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# Samuel Rutherford

By John Howie (from his “Scots Worthies”)

**S**amuel Rutherford, a gentleman by extraction, having spent some time at the grammar school, went to the University of Edinburgh, where he was so much admired for his pregnancy of parts, and deservedly looked upon as one from whom some great things might be expected, that in a short time, though then but very young, he was made Professor of Philosophy in that University.

Some time after this he was called to be minister at Anwoth, in the shire of Galloway, unto which charge he entered by means of the then Viscount Kenmuir, without any acknowledgment or engagement to the bishops. There he laboured with great diligence and success, both night and day, rising usually by three o'clock in the morning, spending the whole time in reading, praying, writing, catechising, visiting, and other duties belonging to the ministerial profession and employment.

Here he wrote his *Exercitationes de Gratia*, for which he was summoned, as early as June 1630, before the High Commission Court at Edinburgh; but the weather was so tempestuous as to obstruct the passage of the Archbishop of St Andrews hither, and Mr Colvil, one of the judges, having befriended him, the diet was deserted. About the same time, his first wife died, after a sore sickness of thirteen months; and he himself was so ill of a tertian fever for thirteen weeks, that he could not preach on the Sabbath-day without great difficulty.

Again, in April 1634, he was threatened with another prosecution at the instance of the bishop of Galloway, before the High Commission Court; and neither were these threatenings all the reasons Mr Rutherford had to lay his account with suffering; for as the Lord would not hide from his faithful servant Abraham the things he was about to do, neither would he conceal from this son of Abraham what his purposes were concerning him. In a letter to the provost's wife of Kirkcudbright, dated April 20, 1633, he says, that upon the 17th and 18th of August, he got a full answer of his Lord to be a graced minister, and a chosen arrow hid in his quiver. Accordingly, the thing he looked for came upon him; for he was again summoned before the High Commission Court for his non-conformity, his preaching against the five articles of Perth, and the forementioned book of *Exercitationes Apologeticae pro Divina Gratia*, which book they alleged did reflect upon the Church of Scotland. But “the truth was,” says a late historian,

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“the argument of that book did cut the sinews of Arminianism, and galled the Episcopal clergy to the very quick; and so Bishop Sydserff could endure him no longer.” When he came before the Commission Court, he altogether declined it as a lawful judicatory, and would not give the chancellor (being a clergyman) and the bishops their titles, by lording of them. Some had the courage to befriend him, particularly the Lord Lorne, afterwards the famous Marquis of Argyle, who did as much for him as was within his power to do; but the Bishop of Galloway, threatening that if he got not his will of him, he would write to the King, it was carried against him; and upon the 27th of July 1636, he was discharged from exercising any part of his ministry within the kingdom of Scotland, under pain of rebellion; and ordered within six months to confine himself within the city of Aberdeen, during the King’s pleasure; which sentence he obeyed, and forthwith went toward the place of his confinement.

From Aberdeen he wrote many of his famous letters, from which it is evident that the consolation of the Holy Spirit did greatly abound with him in his sufferings. Yea, in one of these letters, he expresses it in the strongest terms, when he says, “I never knew before, that His love was in such a measure. If He leave me, He leaves me in pain, and sick of love; and yet my sickness is my life and health. I have a fire within me; I defy all the devils in hell, and all the prelates in Scotland, to cast water on it.” Here he remained upwards of a year and a-half, by which time he made the doctors of Aberdeen know, that the Puritans, as they called them, were clergymen as well as they. But upon notice that the Privy Council had received a declinature against the High Commission Court in the year 1638, he adventured to return to his flock at Anwoth, where he again took great pains, both in public and private, amongst the people who from all quarters resorted to his ministry, so that the whole country side might be accounted as his particular flock; and (it being then in the dawning of the Reformation) men found no small benefit by the Gospel; that part of the ancient prophecy being farther accomplished, “For in the wilderness shall the waters break out, and streams in the desert” (Isa. xxxv. 6).

