

Lady Jane Grey- A Faithful Witness

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Preacher: Janet Schorer

[0 : 0 0] How's that? There we go. Thanks, Aidan. That's a comforting thumbs up. Good morning, everyone. My name's Janet Skora. Lovely to be able to be with you this wonderful summer's morning. I've been a long-time member of St Paul's and have the great privilege of being one of our wardens and one of our community group leaders. Really excited to have the opportunity to speak to you briefly today about the amazing life of Jane Grey. We're in our series over January, as you may be aware, of looking at steadfast women in faith, and Jane Grey is certainly one of those.

So let me pray for us before we have a short look at this amazing woman's life. Our Lord and Saviour, we thank you that you have given us the gift of salvation and thank you for a gospel that is a light for our path and thank you that it was your gospel that lit Jane Grey's path so many hundreds of years ago. We thank you that she is a part of our faith heritage and pray that as we at her life today, that you would speak to us by your spirit about what your gospel means for us here today in this place. Amen. As I said, we continue this week exploring women of faith and we get the opportunity today to look at the very short life of Lady Jane Grey, who's often called the Nine Days Queen. She really is a powerful example of unshakable faith, of personal scriptural conviction and of courage in the face of significant persecution. Though her reign as Queen was brief, her testimony as a young Protestant martyr left an enduring theological legacy.

So I want to reflect on Jane Grey from the perspective of her commitment to God's Word, her unwavering trust in Jesus and her bold witness under persecution. But first, let's have a bit of a look at who she was. Jane Grey was born in 1537 into a very tumultuous time in English history. She was born into a noble family, she was educated and she was wealthy and she was very close to the political controversy that surrounded the English Reformation.

Now, I could probably spend all of this talk and most of the day talking about the Reformation and you'll be very pleased to know that I don't intend to do that. So let's try and give you a short whistle-stop tour so you've got the context if you're not familiar with it.

From 1517, the German monk and professor Martin Luther challenged the Pope about fundamental issues of faith. The basis for his argument was that salvation is by faith alone and that scripture was the ultimate authority on any theological issue. And these were different beliefs to what the Catholic Church has. And it really marked the beginning of the Protestant movement, which we are now a part of. As the Reformation spread from Europe into Britain into the 1520s, Protestant reformers in England were being persecuted for their faith.

[3 : 2 6] This changed somewhat when King Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church. He didn't do that necessarily for good reasons. He did that so that he could divorce Catherine of Aragon.

But at that time, England broke away from the Catholic Church. As a result, the king and his successors, for the most part, adopted a Protestant faith. And over time, the English people came to identify as Protestant. In 1536, the reform-minded Anne Boleyn, who you might have heard of, was out of favour with Henry VIII and was beheaded, as you are, in somewhat dubious circumstances. And over time, the king grew less favourable towards reform. And so evangelicals were again forced into the underground.

And so Jane Grey was born into the midst of this, into the rumbling times between church and politics. So she would have known, had grown up with the knowledge of this context and what had happened prior to Henry VIII's death in 1547. But she had also been exposed to the gospel of grace.

She came from a family who was deeply connected to evangelical theology. Her father, Henry, was a passionate man committed to the gospel of grace, and he was reform-minded. So when King Henry VIII died, Jane went to live with his widow, Catherine Parr, who actively fostered and

nurtured her faith.

When she was 11 years old and Catherine died, Jane went back to live with her family and resumed her extensive studies, benefiting from learning of many of the evangelical thinkers who visited her family home. At the heart of what she learned, though, was that an understanding of scripture must be joined with developing a character of godliness. As a young woman, Jane Grey is described in what I've read as someone who was intelligent, she was loyal, she was studious, she was loving, she was honourable, and she was a bit stubborn. There's no doubt she was raised by her family in a way that acknowledged and perhaps took advantage of the world that she would live in as a woman of noble heritage, receiving a broad and rich education, but equally having a deep understanding of God's word and what it meant to live as his servant. And so we find Lady Jane Grey was deeply committed to scripture. It shaped her theological understanding and it shaped her moral compass. At just 16 years old, when her life ended, she had a remarkable grasp of the Bible and of what the Reformation was all about. She had a deep personal devotion to scripture. Her education was provided to her by people who were critical to evangelical thinking in England. She was fluent in ancient languages and had read a wide range of philosophy and literature. Her education had encouraged her to have a curious mind, but her faith demanded that everything she read be tested against the scripture as a source of truth. And so she became one of the best educated women in England. What stood out consistently though is that Jane was devoted to the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Knowledge of scripture was not enough. It had to grow alongside faith and a character that was shaped towards godliness. What Jane was learning, she had to put into practice.

