

# Heavenly-minded, Courageous John Bradford

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What would inspire a man to fearlessly preach Christ and offer words of hope in the minutes just before he was burned to death on a stake? Consider the life, and death, of John Bradford.



John Bradford lived in Britain in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He was born around 1510, converted in 1547, and he became a “roving chaplain” in 1550, rebuking sin and preaching Christ. Eventually, the rule in Britain was handed over to a rogue regime set against the gospel. The ensuing persecution was fierce, and Bradford was imprisoned because of his love for Christ. He was ultimately condemned to die by wicked men. Another believer, 19 year-old John Leaf, was to be killed beside Bradford.

Finally, the day of their martyrdom arrived. Faith Cook tells what happened next:

Approaching the stake, both men fell on their faces in one brief moment of silent prayer. “Arise and make an end,” said the sheriff impatiently, “for the press of the people is great.” And so the martyrs were chained to the stake. Just moments before the fires were lit, John Bradford lifted up his face and hands in one last plea to his countrymen: “O England, England, repent thee of thy sins. Beware of false anti-christs; take heed they do not deceive you.” He asked forgiveness of any he might have wronged and freely forgave those who so grievously offended against him. After begging the prayers of the people, he turned to address young John Leaf, his fellow-sufferer. The words are unforgettable: “Be of good comfort brother; for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night!”<sup>1</sup>

What gave John Bradford the courage to live, and die, for His Savior? Was he just a naturally gutsy guy? No, Bradford’s courage was inspired by his knowledge of the eternal inheritance to come. Read again these words of Bradford to John Leaf: “Be of good comfort brother; for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night!” Because Bradford’s mind was enthralled with future blessings in eternity, he was freed from the fear of man and the comforts of this world.

Even while Bradford was sitting in prison, his thoughts were on the joys of heaven. He wrote the following to his loved ones:

Ah! dear hearts, be not faint-hearted. Continue to walk in the fear of the Lord, as you have well begun. At the length we shall meet together in Christ’s kingdom, and there never part asunder . . . O joyful place; O place of all places desired!<sup>2</sup>

John Bradford endured suffering and death for Christ because he knew and believed God’s promises. He did what Peter charged his suffering readers to do: “Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13). Bradford was like Abraham who “by faith . . . lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land . . . for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:9-10, emphasis added).

Bradford understood and believed what those suffering Christians knew in Hebrews 10:34. Faced with the choice to either hide and avoid persecution, or visit fellow believers in prison and lose their goods, the author of Hebrews writes, “For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, *knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one*” (emphasis mine). Like these believers, Bradford’s fixation with heaven was the key to his courageous faith.

What was the impact of Bradford’s life and death? Cook writes that he confirmed “by his death the truth of that doctrine he had so diligently and powerfully preached” and “inscribed the Reformation truths more deeply on the conscience of the nation.”<sup>3</sup> He had previously prayed that God would give him strength to glorify Him by his death. His prayer was answered.

John Bradford teaches us the importance of living in light of the hope that awaits us in Christ in heaven. By filling our minds with the truth about the blessings of eternity (which will take more than just a few minutes a day of meditation on Scripture!), we will be strengthened to live for Christ today. This means we must beware of bondage to anything this world has to offer, like the television, or computers, or supped-up technological gadgets. Those things are not wicked, but habitually overusing them will dull your affections for Christ and make you a selfish person who lives a cozy, Christ-denying, non-influential life.

*“So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.”*  
(Hebrews 13:13-14)

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<sup>1</sup> Faith Cook, *Singing in the Fire* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2008), 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.