

## **The Trial & Triumph of Faith**

### **SERMON 22**

By [Rev. Samuel Rutherford](#)

NOW, a word of a strong and great faith, and withal, of a weak and fainting faith. For the most, I go not from the text, to find out the ingredients of a great faith.

1. A strong praying and a crying faith, is a great faith. So must Christ's faith have been, who prayed with strong cries and tears. Strong faith maketh sore sides in praying, as this woman prayed with good will: there is an efficacious desire to be rid of a sinful temptation, as Paul prayed thrice to be freed of the prick in the flesh. Their faith is weak, who (1.) dare not pray against some idol sins; or, (2.) If they pray, it is but gently, with a wish not to be heard.

2. The woman's crying,—her instant pleading in faith, yea, 1, above the disciples' care for her; yea, above Christ's seeming glooms, who denied her to be his, who reproached her as a dog, argueth great grace, great humility, with strong adherence; and so, great faith.

2. For faith saileth sometimes with a strong tide and a fair wind; according as the moon hath an aspect on the sun, so is it full or not full. When the wheels are set right to the sun, the clock moveth and goeth right. The fairer and more clear sight that faith hath of Christ, the stronger are the acts of faith. It cannot be denied, that faith hath a good and an ill day: because grace is various, it is no strong proof that it is not grace.

3. To put faith in all its parts in light, in staying on Christ, in affiance, in adherence, in self-diffidence, in submissive assenting, forth in all its acts, and to lift the soul all off the earth, requireth Christ's high spring-tide: it is not easy to put all the powers that do act in faith afloat, especially because a strong faith is a great vessel; and therefore, more of Christ's tide is required for weighing anchor and launching forth. The wings of a sparrow should not raise an eagle off the earth; the limbs of a pismire could not suit with a horse or an elephant: there is need of a strong winged soul to believe, especially against hope.

4. To believe Christ, when midnight speaketh blackness of wrath, requireth eyes and light of miracles; yea, it is a greater work than the very miracles of Christ, (John 14:12). But especially when Christ is absent, it is with the soul, as with a clock, in which the wheels are broken, the passes or weights are fallen down.

Objection 1. But I aim and endeavour to believe, but can do nothing, and, without His grace, my violence to heaven is without fruit.

Answer. It is true the Semipelagians' halving of the work of believing, and the glory of it, between co-operating grace and [free-]will, as if nature could divide the spoil with the grace of Christ, is damnable pride; but it is God's way to halve the work between Christ within, in regard of the habit of grace, and Christ without, in regard of the assisting grace of God: "While he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." (Luke 15:20.) Christ rewardeth not nature's aims with grace, nor doth he make gifts the work, and grace the hire, or nature's labour the race, and grace the garland. But he rewardeth grace with grace, and that of mere grace, (John 15:3). He hath in his decree and promise marshaled such and such acts of grace to stand beside others, and that by covenant: and therefore believe, that you may believe; pray, that you may pray.

Objection 2. But who can act saving grace, without the blowing of saving grace? I can no more do it, than I can command the west wind to blow when I list.

Answer. I grant all, nor do I speak this to insinuate, that free-will sitteth at the helm, or that grace sleepeth, and will waketh; the contrary is an evident truth. Yet give me leave to say, there is odds between blowing of the wind, and making ready the sails. Though seamen cannot make wind, nor is it their fault to want wind, yet can they prepare the sails, and hoist them up to welcome the wind. We cannot create the breathings of the Spirit; yet are we to miss these breathings? and this is a fitting of the sails, and we are to join with the Spirit's breathings. Christ bindeth up the winds in his garment, so as, if one look of faith, or half a spiritual groan, should ransom me from hell, I have it not in stock; therefore hath God ordered such a dispensation, that in all stirrings of grace, the first spring, Principium motus, the fountain-rise of calling Jesus Lord, shall be up in heaven at the right hand of the Father; and the far end of any gracious thought, is as far above me, as the heart of Christ, who is in the heaven of heavens, is above the earth, though ye think nothing of it. And better Christ be my steward, and that the gospel be at the end of all acts of grace, as that Christ be freewill's debtor.— More reason that Christ be creditor, than debtor to his redeemed ones. (2.) I know the child of God may be so far forth lazy, as that it is his fault that the wind bloweth not, if we speak of a moral cause. (3.) It is his part to join with the working of assisting grace: "Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." (Col. 1:29.) The Lord hath, by free promise, laid holy bands on himself, to give predeterminating grace to his own children to persevere to the end, and to prevent apostacy and heinous sins inconsistent with saving faith; (1 Cor. 1:8; Jude 24, Jer. 32:39-41; Is. 54:10; 59:21,22; Luke 22:32; 1 John 2:1,2,) yet so as he hath reserved a liberty to himself, to co-operate with them in particular acts, as it shall be their sin, not his withdrawing of grace that maketh them guilty, to the end we know we are in

