

The Trial & Triumph of Faith

SERMON 12

By [Rev. Samuel Rutherford](#)

“And his disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away,” etc.

IN the disciples we see little tenderness: no more but “send her away, she troubleth us with crying.” Forsooth, they were sore slain, that their dainty ears were pained with the crying of a poor woman! Why, they say not, ‘Dear Master, her little daughter is tormented with the devil, and thou, her Saviour, answereth her not one word; she cannot but break her heart; we pray thee, Master, heal her daughter.’

DOCTRINE.—Natural men, or Christ’s disciples, in so far as there is flesh in them, understand not the mystery of sorrow, and fervour of affection in the saints, crying to God in desertion, and not heard, (1.) Natural men jeer at Christ deserted: “He trusted in the Lord, let him deliver him.” (Psalm 22:8.) Heavy was the spirit of the weeping Church, a captive woman at the rivers of Babylon; yet, see, they mock them: ‘Sing us one of the songs of Sion.’ (2.) Even the saints, in so far as they are unrenewed, are strangers to inward conflicts of souls praying, and not answered of God. The fainting and swooning Church is pained; “O dear watchmen, saw you my husband?” (Cant. 5:6,7) Heavy was her spirit, but what then? “The watchmen, that went about the city, found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.” (verse 7.) Instead of binding up her wounds, they returned to her buffets, and pulled her hair down about her ears. And the daughters of Jerusalem say to the sick sighing Church pained for the want of her Lord, “What is thy beloved more than another beloved?” etc. (verse 9.) Whereof is thy Christ made? of gold? or is thy beloved more precious than all beloveds in the world? Troubled Hannah grieved in spirit, to Eli, is a drunken woman. The angels find Mary Magdalene weeping, they leave her weeping, they give her a doctrinal comfort; “Woman, why weepest thou? He is not here, He is risen again.” (1.) If a string in the conscience be broken, the apostles that were with Magdalene cannot tie a knot on it again. If there be a rent in the heart, so as the two sides of the soul of the woman rend asunder, she, poor woman, still weepeth: “Oh, why speak you, O angels, to comfort me? They have taken away my Lord: Angels, what are you to me?” And, indeed, they cannot sew up the woman’s rent heart. This is the Lord’s prerogative, “I create the fruit of the lips, peace.” (Isa. 57:19.) I know no creator but one, and I know no peace-creator but one. Peace of conscience is grace; grace is made of pure nothing, and not made of nature. Pastors may speak of peace, but God speaketh

peace to his people. (Psalm 85:8.) (2.) There be some acts of nature, in which men have no hand: to bring bread out of the earth, and vines, men have a hand; but in raising winds, in giving rain, neither king, armies of men, nor acts of Parliament have any influence. The tempering of the wheels and motions of a distempered conscience is so high and supernatural a work, that Christ behoved to have the Spirit of the Lord on him above his fellows, and must be sent with a special commission to apply the sweet hands, the soft merciful fingers of the Mediator, with the art of heaven, that I (saith he) should, as a chirurgeon [surgeon], bind up with splints and bands the broken in heart, and comfort the mourners in Sion. (Isa. 61:1.) There must, 3rd, be some immediate action of Omnipotency, especially when he sets a host of terrors in battle array against the soul, as is evident in Saul, in Job, "His archers compass me round about;" (16:13,) that is, no less than the soul is like a man, beset by enemies round about, so as there is no help in the creature, but he must die in the midst of them. "The terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." (Job 6:4.) Only, the Lord of Hosts, by an immediate action, raiseth these soldiers, the terrors of God; he only can calm them.

USE 1. What wonder, then, that ministers, the Word, comforts, promises, angels, prophets, apostles, cannot bind up a broken heart? Friends cannot, till a good word come from God. It is easy for us on the shore, to cry to those tossed on the sea between death and life, "Sail thus and thus." It is nothing to speak good words to the sick; yet angels have not skill of experience in this. The afflicted in mind are like infants that cannot tell their disease; they apprehend hell, and it is real hell to them. Many ministers are but horse-physicians in this disease; wine and music are vain remedies, there is need of a Creator of peace. "She is frantic (say they), and it is but a fit of a natural melancholy and distraction."

USE 2. The disciples are physicians of no value to a soul crying, and not heard of Christ. Oh! Moses is a meek man, David a sweet singer, Job and his experience profitable, the apostles God's instruments, the Virgin Mary is full of grace, the glorified desire the church to be delivered; but they are all nothing to Jesus Christ. There is more in a piece of a corner of Christ's heart (to speak so) than in millions of worlds of angels and created comforts, when the conscience hath gotten a back-throw with the hand of the Almighty.

