

Samuel Rutherford



Samuel stood looking at the burn marks on the wall high above him.

'Jedburgh Abbey was burned down by the Earl of Surrey's army about ninety years ago,' his teacher told the boys. 'In 1523, to be exact. Since then it has been occupied several times. In fact, from what is left it is hard to imagine how magnificent the building once was.'

'Sir,' said Samuel. 'Was the church roof originally much higher? It seems so low compared with the rest of the building.'

'Good thinking,' the teacher said. 'The roof was very high before the great fire. But rather than replace it after it was burned down, it was lowered and internal walls were built to make the church smaller. Of course, the Latiners' Alley, where the school meets, was originally inside the great abbey.'

The teacher surveyed his pupils.

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'How,' he asked the youngest boy, 'did the Latiners' Alley get its name?'

The boy looked puzzled, then he grinned.

'Sir,' he said. 'Is it because that's where we learn Latin?'

'Quite right,' smiled the teacher, and that's what we're going to do now.'

Glancing all around him, Samuel tried to imagine what Jedburgh Abbey must have looked like before the Earl of Surrey's army did their worst.

As they walked home to the village of Nisbet after school that afternoon, Samuel and his brothers discussed what they had been told.

'Will we go by the road or along the Jed Water?' James asked.

'Let's go by the river,' suggested George.

The three brothers left the road and dropped to the right towards the riverbank.

'I like history,' Samuel commented. 'It makes sense of things.'

'Let's pretend to be the Scots' army spying on the Earl of Surrey's troops,' George said. 'I reckon we could get all the way to Bonjedward without being seen from the road if we kept to the bushes.'

His brothers thought that sounded a very satisfactory way of returning home after a day at school. For over a mile they dodged from bush to bush and rock to rock. Even though they could see people walking on the main road, and on the track to the other side of the Jed Water, nobody called their names and shouted hello. They were very pleased with themselves, if a little dusty and covered in grass.

'Just quarter of a mile to go,' whispered James, as they neared Bonjedward.

'What did you say?' asked a voice from the far side of the copse they were hiding in.

The boys felt like burst balloons. They had been so pleased with their spy act, and just before reaching the village they had been discovered. An old man came round the copse to where the boys were crouching.

'Hiding, are you?' he asked.

Samuel decided it was better to explain what they'd been playing at than to seem very foolish. Old Mr Ker smiled when he heard their story.

'I'm going home to Bonjedward,' he told them. 'And if you walk with me I'll tell you some more of the history of the area. And it's every bit as exciting as the Earl of

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Surrey's attack on the Abbey, because I saw it with my own two eyes.'

The boys got to their feet immediately, and joined the old man on his walk along the river bank.

'When I was a boy,' he said. 'There was a great battle just four miles from here, at Ancrum. I was six years old at the time, and I'm 76 now, but I remember it as though it was yesterday. King Henry of England sent an army that landed at the port of Leith before entering Edinburgh, where he set the city on fire. It was said that the fires didn't go out for four days.'

The boys' eyes danced with excitement.

'His army marched south, and some Scots families joined them on the way.'

'Why did they do that?' George asked.

'I suppose it was join them or be killed by them,' Mr Ker explained. 'By February 1545 the great army had reached Ancrum Moor and camped there. Do you know where the battle site is?'

'Yes,' James told him. 'It's just three miles up the road from here.'

Pleased that they knew where the battle site was, Mr Ker went on with his story. 'News went round that the English army had set fire to the Tower of Broomhill, burning to death an old woman, her family and her servants, who were locked inside. So the Scots forces

were in a real mood for battle. They were an odd assortment of men, but rage drove them on. With cries of "Remember Broomhouse" they surged towards the English. Very cleverly they timed the battle for late afternoon when the setting sun would dazzle their enemies' eyes. The Scots fought with a fury and scattered their enemy, or what was left of them, for 800 English troops died on Ancrum Moor.'

The old man, seeing that his audience was captivated by his tale, looked for the perfect finishing line.

'That was my earliest memory,' he said. 'The cries of "Remember Broomhouse" and the clash of swords. Your earliest memories will be tamer than that, I'm sure.'

James and George looked at their brother, wondering if he would tell Mr Ker his story.

'Would you like to know my earliest memory?' Samuel asked.

'I would indeed,' said the old man.

'There is a well in the village of Nisbet,' the lad said. 'The water in it is about three feet deep. I was playing there with my friends one day when I sat on the edge of the well and fell in. They ran for help, knowing I would drown if I didn't get out. But while they were away a lovely man dressed in white came and pulled me out of

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the well. I was safe on the grass beside the well when my friends came back with help.'

'A lovely man dressed in white,' Mr Ker repeated. 'Who was he then?'

'I didn't know him,' Samuel said.

'Was he an angel?' asked the old man.

Samuel shook his head and smiled. 'I didn't know him,' he repeated. 'But that's my earliest memory.'

By the time the boy had told his story, the four of them had reached the village of Bonjedward. The boys left Mr Ker there and walked the last stretch of the Water of Jed to where it joined the River Teviot. Then they turned east, and walked the mile along the grassy bank of the Teviot to their home, passing the well on the way.

By the time Samuel was 17, he was a student in Edinburgh. Soon after he graduated in 1621, he was made a professor. But he resigned just four years later and spent his time studying theology. In 1627, he moved to the parish of Anwoth and became minister there. We don't know when Samuel became a Christian, but his heart was just full of love for the Lord Jesus by the time he had grown up.

'What do you think of the Solway coast?' one of his church members asked, not long after he arrived in the area.

'It's a fine part of Scotland,' Samuel told him. 'And the church is in a beautiful place, with the hill beside it, trees around it, and the sea within walking distance. I already love the place, and I'm growing to love the people too.'

