

Women of the Reformation II, Anne Askew

Introduction

This afternoon, we continue on with our short series on “Women of the Reformation.” Last time, we considered the life and martyrdom of Lady Jane Grey, who was ultimately beheaded under the orders of her cousin, Queen Mary (“Bloody Mary”). This morning, we continue on with a second woman martyr of the faith, who was an older contemporary of Lady Jane Grey (from 16th century England), who had been put to her death during the reign of King Henry VIII. You briefly hear about this dear saint, Anne Askew, in the biography of Lady Jane Grey that I had used last time. However, I was able to get her full story from another biography, written in the form of a novel, by Leslie S. Nuernberg, titled, “Only Glory Awaits.”

Rather than work through all of the introductory material that we had worked through last time, let me just give you a very brief overview of the timeline within which Anne lived, so as to provide you with a sense of the historical context within which we will be working for this afternoon. If you were not here for the lecture I gave on Lady Jane Grey, listening to that message at sermonaudio.com can be helpful, in giving you a much broader understanding of the time in this regard (which is why it took me so long to work through that message).

Anne Askew was born in 1521, 4 years after Martin Luther had posted his “95 Theses” on the Castle Church door at Wittenberg, and in the exact same year that Luther was officially excommunicated from the RCC by Pope Leo. And so, Anne is born in the heat of the reformation, and she grows up during the time that it is spreading like wildfire, in the face of great opposition and persecution. To give you an additional perspective, Anne was born about 16 years prior to the birth of Prince Edward and Lady Jane Grey, who were both born in 1537. Mary Tudor (later, Queen Mary) was about five years older than Anne. And Anne was martyred in 1546 (one year before King Henry VIII died, and Prince Edward ascended the throne).

Anne was only a little over the age of 1, when her natural mother died, after giving birth to Anne’s younger sister, Jane. She was born in a family of very high nobility, rank and wealth, and her father, Sir William Askew was well established in King Henry’s court. Sir William owned the Lincolnshire estates. When Anne was about 3 1/2, her father had remarried a woman, Dane Elizabeth Hansard. Anne had four older siblings, Francis, Christopher, Edward and

Martha, and two younger siblings, Jane, and the only child shared by Sir William and Elizabeth, Thomas.

Throughout the course of Anne's young life, the Roman Catholic and Protestant battle for power, in seeking to sway King Henry one way or their other, was fierce and ongoing. Again, remember, King Henry, though Roman Catholic by label, was really concerned with politics and whatever he saw as advantageous to his kingdom. And so, he could swing one way or the other, and there were both RC's and Protestants in the royal court (and on the royal council), who were vying for the king's favor toward their respective causes. As we saw last time, one of the key blows to the RC side of the equation was when the Pope refused to allow King Henry to get an annulment with his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. However, Henry would still often totter back into RC favor, just without accepting the authority of the Pope. Remember, KH ultimately declared himself supreme ruler over the Church of England.

I. Anne's Conversion

Francis, Anne's oldest brother was a devout Christian, who sat under the teaching of Thomas Cranmer, the Bishop of Canterbury, who was well respected by the king (he granted KH the annulment) and who was a strong proponent of the Reformation in England. Francis was also greatly influenced by the writings of Martin Luther and William Tyndale, whose anti-catholic tracts and books, though banned by the RCC, were spreading around because of the printing press. Anne was very close to Francis, and had been deeply influenced by him, concerning matters of the reformation. He would bring her pamphlets and tracts written by the Reformers, which she ate up, and loved to discuss with Francis. This ultimately led to her conversion at age 11, when Francis challenged her, out of concern that her interest in spiritual matters would be something that not only informed her mind, but was actually appropriated to her own heart and life, before God. Let me read a few quotes about her conversion, which I think are very edifying and can be especially helpful to us and to our children. [Read pgs. 12-13]

II. The (Lincolnshire) Peasant Revolt (Summer of 1536)

Anne Boleyn, King Henry's second wife, who was a Protestant, was executed by the king in 1536, after he had falsely accused her of multiple infidelities as a means of getting rid of her without going through the same difficulties that he had gone through when he had sought an annulment with Catherine of Aragon, his first wife. The Pope (Paul III) thought this would be a great opportunity to reconcile with England and to regain his influence. However, Henry enjoyed his power and immediately defeated such a notion, especially as he began to penalize anyone who had sought to recognize the authority of the Pope, while placing heavy taxes on those portions of the land that were occupied by monasteries, abbeys and other RC assets. Henry was looking to replenish the royal coffers, which were diminishing, and the RCC felt the brunt of this taxation. Monks and priests, who were formerly living lush lives, were deeply affected by these actions, leading the priests to influence the peasants into forming a growing rebellion. This led to a major peasant revolt in the summer of 1536.

