

# **Hugh Latimer**

The foremost preacher of  
the English Reformation

by

**Richard M. Hannula**

## **EP BOOKS**

1st Floor Venture House, 6 Silver Court, Watchmead,  
Welwyn Garden City, UK, AL7 1TS

www.epbooks.org  
sales@epbooks.org

EP BOOKS are distributed in the USA by:

JPL Fulfillment  
3741 Linden Avenue Southeast,  
Grand Rapids, MI 49548.

E-mail: sales@jplfulfillment.com  
Tel: 877.683.6935

© Richard M. Hannula 2013. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

First published 2013

Reprinted 2016

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available

ISBN: 978-0-85234-930-4

Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, published by HarperCollins Publishers © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

# Contents

	Page
Introduction	7
Timeline of Hugh Latimer and the Reformation	9
1 The convert	11
2 The preacher	27
3 The parson	45
4 The bishop	59
5 The outcast restored	81
6 The trial	99
7 The stake	113
Summary	123
Bibliography	125



## Introduction

**T**he life of Hugh Latimer (c. 1485–1555) spanned the most critical years of the great revival of biblical Christianity known as the Reformation. Within a year of his conversion to Christ in 1524, he became a popular preacher and reformer. He soon fell foul of church authorities who despised his simple gospel message and his condemnation of the church's false doctrines. Of all the English reformers, Latimer was the most effective warrior, doing battle against superstition, the cult of the saints, or any church practice that kept people from looking to Christ alone for salvation. His ministry seesawed between preaching to great crowds in the court chapels of Henry VIII and Edward VI and enduring two stints in dark cells of the Tower of London, and then suffering a martyr's death.

Henry VIII applauded his preaching, and made him a royal chaplain and a bishop; then he imprisoned him and banned him from preaching for eight years. Restored to favour by Edward VI, Latimer often preached before the king and to packed churches throughout the realm. In an age rife with corruption and injustice, his was the strongest and most consistent voice for the poor and dispossessed.

He pointed countless of his countrymen to the risen Saviour Jesus Christ. Latimer was widely acclaimed as the foremost preacher of the English Reformation. His sermons still resonate with power and effect nearly 500 years since they were first delivered. 'I have an ear for other preachers,' one nobleman said, 'but I have a heart for Latimer.'

Together with his friend, the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, Latimer led the fight to make the Scriptures in English legal and accessible to everyone. They laboured for decades to bring the doctrines and practices of the Church of England in line with the Word of God.

The testimony of Latimer's steadfast faith in Christ while being burned at the stake with Nicholas Ridley became one of the most famous martyr stories in the English-speaking world. Hugh Latimer lit a candle for Christ that still shines brightly today. Bishop Ridley called him 'The True Apostle of the English Nation'.

## **Timeline of Hugh Latimer and the Reformation**

- 1485      Approximate date of Latimer's birth in Leicestershire (precise date unknown)
- 1510      Latimer elected a Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge
- 1516      Erasmus's Greek New Testament published
- 1517      Luther's *95 Theses* posted
- 1524      Latimer led to Christ by Bilney
- 1525      Latimer questioned by Wolsey; Tyndale's English New Testament published
- 1530      Latimer first preached before Henry VIII
- 1531      Latimer made Parson of West Kington; Bilney burned at the stake
- 1533      Cranmer installed as Archbishop of Canterbury
- 1534      Act of Supremacy; English Church severed ties with Rome

- 1535 Latimer ordained Bishop of Worcester
- 1536 Preached before Convocation; Calvin's *Institutes* first published
- 1539 Six Articles enacted; Latimer resigned bishopric; placed under house arrest
- 1540 Barnes martyred; Latimer released from house arrest; banned from preaching
- 1546 Latimer imprisoned at the Tower of London; Council of Trent
- 1547 Henry VIII died; Edward VI crowned; Latimer released from Tower
- 1549 Act of Uniformity enacted; Use of *Book of Common Prayer* begun
- 1553 Edward VI died; Mary I crowned; Evangelicals purged; Latimer imprisoned
- 1554 Latimer condemned as heretic at Oxford; Latin mass re-established
- 1555 Bradford burned in London; Latimer and Ridley burned at the stake in Oxford
- 1558 Mary I died; Elizabeth I crowned; English Reformation restored



# 1

## The convert

*They only were hearing it said, 'He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy' (Galatians 1:23).*

When the earthquake of Martin Luther's (1483–1546) challenge to the Roman church began to rock the foundations of religious life in Europe, leaders of church and state in England feared that their island kingdom would be shaken by the reformation in Germany. They had good reason for concern. The English had long resented papal taxation and the unbridled powers of church courts, where a dungeon cell awaited those who dared bring complaints against the clergy. Money-grubbing and immoral clergymen fuelled an anticlerical bias among the people, who sang ditties featuring 'the dicing and drinking and hunting and wenching' of priests and monks. Cardinal Wolsey (c. 1473–1530), the most powerful churchman in the land, alienated the people by using his many church offices to amass unimaginable

wealth, which he showed off in the most ostentatious ways possible. He granted his illegitimate son, while he was still a small boy, the benefices of a number of high church offices whose annual revenues were worth a fortune.

Bishops charged for the probate of wills and imposed clerical taxes. Priests demanded fees for everything, including baptism and burial services. ‘The priests have no compassion,’ a Member of Parliament said. ‘The children of the dead should all die of hunger and go begging, rather than the priests should leave them the only cow which the dead man owned.’

‘What a trade is that of the priests!’ William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536), the English reformer, wrote. ‘They want money for everything: money for baptisms, for weddings, for buryings, for images, penances, and soul-masses ... Poor sheep! The parson shears, the vicar shaves, the parish priest polls, the friar scrapes, the indulgence seller pares ... we lack but a butcher to pull off the skin.’

A century and a half earlier, John Wycliffe (c. 1329–1384), Master of Balliol College in Oxford, taught that the church’s unbiblical doctrines and elaborate rituals hid Christ’s gospel from the people. ‘Canon Law has no force,’ Wycliffe wrote, ‘when it is opposed to the Word of God.’

At that time, the Latin Vulgate was the only Bible translation sanctioned by the church, but only the educated elite understood Latin. With the help of his students, Wycliffe translated the Bible into English. He sent out his followers to preach and distribute hand-written portions of the English Scriptures. The Lollards, as they were called, won thousands of Englishmen to Christ, but the bishops convinced the king to crush them. The Lollards were