He was before that Venerable Assembly held at Glasgow in 1638, and gave an account of all these his former proceedings, with respect to his confinement, and the causes thereof. By them he was appointed to be professor of divinity at St Andrews, and colleague in the ministry with the worthy Mr Blair, who was translated thither about the same time. And here God did again so second this his eminent and faithful servant, that by his indefatigable pains both in teaching in the schools and preaching in the congregation, St Andrews, the seat of the archbishop, and the nursery of all superstition, error, and profaneness, soon

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became forthwith a Lebanon, out of which were taken cedars for building the house of the Lord, almost throughout the whole land. Many of those who received the spiritual life by his ministry he guided to heaven before himself, and many others did walk in that light after him.

As Samuel Rutherford was mighty in the public parts of religion, so he was a great practiser and encourager of the private duties thereof. Thus, in the year 1640, when a charge was foisted in before the General Assembly, at the instance of Mr Henry Guthrie, minister at Stirling, afterwards Bishop of Dunkeld, against private society meetings, which were then abounding in the land, on which ensued much reasoning; the one side yielded that a paper before drawn up by Mr Henderson should be agreed unto, concerning the order to be kept in these meetings; but Guthrie and his adherents opposing this, Mr Rutherford, who was never much disposed to speak in judicatories, threw in this syllogism, "What the Scriptures do warrant, no Assembly may discharge; but private meetings for religious exercises, the Scriptures do warrant," "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another" (Mal. iii. 16). "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another" (James v. 16). And although the Earl of Seaforth there present, and those of Guthrie's faction, upbraided the good man for this, yet it had influence upon the majority of the members; so all that the opposite party got done, was an act anent the ordering of family worship.

Samuel Rutherford was also one of the Scots commissioner.—"appointed in 1643 to the Westminster Assembly, and was very much beloved there for unparalleled faithfulness and zeal in going about his Master's business. It was during this time that he published *Lex Rex*, and several other learned pieces, against the Erastians, Anabaptists, Independents, and other sectaries, that began to prevail and increase at the time; and none ever had the courage to take up the gauntlet of defiance thrown down by this champion.

It is reported, that when King Charles saw *Lex Rex*, he said, it would scarcely ever get an answer; nor did it ever get any, except what the parliament in 1661 gave it, when they caused it to be burned at the cross of Edinburgh, by the hands of the hangman.

When the principal business of the Westminster Assembly was pretty well settled, Samuel Rutherford, in October 24, 1647, moved, that it might be recorded in the scribe's book, that the Assembly had enjoyed the assistance of the commissioners of the Church of Scotland, all the time they had been debating and perfecting these four things mentioned in the solemn league, viz., their composing a Directory for Worship, a uniform Confession of Faith, a Form of Church

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Government and Discipline, and the Public Catechism; which was done in about a week after he and the rest returned home.

Upon the death of the learned Dematius, in 1651, the magistrates of Utrecht in Holland, being abundantly satisfied as to the learning, piety, and true zeal of the great Mr Rutherford, invited him to the divinity-chair there; but he could not be persuaded. His reasons (elsewhere, when dissuading another gentleman from going abroad) seem to be expressed in these words: "Let me entreat you to be far from the thoughts of leaving this land. I see it, and find it, that the Lord hath covered the whole land with a cloud in his anger; but though I have been tempted to the like, I had rather be in Scotland beside angry Jesus Christ, knowing He mindeth no evil to us, than in any Eden or garden on the earth." From this it is evident, that he chose rather to suffer affliction in his own native country, than to leave his charge and flock in time of danger. He continued with them till the day of his death, in the free and faithful discharge of his duty.

When the unhappy difference fell out between those called the Resolutioners and the Protesters, in 1650 and 1651, he espoused the protesters' quarrel, and gave faithful warning against the public resolutions; and likewise during the time of Cromwell's usurpation, he contended against all the prevailing sectaries that were then ushered in by virtue of his toleration. And such was his unwearied assiduity and diligence, that he seemed to pray constantly, to preach constantly, to catechise constantly, and to visit the sick, exhorting them from house to house; to teach as much in the schools, and spend as much time with the students and young men in fitting them for the ministry, as if he had been sequestered from all the world besides; and yet withal to write as much as if he had been constantly shut up in his study.