Thomas Cromwell oversaw the assessment of these taxes on RC properties, on behalf of the king. Sir William Askew (Anne's father) was called to serve under Cromwell, along with other nobles, to carry out the King's orders in retrieving the taxes which the king had imposed. Naturally, this put him (and the others) in a very unfavorable position among the general population, leading to a major event that would greatly affect his family going forward. To make a long story short, Sir William & the men who were with him were ultimately taken hostage by the peasants, even having some of their own servants turn on them. And a large group of peasants also went to Sir William's home, where they took Francis and Thomas hostage as well, and used them as a means of forcing Sir William to lead one of the peasant brigades (because they had no military experience). Although Sir William and his men did everything to remain loyal to the king, and probably even saved the king from being overthrown (by encouraging the peasants to delay their attack), following the revolt, King Henry never trusted Sir William again, thinking the worst of his intentions. This significantly reduced Sir William's position in the kingdom and also diminished his wealth, pretty significantly, although he was still relatively secure financially.

All of that said, the whole ordeal that Sir William was involved in, was about ten days long, and it really taxed his family. For Anne, this deeply impacted her prayer life, leading her to

the place where her faith in God (and trust in His providential workings), had to supersede all of her fears. She had really come to trust God, placing her brothers and her father in His hands. Also, she had come to further embrace the writings of Martin Luther, and the Reformed faith (pgs. 67-68). However, Elizabeth, Anne's stepmother lost whatever little trust she had in God, seeing both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism as the causes of these kinds of problems. Furthermore, she had lost her former husband and a son, to bouts with a deadly illness ("the sweating sickness"), and so, the stress of potentially losing her present husband and her son Thomas (through this revolt), overwhelmed her to the point that she was done with God. This is important, because it created a deep-seated, ever increasing tension between her and Anne, as she grew to despise Anne's faith.

Elizabeth's bitterness and frustration toward Anne became evident as she continually sought to stop Anne from witnessing to the servants, evangelizing the village commoners, and speaking biblical truth to Elizabeth, which she found to be a nuisance. However, Anne would not stop doing what she believed to be the Lord's work. No form of discipline could keep her from serving the Lord in these ways. [Note: Her dad did try to encourage her to pull back a bit, at least, from quoting the Bible to her stepmother. Anne seemed to be over zealous in this matter]

III. Anne's Older Sister, Martha, Dies

When Anne was 18, her 22 year old sister, Martha, was set to be given in marriage to a man, named, Thomas Kyme, who was a wealthy farmer that had much property and livestock. While Martha was happy to be given in marriage to Thomas, Anne did not like Thomas at all. If his rugged, heathen like personality weren't enough, Thomas was a Roman Catholic. However, Anne did what she could to show support to her sister.

Sadly, Martha who was naturally frail and often ill, had gotten very sick before she was ever able to marry Thomas, leading to her untimely death. This was another blow to Elizabeth, Anne's stop mom, who yet again, grew furious with Anne for still having faith in her God. That said, Martha was converted on her deathbed, in a most profound way. It was Anne's turn to stay awake and to watch after Martha, who was asleep and nearing death. As Anne held Martha's

hand and began to nod off herself, something profound happened. Let me read the account of this event to you, from the book. [Read pgs. 92-94]

IV. Anne's Marriage to Thomas Kyme

Following the death of Martha, Anne was faced with one of the most difficult providences of her entire life. Since Martha was now out of the picture, Thomas Kyme had expressed an interest in marrying Anne, in her sister's place. When Anne's parents approached her with this news, expressing their desire for Anne to consent, Anne was utterly crushed and expressed her absolute refusal to marry Thomas. No threat of discipline or repercussions could sway her to change her mind. She could not stand Thomas Kyme.