Verse 24. "But he answered and said, I am not sent but for the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

In this answer, two things are to be observed, (1.) The temptation coming from Christ, denying he had any thing to do with this woman: "I am not sent for her."

(2.) The matter of the temptation, containing Christ's,

[1.] Sending,

[2.] To whom, To the House of Israel.

[3.] Under what notion; The sheep of the House of Israel.

[4.] What sort of sheep; The lost sheep.

In the temptation, consider, (1.) Who tempteth; (2.) The nature of the temptation. For the former, it is Christ who tempteth. Hence these positions:

1. POSITION. God tempteth no man to sin. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted, neither tempteth he any;" (James 1:13;) "but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust:" (verse 14.) God doth try, rather than tempt. (1.) God cannot command sin. (2.) He cannot actuate the crooked faculties to sin, as he that spurreth a horse, putteth the horse to actual motion; but the dislocated leg of the horse, putteth in act the halting power of the horse. (3.) He cannot infuse sinful habits, which are as weights of iron and lead, to incline the soul to sin. (4.) He cannot approve sin. Satan never tempteth, but upon practical knowledge, either that the wheels may run down the mount, as he tempted Eve, and upon that false persuasion tempted Christ to sin; or then, he knoweth sin hath oiled the wheels and inclinations, and so he casteth in fire-brands, knowing that there is powder and fire-wood within us, in our concupiscence. He should not offer to be a father to the brood of hell, if he knew not that a seed and mother were within us. Except Christ by grace cast water on our lusts, and cool the furnace, we conceive flames easily.

2. POSITION. Neither devils, nor men, nor our heart, may, without sin, tempt or try the creature, by putting it to do that which may prove sin, upon any intention to try, whether that creature shall obey God or not. Had Abraham commanded Isaac to kill Jacob his son, to try whether Isaac loved God or no, it had been a sinful tempting of him. A creature cannot put his fellow-creature upon the margin and border of death (such as all sin is) to try if the creature hath a good head that cannot be giddy. God may try duties by events: he is the Potter, we the clay; but clay is limited to try events upon clay by duties only, and not duties by events.

3. POSITION. Wanton and vain reason would say, Why did the wise Lord create such a tree of knowledge, the tasting whereof was the second death by law, and that in Eve's eye? Why did not God fortify the first besieged castle, Eve's will and mind, with grace, that the day should not have been the devil's? But, O vain man, is the potter holden to make a vessel of earth as strong as a vessel of iron or brass, that though it fall by no fault of the maker, it shall not be broken? We may say to superiors of clay, yea to angels, Who art thou that commandest? And, besides, we may say, What dost thou? and Why dost thou? and, What commandest thou, another gospel, or no? and we may take their will with a reserve. But we may know of God, who he is, that he is Jehovah; but we are not to enquire, Lord, why dost thou this? or, Lord, what is it that thou commandest? The agent here warrants the action, and all its motives. God infuseth wisdom and goodness in all his ways, because they are his ways. Goodness is a stranger to what angels and men do, except there be a safer law for their doing, than their person. God must have absolute obedience, though he seeketh no blind obedience; men's actions must be warranted, not only from the wisdom of the doer, but also from the nature of the deed. God's actions have all, and abundance of goodness in them, from the Lord. It is enough to me what I suffer (I

mean, it ought to be enough), if ten hells for one sin, if the absolute Former of all things do it. We love to put law on God; whereas, to examine mens' commandments, is religion; we take them upon trust: and to examine God's ways is arrogancy; yet we must judge God. We see, in permitting sin in bloods, in confusion, in the fall of Adam, more fairness, beauty, and glory in Christ Jesus, and his new heaven, than we can see of blackness of hell, of sin, in devils and in sin: Possibly it should have been lawful to the creature, and to angels to permit sin; so they could and would from thence raise a gospel, a heaven of free-grace.

Now for temptations from God; we are to consider that they are all reason, all wisdom, all goodness.

1. POSITION. Christ saith to the disciples of her (it had been some comfort if he had given herself but one word), I am not sent for this woman, nor for any of her blood and kindred; she is a Gentile, I am sent primarily for Jews. Hence, Christ may, in words, and to the apprehension of weak ones, say, I am not thy Saviour; thou art not any of my redeemed ones. Christ may give rough answers, when he hath a good mind. He put a hard word upon the nobleman, that came to him for his dying son: "Ye (and all your nation) will not believe, except ye see signs and wonders." (John 4.) Never any man saw and apprehended harder things of God than Jeremiah: "Wilt thou be altogether to me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" (Jer. 15:18.)