But no sooner did the restoration of Charles II. take place than the face of affairs began to change; and after his fore-mentioned book *Lex Rex* was burnt at the cross of Edinburgh, and at the gates of the new college of St Andrews, where he was professor of divinity, the parliament, in 1651, were to have an indictment laid before them against him; and such was their humanity, when everybody knew he was a-dying, that they summoned him to appear before them at Edinburgh, to answer to a charge of high treason! But he had a higher tribunal to appear before, where his judge was his friend. He was dead before the time came, being taken away from the evil to come.

It is commonly said that, when the summons came, he spoke out of his bed and said, "Tell them I have got a summons already before a superior Judge and judicatory, and I behove to answer my first summons, and ere your day come I

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will be where few kings and great folks come.” When they returned and told he was a-dying, the parliament was put to a vote, whether or not to let him die in the college. It was carried, “put him out,” only a few dissenting. My Lord Burleigh said, “Ye have voted that honest man out of the college, but ye cannot vote him out of heaven.” Some said, He would never win there, hell was too good for him. Burleigh said, “I wish I were as sure of heaven as he is, I would think myself happy to get a grip of his sleeve to haul me in.”

When on his deathbed, he lamented much that he was withheld

from bearing witness to the work of Reformation since the year 1638; and upon the 28th of February, he gave a large and faithful testimony against the sinful courses of that time; which testimony he subscribed twelve days before his death; being full of joy and peace in believing.

During the time of his last sickness, he uttered many savoury speeches, and often broke out in a kind of sacred rapture, exalting and commending the Lord Jesus, especially when his end drew near. He often called his blessed Master his kingly King. Some days before his death, he said, “I shall shine—I shall see Him as He is—I shall see Him reign, and all his fair company with Him; and I shall have my large share. Mine eyes shall see my Redeemer: these very eyes of mine, and none other for me. This may seem a wide word; but it is no fancy or delusion; it is true. Let my Lord’s name be exalted; and, if He will, let my name be grinded to pieces, that He may be all in all. If He should slay me ten thousand times, I will trust.” He often repeated Jer. xv. 16. “Thy words were found, and I did eat them.”

When exhorting one to diligence, he said, “It is no easy thing to be a Christian. For me, I have got the victory, and Christ is holding out both His arms to embrace me.” At another time, to some friends present, he said, “At the beginning of my sufferings I had mine own fears, like other sinful men, lest I should faint, and not be carried creditably through, and I laid this before the Lord; and as sure as ever He spoke to me in His word, as sure as His Spirit witnesseth to my heart, He hath accepted my sufferings. He said to me, Fear not, the outgate shall not be simply matter of prayer, but matter of praise. I said to the Lord, if He should slay me five thousand times five thousand, I would trust in Him; and I speak it with much trembling, fearing I should not make my part good; but as really as ever He spoke to me by His Spirit, He witnessed to my heart, that His grace should be sufficient.” The Thursday night before his death, being much grieved with the state of the land, he had this expression, “Horror had taken hold on me.” And afterwards, falling on his own condition, he said, “I renounce all that ever He made me will and do, as defiled and imperfect, as coming from me; I

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betake myself to Christ for sanctification, as well as justification; repeating these words (I Cor. i. 30)— “He is made of God to me wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption adding, “I close with it, let Him be so: He is my all In all.”

March 17. Three gentlewomen came to see him; and after exhorting them to read the Word, and be much in prayer, and much in communion with God, he said, “My honourable Master and lovely Lord, my great royal King, hath not a match in heaven or in earth. I have my own guilt, even like other sinful men; but He hath pardoned, loved, washed, and given me joy unspeakable and full of glory. I repent not that ever I owned His cause. These whom ye call protesters are the witnesses of Jesus Christ. I hope never to depart from that cause, nor side with those who have burnt the “Causes of God’s Wrath.” They have broken their covenant oftener than once or twice, but I believe the Lord will build Zion, and repair the waste places of Jacob. Oh! to obtain mercy to wrestle with God for their salvation. As for this presbytery, it hath stood in opposition to me these years past. I have my record in heaven. I had no particular end in view, but was seeking the honour of God, the thriving of the Gospel in this place, and the good of the new college; that society which I have left upon the Lord. What personal wrongs they have done me, and what grief they have occasioned to me, I heartily forgive them, and desire mercy to wrestle with God for mercy to them. and for the salvation of them all.”