However, after Francis had exhorted her to be obedient to her parents, and after considering the possibility that God might just use her to bring Thomas and others to the true faith through this means, and after many, many tears and heartache, she finally, but very reluctantly, consented. Her sorrowful demeanor at the wedding (in April of 1539) betrayed her true feelings, and while Thomas (and others) would have attributed this sorrow to wedding jitters and the natural challenge for a young woman to leave her home, Francis knew that Anne was broken, and this deeply saddened him. Later on, Francis had regretted encouraging Anne to marry Thomas.

To say that Anne's marriage to Thomas was strained, would be a gross understatement. Right from the outset, when Thomas was out working, Anne had her belongings moved from Thomas's room, into a guest room, where she could maintain a degree of privacy, while allowing Thomas conjugal visits, so as to seek to fulfill her marriage vows. All in all, Anne just could not give her heart to Thomas. Thomas grew very bitter and angry toward Anne, but he was no match for her witty responses and use of Scripture, to support her actions. In all fairness, Thomas was not a believer (he was RC) and one could appreciate how frustrating it would be to have a wife who was distant and contrary. After reading 1 Peter 3:1, Anne was convicted to work on submitting better to Thomas, and she did, but even then, it was still limited. Two of the other main points of contention that existed between Thomas and Anne was 1) Anne *rightly* refused to partake in the Mass with Thomas, which greatly embarrassed him, because, being a wealthy

man, he had his own private mass in his home, and those who partook with him, witnessed the fact that his wife was never present. And 2) Anne would go out in the countryside and evangelize, often speaking against the RC church, its traditions and the mass. A local priest, Vicar Jordan would continually rebuke and put pressure upon Thomas, for not being able to control his wife in these regards. All of this was demeaning and embarrassing to Thomas, who again, was a well to do, well known, very successful farmer. And, no matter what he said or did, Anne had refused to compromise on what she considered to be her general responsibilities to God and His kingdom. [Keep in mind, Anne is generally unchurched]

In fact, Anne did get a following, which met with her at a place called, "Lucas Cottage." One woman in particular, by the name of Sarah Lucas, to whom this cottage apparently belonged, was a true and faithful convert. This gave Anne great encouragement in the midst of her very difficult (and sometimes abusive) circumstances back at home. Two other major events happened while Anne was married to Thomas. One, she had received word that her father, Sir William, had passed away, and this obviously brought great grief to her heart. And then, secondly, her younger brother, Thomas, had died in an accident, where he was thrown off of a horse, while attempting to jump a ravine. He had broken his neck. Needless to say, Elizabeth, Anne's stepmother (and Thomas's natural mother) was broken beyond repair now; virtually catatonic, remaining in her room most of the time.

V. King Henry's Edict

When Anne and Thomas had first gotten married, something had happened, of which they were not aware, which would ultimately lead to the deep persecutions and martyrdom of Anne. [Read pgs. 133 1/2 -134]. The news of this decree took time to reach Friskney, where Thomas and Anne lived, but when it did, it posed great trouble for Anne, who was very outspoken about her faith and often taught against the RC doctrine. Out of fear for their lives, the women who were meeting at Lucas Cottage, stopped attending Anne's gatherings, with the exception of Sarah Lucas, whose faith remained strong. The King's decree did nothing to move Anne, who again, was determined to honor God and not men. That said, further threats came from Vicar Jordan, both to Anne, and to Thomas, who had failed to restrain his wife.

Finally, Thomas snapped under all of the pressure, and in a fit of rage, he barged into Anne's room. Finding reformation literature and tracts, he tossed them into the fire, and ignoring Anne's pleas, he took her Bible away and left the room. He hid her Bible in a secret compartment in one of the dressers that was located in his bedroom. During this time, Anne relied on the many Scriptures that she had memorized, to maintain her spiritual vigor. Furthermore, Thomas mocked Anne's faith, leading her to refuse to sit down to eat with him. Thomas then commanded his servants not to give her any food, until she had agreed to sit down with him to eat. Much to his chagrin, Anne still refused, and after a week had passed without Anne eating, Thomas relented and allowed her to receive food, mostly, because he was afraid that he would be held responsible for her death, should she die in this way.