graces debt, in all good and supernatural acts. So (2 Chron. 32:31,) Hezekiah was tried of God in the business of the king of Babylon's ambassadors, that the king might see, that he could not walk to heaven on clay legs, or by his own strength. And the reason is clear: (1.) God cannot make a promise of contributing this bowing and predeterminating grace, but in a way suitable to free grace; for God cannot change grace unto natural debt, it remaining grace, for so it should be grace, and no grace, which is a contradiction. (2.) The Lord hath reserved liberty to himself in this promise, that in this or that particular act (the omission whereof may consist with perseverance in grace), he may contribute his influence of grace, or not contribute it. So David hath not actual grace at his will and nod, to eschew adultery and murder as he pleaseth; nor Peter to decline an evil hour, when he shall be tempted to forswear his Saviour Christ; nor hath Heman in his hand, (Psalm 88,) nor the deserted church power, (Psalm 77,) to pray, and believe, and rejoice in the salvation of God, at the disposition of free-will: but the key is up in the hands of the kingly Intercessor, at the right hand of the Father, that must open the heart. It is far to fetch, as far as the heaven of heavens, to make wind and sailing to Christ-ward; therefore, (3.) Seasons of acts of grace to believe, to walk in any warmness of love to Christ and his members, are fruits of royal liberty and free grace. Who hath the key of the house of wine, to stay the soul with the flagons and apples of love? Certainly, it is the king himself, that taketh the spouse into his banqueting house, (Cant. 2:4). And yet, so as the omission of all supernatural duties, yea, our laziness in the manner of doing, our failings and sins, are imputed to ourselves, and not to the not blowing of the wind of the Holy Spirit, nor to the want, of the efficacious motion of the Spirit, as Libertines teach, with Arminians; for we so sin through the want of the motions of efficacious grace, as through the want of a physical, not of a moral cause; and so, as we are most willing to want that influence, and so are guilty before the Lord.

(4.) God hath reasons strong and convincing why he worketh thus; [1.] It suiteth not Grace to work by engagement; the spirit of the living creatures is within every wheel of Christ, that it must move from an inward principle: the motion of saving grace, is Christ's heart wheeled about by itself, and by no foreign cause without itself: love worketh as love without boon or bribe from men or angels. Grace is both wages and work, the race and the gold to itself. [2.] God delights to have men and angels his debtors. Grace holdeth an open and a free inn, with all the dainties that Christ can make, to all comers and goers, for nothing but thanks, and heartily welcome. Grace maketh no gain of my work. The sweating of angels, and of the thousand thousands that sing up the glory of Christ before the high throne, is no income to Christ's rent. Grace would not be grace, if it could traffic, or buy, or sell with a creature. Angels and men stand in the books of free grace for millions of borrowed sums. Christ's blood and deep love may be praised, but never recompensed. Christ's love hath filled this world, and the new paradise with debtors; and angels can neither read, nor sum, nor cast up the accounts of free grace. [3.] That we cannot be masters of one good act, without His preventing grace, evidenceth what nature is, and maketh grace both my staff

