

The Trial & Triumph of Faith

SERMON 6

By **Rev. Samuel Rutherford**

IN her prayer, as it is expressed by Matthew, we have, 1st, The manner of it: “she cried.” 2nd, The compellation, or party to whom she prayeth: “O, Lord, thou Son of David.” 3rd, The petition: “have mercy upon me.” 4th, The reason: “for my daughter is vexed with a devil.”

“She cried.” The poor woman prayed (as we say) with good will, with a bent of affection. Why is crying used in praying? Had it not been more modesty to speak to this soul-redeeming Saviour, who heareth sometimes before we pray, than to cry out and shout?—for the disciples do after complain, that “she crieth so after them.” Was Christ so difficult to be entreated? The reasons of crying are, 1st, Want cannot blush. The pinching necessity of the saints is not tied to the law of modesty. Hunger cannot be ashamed. “I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise,” saith David, (Psalm 55:2;) and Hezekiah, “Like a crane, or a swallow, so did I chatter; I did mourn as a dove,” (Isa. 38:14). “I went mourning without the sun; I stood up, and I cried in the congregation.” (Job 30:28.) 2nd, Though God hear prayer, only as prayer offered in Christ, not, because very fervent; yet fervour is a heavenly ingredient in prayer. An arrow drawn with full strength hath a speedier issue; therefore, the prayers of the saints are expressed by crying in Scripture. “O my God, I cry by day, and thou hearest not.” (Psalm 22:2.) “At noon will I pray, and cry aloud.” (Psalm 55:17,) “In my distress I cried to the Lord.” (Psalm 18:6.) “Unto thee have I cried, O Lord.” (Psalm 88:13.) “Out of the depths have I cried.” (Psalm 130:1.) “Out of the belly of hell I cried.” (Jonah 2:2.) “Unto thee will I cry, O Lord, my rock.” (Psalm 28:1.) Yea, it goeth to somewhat more than crying: “I cry out of wrong, but am not heard.” (Job 19:7.) “Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.” (Lam. 3:8.) He who may teach us all to pray, sweet Jesus, “In the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears,” (Heb. 5:7;) he prayed with war-shouts. 3rd, And these prayers are so prevalent, that God answereth them: “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard, and saved him from all his fears.” (Psalm 34:6) “My cry came before him, even to his ears.” (Psalm 18:6.) The cry addeth wings to the prayer, as a speedy post sent to court upon life and death: “Our fathers cried unto thee, and were delivered.” (Psalm 22:5.) “The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth.” (Psalm 34:17.) We all know the parable of the poor widow, and the unrighteous judge: if the oppressed be not delivered, Christ, and his Father, and heaven shall hear of it. Hence, 4th, Importunity in praying, “I will not let thee go (saith Jacob to his Lord) till thou bless me.” So James calleth it, (chap. 5, verse 16.) “Prayer

possessed with a spirit," but a good spirit; prayer steeled with fervour of spirit;— so fervent, that David is like the post, who layeth by three horses as breathless; his heart, his throat, his eyes: "I am weary of my crying, my throat is dried, mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God." (Psalm 69:3.) 5th, There is violence offered to God in fervent prayer. (Exod. 22:10.) Moses is answered, when he is wrestling with God by prayer for the people, "Now, therefore, let me alone, that my anger may wax hot against them:" "Let me alone," is a word of putting violent hands on any. There be bones and sinews in such prayers; by them the King is held in his galleries, (Cant. 7:5).

Objection 1. But if so be that prayers must be fervent, even to vocal crying and shouting, then I cannot pray, who am often so confounded, that I cannot speak one word. Answer. So was the servant of God, in a spiritual kind of praying, in uttering Psalm 77, when he saith, verse 4, "Thou holdest mine eyes waking; I am so troubled, that I cannot speak." Yea, groaning goeth for praying to God: "The Lord looked down from heaven, to hear the groaning of the prisoner." (Psalm 102:20.) "The Spirit intercedeth for us with sighs that none can speak." (Rom. 7:26.) Faith doth sigh prayers to heaven; Christ receiveth sighs in his censer, for prayer. Words are but the body, the garment, the outside of prayer; sighs are nearer the heart-work. A dumb beggar getteth an alms at Christ's gates, even by making signs, when his tongue cannot plead for him; and the rather, because he is dumb.

Objection 2. I have not so much as a voice to utter to God; and Christ saith, "Cause me hear thy voice." (Cant. 2:14.) Answer. Yea, but some other thing hath a voice beside the tongue: "The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping." (Psalm 6:8.) Tears have a tongue, and grammar, and language, that our Father knoweth. Babes have no prayers for the breast, but weeping; the mother can read hunger in weeping.

Objection 3. But I am often so, as I cannot weep: weeping is peculiar to a man as laughing is, and spiritual weeping is peculiar to the renewed man. Answer. Vehemency of affection doth often move weeping, so as it is but sprit weeping that we can attain: hence, Hezekiah can but "chatter as a crane, and a swallow, and moan as a dove," (Isa. 38:14). Sorrow keepeth not always the road-way; weeping is but the scabbard of sorrow, and there is often more sorrow where there is little or no weeping; there is most of fire, where there is least smoke.

Objection 4. But I have neither weeping one way or other, ordinary nor marred. Answer. Looking up to heaven, lifting up of the eyes, goeth for prayer also in God's books. "My prayer will I direct to thee, and I will look up." (Psalm 5:3.) "Mine eyes fail with looking upward," (Psalm 69:3). Because, 1st, Prayer is a pouring out of the soul to God, and faith will come out at the eye, in lieu of another door: often affections break out at the window, when the door is closed; as smoke venteth at the window, when the chimney refuseth passage. Stephen looked up to heaven, (Acts 7:55). He sent a post; a greedy, pitiful, and hungry

look up to Christ, out at the window, at the nearest passage, to tell that a poor friend was coming up to him. 2nd, I would wish no more, if I were in hell, but to send a long look up to heaven. There be many love-looks of the saints, lying up before the throne, in the bosom of Christ. The twinkling of thy eyes in prayer, are not lost to Christ; else Stephen's look, David's look should not be registered so many hundred years in Christ's written Testament.