The same day James M’Gill, John Wardlaw, William Vilant, and Alexander Wedderburne, all members of the same presbytery with him, coming to visit him, he made them welcome, and said, “My Lord and Master is the chief of ten thousand, none is comparable to Him in heaven or earth. Dear brethren, do all for Him; pray for Christ, preach for Christ, feed the flock committed to your charge for Christ, do all for Christ; beware of men-pleasing—there is too much of it amongst us. The new college hath broken my heart; I can say nothing of it; I have left it upon the Lord of the house; and it bath been, and still is, my desire that He may dwell in this society, and that the youth may be fed with sound knowledge.” After this he said, “Dear brethren, it may seem presumptuous in me, a particular man, to send a commission to a presbytery;”—and Mr M’Gill, replying, that it was no presumption, he continued,—” Dear brethren, take a commission from me, a dying man, to them to appear, for God and His cause, and adhere to the doctrine of the covenant, and have a care of the flock committed to their charge. Let them feed the flock out of love, preach for God, visit and catechise for God, and do all for God; beware of men-pleasing—the chief Shepherd will appear shortly. . . . I have been a sinful man, and have had mine

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own failings; but my Lord hath pardoned me and accepted my labours. I adhere to the Cause and Covenant, and resolve never to depart from the protestation against the controverted Assemblies. I am the man I was. I am still for keeping the government of the Kirk of Scotland entire, and would not for a thousand worlds have had the least hand in the burning of the ‘Causes of God’s Wrath.’ Oh! for grace to wrestle with God for their salvation.”

Mr Vilant having prayed at his desire, as they took their leave he renewed his charge to them to feed the flock out of love. The next morning, as he recovered out of a fainting, in which they who looked on expected his dissolution, he said, “I feel, I feel, I believe, I joy and rejoice, I feed on manna—” Mr Blair, whose praise is in the Churches, being present, when he took a little wine in a spoon to refresh himself, being then very weak, said to him, “Ye feed on dainties in heaven, and think nothing of our cordials on earth.” He answered, “They are all but dung; but they are Christ’s creatures, and, out of obedience to His command, I take them. Mine eyes shall see my Redeemer; I know He shall stand the last day upon the earth, and I shall be caught up in the clouds to meet Him in the air, and I shall ever be with Him; and what would you have more? there is an end.” And stretching out his hands, he said again, “there is an end.” And a little after, he said, “I have been a single man, but I stand at the best pass that ever a man did; Christ is mine, and I am His;” and spoke much of the white stone and new name. Mr Blair, who loved with all his heart to hear Christ commended, said to him again—” What think ye now of Christ?” To which he answered, “I shall live and adore Him. Glory! glory to my Creator and my Redeemer for ever! Glory shines in Immanuel’s land.” In the afternoon of that day, he said, “Oh! that all my brethren in the land may know what a Master I have served, and what peace I have this day. I shall sleep in Christ, and when I awake I shall be satisfied with His likeness. This night shall close the door, and put my anchor within the vail; and I shall go away in a sleep by five of the clock in the morning;” which exactly fell out. Though he was very weak, he had often this expression, “Oh! for arms to embrace Him! Oh! for a well-tuned harp!”

