

The Trial & Triumph of Faith

SERMON 4

By **Rev. Samuel Rutherford**

“The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation.”

MUCH woe is denounced by the prophets against Tyrus and Sidon; yet sweet Jesus draweth aside the curtain, and openeth a window of the partition, and saveth this woman. Lo, here Christ “planting in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, the myrtle, the oil tree,” (Isa. 41:19;) and here, Isa. 55:13, is fulfilled, “And instead of the thorn (what better are Sidonians than thorns?) shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar, shall come up the myrtle tree; (and no praise to the ground, but to the good Husbandman:) and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off.” Christ, then, can make and frame a fair heaven out of an ugly hell, and out of the knottiest timber he can make vessels of mercy, for service in the high palace of glory.

1. What are they all, who are now glorified? The fairest face that standeth before the throne of redeemed ones, was once inked and blackened with sin. You should not know Paul now, with a crown of a king on his head: he looketh not now like a “blasphemer, a persecutor, an injurious person.” The woman that had once seven devils in her, is a Mary Magdalene far changed, and grace made the change.

2. Grace is a new world. (Heb. 2:5.) The land of grace hath two summers in one year. “The inhabitants shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein, shall be forgiven their iniquity.” (Isa. 33:24.) “Whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die.” (John 11:26.) They are not mortal men that are in grace; there is neither sickness nor death in that land.

3. We say of such a physician, He hath cured diseases that never man could; he cured stark death; then you may commit your body to him, he is a tried physician. Christ hath made a rare copy, a curious sampler of mercy, of the apostle Paul; for in him he hath shown all “long-suffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe in him to life eternal.” (1 Tim. 1:16.) Heaven is a house full of miracles; yea, of spectacles and images of free grace. You may entrust your soul, with all its diseases, to Christ; he hath given many rare proofs of his tried art of grace; he hath made many black limbs of hell fair saints in heaven: such a man, such an artificer, threw down an old dungeon of clay, and made it up a fair palace of gold.

Objection. But what am I, a lump of unrepenting guiltiness and sin, to such a vessel of mercy, as holy Paul, and repenting Mary Magdalene? Answer. Grace, as it is in God, and fitness to receive grace in us, is just alike to all. There was no more reason why Paul should obtain mercy, than why thou, or any other sinner like thee, should obtain mercy. There is a like reason for me to have noble and broad thoughts of the rich grace of Christ, as for Abraham, Moses, David, all the prophets and apostles to believe. There was no greater ransom given by Christ to buy faith and free grace for Noah, Job, and Daniel, to Moses and Samuel, than to poor and sinful me: it is one cause, one ransom, one free love. If there had a nobler and worthier Redeemer died for Moses and Paul, than for you and me; and another heaven, and a freer grace purchased to them, than to me, I should have been discouraged: grace is grace to thee, as to meek Moses: Christ is Christ to thee, as to believing Abraham. And further, The same grace that is here, is in heaven. (1.) As faith that is freely given us, is the conquest of the new heir, Jesus Christ, (John 6:44; Phil. 1:29; Eph. 1:3,) so are all Christ's bracelets about our neck in heaven, and the garland of glory, the free grace of God. It is the same day-light when the sun breaketh forth out of the east, and at noon-day in the highest meridian. Though we change places when we die, we change not husbands. (2.) We stand here by free grace. (Rom. 5:2.) Repentance and remission of sins are freely given here to Israel, by the exalted Prince Christ Jesus. (Acts 5:31.) Our tears are bought with that common ransom; so the high inns of the royal court of heaven is a free and open house, and no bill put upon the inhabitants; neither fine, nor stent, nor excise, nor assessment, nor taxation; all is upon the royal charges of the Prince of the kings of the earth. There is no more hire, merit, wages, or fees there than here; the income of glory for eternity, and the life-rent of ages of blessedness, is all the goodwill of Him who sitteth on the throne. Every apple of the tree of life is grace; every sip, every drop of the sea and river of life, is the purchase of the blood of the Lamb that is in the midst of them. (3.) They be as poor without Christ who are there, as we are. Glory is grace, and their dependency for ages of ages is, that the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne, does feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God wipeth away all tears from their eyes. (Rev. 7:17.) Then they cannot walk there alone, but as the Lamb leadeth them; and if Christ were not there, or if he should take grace, glory, and all his own jewels and ornaments from Moses and Enoch, there should remain no more there but poor nature. As good angels do therefore not fall, because in Christ, the Head of angels, they are confirmed, (and if they lacked this confirming grace, they might yet fall, and become apostate devils,) so the glorified in heaven do therefore stand, and are confirmed in the inheritance, not by free-will there, more than here; but by immediate dependence of grace on the Lamb, whom they follow whithersoever he goeth. Grace, then, for kind, is as good as heaven. Glory, glory to our ransom-payer!