Then, everything hit the fan on one occasion. Joane, who was Anne's personal and faithful servant (sent with her, when she had married Thomas) had overheard Thomas speaking to others about where he had hid Anne's Bible. At the risk of her own life, Joane snuck into Thomas's room, located the Bible, took it, and brought it to Anne. One of Thomas's servants had secretly observed what had happened and reported it to Thomas. Thomas went into another rage, barged into Anne's room, started tossing her dresses out of the closet and onto the floor, and demanded that she leave immediately. Anne, much obliged to leave, left many of her belongings behind, so that she could flee before Thomas changed his mind. Anne and Joane then headed back to Anne's home, where Francis was now in charge of the estate. Thomas later regretted what he had done, not because he cared about Anne, but because the RCC would frown upon it. Under much, ongoing pressure then, he would continually write to Francis, seeking to retrieve his wife, first, cordially, and then, as time went on, with significant threats.

VI. Off To London

Anne was thrilled to be back at home, where she was determined to commit herself to remaining single (and in the service of the Lord), especially evangelizing in the local town square. She also knew that she needed to seek an annulment from her marriage to Thomas, especially since he had thrown her out, and was even abusive at times. However, after hearing Anne testify, the local council rejected Anne's plea, and ordered her to return to Thomas at

Friskney. With Thomas sending threatening letters, and the council's decision finalized, Francis had encouraged Anne to flee to London, where she might find refuge under the care of her other brother, Edward, who was now an avid Christian, and who held a high position in the king's court, within Thomas Cranmer's inner circle. Anne's second oldest brother, Christopher, had died a year earlier, and so, Edward was now her only option. And so, Anne did just that.

Edward had secured lodgings for Anne close to Westminster, receiving her with open arms. For the first time, Anne was able to sit under sound, biblical preaching, as she got involved with a reformed fellowship, with the help of a godly man and a fervent evangelist (especially to the poor), named, John Lascelles. Anne's soul was fed like never before, through the preaching that she had encountered at this fellowship. And she was thoroughly blessed to be among those of like mind and faith now. John Lascelles was an important figure, because he was the one who had discovered the infidelities of Catherine Howard, King Henry's then beautiful wife (who was Roman Catholic). When he had reported her immoral behavior to Cranmer, Cranmer reported it to the king, and Catherine was executed. While this helped serve the purposes of the Reformation, Lascelles became a targeted man from the Roman Catholic nobility. Furthermore, this added pressure to the King's RC council members to seek to enact the King's edict, further ridding the country of reformers, before the tides should possibly change.

Early on, Lascelles sought to test Anne's faith by bringing her into the most poverty stricken part of the city, to see how she would respond to the lowest class, which dwelt in the midst of the most wretched of conditions. When she had removed her own, expensive cape and covered a cold woman's shoulders with it, while helping the woman quiet her crying baby, Lascelles knew that Anne was the real deal. Furthermore, Anne's heart was deeply moved for these lost and suffering souls, and this became an evangelistic stomping ground for her. Anne had had a tender heart for the lost of all social classes.

Only in London for four months, Anne became well known throughout the city, because of her fervent evangelistic labors. She was even brought to meet the new queen, Catherine Parr, who was a devout Christian. Anne found herself among the queen's ladies, having Bible studies with the queen, who had come to greatly respect Anne's faith. However, with that popularity, came trouble. The RC opposition also took notice, and began to set its crosshairs on Anne, as

well. Anne was very bold and outspoken about her faith and her opposition to RC doctrine, and this put her in a very dangerous situation. Nonetheless, Anne was not moved by such circumstances and threats, and continued to remain faithful.

VII. Anne Faces Severe Roman Catholic Opposition

Two Roman Catholic men, in particular, are worthy of note, who were in significant positions of power at the time, and who were bent on overthrowing the reformation. The first is Steven Gardiner, who was the Bishop of Winchester. The second was Thomas Wriothesley, who had originally come into the king's court through Thomas Cromwell, as a proponent of the reformation, but had later shifted his support to Roman Catholicism, when it was advantageous for him to do so, bringing him into a very high position of respect with the king. Anne, who was becoming more and more known for her great evangelistic labors, came onto the radar of these two men, and they wanted to quench her flame.