He exhorted Dr Colvil, a man who complied with prelacy afterwards, to adhere to the government of the Church of Scotland, and to the doctrine of the Covenant; and to have a care to feed the youth with sound knowledge. And the Doctor being the professor of the new college, he told him that he heartily forgave all the wrongs he had done him. He spake likewise to Mr Honeyman, afterwards Bishop Honeyman, who came to see him, saying, “Tell the presbytery to answer for God, and His cause and covenant. the case is desperate; let them be in their duty.” Then directing his speech to Dr Colvil and Mr Honeyman, he said, “Stick

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to it. You may think it an easy thing in me, a dying man, that I am now going out of the reach of all that men can do; but He, before whom I stand, knows I dare advise no colleague or brother to do what I would not cordially do myself upon all hazard; and as for the 'Causes of God's Wrath,' that men have now condemned, tell Mr James Wood, from me, that I had rather lay down my head on a scaffold, and have it chopped off many times, were it possible, before I had passed from them." And then to Mr Honeyman he said, "Tell Mr Wood, I heartily forgive him all the wrongs he hath done me; and desire him, from me, to declare himself the man that he is still for the government of the Church of Scotland."

Afterwards, when some spoke to him of his former painfulness and faithfulness in the ministry, he said, "I disclaim all that; the port that I would be at is redemption and forgiveness through His blood; 'Thou shalt show me the path of life, in Thy sight is fulness of joy:' there is nothing now betwixt me and the resurrection, but "to-day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." Mr Blair saying, "Shall I praise the Lord for all the mercies He has done and is to do for you?" He answered, "Oh ! for a well-tuned harp." To his child he said, "I have again left you upon the Lord; it may be you will tell this to others, that 'the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; I have got a goodly heritage.' I bless the Lord that He gave me counsel."

Thus, by five o'clock in the morning, as he himself foretold, it was said unto him, "Come up hither;" and he gave up the ghost, and the renowned eagle took its flight unto the mountains of spices.

Thus died the famous Samuel Rutherford, who may justly be accounted among the sufferers of that time; for surely he was a martyr, both in his own design and resolution, and by the design and determination of men. Few men ever ran so long a race without cessation; so constantly, so unweariedly, and so unblameably. Two things rarely to be found in one man, were eminent in him, viz., a quick invention and sound judgment; and these accompanied with a homely but clear expression, and graceful elocution; so that such as knew him best, were in a strait whether to admire him most for his penetrating wit, and sublime genius in the schools, and peculiar exactness in disputes and matters of controversy, or for his familiar condescension in the pulpit, where he was one of the most moving and affectionate preachers in his time, or perhaps in any age of the Church. To sum up all in a word, he seems to have been one of the most resplendent lights that ever arose in this horizon.

In all his writings he breathes the true spirit of religion; but in his every way admirable Letters, he seems to have outdone himself, as well as everybody

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else. These, although jested on by the profane wits of this age, because of some homely and familiar expressions in them, it must be owned by all who have any relish for true piety, contain sublime flights of devotion, and must ravish and edify every sober, serious, and understanding reader.

Among the posthumous Works of the laborious Mr Rutherford, are, his Letters; the Trial and Triumph of Faith; Christ's Dying and Drawing of Sinners; a discourse on Prayer; a discourse on the Covenant; on Liberty of Conscience; a Survey of Spiritual Antichrist; a Survey of Antinomianism; Antichrist Stormed; and several other controversial pieces, such as Lex Rex; the Due Right of Church Government; the Divine Right of Church Government; a Peaceable Plea for Presbytery; as also his Summary of Church Discipline, and a treatise on the Divine Influence of the Spirit. There are also many of his sermons in print, some of which were preached before both Houses of Parliament, 1644 and 1645. He wrote also upon Providence; but this being in Latin, is only in the hands of a few, as are also the greater part of his other works, being so seldom republished. There is also a volume of Sermons, Sacramental Discourses, etc.

### An Epitaph on His Grave-Stone

What tongue, what pen, or skill of men  
Can famous Rutherford commend!  
His learning justly rais'd his fame  
True goodness did adorn his name.  
He did converse with things above,  
Acquainted with Immanuel's love.  
Most orthodox he was and sound,  
And many errors did confound.  
For Zion's King, and Zion's cause,  
And Scotland's covenanted laws,  
Most constantly he did contend,  
Until his time was at an end.  
At last he won to full fruition  
Of that which he had seen in vision.

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