3. Her little daughter was vexed (Kakos daimonizetai, she is exceedingly devilled,) she saith, or grievously tormented with a devil. Then observe, that

common punishments of sin, and sad afflictions do follow justified persons, as well as the wicked; for it was a sad burden to the mother, that the devil had such a dominion over her daughter; yet the text cleareth, that she was a justified person, as her instancy of praying, adoring, and great faith, even prevailing over Christ, under sad trials, do manifestly evidence. And we see the reasons that the Scripture allegeth, (1.) That the gold of precious faith, and the upright metal therein, may be seen. (1 Pet. 1:7.) Afflictions are the servants and pursuivants of the accusing law, sent out to cause us lay hold, by faith, on peace made, and pardon purchased in Christ. The hot furnace is the workhouse of Christ; in that fire he taketh away the scum, the dross, the refuse of the true metal, that faith may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearance of Jesus Christ. (2.) Afflictions drive us to seek God, they being God's firemen; and his hired labourers, sent to break the clods, and to plough Christ's land, that he may sow heaven there; but Christ must bring new earth to the soil. In prosperity we come to God, but in a common way; as the grave man came to the theatre, only that he might go out again. But in trouble, the saints do more than come; they make a friendly visit when they come. Also, the prayers of the saints in prosperity, are but summer prayers, slow, lazy, and alas! too formal. In trouble, they rain out prayers, or cast them out in co-natural violence, as a fountain doth cast out waters. Both these are in one well expressed by the prophet: "Lord, in trouble they have visited thee; they pour out a prayer when thy chastening hand is on them." (Isa. 26:16.) (3.) We must be made like Christ, in the cross and the crown, (2 Tim. 2:12,) and conform to him. (Rom. 8:29.) Christ the corner-stone: though there was no sin in him, yet before he was made the chief corner-stone, he was by death hammered. (Acts 4:10-12.) And much more, the strokes and smiting of the cross must knock down all the superfluity of naughtiness, and every height, till by smoothing and chipping, the child of God be made a stone, in breadth, length, proportion, smoothness, some way conform to the first copy, and to Christ the sampler-stone. There is a 4th reason, but it is a controverted one: The justified person may be afflicted for sin. Some teach that this is Popery, to affirm, that the justified bear the punishment of their sin; because, Christ only was wounded for our iniquity, and did bear, in his own body, our sins on the tree: therefore (say they) respect seemeth to be had (as one speaketh) to sin, not principally, but secondarily and occasionally; not as it offendeth God, who by that one sacrifice is for ever pacified, (Heb. 10:14; Matt. 3,) but as it offendeth and diseaseth the minds of the faithful: not that afflictions simply, properly, and immediately do ease, quiet, and cure the conscience, (for their natural effect is to deject and terrify, as appendices of the law;) but that they awaken and stir up our dullness, to a lively apprehension of Christ's righteousness. And so, while God, as a father, correcteth for sin, sin hath not properly with God the nature of sin, which is an offence of Divine justice, but is considered as a disease troubling his child; which in love, and in pity, he seeketh to make riddance of, in manner aforesaid, and not in anger and displeasure.

