, said, 'I thank God for it. I have looked for the same a long time, and therefore it comes not now to me suddenly, but as a thing waited for every day and hour. The Lord make me worthy thereof.' And so thanking her for her gentleness, he departed up into his chamber, and called his friend with him, and when he came thither, went secretly himself alone a long time and prayed. Which done, he came again to him that was in his chamber, and took him divers writings and papers, and showed him his mind in those things, what he would have done. And after that they had spend the afternoon till night, in many and sundry such things. At last came to him half a dozen of his friends more, with whom all the evening he spent the time in prayer and other good exercises, so wonderfully, that it as marvellous to hear and see."

"A little before he went out of the Compter, he made a notable prayer of his farewell, with such plenty of tears, and abundant spirit of prayer, that it ravished the minds of the hearers. Also, when he shifted himself with a clean shirt that was made for his burning, by one M. Walter Marlar's wife, who was a good nurse unto him, and his very good friend, he made such a prayer of the wedding garment, that some of those that were present were in such great admiration, that their eyes were as thoroughly occupied in looking on him, as their ears gave place to hear his prayer. At his departing out of the chamber, he made likewise a prayer, and gave money to every servant and officer of the house, with exhortation to them to fear and serve God, continually labouring to eschew all manner of evil. That done, he turned him to the wall, and prayed vehemently that his words might not be spoken in vain, but that the Lord would work the same in them effectually, for his Christ's sake. Then, being beneath in the court, all the prisoners cried out to him, and bade him farewell, as the rest of the house had done before, with weeping tears."

"The time they carried him to Newgate, was about eleven or twelve o'clock in the night, when it was thought none would be stirring abroad. Contrary to their expectation in that behalf, there was in Cheapside

and other places, between the Compter and Newgate, a great multitude of people that came to see him, who most gently bade him farewell, praying for him with most lamentable and pitiful tears, and he again, as gently, bade them farewell, praying most heartily for them and their welfare. Now, whether it were a commandment from the queen and her council, or from Bonner and his adherents, or whether it were devised of the lord mayor, aldermen, and sheriffs of London, or no, I cannot tell. But a great noise there was over night about the city, that Bradford should be burnt the next day in Smithfield, by four of the clock in the morning, before it should be greatly known to any. In which rumour many heads had divers minds. Some thinking the fear of the people to be the cause thereof. Others thought nay, that it was rather because the papists judged his death would convert many to the truth, and give a great overthrow to their kingdom. So some thought one thing, and some another, that no just conjecture of the cause could be known that ever I heard yet. But this was certain, the people prevented the device suspected. For the next day, at the said hour of four o'clock in the morning, there was in Smithfield such a multitude of men and women, that many, being in admiration thereof, thought it was not possible that they could have warning of his death, being so great a number, in so short time, unless it were by the singular providence of almighty God."

"Well, this took not effect as the people thought. For that morning it was nine of the clock before Bradford was brought into Smithfield. In going through Newgate thitherward, he spied a friend of him whom he loved, standing on the one side the way, unto whom he reached his hand over the people, and pulled him to him, and delivered to him from his head his velvet night-cap, also his handkerchief, with other things besides. After a little secret talk with him, as they parted, immediately came a brother-in-law of his, called Roger Beswick, who as soon as he had taken the said Bradford by the hand, one of the sheriffs of London, called Woodroffe, came with his staff and brake the said Roger's head, that the blood ran about his shoulders. Which Bradford beholding with grief, bade his brother farewell, willing him to commend him to his mother, and the rest of his friends, and to get him to some surgeon. So they departing, had little or no talk at all together. Then was he led forth to Smithfield with a great company of weaponed men, to conduct him thither, as the like was not seen at any man's burning. For in every corner of Smithfield there were some, besides those which stood about the stake."

"When they came to the stake in Smithfield to be burned, M. Bradford lying prostrate on the one side of the stake, and a young man, John Leaf, on the other side, they lay flat on their faces, praying to themselves the space of a minute. Then one of the sheriffs said to M. Bradford, 'Arise and make an end; for the press of the people is great.'"