[7 : 07] And as her life went on, the depths in her understanding of scripture enabled her to speak confidently about her faith, even in situations where people with many more years and much more life experience would find daunting. It shaped her character, it shaped her worldview and her moral framework.

Later in her young life, when Jane is, she needs to debate her faith with some of the Catholic Christians. And she did that with, she did, Jane defended the authority of scripture over human tradition and was able to quote the Bible to counter arguments. This was because it conveyed the importance of God's word, not the church as the authority over her life, as it should for any believer. Jane's life really illustrates the power of scripture to guide and sustain us as believers. Her knowledge of God's word enabled her to stand firm in her convictions, even when she was facing death.

Her example challenges us to deepen our engagement with scripture for ourselves and to make it a foundation for our faith. At a very young age, Jane's life took a very swift turn as she's drawn more into the controversy of the English throne. The Duke of Northumberland, which sounds very grand, wanted his son, Guildford Dudley, to marry royalty. And so he persuaded the dying King Edward to change his will so that Lady Jane Grey would inherit the crown and then he had to his son. Now Lady Jane wasn't aware that this had occurred. And so when the King died, people turn up at her door to inform her that she is his successor and will be appointed Queen. And she wasn't thrilled about this idea, it's safe to say, saying, the crown is not my right, it pleases me lot, not Lady Mary is the rightful heir, Mary being the Queen, the Princess. Eventually she was persuaded to take the throne, but there was no fanfare, there wasn't the usual ceremony that went with the proclamation of the Queen, because she was well aware that Princess Mary expected to be Queen. One of Jane's only actions during her very short reign was to oversee a ceremony baptising a baby. Edward Underhill was a man who had been transformed by the gospel of Jesus and had gone from living a very wild life to becoming a man of faith. He wanted to have his son baptised and Queen Jane stood as his godmother. As she was praying that the baby would trust in Christ all his life and fight for the gospel, Mary became Queen and things changed again for young Jane.

[10 : 06] Lady Jane had a personal theology that was centred on salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. The principle of the Reformation was at the heart of her disagreement with what the Reformation was about and it was central to her personal faith, and she lived that out in how she wanted to see other people understand who Jesus was. In her writings, in her conversations, she made that very clear, that her hope was in Christ's atoning work, not in rituals and not in human effort. In the passage that Gary read to us earlier, this is affirmed. It is by grace you have been saved through faith. It's not from yourselves, it's a gift from God. And these are the words that Jane

Grey was convinced of, that salvation came by God's grace, not by anything any of us do. Not all the good deeds in the world, not for the most noble, not for the best dressed or the well educated.

Salvation is for all people a gift of God and we don't work for gifts. Even as she faced circumstances well beyond her experience as a young woman, Jane declared her trust in Jesus saying, I look to be saved by no other means but only by the mercy of God in the blood of his only son, Jesus Christ. Her faith in the sufficiency of Christ calls us to examine where we place our hope and whether we fully trust in his grace in all our life circumstances.

And so soon after Queen Mary took the throne, Lady Jane and her husband were imprisoned in the Tower of London. Now the Queen was very determined to make a spectacle of Lady Jane and so she was set to have a very public trial which meant a very long walk through the very busy streets of London to where her trial would happen. She was charged with treason and she was condemned to be beheaded.

Those in attendance expected that she would break down but she stood firm. In the aftermath of the trial she wrote a prayer. O merciful God, consider my misery best known unto thee and be thou now unto me a strong tower of defence. I humbly require thee, suffer me not to be tempted above my power but either be a deliverer unto me out of this great misery or else give me the grace patiently to bear the heavy hand and sharp correction. In such extreme circumstances this young woman displayed a sense of peace and calm that could only be a reflection of her spiritual composure. She continued to be unwavering in her faith, her dependence on God and her proclamation of it. So while she's imprisoned, she lives with a jailer in his house and soon learned that her father-in-law, the Duke of Northumberland, had denied his faith prior to his execution in the hope of receiving a pardon. Lady Jane was horrified at this and it seemed to bolster her own convictions even further. She wrote,

Should I, who am so young and few in years, forsake my faith for the love of life? No, God forbid it. But God be merciful to us for he says, whoever denies him before men, he will not know him in the Father's kingdom. Now it seems that Queen Mary was willing to be somewhat lenient on Lady Jane. She afforded her some freedoms while she was imprisoned that made it a little more bearable. However, some senior nobles, including Lady Jane's father, unfortunately, made an attempt to remove her from the throne and this really extinguished any chance of leniency and so Lady Jane's fate was sealed. One of the most gripping accounts of Lady Jane is the conversation that happened between her and the Catholic chaplain, John Feckernam, in the days before she was beheaded. The chaplain goes to Jane in an attempt to save her soul, to convince her that her faith was a fraud and that she should go back to her Catholic belief.