Objection 5. Alas! I have no eyes to look up. The publican, (Luke 18,) looked down to the earth. And what senses spiritual have I to send after Christ? Answer. There is life going in and out at thy nostrils. Breathing is praying, and is taken of our hand, as crying in prayer. "Thou hast heard my voice; hide not thy ear at my breathing, at my cry." (Lam. 3:56.)

Objection 6. I have but a hard heart to offer to God in prayer; and what can I say then, wanting all praying disposition? Answer. 1st, Therefore pray, that you may pray. 2nd, The very aspect, and naked presence of a dead spirit, when there is a little vocal praying, is acceptable to God; or, if an overwhelmed heart refuseth to come, it is best to go and tell Christ, and request him to come, and fetch the heart himself. 3rd, Little of day-light cometh before the sun; the best half of it is under ground. "We ourselves groan within ourselves." (Rom. 8:23.) All is here transacted in our own heart. The soul crieth, Oh! when will my father come, and fetch his children? When shall the spouse lie in her husband's bosom? 4th, If Christ's eye but look on a hard heart, it will melt it. 5th, I show here the smallest of prayer in which the life and essence of prayer may breathe and live. Now, prayer being a pouring out of the soul to God, much of the affections of love, desire, longing, joy, faith, sorrow, fear, boldness, comes along with prayer out to God, and the heart is put in Christ's bosom. And it is neither up nor down to the essence of sincere praying, whether the soul come out in words, in groans, or in long looks, or in sighing, or in pouring out tears to God, (Job 16:20,) or in breathing.

Objection 7. What shall be done with half-praying, and words without sense? Answer. This is the woman of Canaan's case: Piscator observeth an ellipsis with words, of the particule (gar), or because, or for: "Have mercy on me, my daughter is vexed:" she should have said, "because my daughter is vexed:" but the mind is hasty, that she lets slip words. So are broken prayers set down in Scripture, as prayers. "I love, because the Lord hath heard my voice." (Psalm 116:1,) There is nothing in the Hebrew but one word, (Ahbati) I love; but he showeth not whom he loveth. It is a broken word, because, as Ambrose saith, he loved the most desirable thing. I have love, (he would say) but its centre and bed is only God. "My soul is sore vexed, but thou, O Lord, how long?" (Psalm 6:3.) That is a broken speech, also. "For my love they were mine enemies," (Psalm 109:4,) in the Hebrew it's Vani Tephilla, at ego oratio: But I prayer; or, I was all Prayer, as if I in soul and body had been made of Prayer. The reasons of broken prayers are often, 1st, The hastiness of the affections; not the hastiness always of unbelief, (Isa. 28:16,) but often of faith, (2 Pet. 3:10). Love and longing for Christ have

eagle's wings; and love flieth, when words do but creep as a snail. 2nd, It cometh from a delique in the affections (they are broken as a too high-bended bow) that there is a swooning and delique of words. Every part of a supplication to a prince, is not a supplication; a poor man out of fear may speak nonsense, and broken words that cannot be understood by the prince; but nonsense in prayer, when sorrow, blackness, and a dark overwhelmed spirit dictateth words, are well known in, and have a good sense to God. Therefore, to speak morally, prayer being God's fire, as every part of fire is fire; so here, every broken parcel of prayer is prayer. So the forlorn son forgot the half of his prayers; he resolved to say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants;" (Luke 15:19,) but (verse 21,) he prayeth no such thing; and yet, "his father fell on his neck, and kissed him." A plant is a tree in the potency; an infant, a man; seeds of saving grace are saving grace; prayer is often in the bowels and womb of a sigh; though it come not out, yet God heareth it as a prayer. "And he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." (Rom. 8:27.) "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble." (Psalm 10:17.) Desires have no sound with men, so as they come to the ear; but with God, they have a sound, as prayers have. Then when others cannot know what a groan meaneth, God knoweth what is under the lap of a sigh, because his Spirit made the sigh: he first made the prayer, as an intercessor, and then, as God he heareth it; he is within praying, and without hearing.

Objection 8. But, are all my cryings in prayer, works of the Spirit? Answer. The flesh may come in and join in prayer, and some things may be said in haste, not in faith; as in that prayer, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" (Psalm 77:9.) Nor is that of Jeremiah to be put in Christ's golden censer, to be presented to the Father: "Wilt thou be altogether to me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" (Jer. 15:18.) Nor that of Job, (13:24,) "Wherefore holdest thou me for thine enemy?" Christ washeth sinners in his blood, but he washeth not sin: he advocateth for the man that prayeth to have him accepted, but not for the upstarts and boilings of corruption and the flesh that are mixed with our prayer, to have them made white. Christ rejecteth these things in prayer that are essentially ill; but he washeth the prayer, and causeth the Father accept it. There be so many other things that are a-pouring out of the soul in prayer; as groaning, sighing, looking up to heaven, breathing, weeping; that it cannot be imagined, how far short printed and read prayers come of vehement praying: for you cannot put sighs, groans, tears, breathing, and such heart-messengers down in a printed book; nor can paper and ink lay your heart, in all its sweet affections, out before God. The service-book then must be toothless and spiritless talk.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [RPM Forum](#).

Subscribe to RPM

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).