

# A Scotsman At Prayer

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now this gentleman on the screen is called Samuel Rutherford. Samuel Rutherford stands in the very front rank of all the great figures in Scottish church history.

He was an intellectual giant, a political genius. Rutherford, though, was best known as pastor of a tiny Galway hamlet called Anwal.

Recent events in Eastern Europe have taught us that those who fail to learn from the past repeat its mistakes. Rutherford, famous for his letters, which if you haven't read, you really must read what Scottish reform poetry is all about, was also one of the commissioners fed by the church in Scotland to Westminster to help in its production of its confession and catechisms in the mid-1640s.

But catechisms were no new thing to Samuel Rutherford. Learning by question and answer, which is what a catechism is, was how Rutherford taught his people in Anwal to grow in their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As well as helping produce the shorter catechism, Rutherford had his own catechism, which he used in Anwal among his own people. In the next few weeks I want us to learn some things from Samuel Rutherford's catechism on the subject of prayer.

[ 1 : 24 ] He doesn't say anything which isn't said in other confessions and catechisms of the day, but he says it in such inventive, beautiful and Scottish ways.

But it will help us first to understand how our fathers in the faith, like Rutherford understood prayer, and therefore how we as Christians of the 21st century are to understand prayer.

You can find a copy of this catechism online. He devotes the whole of chapter 29 of his catechism to prayer, mostly an exposition of the Lord's prayer.

Out of this section, I've chosen four weeks worth of his questions and answers. Tonight, we want to consider the first question and answer in his section on prayer.

A question and answer which opens our minds, warms our hearts, and stiffens our wills. For it, in the application of Romans 8.14, expounds for us the healthy eating heart of a Christian's prayer life.

[ 2 : 28 ] The question is this, what is the other fruit of adoption? The answer is, it makes us to pray and cry, Abba, Father, as earthly bairns, because they as sons seek all things they need from their father.

It makes us pray and cry, Abba, Father, as earthly bairns, because they as sons seek all things they need from their father. Now, from this question and answer, I want us to understand two things.

Pray and sonship, and pray and scarcity. Remember, these are the things that drove Rutherford and his contemporaries to their knees in prayer. Not moral law, not fair duty, but an overwhelming sense of their adoption as children of God, and their overbearing sense of personal need.

The truth is that nothing much has changed about us as Christians. We are still sons and daughters of God. We're still a me. And ultimately, that's why we pray with us.

First of all then, prayer and sonship. Prayer and sonship. Our view of the 17th century Scottish divines, or Scottish puritans, you call them what you will, is driven more by fiction than by fact.

[ 3 : 53 ] They're presented to us by such figures as Sir Walter Scott, as harsh and smiling and legalistic. But the reality couldn't be more different.

Yet it's never serious. Difficult not to be serious when you're being persecuted unto death for your faith in Christ, as many of them were. It's difficult not to be serious when, as was the case for Samuel Rutherford, most of your children die of sickness and disease before they reach adulthood.

But that's smiling and legalistic. Not for a second. These men were filled with the joy of the Lord. That's what made them so strong and vigorous in their faith.

They were filled with joy because they knew that although they were hated by the Scottish establishment, they were dearly beloved to God. The world hated them, but God loved them.

But even more than that, while the world around them hunted them mercilessly down, God was their father and they were his children.

[ 4 : 58 ] They viewed their status before God, not so much in terms of justified sinners, but as dearly beloved children. They had a brighter, more informed and more vivid view of what it means to be adopted as God's children than we do.

And that gave them a strong sense of security and belonging from which they prophesied against the sins of the Scottish establishment.

According to Rutherford in his Catechism, one of the fruits of adoption is prayer. The Christian man or woman who is praying is a Christian man or woman who understands, appreciates and experiences their status as a child of God.

Prayer is not a function of our obedience to the law, but it springs from our adoption as sons and daughters of God. We ask ourselves, why do I pray?

Is it because it's expected of me according to a set of standards? Or is it because I'm so aware that God is my father that I cannot but cry out to him?

[ 6 : 11 ] Rutherford's teaching here is entirely consistent with Jesus teaching the Sower on the Mount, where the ultimate object of prayer is our Father.

And a prayer is directed toward our Father who sees in secret. The ultimate source of a Christian's prayer is not obedience to the law.

It's not even a response to the Gospel. It's an act of love between a child and a father. But we are, to use Rutherford's words, you can see them there, God's earthly barrens.

That's what we are as Christians. God's earthly barrens. By faith in Jesus Christ, we are earthly barrens of God. Now, while we know from Romans 8.14 that Abba does not mean Dad enough, it does mean an incredibly close, intimate, loving relationship.

Just like a parent never stops being a parent, so a child never stops being a child. No matter how old we are, we still remain a barren of our father and our mother.

[ 7 : 23 ] That close relationship might change, but it never ends. And we are God's earthly barrens. That is ultimately why we pray.

This is theology at its finest moment. What J.I. Packer calls the pinnacle of Christian salvation in his book, Knowing God.

That we are no longer rebels, we are sons. We are no longer enemies of God, but his beloved children through Christ and his cross. We're going to come back to this in a few weeks from Rutherford's Catechism.