As they set their eyes on Anne, they found out about her marriage to Thomas Kyme and her failure to return to Thomas in accordance with the council's ruling. They jumped on this opportunity, calling her to their chancery court, where they again ordered her to return to her husband. Anne's brother Edward pled with her to leave London, understanding that if she defied the court ruling, she would be in great danger, and he would be incapable of helping her at this point. The following is an excerpt from Anne's interaction with Edward [Read pgs. 170-171].

It wasn't long before Anne's refusal to obey the court's order had come back to Wriothesley. Wriothesley then saw this as an opportunity for bringing charges of heresy against Anne. However, his original intent was to work on getting her to recant her beliefs, which he thought would be helpful in bringing a blow to the reformation. He knew that if she were put to death, more often than not, martyrdom actually served to fuel the fire of the reformation. And so, getting her to recant and compromise was his goal. Anne was then arrested and forced to appear at Saddler's Hall, London, on March 10, 1546, where they would work to achieve Wriothesley's goal.

VIII. Anne On Trial

The main question which the court sought to force Anne to address, was her view of the RC Mass, and particularly whether or not the bread and the wine became the actual body and blood of Christ. If they could get her to confess her denial of this truth, then they would have her where they want her, and be able to, upon severe threat, seek to compel her to recant. According to the King's edict, it was illegal to contradict the RC doctrine of Transubstantiation in this regard. However, Anne, knowing their underhanded design, used great wit in responding to their questions about this matter. From the outset, Anne knew that she was not dealing with biblical scholars, but mere RC puppets, and she took advantage of this. [Read pgs. 178-182].

Anne continued to frustrate the courts in these ways, and even when RC theologians were brought in, they could not pin her down. She endured twelve days in prison and a constant barrage of attacks, attempting to pin her down, but her interrogators only wound up frustrated every time. Finally, with the help of Edmond Bonner, Bishop of London, her accusers developed a plan which they knew could not fail. Anne was to stand in the presence of an assembly of several archdeacons, theologians and Bishop Bonner himself, where Anne's supporters were also intentionally welcomed to observe the interrogation. Bonner provided a written document, which contained the RC teaching on the Mass, which was in accordance with the king's law, and asked her to sign in agreement with the document. By doing this, it forced Anne to reveal whether or not she was in agreement with the teachings. Recognizing that this could be the end of the line for Anne, many of her supporters urged her to sign the document, telling her that they all knew what she really believed, and that God knew her heart in the matter. Here's an account of what happened [pgs. 199-201].

IX. Anne Returns to South Kelsey Hall (at Lincoln)

Refusing to go back to Thomas, and overwhelmed by all that had happened in London, Anne returned home to Francis, determined never to give in again, in the way that she had done when she had signed the RC document.

King Henry was growing very ill at this time, and Bishop Steven Gardiner knew that his days were numbered. Prince Edward, Henry's son, was an avid Protestant, and once Henry

passed, the tides of the spiritual climate would surely shift away from Roman Catholicism. Gardiner knew he had little time to do all that he could to squelch the reformation, and so, he put all of his energy into seeking to do so, while he still had some time. Gardiner had already had John Lascelles and several others arrested for heresy. However, at this point, he had especially set his crosshairs on a much bigger prize, the Queen, Catherine Parr, whom he knew was a very influential, adamant, (and yet, cautious) Protestant. Taking advantage of a moment of weakness, Gardiner and Wriothsley were given the opportunity to bring charges against the queen, if they could secure proof of the Queen's treasonous doctrines. An opportunity came for them to secure evidence against the queen, through the following circumstances, involving Anne Askew.

All manner of people were called to stand before the courts, as Gardiner and Wriothsley sought to quell the reformation. To this end, Thomas Kyme and Anne, were both called to appear before the court as well, and they had ten days to show up. Having received several threatening letters from Thomas already, concerning the return of his wife, Anne, Francis went into a panic, when he received another letter, stating that Thomas himself was coming to South Kelsey Hall, and he was bringing the authorities with him to take Anne. At this point, Thomas, longing to remarry, just wanted to get rid of Anne altogether. And so, he had drawn up formal charges of heresy against her, with the hope of having her condemned and put to death. Now, he aimed to take Anne by force, to the courts, to accomplish this end.