"At that word they both stood up upon their feet. And then M. Bradford took a faggot in his hand, and kissed it, and likewise the stake. When he had so done, he desired of the sheriffs that his servant might have his raiment. 'For', said he, 'I have nothing else to give him; and besides that, he is a poor man.' And the sheriff said, he should have it. Forthwith M. Bradford put off his raiment, and went to the stake, and holding up his hands and casting his countenance of heaven, he said thus, 'O England, England, repent thee of thy sins, repent thee of thy sins! Beware of idolatry, beware of the false antichrists, take heed they do not deceive you.' And as he was speaking these words, the sheriff bade to tie his hands, if he would not be quiet. 'O master sheriff,' said M. Bradford, 'I am quiet. God forgive you this, master sheriff.' And one of the officers who made the fire, hearing M. Bradford so speaking to the sheriff, said, 'If you have no better learning than that, you are but a fool, and were best to hold your peace.' To the which words M. Bradford gave no answer; but asked all the world forgiveness, and forgave all the world, and prayed the people to pray for him, and turned his head unto the young man that suffered with him, and said, 'Be of good

comfort, brother, for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night.' And so spake no more words that any man did hear, but embracing the reeds, said thus, 'Strait is the way, and narrow is the gate that leads to eternal salvation, and few there be that find it'."

"And thus they both ended their mortal lives, like two lambs, without any alteration of their countenance, being void of all fear, hoping to obtain the prize that they had long run at. To the which I beseech almighty God happily to conduct us, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour." Amen.

Such was the end of John Bradford, concerning whom Ridley, whose chaplain he was, bore the following testimony. "He was man by whom God has and does work wonders in setting forth his word." The papists were so sensible of his worth, that they took more pains to bring him over to their doctrines than any other.

His long protracted confinement was rendered a blessing to the church of Christ, and affords a striking instance how God overrules the wrath of man, causing it to praise him. Had he not been thus secluded from public services, he could hardly have been more useful among the people at large, as appears from the testimony of the papists respecting his letters. And certainly some of the most valuable statements of the doctrines of the British Reformers would have been wanting to succeeding generation. He translated some of the writings of the German Reformed in addition to the pieces included in this volume, which, however, is the most complete collection of his works yet published. In his letters and tracts he, being dead, yet speaks. And many a weary and heavy laden soul has blessed God for the writings of John Bradford. They often resent more of the genuine truths of the gospel in a single page, than is contained in whole volumes of later divines. Fox well observes, "They show how godly he occupied his time when a prisoner; what special zeal he bore to the state of Christ's church; what care he had to perform his office; how earnestly he admonished all men; how tenderly he comforted the heavy hearted, and how fruitfully he confirmed them whom he had taught." They plainly evidence the deep abhorrence of sin felt by the writer, and his sense of the divine mercy which had been imparted to him. In connection with this, it may be related, that when he saw malefactors carried to execution, he would say, "There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God!"

How was his testimony only in writing or in words. As Fuller beautifully says, "He endured the flame as a fresh gale of wind in a hot summer's day, without any reluctance; confirming by his death the truth of that doctrine, which he had so diligently and powerfully preached during his life."

A Letter of Father Traves (as it seems) to John Bradford; concerning a debt of his, and making restitution; which he was not yet able to do.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. You shall understand, that after the receipt of your letters, I declared to M. Latimer the sum you wrote to me concerning your matter with your master. When I came to that place, that you offered yourself to be a bondman, he disliked it, and said, though by God's word appears, that to make restitution, we ought to sell ourselves, "yet would I not," said he, "that he should go so far with his master." I asked him, what counsel he would give? He said, "Better counsel, or more than I have given him, I cannot. Let him tarry, and, committing the whole to God, work by leisure." More could I not get of him; and I dared not trouble him, because he was studiously occupied in preparing a sermon to be preached, if God will, before the king this next Sunday. He knows not certainly whether he shall thereto be called, but as yet judges. What his counsel is you have heard.