But I want us all to reflect on this astonishingly amazing truth. The God who made the heavens and the earth is our Father.

The God before whom the angels fly and who is exalted in the throne of the heavens is our Father. The God who directs time and space, working all things together according to his eternal purposes in Christ, is our Father.

[ 8 : 29 ] Thomas Chambers, the founder of the Free Church of Scotland, on the night before his death, was walking in his garden in Edinburgh. He was heard to pray these words. Oh Father, my heavenly Father.

He was an intellectual colossus of a man. He was a spiritual giant. He never rose beyond the height of his adoption as a child of God.

Neither did he brother for him. And that's what drove him to his knees in prayer. He was known for his piety, for the passion of the public, in his private prayers. But it was all rooted here.

Not in a sense of legal duty. Not because it was expected of him, but in his security and belonging as a child of God.

The longer you go on in the Christian faith, the more matured you become as a Christian, the more you understand, appreciate and experience your adoption as children of God.

[ 9 : 33 ] And by necessary consequence, the more you want to pray. For what is prayer? According to Sam Rutherford, that God's earthly bairns crying out, Abba, Father.

Prayer assumption. But then secondly, prayer and scarcity. Prayer and scarcity. Another view of 17th century Scottish divines, we owe more to the literature of Sir Walter Scott and to reality, is that they were akin to the legalistic Pharisees.

They admitted no weakness, they admitted no need, and they just looked down at everybody else. Very far from the truth. The 17th century reformed divines were men of deep emotion, vulnerability and heart wrenching need.

Their passion for heaven was largely caused by material and social poverty. They were far more akin to the Lazarus of Jesus' parable than to the rich man.

And for that reason, Rutherford writes, they as sons seek all things they need from their father. You see, the fatherhood of God wasn't a mere doctrine to Rutherford in his contemporaries.

[ 10 : 47 ] It was their day-to-day experience. And so as God's children, they went to their father seeking everything they needed. And when he uses the word all things here, Rutherford really means all things.

All things spiritual. All things physical. All things emotional. All things social. Every need he had was turned into prayer.

Read his letters for evidence of that. It might be a need for forgiveness from his heavenly father. It might be a need for daily bread to meet the needs of his earthly family.

It might be a need for wisdom to address the Scottish Parliament. It might be a need for his father's grace to sustain him during the long hours of his imprisonment in Aberdeen.

Again, by using this kind of language, Rutherford's delving deep into scriptural wells. In Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul talks about praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer, all supplication.

[ 11 : 52 ] Again in Philippians 4, in everything, by praying the supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made with you to God. All. There's nothing to be excluded from our prayers.

Not the things we naively think are too big for our heavenly father to deal with. And not the things we faithlessly think that our heavenly father doesn't care about. If it's big enough to bother you, it's big enough to take to our heavenly father in prayer.

One of the secrets of the spiritual giant status we place upon such as Samuel Rutherford and John Owen is that they prayed about everything, all things.

They prayed continually and we can also. So in the office. We turn our projects into prayer. We turn our work relationships into prayer.

We turn everything over to God in prayer. We turn our personal finances into prayer. We turn our relationships with our parents, our children, our friends into prayer.

[ 13 : 00 ] We turn everything over to God in prayer. We all have needs. We're all sons and daughters of earthly scarcity. Not all our needs are visible to the naked eye.

Even the healthiest and most prosperous amongst us here, Even those who seem to have it most together emotionally, we have needs. If at the very least, the vibrancy of a deep spiritual relationship with Christ.

We're earthly barons of a heavenly father and we go to him with our scarcity. Just as a needy child goes to its mother, so we go to God.

We don't have the same infant mortality rates, thankfully, as the 17th century Scotland. We don't have the same economic privations or government persecution as Christians, like Rutherford and his fellow covenanters did.

But we still have as many needs as they, perhaps even more. The greatest of which may well be that we're self-deceived into thinking that we have no means at all.

[ 14 : 12 ] Rutherford's Catechism reminds us that as earthly barons of a heavenly father, We seek from him all things we need.

What is your particular need this evening? I don't really refer to spiritual needs, but social needs, mental needs, emotional needs, physical needs, economic needs.

Our first portent call for them all is to be our heavenly father. It's that life of dependence, that day-to-day reliance as bearers of our father that Rutherford wants us to experience for ourselves.

And really, that's the most beautiful thing. Growing up to be a child of God. The more mature he becomes a Christian, the more dependent we become upon him and his grace.

Just as Jesus, his only begotten son was dependent upon his father all the way through his life. That's it, is it not? This Catechism calls us to tread in the footsteps of Jesus.

[ 15 : 23 ] It calls us to walk in him. To walk in the path of dependence upon our heavenly father for everything. And so we close with Rutherford's answer again.

Our adoption makes us to pray and cry, Abba, Father, as earthly bairns, because they as sons seek all things they need from their father.

Therefore we incubate and cry,rop call to be a brillian for their father. To change the race and recak the fences of Jesus or child■s us in our death.

We anchored as human beings.