and my convoy in at heaven's gates; nature and free-will must stoop and do homage to Christ. There is a glory active, and a glory passive, as there is also grace active and passive; free-will is active under grace, and passive also; and therefore, grace and mercy is to the saints and upon the saints: nature emptieth its lamp upon the golden pipe, the rich grace of the Mediator, and free-will moveth and runneth, but not but as moved, driven, and breathed upon by free grace. But as concerning glory, it hath a more eminent and noble relation: glory shall be on the saints as a garment, as a crown, for they shall be glorified. But no glory to the saints, but only to the Lamb, to the flower of the glory of glory, Jesus, the celebrated, eminent, most high and adored Prince of the kings of the earth. And, therefore, there is room and place left for sin and shame to free-will in the business of predetermining grace, that nature can but sigh and sin, and grace sing, and be spotless and innocent. Christ so draweth, as we sin in not being drawn; Christ so taketh and allureth, that it is our guilt that we are not taken and overcome with the smell of the King's ointments. So is sin the field out of which springeth the rose, the flower of free and unhired grace. Sin must go with us as near to heaven, as to the threshold of the gates, that the sinner may halt and crook, when he moveth his foot on the threshold-stone of glory; that so, pardoning grace may enter the new city with us. [4.] The Lord will have us take to heaven with us, a book of the psalms and praises of grace, that in that land we may extol and advance free grace, and may hold the book in our hand all the way, and sigh, and weep, and sing, and adore the Saviour of free grace, and may take grace's bill in our hand into heaven with us. Oh, how sweet to be grace's drowned and over-burdened debtor! It is good here to borrow much, and profess inability, for eternity, to pay, that heaven may be a house full of broken men, who have borrowed millions from Christ, but can never repay more, than to read and sing the praises of grace's free bill, and say, Glory, glory, to the Lamb that sitteth upon the throne for evermore: praising for ever in heaven, must be in lieu of paying debt. {1.} God is not behind, nor wanting to the gracious soul, for there is a promise of grace here. {2.} There is an intercession at hand, and that more mighty now, than at Christ's first ascension, and shall be more mighty when all Israel shall be converted. {3.} There is a stirring required in a gracious spirit, but with sense of nature's weakness, so as he is "to arise, and be doing, and the Lord shall be with him;" and he is so to blow upon the coals, as if he could do his alone, though not without the faith of dependence upon an immediate acting from heaven.

Objection 3. Adam, yet sinless, was to believe weakness and sin in himself, before he sinned.

Answer. Not so, but he was to have that which, by analogy, answereth to sense of sin, that is, a sinless consciousness and solicitude, that if God should withdraw his stirring and predetermining influence of corroborating him to will and to do (you may call it grace), he should fall; and that legs in paradise, without actual assistance, could not bear the bulk and weight of Adam's con-natural and constant walking with God, that Adam might know, before he was a debtor to

justice, that he had need of mercy, or the free goodness of a surety, such as Jesus Christ, to prevent debt, no less than to pay debt; even as angels are debtors to Christ their head, for redemption from all possible sins, no less than we are (though the degrees of altitude of grace varieth much), the obliged underlings of such a bountiful landlord, for redemption from actual misery.

3. That is a great faith, that is not broken with a temptation, but (1.) Taketh strength from a temptation; as some run more swiftly after a fall, that they may recompense their loss of time; and that is great faith, that argueth from a temptation, as this woman doth. (2.) That is Job's great faith, (chap. 2:3). "That he still holdeth fast his integrity;" the word (Hazak) is, to hold with strength and power: he keepeth fast, and with violence, his innocency, and faith maketh him stronger than he was. The word is used, (Psalm 147:13), for making stronger the bars of ports. And it is Job's praise, (chap. 1:22,) "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God with folly." (3.) It is a strong faith in this woman, that, in a manner, conquers Omnipotency by believing. Yea, Satan, winds, fire from heaven, wife, Sabeans, yea, apprehended wrath, cannot prevail with Job to subdue his faith: in all he standeth by this, "Though the Lord should slay me, I will trust in him." (Job 15:13.) It is great faith to be at holding and drawing with God; and yet believe and pray, (Hosea 12:3; Gen. 32:26,) and not let the Lord alone, nor give him any rest, (Isa. 62:6,7,) till he answer. As suppose thy prayers were never heard, and the acts of believing were but darts thrown at heaven and the throne without any effect; yet because prayer and believing are acts of honouring God, though they never benefit thee, it argueth strong grace, and so great faith, that it can be said, there be ten years, twenty years of reiterated acts of faith, and prayers of such a man lying up before the throne, yea, in Christ the High Priest's bosom. Let God make of my faith what he will, yet am I to believe: continued believing is Christ's due, though it should never be to me gain of comfort or success. That is a weak man who is thrown down on his back with a blast of wind, or made to stagger with the cast of a straw, or a feather. The temporary faith is in this seen to be soft, that it is broken with persecution: "When the sun riseth anon, he is offended, and withereth quickly." (Matt 13:21.) Some spirit of soft clay for a scratch with a pin on his credit, casteth away all his confidence, despaireth, and hangeth himself as Ahithophel. Such a temptation would not once draw blood of a strong believer. Straws, and feathers, and flax do quickly take fire, and are made ashes in a moment; but not so gold: there is bones and metal in strong faith; so the martyr's faith, that could not be broken with torments, is proved to be a great Faith, Heb. 11:35, Etympnisthesan, Their bodies were racked out as a drum, and beaten to death after racking, and they would not accept a deliverance. Why? Faith looked to a better resurrection. He who sweateth, panteth up the brow of the mount after Christ, and carrieth death on his back, must have this strong faith, that Christ is worthy of tortures. A strong faith can bear hell on its shoulders, the grave and the sorrows of death, and not crack, nor be broken, (Psalm 18:4-6; 116:3,4).