You proceed and ask my counsel. Alas! You know that I am but a very block, yea, more dumb than a dumb idol. As little help in me as in the block of Walsingham (note: this is the image of the virgin Mary,

worshipped at Walsingham in Norfolk, which was much resorted to by pilgrims). Earnestly I protest that I know not what, nor how, to counsel you; but pray, pray, and commit yourself wholly to God. Wish an increase of that desire that you have to make restitution. And whether that God will so enrich you, that you shall be able to pay it, or that he will move your master, so that he will and shall pay it, commit it to God with earnest desire and faithful prayer, that at length, yet when his merciful eye shall see most meet, he will unburden you of your check. And look for his help in peace. I mean not such brutish security as is in me; but with patient suffering, without writhing, wresting, or doubting of his promise, without desperate voices, thoughts, groanings, or woes. For the Lord knows when and how to deliver that trust in him, for their best avail. Yea, in spite of all hard hearts, God will at length, man, deliver you. In the mean time, be neither stock nor stone, but labour for your part towards the ending of it, as opportunity shall serve; whether in moving him again, as I would surely wish to do, or labouring to gather of your own, for the payment thereof. Do it freely, but do all in the name of the Lord, in all things giving thanks to God the Father, through Jesus Christ. And the most mighty God move the heart of your master to enrich you to your unburdening, even when his will shall be.

Despair not, though all in haste it be not repaid, as though you were a man forlorn, for that the payment is not made. But rather give thanks to God even heartily, for that he has opened the fault unto you, and has given you a conscience in it. For he might have given you up into a lewd (ignorant, editor) mind, which should, nothing regarding it, have cried Peace! peace! until sudden destruction had come. But God of his mercy has opened it to you. Not that you should delight in it, as oh! God forgive me that I do in commemoration of my iniquity much more delight, than sorrow. But that it should be a school, a cross, a vexation, and perturbation of mind unto you. And also, that you must be void from that desperate solicitude, and with this, that God has given you an earnest desire to recompense; which is a great comfort, a signifying, that though you are a wretch and a sinner, yet God is with you and in you. Who can then harm you?

But how shall I do, if I die, say you, this being unpaid? I say, God has given you a desire to pay it, but not a power. Is God so cruel, think you, that he will exact of you to do that which is impossible for you to do? Are you able to pay it? Then pay it. Are you not able? Have a continual desire, which is to be begged of God, to pay. And, in the name of God, work so long as you live, as God shall lead you towards the payment of it. And if you die before the satisfaction, yet I think you shall go without peril. For I believe the sin is forgiven already, for Christ's sake.

There remains then by the doctor's mind but restitution. And I believe that you have *animum restituendi* (a desire and mind to restore, editor), and earnestly labour and follow, upon God's preparation, toward the restitution. The same has made a good restitution, if you die before a full restitution.

But indeed that substance that you have at that time gathered together, must go fully towards it. But what talk you of death? God is able to make you to make restitution, even tomorrow. Pray continually for his help, and ease to unburden, that way which he knows to be best for you. And I dare say, that, for Jesus' sake, he will both hear and help you. But pray not, appointing God any time. 'sed expecta Dominum, donec misereatur tui (but wait upon God till he have compassion upon you, editor), with full submission even in a patient, faithful mind to his will. Oh! how arrogantly take I upon me to babble. But as I scribble, so do I but partly. Follow not me, Bradford, follow not me. For I am a very impenitent beast. I tell you of restitution? Oh! Lord, spare me. Give me not up altogether to a lewd impenitent heart, in which I procure heaps of wrath. Lord, help, for Christ's sake, help me. All that I do, I do it in sin and vainglory. Yet shall not the devil hinder me to write. For out of the wild fig-tree some profit may come. But no thanks to the tree,

but the Creator.

Now foolishly further will I go. I would not offer myself into bondage to that earthly master. You know not what bondage means. Be it that I speak but carnally, I speak as I am. I would not but think assuredly, that as God has given me that grace to acknowledge my debt, being free, that the same Lord, of his mercy will, and is able, at ease to work in me freedom the discharge of my debt.

(Something is wanting.)

Note relative to the disputations in the King's Bench prison, see above.