It is true, Papists hold, that when God forgiveth sin in David, he forgiveth not the punishment; for David is punished with the sword on his house for that same sin:

but it is known, that this doctrine is a too-fall and pillar, to underprop the chamber in hell, which they call Purgatory: and that their meaning is, that punishment inflicted on a justified person, is a punishment satisfactory to the justice of God; that so, they may make the merits of the saints suffering, to ride up, as a collateral sharer with the high and noble blood of the killed Lamb of God, who only satisfactorily taketh away the sins of the world. This we disclaim; but, on the other hand, we hold, that there is another justice in God, than that legal and sin-revenging justice, which Christ's sufferings have expiated and fully satisfied, both in regard of God's acceptance, and of the intrinsical worth of the death of him who was God, the Prince of life. And this other justice, is also the justice of an offended father, correcting, though in mercy, (and so it is a mixed justice,) the sins of the saints as sins:

1. Because the sins of the saints are not only the offending of divine revenging justice, but also, a wrong done against this mixed justice, and against the mercy and kindness of God, (2 Sam. 12:7-9; Exod. 20:1,2; Psalm 81:6,7,10,11; and 78:11-13,42,53-56; Deut.32:11-18; Amos 3:2.) And therefore God doth punish, in his own, sins as sins.

2. Those who are not to perish with the world, are, for this cause, (because they eat and drink unworthily), sick, and punished with death. (1 Cor. 11:30,32,33.) It is clearly against the text, that Mr. Towne saith, That a justified person, having the least measure of faith, cannot eat and drink unworthily; the smallest faith maketh them worthy; and so those who, in that text, did eat unworthily, did but dally with the gospel, and never actually put on Christ. But faith doth no more hinder a justified person to receive the Lord's supper unworthily, than it doth hinder him to commit adultery, or incest, or to kill; and whosoever should come to the Lord's table under these sins, without repenting, should eat and drink unworthily; and such a sin may a believer according to God's heart (as David was) commit. And there is great odds between being unworthy, and eating unworthily. All believers, of themselves, are unworthy of Christ and salvation, but being in Christ by faith, they are counted worthy; and yet they may eat and drink unworthily. But Mr. Towne's sense seemeth to carry, that a justified person cannot sin, nor eat and drink unworthily, because faith maketh him worthy: and if so, the way of grace is a wanton merry way; the justified are freed from the law, and from any danger of sinning.

3. Nothing is more evident, than that David was punished according to the rule of that mixed and fatherly justice, which keeps a due proportion between the sin and the punishment. His sin was, to cut off Uriah's house out of Israel; God sendeth the sword against his house, all his days. He took another man's wife secretly, and did commit filthiness with her; the Lord took his wives, before the sun, and gave them to Absalom, who defiled his bed. (2 Sam. 12.) Here is justice, though, I grant, mixed with mercy; sword for sword, bed for bed. Eli honoured his sons more than God, and suffered them to profane priesthood and sacrifices; justice rooted out his sons from priesthood and sacrifice. Hezekiah,

out of his pride, showed all his treasures, and all that was in his house, to the king of Babylon's messengers; and justice measured out the like to him: all that was in his house, and all his treasures, were carried away as a spoil to Babylon.

4. "Slay old and young—begin at my sanctuary." (Ezek. 9:6.) "And behold thou shalt be dumb—because thou believest not my word." (Luke 1:20.) The church of God, in terminis, saith so much: "The Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against his commandment." (Lamen. 1:18,) "The yoke of my transgression is bound by his hand; they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck." (verse 14.) "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?" (chap. 3:39.) "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." (verse 40.) "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, against whom we have sinned?" (Isa. 42:24.) "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned." (Micah 7:9.) "For through the anger of the Lord it came to pass in Jerusalem, and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon." (2 Kings 24:20.) It is not of weight that is brought, to take off the force of these pregnant scriptures. The church, consisting of mixed persons, good and bad, elect and reprobate, (say they,) is, according to the wicked party, punished in justice, but not the believing party. But I answer, all Judah, good and ill, Jeremiah, Daniel, and all the holy seed, were involved with the perverse and obstinate idolaters, in the same common calamity of a sad captivity. And it was not the ill figs, and stiff-necked idolaters, that did confess the Lord's righteousness, and their own rebellion against the Lord; nor did the wicked party enter into a trial of their ways, and acknowledge, that the unregenerate man only suffereth for his sins; nor did any of that side, with patience, hope, and silence, bear the indignation of the Lord: it was the true church, God's Jacob, the meek of the earth, that did thus stoop to God's correction; and yet these same were punished for their sins, as they acknowledge. (Lam. 1:18; Mic. 7:9.)