4. That faith is argued to be strong, that hath no light of comfort, but walketh in darkness upon the margin and borders of a hundred deaths, and yet stays upon the Lord, (Isa. 50:11). So this woman had no comfort, nor ground of sense of comfort from Christ, except rough answers and reproaches; yet she believeth, and so, must be strong in the faith, (Psalm 3:6). David's faith standeth straight without a crook, when ten thousand deaths are round about him; (and Psalm 23:4,) he feareth no ill, when he walks in the cold and dark valley of the shadow of black death. Heman, (Psalm 88:7,) "Thy wrath lieth hard on me, thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves:" then, in his sense, God could do no more to drown him; not waves, but all waves, all God's waves were on him, and above him; yet (verse 9,) "Lord, I have called daily upon thee." Then he believed daily. Hezekiah's comforts are at a hard pinch, (Isa. 39:14,) "Mine eyes fail with looking upward, O Lord, I am oppressed;" yet praying, argueth, believing, "Lord, undertake for me." We must think Christ's sense of comforts was ebb and low when he wept, cried, (Heb. 5:7,) and was forsaken of God; yet then his faith is doubled, as the cable of an anchor is doubled, when the storm is more than ordinary,—"My God, my God." David chideth his cast-down soul when there is no glimpse of comfort, with strong faith, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him." (Psalm 42:11.) In swimming well, the less natural helps to hold up the chin and head, the greater wave, if the swimmer be carried strongly through, as it were in despite of the stream, there is the more art. Art may counterbalance strength, and sometimes wisdom is better than strength. The less comfort, if yet you believe at midnight, when the spirit is overwhelmed, the more is the art of believing. When an inward principle is weak, we help it with externals. That the child must be allured with rewards, as with apples, a penny, or the like, it is because his sight and desire of the beauty and excellency of learning and arts, is but weak or nothing at all. Sense and comforts are external subsidies and helps to faith, and those that cannot believe but upon feelings, and sense of the sweetness of comforts, are hence argued to have weak and broken inclinations and principles of faith. The more freeness and ingenuity of spirit that is in believing, the more strength of faith; for that is most connatural, that hath least need of hire. You need not give hire, reward, or bribes to the mother's affection, to work upon her, and cause her to love her child: love can hardly be hired; nature is stronger than rewards or any externals. Comforts are but the hire of serving of God, and the results of believing in a sad condition.

There be some cautions here that are considerable. (1.) God leadeth some strong ones to heaven, whose affections are soft as David's were, (Psalms 35:13; 119:25,28; 136:53; 6:6). And yet faith is strong, (Psalm 22:1). God possibly immediately working upon the assenting, or believing faculty, leaving the affections to their own native disposition. (2.) God useth some privileged dispensations, so as a strong believer shall doubt upon no good ground, (Psalm 116:11), God so disposing, that grace may appear to be grace, and the man but flesh. (3.) Softness of affection, and light of comfort, may by accident concur with strong acts of believing; for, with these, in many, there is little light, much faith,

and they should, without those apples given to children, strongly believe; and God, to confirm his own, of mere indulgence sweeteneth affections.

But if God give comforts, ordinarily it is a sort of indulgence of grace, or the grace of grace. It is true, rejoicing falleth under a gospel commandment, (Phil. 4:4,) yet so, as God hath not tied the sweet of the comfort of believing to believing, that you may know its strength of faith, that is, the principle of strong faith, as intense and strong habits make strong acts. God keepeth some in a sad condition all their life, who are experienced believers, and they never feel the comfort of faith till the splendour of glory glance on their eyes; as one experienced believer, kept under sadness and fear for eighteen years, at length came to this 'I enjoy and rejoice, with joy unspeakable and glorious;' but he lived not long after. Another living in sadness all his life, died with comforts admirable. And (3.) Let this be put as a case of conscience, why divers believing, and joying much in God's salvation all their life, yet die in great conflicts, and, to beholders, with little expression of comfort and feeling; as divers of the saints die. Certainly, God, [1.] walketh in liberty here. [2.] He would not have us to limit the breathings of the Holy Ghost to jump with our hour of dying. [3.] We may make an idol of a begun heaven, as if it were more excellent than Christ. To conclude, little evidence, much adherence, speaketh a strong faith.

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