2. POSITION. How often do the promises of the gospel lie at a distance to us, and we have four doubts touching them: (1.) They are not mine. In dispensation, God dealeth otherwise with me than with the rest. So David, "Our fathers trusted in thee, they trusted in thee, and thou deliveredst them;" (Psalm 22:4:) and why should he not deliver thee also? Alas, it is not so: But I am a worm and no man, (verse 6). So Isaiah, 49:13, "Sing, O heavens; be joyful, O earth, and break forth into singing, O mountains." What is the matter, that the skies and stars are bidden sing psalms?—"For God hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted." Yea, but no mercy for me; "But Sion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me:" (verse 14). Whoever find mercy, God's dispensation saith, I shall find none. (2.) For unworthiness and sin, I am incapable of mercy: The forlorn son dare not believe his father will make him a son in his house. Why? there is all his reason: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." (Luke 15:18,19.) Such was Peter's reasoning; "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man." (3.) I know not how the promises shall be made good to me: but Joseph had a word, that the sun, moon, and the eleven stars should honour him. But how that could be performed he saw not, when he was sold as a slave, and that was far from honour; yet was he to believe his dream should be fulfilled. And so Abraham did adhere to the promise, when God commanded the son of promise to be killed, "Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." (Heb. 11:19.) (4.) I see not the time of the fulfilling the promise; yet "Though the vision tarry, wait for it, because it will surely

come and not tarry.” (Hab. 2:3.) We are to remember, God can trail his promise, in our seeming, through hell, and the devil’s black hands, (as he led Christ through death, the curse, and hell,) and yet fulfill it. When Christ is under a stone, and buried, the gospel seems to be buried.

3. POSITION. Christ is on both sides: he holdeth up, and throweth down, in one and the same act; he denieth the woman to be his, and is on her side to grace her, to believe that he is her’s. Christ putteth his child away, and he desireth that his child should not be put away from him; he is for Jacob in his wrestling, and as if he were against him, saith, ‘Let me alone.’ Christ here doth both hold and draw, oppose and defend at once.

“I am not sent.” He doth not here deny the interest of the Gentiles in the Messiah; but his meaning is, I am not first and principally sent, (2.) in the flesh, and personally as man for the Gentiles, to preach the gospel to them, and to work miracles for them; but principally, as the minister of circumcision, to the Jews. Therefore, (Matt. 10,) he forbiddeth his disciples to go to the Samaritans, but rather, to preach to the house of Israel. First, then, a word of Christ’s sending which includeth these three:—

1. Designation.
2. Qualification.
3. Special Commission.

1. The designation was an act of divine and voluntary dispensation, according to which, the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, not the Father, not the Holy Ghost, was designed, and set apart to take on him our nature, place, and the office of the Mediator to redeem us, in his own person. The Son was fittest to be the first and original sampler of sons; the Son by natural generation, was the most apt person to be the perfect mould and pattern of all the sons by the adoption of grace. (Gal. 4:4.) The substantial power of God is in the Holy Ghost; the personal rise and fountain of all the excellencies of God, was in the Father; and so, though there was no unfitness in either to be our King, Priest and Prophet, yet the love, grace, mercy, righteousness of God, and his infinite wisdom, dwelleth in the Son. Oh, what a bargain of love, that (to borrow the word) the lot of matchless love and free grace fell upon the Son: ‘Son, my only-begotten Son, thou must go down, empty thyself, and leave heaven, and go and bring up the fallen sons out of hell.’ Mankind, like a precious ring of glory, fell off the finger of God, being his image, and was broken: the Son must stoop down, though it pain his back, to lift up the broken jewel, and mend, and restore it again, and set it as a seal on the heart of God. This was the rise of the covenant from eternity, that Christ gave his word as the prime Son, that all the derived sons should put their hands and hearts to the pen, and sign and subscribe the covenant of grace: the writs, evidences, and charters of our salvation were concluded, and passed the sign and seal of the blessed Trinity in heaven from eternity. The gospel is not a yesterday’s fable; it is an old counsel of infinite wisdom.

2. The Son was qualified, (1.) With a passive aptitude (to speak so) to be a man, that he might suffer. (2.) He was graced with all active endowments to be a mediator. [1.] The ground-work of all, was the grace of union, the Godhead dwelling bodily in him. [2.] The sea of infused graces above all his fellows; to say nothing of what he learned by experience: being a Son put to school, he learned his lesson of obedience with many stripes, though an innocent child, (Heb. 12:8). Hence he came loaded with grace and blessings for all the cursed sons.