The man was about to say more, but Samuel excused himself.

'There are two lads over there herding the sheep. I'd like to talk to them.'

With that Samuel was off to make friends with the youth of his congregation.

The man watched him go. 'Rutherford's nothing to look at,' he thought, 'just a little fair-haired man. But there is something about him I like.'

'Hello there,' Samuel called out to the boys. 'I'm the new minister. What are your names?'

'I'm Thomas,' one answered.

'And I'm Archie,' said the other.

'Well, Thomas and Archie,' Rutherford smiled. 'I've got news for you.'

The boys looked interested.

'The Lord Jesus himself knew about herding sheep,' he told them. 'He's the best shepherd of all, and he loves you both more than you'll ever know.'

The boys liked their new minister immediately.

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'Goodbye, boys,' Samuel said. 'It's good to meet you.'

'Mr Rutherford is different from many ministers,' commented a local farmer.

'In what way?' asked the farmer's brother, who was visiting him.

'Most ministers preach about hell's fire and try to frighten us into becoming Christians.'

'So they do,' the other man said. 'And there's nothing wrong with that.'

The farmer ignored what had been said.

'Mr Rutherford preaches about the love of God rather than the fires of hell. He makes God's love sound so ... so...so lovely.'

'Lovely!' his brother said crossly. 'That message will not make much of an impact. You need hell shouted from the pulpit to make people listen.'

'We do listen to Mr Rutherford,' the farmer told his brother. 'It's almost as if he wants us to fall in love with the Lord Jesus.'

'I've never heard anything so sloppy in all my life!' the other man announced.

But the farmer knew that he had fallen in love with Jesus, and his life had been changed completely.

Samuel worked hard in Anwoth, even though things were far from easy for him. His young

wife died after a year of illness, and two of his children died there too. In 1636, he published a book showing that we are saved through God's grace and special choice. Unfortunately the church authorities didn't like that at all and he was called before the High Court! The court exiled him to Aberdeen.

'I long to be in Anwoth,' Samuel thought, as he looked out over the grey granite buildings of Aberdeen. 'I long to see my dear people and to tell them about the love of Jesus.'

He sat at his table and began to write a letter to one of his congregation. It was the first of many letters that went from Aberdeen to Anwoth. And so beautiful were his letters, and so full of love, that people kept them and they were collected into a book which is still being read today, over three-and-a-half centuries after they were written!

Scotland in the 1630s was in great confusion. The king was trying to make the church in Scotland like the church south of the border, and not everyone was happy about it. In 1638, there were so many comings and goings that Samuel was able to slip out of Aberdeen and make his way back to Anwoth.

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'Every mile is a mile nearer Anwoth,' he thought, as he travelled from the northeast of Scotland to the southwest. 'And every mile is a mile nearer my dear people.'

But Samuel was not back in Anwoth long before the Church of Scotland held a General Assembly and broke free from the king's church once again. Not only that, but the Assembly appointed Samuel Rutherford as a Professor of Theology in St Andrews University.

It was with a very sad heart that he said goodbye to the people he loved, and rode away from Anwoth.

Five years later, Samuel found himself in London. A great assembly of ministers was held there, and he was invited to join them. They had the job of working out exactly what the Bible taught, and putting the teachings together in a book that became known as the Westminster Confession of Faith. They also compiled the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. All of these are still in use today!

'It's good to be home in Scotland,' Samuel told his colleagues, when he arrived back from London. 'I much prefer the fresh sea air to the awful smell of the River Thames.'

'Have you made plans for what you'll do now?' he was asked.

Rutherford nodded. 'Yes,' he said. 'I'll teach my students, of course. But there's a book that needs writing, and I think I'm the one to write it.'

'What will it be about?' queried his colleague.

Samuel thought for a moment before answering. 'It will be about the relationship between the king and the church. God is the King of Kings, and the king of the country needs to know that.'

The other university teacher shook his head.

'Are you wise to think of writing a book on that subject?' he asked. 'It won't be popular.'

He did write his book, and the king didn't like it one little bit. Rutherford was charged with treason in 1661 and summoned to appear in court. Samuel, who was by then very unwell, refused to go. When the summons was delivered to him, he answered the messenger, 'I must answer my first summons; and before your day arrives, I will be where few kings and great folk come.' By the day that had been set for his trial, Samuel Rutherford had answered God's summons to go to heaven, where he met the King of Kings, whom he had loved deeply and served faithfully.



Fact File: *The Covenanters.*

During Samuel's life there was a lot of disagreement between the king and the church in Scotland about the way that they should worship God. Many of those who disagreed with the king were persecuted by government soldiers. These people were called the *Covenanters*, because some of their leaders had signed a protest about what the king was doing. This protest was called *The National Covenant*. It said that they would obey God rather than the king. The *Covenant* was signed in *Greyfriars Kirkyard* in *Edinburgh*.



Keynote: Samuel got into a lot of trouble because he resisted the king's attempts to control the church. He was willing to go through this because he knew that God was the King of kings and was more important than any human leader. There are still countries where Christians are persecuted. They know that God is more

important than any government. Although Samuel suffered greatly, God gave him the strength and help that he needed to get through the difficult times.



Think: Samuel believed that God is the King of kings. That means that he is most important, and that we should all do what he tells us in the Bible. When we don't do this, we sin. Sin displeases God. Jesus came so that we could be forgiven for our sins, but also so that we can learn to obey God more and more each day. Do you try to obey God? Who can help you to find out more about what God wants you to do?



Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for your love. You are perfect, and in charge of everything. Thank you for those who suffered in the past so that we would be able to worship you in the way that the Bible tells us. Help those Christians who are suffering for you today. Amen.