5. This is also against the covenant, and threatenings thereof: "And if ye walk contrary to me, and will not hearken to me, I will bring seven times more plagues on you," etc. (Lev. 26:21-40.) "If then (in their heavy afflictions) their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity," (verse 41,) "Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob." (verse 42.) "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments," etc. (Psalm 89:30,) "Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." (verse 32.) "Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him," etc. (verse 33.) Nothing is more evident, than that those who are in the covenant of grace, from whom God cannot remove the sure mercies of David, are visited for their iniquities, with temporal rods.

6. It is against God's anger and displeasure at the sins of his own children; for God is really angry at his own children's sins; and why then doth he not punish them for their sins? "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses." (Exod. 4:14.) "Also the Lord was angry with me for your sake." (Deut. 1:37.) And the

story showeth, because Moses sanctified not the Lord at the waters of Meribah, God would not suffer him to set his foot in the holy land. "God was angry with Solomon." (2 Chron. 11:9.) "The Lord was very angry with Aaron." (Deut. 1:20.) The prophet Jehu said to Jehoshaphat, that good king, "There is wrath upon thee from the Lord." (2 Chron. 19:2.) "For in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour I have had mercy upon thee." (Isa. 60:10.)

7. The contrary error is founded upon two other errors, That all afflictions are subservient officers and sergeants to the law; and so, they are signs of God's wrath, as is the law: And as believers are freed from the ruling power of the law, so also, from the rod. But this is false; for God's rod, of itself, is neither a sign of revenging justice, nor of free mercy; but it taketh its nature and specification from the intention and mind of God: all these externals fall alike to elect and reprobate. The repenting thief, and the blaspheming thief are under the same rod of God; both die a violent death. Wicked Ahab, and good Josiah are both killed in war. The botches and agues threatened in the law, (Deut. 28:60,) are upon Job, (chap. 2:7) What maketh the same rod, to be a work of revenging justice, in the reprobate, and of justice mixed and tempered with mercy and fatherly kindness, in the other? Certainly, God's pleasure and wise intention, punishing for different ends, varieth the nature of the rods; so as an intention to take satisfactory vengeance on the reprobate, specifieth his rod, and maketh it punishment of black wrath, of salt and unmixed justice on him. And this intention, is an essential ingredient in satisfactory punishment. God writeth and engraveth upon the toothache of a reprobate, a parcel of hell; and he stampeth upon burning quick, racking and torturing, the engraving of heaven, of mercy and loving-kindness, in the believer. Bastard crosses, and lawfully begotten afflictions have the same father, but not the same mother, (2.) If the patrons of this error could make God's rod as arbitrary, as they fancy the duties of the teaching and ruling law of God to be, they should cry down all crosses, and send all the justified persons to heaven with a pass, securing them from all affliction in the way to heaven; and so, Christ should bring his many children to glory, with dry faces and whole skins. Whereas Christ himself passed to heaven with the tear in his eye, and a bruised soul. The other error is, That Christ hath made a full atonement for sin, and fully satisfied justice for all that are justified in his blood; and therefore, they cannot be punished for sin themselves. But, (1.) There is more in the conclusion than in the premises; ergo, the justified cannot suffer satisfactory punishment for sin, either in whole or in part. This is most true; no man's garments were ever dyed with one drop of red satisfactory vengeance for sin; Christ hath alone trode this winepress, and of all the nations, there were none with him. But yet it no ways followeth, that the regenerate do not suffer punishment for sin, according to the rule of another mixed and tempered justice. (2.) If this argument from Christ's suffering have nerves, it shall conclude, that the elect, before they be justified, are never punished for sin, more than believing saints are; yea, that God is not displeased with Abraham's idolatry before his conversion, nor with Manasseh's blood, nor with Saul's persecution; because Christ paid justice for sins of elect persons committed before justification, as for sins committed after justification.