Francis, determined to protect his sister, sent Anne away to one of the Lincolnshire cottages, to hide, so that she would not be found. When Thomas had arrived with the authorities, Francis denied knowing of Anne's whereabouts. However, when they searched the house, they found a letter from Anne to Francis (which Francis was unaware of), where Anne was letting Francis know that she was doing well in the cottage. Ultimately, Thomas and the officers found Anne and arrested her, and brought her to the court in London. Just before this happened, when Anne was warned of Thomas's coming, she hid her Bible under a sheet of raw dough and put it in an oven. Later on, following her guilty verdict, she told Joane (her faithful servant), that she wanted her to have it.

X. Anne's Trial and Guilty Verdict

While in custody, Anne had spent much time in prayer, and was determined not to falter or compromise in any way, this time. On June 19, 1546, Thomas and Anne were summoned to appear before the council in Greenwich. Wriothesley and Gardiner were both part of this council. Anne first gave her defense for not returning to Thomas, but it was rejected. Thomas was allowed to go free at this point. Anne had stood strong through constant questioning by the members of the council, for very long periods of time. She had eventually become physically ill, lethargic, dizzy, exhausted and weak, but none of that moved the council to slow the trial or to ease her living conditions, at one point, when she was again moved into a prison. Again, the major doctrinal issue that they were trying to nail her on, was the doctrine of the Mass. However, this time, Anne would sign no documents, and at times, she would refuse to speak at all, which irked the council members. Anne had even passed out a few times from her illness, but she hardly found any sympathy from the council. Finally, Anne just boldly confessed what she had believed concerning the Mass, sealing her own death warrant. Anne was condemned and sentenced to death by burning [Read pg. 227-228]. However, this was not the end of the matter.

XI. Anne's Martyrdom

Gardiner and Wriothesley found their opportunity to secure evidence against the Queen. If they could link the Queen to Anne (who was now a condemned heretic), they could secure the Queen's demise, charging her with being sympathetic to a heretic. All they needed to do was to get Anne to admit that the Queen was associated with her, and that, some of the Queen's ladies had helped Anne throughout the course of her imprisonment.

Repeated attempts to get Anne to recant failed, and securing any kind of confession from her, regarding her connection to the Queen, was not going to come easy. Wriothesley then determined to do whatever it took to get this confession out of Anne, even doing something that had never been done before. He would put Anne on the rack in the White Tower! Even the masked jailor (who had no problem administering such torture to men) was deathly afraid of doing this, informing Wriothesley that this was illegal. Seeing Anne as a condemned heretic, Wriothesley could care less at this point. He needed this confession.

At first, and at the threat of being punished, the jailor (Sir Anthony Knyvett) hooked Anne up to the wrack, as he was told that they would only scare Anne and stretch her out minimally. However, when Anne had refused to betray the Queen, Wriothesley had determined to go to any length to secure a confession. At this point, the jailor refused to cooperate and Wriothesley himself, took off his his cumbersome outer coat and decided to administer the torture himself. The jailor slipped out and went to report what was being done illegally.

Wriothesley stretched Anne out so far that he had broken one of her ankles, and brought her to the point that she would never be able to walk again. She would have to be carried around from this point on. Nonetheless, he did not get his confession. Anne held her own.

When Anne was returned to her cell, she had completed a manuscript of all of the events that she had faced, including the barbaric treatment she had received, and had it smuggled out by Joane, her maid. Joane got the manuscript to the Protestants and word spread, about all that had happened to Anne, and this served to further fuel the zeal of the reformers, while embarrassing those who had so grossly and harshly tortured an innocent young woman (Anne was only 24).

It was at this point when, as I had spoken about last time, Wriothesley and Gardiner had been rebuked by the king, just as they were about to condemn the Queen. Catherine Parr had appealed to Henry, after discovering their plot, and he received her back. Later on, Wriothesley and Gardiner were confined to the tower, but not before Anne was executed. Anne had actually sent a letter to Wriothesley and the king, requesting pardon (for her innocence), and she probably would have been freed by the king, at this point. However, Wriothesley burned her letters in the fire, never allowing them to reach the king. He was determined to see her burn at this point.

Finally then, Anne, along with John Lascelles and a few other men, were brought to the place where they would be burned. Here are a couple of noteworthy comments that describe what happened there. [Pg. 248 - circus atmosphere; pgs. 249-252]

Epilogue

[Read pg. 253]

Only Glory Awaits by Leslie S. Nuernberg