The account given by Strype of the disputes in the King's Bench, mentioned above, is as follows. "One thin now fell out, (A. D. 1554), which caused some disturbance among the prisoners. Many of them, that were under restraint for the profession of the gospel, were such as held free will, tending to the derogation of God's grace, and refused the doctrine of absolute predestination and original sin. They were men of strict and holy lives, but very hot in their opinions and disputation, and unquiet. Divers of them were in the King's Bench, where Bradford and many other gospellers were. Many whereof, by their conferences they gained to their own persuasions. Bradford had much discourse with them. The name of their chief man was Harry Hart, who had written something in defence of his doctrine. Trew and Abingdon were teachers also among them. Kemp, Gibson, and Chamberlain were others. They ran their notions as high as Pelagius did, and valued no learning. And the writings and authorities of the learned they utterly rejected and despised." Strype then notices Bradford's correspondence with Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, on this subject.

Trew wrote some particulars of these contentions, and pointed out what he styled various "enormities" in doctrine, which he imputed to Bradford and his friends. He also accuses the followers of "the imagined predestination sect", as he styles them, of playing at bowls, cards, and dice, and of behaving in an unkind manner towards the freewillers. Bradford replied in his short and pithy defence of the doctrine of election, to which was added a second part, answering the prominent "enormities" alleged by Trew. He wrote in a Christian spirit, and his arguments appear too be satisfactory and conclusive.

Trew's statement, and Bradford's defence, have lately been printed from a manuscript in the Bodleian library. The former is stated to be "the most complete document upon the anti-predestinarian side of the question." Prominence is given to the deflections cast by Trew and his party upon their opponents, while the full and satisfactory letters of Bradford on this subject (see letter 66, 67, 68, 69), are passed over.

This statement of Trew has been also referred to, as evidence of a laxity of manners among the professors of predestination, and as supporting what is called a natural conclusion, that the Calvinist will be careless about morals.

It is unnecessary here to enter into the doctrinal part of this controversy, or to urge that such conclusions are unfounded, but as the allegations just noticed have induced some to suppose that Bradford and his associates were licentious and careless in their conduct, it is important to refer the reader to the letters already quoted, and to the following, and to the following extract from the second part of his defence, in which, after replying to Trew, he adds:

"This withal I say, that no man can use more godly discipline towards themselves, and to the correcting and chastening of the old man, than those do, which have truly tasted of the spirit of God's election. For to

such the corruption of our nature is felt a more horrible thing than hypocrites are able to think. And therefore they are more rough and severe to others, which are fallen, than the elect are, who have put on them bowels of mercies, and cannot but take other men's fault to heart, as their own. And therefore, so soon as any lovely sign of repentance ensues, they seek with Paul that charity might prevail. Where hypocrites are haughty, and condemn the poor publicans, as did the proud Pharisee. Again, indeed, we say, that none is good but such as are predestinate. And also we say, that of those which are now in our sight evil, many may be called hereafter, and as God's dear elect, declare themselves to the world, and the wicked of they would see it."

"As for who are the elect, and who are not, because it is God's privilege to know who are his, God's people are not curious in others, but as in themselves they feel the earnest of the Lord, and have God's Spirit in possession by faith, (I speak of those which are of years of discretion,) so do they judge of others by their works, and not further do they enter with God's office."

"Moreover where he says Predestination is not absolute, if he means it is not infallible, or it is not so certain but it may alter, then, when he has proved it by scripture, a man may something be moved to mark better his words. But till that time, which will never be, I will say, that if God predestinate any to life, they shall never be undone."

"As for his surmised imagination of election in the elect, whereby he taunts their faith, I will speak nothing. But God increase his, and all our faith, and open our eyes to see what true faith is, whereof for my part I acknowledge a great weakness, and much more imagination, than true faith. But yet, he is ever so little, I hope the Lord allows it, and will increase it for his name's sake, which I humbly crave at his hands, for the love of our only blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, who lighten all our darkness to see his true light, and inflame our hearts and wills to approve and love the same unfeignedly. Amen. Then will taunting not tarry, but charitable admonition, and sorrowful sighing to see any professing God with us, entangled with such errors, as nourish such enormities, as here he makes this most comfortable and profitable doctrine of God's holy election, for the which God's holy name be praised and magnified for ever, through Jesus Christs our blessed Lord and Saviour. Amen."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-bradford/life-of-master-john-bradford/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net