3. All was nothing, except this Ambassador of heaven had also a commission for us; but he brought two writs, two books from heaven. (1.) He came as a flying angel, with the everlasting gospel, to preach to the nations: (2.) The Book of Life also. In the former, were three acts of law; so Christ is our Saviour both by nature and by a positive law. Christ and grace are law: (1.) Because of his place and birth, being our Goel and nearest kinsman, he was more kind than any other here to redeem the sold inheritance. Christ's nature in the womb was grace; it is nothing but nature, and that bad enough, for us to be born. Christ's mother's womb was grace: it was grace that the Son should be conceived and born, and by this he had law to us. (2.) Christ's act of dying was a special law: "This commandment received I of my Father, that I should lay down my life." (John 10:18.) (3.) By his death and resurrection he is made a Prince by law, and hath law and authority to forgive sins, (Acts 5:31; Matt. 9:6); and power to give life eternal, (John 17:2,)—and rule all by a new law in his new kingdom. (Matt. 28:8.) Our heaven now, is by law and a special commission; but the gospel is a general: he brought all God's secrets from heaven; and in his special commission, Christ hath, as it were, private instructions: Save such and such persons, not any other, not all Israel, but the lost sheep; not the goats. There is a great mystery, how there be no double-dealing in the gospel, and two contrary wills in God.

USE 1. He offereth, in the gospel, life to all, so they believe; and God mindeth to work faith, and intendeth to bestow life on a few only; like a king's son coming to a prison of condemned men, with offered pardons to all, upon condition they accept of them; but yet he singleth out some, and persuadeth them to lay hold on the Father's grace; and by the head taketh them out, and leaveth all the rest to justice. Yet is it no greater mystery than this, "Many are called, but few are chosen." So Christ's sending with his commission, cometh under a two-fold notion: one is, in the intention of the Evangel; the other is, in the intention of him who proposeth the Evangel to men,—I mean, God's intention to give faith and effectual grace. The former is nothing but God's moral complacency of grace, revealing an obligation that all are to believe if they would be saved; and upon their own peril be it, if they refuse Christ. This is the heart and mind of Christ to persons, revealing two things: (1.) Men's duty; (2.) God's grace to give life eternal to believers. But the latter is not a moral will in God only, but a real physical will, (to speak so,) according to the which, Christ effectually, strongly layeth bands of love, cords of sweet enforcing grace, to persuade the soul to take Jesus Christ.

Christ cometh to the mind under a higher apprehension, with his rainy and wet hair, knocking, and again knocking, to show his face in such soul-redeeming beauty and excellency, as the soul must be taken captive, subdued, and overcome with the love of Christ; as the spouse is so wrought on with the beauty, grace, riches, endowments of excellency, words of love of such an husband, that she is forced to say, 'I have no power, neither heart nor hand to refuse you.' Now, the former notion of the gospel is enough to lay the obligation of believing on all; so as though the gospel reveal not God's purpose of election, (that is only and formally revealed in, and by God's efficacious working of faith, called the inward calling,) yet it saith this to all, 'You are all to believe no less, than if there were not any reprobated persons amongst you.' If, therefore, any despairing ones, as Cain, yea, and many weak ones, refuse to believe, on this ground, Why should I believe? the gospel hath excepted me, it belongeth not to me, I am a reprobate,—they are deluded, for the gospel formally revealeth neither the Lord's decree of election nor reprobation. The embracing of the gospel, and the final rejection thereof, can speak to both these; but that is neither the gospel voice, nor the gospel spirit, that revealeth any such bad tidings. It is true, Satan may speak so, but Christ cometh once with good tidings to all, elect and reprobate. Men do here buy a plea against Christ, and force a quarrel upon him. The believer breaketh first with Christ, before ever Christ breaketh with him. Bad tidings are too soon true. I doubt if reprobation be so far forth revealed to any, even to those that sin against the Holy Ghost, as they are to believe their own impossibility to be saved; for though a man knew himself to be over score and past all remedy, he is obliged to believe the power of infinite mercy to save him, and to hang by that thread, in humility and adherence to Christ.

USE 2. If Christ be sent for lost Israel, and say in the gospel, 'Who will go with me?' and say to thee, 'My Father the King sent me, his own Son, to bring thee up to his house,' why, but thou shouldst go? When old Jacob saw the chariots and messengers that Prince Joseph, his own son, yet living, had sent to fetch him, "His heart failed for joy." Seest thou the chariot of Pharaoh paved with love? make, then, for the journey. The home we have here is a taking lover; why, but thou mayest say, I cannot stay here, the king hath sent for me.

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