USE. 1. We can fetch no conclusion of a bad condition from affliction. It is a part of tenderness of conscience in the regenerate, to be too applicatory of the law and of wrath: "I am afflicted above all others, therefore God is angry with me, and I am cast off by God." It is a bad consequence. There be some rules to be observed in affliction: (1.) We are not either to over-argue or to under-argue, neither to faint nor despise. (Heb. 12.) Conscience is too quick-sighted after illumination, and too dull-sighted before. The reasons why we argue from afflictions to God's hatred are, [1.] There is a conscience of a conscience in the believer; that is, even in an enlightened conscience, there is some ill conscience to deem ill of God. "For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes." (Psalm 31:22.) This is a hasty conscience; as we say, Such a one is a hasty man, and soon saddled, easily provoked to anger. This is a conscience soon provoked to anger. [2.] We have not that love and charity to God, that we have to some friend. We have such a love to some dear friend, that all his blacks are white; his seeming injuries to us do not provoke us. We say, I can believe no evil of such a man; and we over-shoot ourselves in an over-charge and surfeit of charity, which proceedeth from an over-plus and dominion of love, to a creature. We are in the other extremity to God and Jesus Christ. Sense of affliction coolth our love, and we cannot extend charity so far to our Lord, as when we see he dealeth hardly with us, to keep the other ear without prejudice, free from the report that affliction, and the sense of affliction, maketh. [3.] The flesh joineth with affliction against God: affliction whispereth wrath, justice, sin, and the flesh saith, That is very true; for flesh hateth God, and so, must slander his dispensation. Ahab could not but slander Micaiah: "He never prophesieth good (saith he) to me." Is not God's truth good? Surely, every word of prophecy is like gold seven times tried. The reason of the slander is given by himself—"I hate him." The other extremity is, that we under-argue in affliction; as [1.] we say, It is not the Lord. The Philistines doubted whether God had sent the emerods on them, for keeping the ark captive, or if chance had done it. It is grace to father the cross right. [2.] We look seldom spiritually on the cross: a carnal eye upon a cross is a plague. "God's anger set him on fire round about, and he knew it not; and it burned him, and he laid it not to heart." (Isa. 42:25.) It is strange, that God's fire should burn a man, and yet, he neither seeth nor feeleth fire. Why? There is something of God in the cross, that the carnal eye cannot see; because, as Zophar saith, "A fire not blown shall consume him." (Job 20:26.) Some make it (and not without reason) a fire that hath no noise of bellows or wind, to make it take fire, and to flame up. Some are burnt, and they neither hear nor see. There is a white powder, that burneth, and maketh no noise or sound. A dumb rod is twice a rod. We scarcely see what God is doing in this war; we are smitten of God in the dark. And so, wicked men never do come lawfully out of affliction; they see not God nor sin; and for that come they not out of prison by the king's keys, but they break the jail, and leap out of a window, the land is to see all the circumstances of this bloody war in these three kingdoms.

USE 2. We are to put a difference between God's afflicting one man, and a whole church. Now, God hath his fire in our Zion, and we wonder that wars have lain on Germany twenty-six years, and that for divers years the sword has been on us in these kingdoms. (1.) There be many vessels to be melted: a fire for an afternoon, or a war for a morning of a day, or a week, cannot do it. Seven days' sickness of a dying child, putteth David to go softly and in sackcloth. Years are little enough to humble proud Scotland and England. God humbled Israel four hundred years and above, in Egypt, and kept them forty years in the wilderness; and Judah must lie smoking in the furnace seventy years. (2.) One temple was forty-six years in building: God hath taken eighty years to reform England, and many years to reform Scotland, and the temple is not built yet: give to our Lord, time; hope, and wait on. (3.) Babylon is a great cedar that cannot fall at the first stroke; it is not a work of one day or a year, to bring that princess, the lady of nations, from her throne of glory, to sit in the dust, and take the millstones and grind meal.

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