[14 : 25] So think for a moment about that scene. You have a 16-year-old girl, imprisoned for days and imprisoned and days away from what she knows will be a horrific death and you have a seasoned, older, experienced minister of the church who has authority and perhaps influence over what the Queen might do to spare Jane's life. Now this conversation happened over three days and so I don't, I'm not going to go over the detail of it but Feckernam asked her at one point what is required in a Christian and she answered, to believe in God the Father, in God the Son, in God the Holy Ghost, three persons and what God. Is there anything else required in a Christian but to believe in God?

She answered, yes, we must believe in him, we must love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and our neighbour as ourself. After three days of talking the chaplain concluded that Jane was not to be persuaded to deny her faith and he left her saying that they would not meet again. She replied, true that we shall never meet again unless you, unless God turn your heart, for I am sure unless you repent and turn to God you are an evil case. I pray to God in the bowels of his mercy to send you his Holy Spirit. Jane Gray doesn't let her youth or her diminished status, or her status diminished her testimony. She engages in a debate with Feckernam and stands firm in what she believes and she knows what she believes. She's spent time in scripture herself, she's asked questions, she understands what she's saying, she is out, she's compelled, she's assured. The chaplain presses that we can be saved by our works, that the scripture has authority over the church, not the other way around. It demonstrated that she had that unwavering faith and strength in her belief and that she was convinced that faith is by Christ alone and in the authority of the scripture.

And so Queen Mary pressed on with her efforts to stamp out evangelicalism and have her reign preserved. Knowing that her fate was now inevitable, Jane wrote words of encouragement. In small

Bibles, for her sister and for the jailer who had kept her, urging them to consider the gospel for themselves and to stay true to their faith. As she stood in the public arena before her death, she shared her final testimony, including these words.

Jane's martyrdom is a testimony to her courage and her faith. Offering a chance to recant, she said, she was led to her death on the 12th of February, 1554.

Jane's martyrdom is a testimony to her courage and her faith. Offering a chance to recant and to embrace her Catholicism, Jane chose instead to remain faithful to her beliefs. She faced her death with serenity, reportedly quoting the Apostle Paul, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race and I have kept the faith. And so what can we reflect on from the life of Lady Jane Grey? [18:07] Her death at 16 reminds us that faithfulness to Christ comes at a cost. Her example challenges us to consider whether we are prepared to stand firm in our faith when we're facing difficult circumstances, opposition or suffering. Her life is a profound example of commitment to God's word, of trust in Christ alone for everything we need and boldness in witness. Her faith, though tested, never wavered. I have also reflected on the fact that this is a young woman in extraordinary times and certainly extraordinary circumstances, but she's still a teenager. I think Jane is a tremendous encouragement to our young people. You need to know that you believe, know what you believe, know why you believe it. Search the Bible for yourself, ask questions, be courageous in your faith. Don't underestimate the impact that you can have. Your faith and your testimony is just as powerful as someone who's older. Lady Jane Grey, known as the Queen of Nine Days, was remembered at the time and we remember through her history for her faith, for her hope and her deep love. Her life and her death are equally inspiring for their passion for the truth, courage under trial and an unwavering hope in Christ. I'm also impressed by how deeply invested in the scriptures she was and to constantly learning more, being educated, having the word of God in her heart, in her mouth, and knowing that it gave her life and hope. Her love of the scriptures gave her a firm grasp of the truth. It gave her the foundation for her life and her character. It's the same word that we open today, the same word that we use to teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness.

And so maybe your next step this year is spending more time in God's word so that you might have the same assurance, hope and courage that she showed. Read the Bible four or more times a week. Ask God to speak to you about what you're about, to speak to you through what you read. Meet with other people and be challenged and encouraged through his word to continue in faith. We've already heard this morning, it's a great time of year to join a community group. We'll spend some time with someone one-on-one and open the scripture together. Commit to that investment in yourself this year.

Lady Jane was also compelled that everyone should hear and respond to the gospel. She knew that salvation was only to be found in Jesus and she wanted people to know that. Even in the faith, she had fought in her short life to proclaim that it isn't a works-based gospel. It's not something we can earn or buy. God loved the world so much that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jane knew that God loved her that much. She had nothing to fear in this world because her eternal life was assured. Her words after darkness, I hope for light, were realised in her own life and convey for us too the assurance that we can have in Christ.

If that's not your assurance today, my encouragement is that you will take your next step and find out before you leave what God has done for you. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the example of Lady Jane Grey, who remains steadfast in her faith, even to death. Teach us to value your word, trust in Christ alone and to boldly proclaim your truth.

[21:54] Strengthen us to follow her example that we might glorify you in all we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.