

Lady Kenmure

by Alexander Whyte

The sermon explores the life of Lady Kenmure, her struggles, and the profound impact of Samuel Rutherford's letters on her faith and resilience in adversity.

Scripture: Psalm 30:5, Psalm 34:17, Matthew 11:28, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:13, Hebrews 12:1, James 1:2, 1 Peter 4:12, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Suffering And Hope", "Christian Perseverance"

Description

Alexander Whyte preaches about the life of Lady Jane Campbell, a woman of remarkable gifts of mind who faced challenges such as bad health and a disastrous marriage. Despite her struggles, her misfortunes were turned for good through the grace of God and the wise counsel of Samuel Rutherford, her lifelong friend and minister. Rutherford's letters to Lady Kenmure provided comfort, encouragement, and profound insights on enduring afflictions, finding hope in eternity, and carrying the cross of Christ with grace and faith.

Transcript

'Build your nest, Madam, upon no tree here, for God hath sold this whole forest to death.'--Rutherford.

Lady Kenmure was one of the Campbells of Argyll, a family distinguished for the depth of their piety, their public spirit, and their love for the Presbyterian polity; and Lady Jane was one of the most richly-gifted members of that richly-gifted house. But, with all that, Lady Jane Campbell had her own crosses to carry. She had the sore cross of bad health to carry all her days. Then she had the sad misfortune to make a very bad marriage in the morning of her days; and, partly as the result of all that, and partly because of her peculiar mental constitution, her whole life was drenched with a deep melancholy. But, as we are told in John Howie and elsewhere, all these evils and misfortunes were made to work together for good to her through the special grace of God, and through the wise and wistful care of her life-long friend and minister and correspondent, Samuel Rutherford. Lady Jane Campbell had very remarkable gifts of mind. We would have expected that from her distinguished pedigree; and we have abundant proof of that in Rutherford's sheaf of letters to her. His dedication of that most remarkable piece, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith*, is sufficient of itself to show how highly Rutherford esteemed Lady Kenmure, both as to her head and her heart. Till our theological students have been led to study *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* : *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself*--which, to my mind is by far the best of Rutherford's works--*The Covenant of Grace* and *The Influences of Grace*, they will have no conception of the intellectual rank of Samuel

Rutherford himself, or of the intelligence and the attainments of his hearers and readers and correspondents. Thomas Goodwin was always telling the theological students of Oxford in those days to thicken their too thin homilies with more doctrine: Rutherford's very thinnest books are almost too thick, both with theology and with thought.

How ever a woman like Jane Campbell came to marry a man like John Gordon will remain a mystery. It was not that he was a man of no mind; he was a man of no worth or interest of any kind. He was a rake and a lick-spittle, the very last man in Scotland for Jane Campbell to throw herself away upon. And she was too clever and too good a woman not to make a speedy and a heart-breaking discovery of the fatal mistake she had committed. Poor Jane Campbell soon wakened up to the discovery that she had exchanged the name and the family of a brave and noble house for the name and the house of a poltroon. No wonder that Rutherford's letters to her are so often headed: 'To Lady Kenmure, under illness and depression of mind.' Could you have kept quite well had you been a Campbell with John Gordon for a husband? Think of having to nurse your humbug of a husband through a shammed illness. Think of having to take a hand in sending in a sham doctor's certificate because your husband was too much of a time-server to go to Edinburgh to give his vote for a persecuted church. Think of having to wear the title and decoration your husband had purchased for you at the cost of his truth and honour and manhood. Lady Kenmure needed Samuel Rutherford's very best letters to help to keep her in bare life all the time the county dames were green with envy at the dear-bought honours. And Kenmure himself had to be brought to his death-bed before he became a husband worthy of his wife. We still read in his Last Speeches how God made Lord Gordon's sins to find him out, and with what firmness and with what tenderness Rutherford handled the soul of the dying man till all his cowardice, title-hunting, and truth-betraying life came back to his death-bed with a sharper sting in them than even his grossest sins. Whoredom and wine after all are but the lusts of a man, whereas time-serving and truth-selling are the lusts of a devil. 'Dig deeper,' said Rutherford to the dying courtier, and Kenmure did dig deeper, till he came down to the seals and the titles and the ribbons for which he had sold his soul. But he that confesses and forsakes his sins even at the eleventh hour shall always find mercy, and so it was with Lord Kenmure.

'Between the stirrup and the ground

Mercy I sought and mercy found.'

We do not grudge Viscount Kenmure all the grace he got from God; we shall need as much grace and more ourselves; but we do somewhat grudge such a man a place of honour among the Scots worthies. We are tempted to throw down the book and to demand what right John Gordon has to stand beside such men as Patrick Hamilton, and John Knox, and John Wishart, and Archibald Campbell, and Hugh M'Kail, and Richard Cameron, and Alexander Shields? But Lochgoin answers us that God sometimes accepts the late will for the whole timeous deed, and the bravery and loyalty of the wife for the meanness and poltroonery of the husband. 'Have you a present sense of God's love?' 'I have, I have,' said the dying Viscount. As Rutherford continued in prayer, Kenmure was observed to smile and look upwards. About sunset Lord Kenmure died' at the same instant that Rutherford said Amen to his prayer. The Last and Heavenly Speeches is a rare pamphlet that will well repay its price to him who will seek it out and read it.

This was the correspondent, then, to whom Samuel Rutherford wrote such counsels and encouragements as these : 'Therefore, madam, herein have comfort, that He who seeth perfectly through all your evils, and who knoweth the frame and constitution of your nature, and what is most healthful for your soul, holdeth every cup of affliction to your head with his own gracious hand. Never believe that your tender-hearted

Saviour will mix your cup with one drachm-weight of poison. Drink, then, with the patience of the saints: wrestle, fight, go forward, watch, fear, believe, pray, and then you have all the infallible symptoms of one of the elect of Christ within you' (Letter 3).

On the death of her infant daughter, Rutherford writes to the elect lady: 'She is only sent on before, like unto a star, which, going out of our sight, doth not die and vanish, but still shineth in another hemisphere. What she wanted of time she hath gotten of eternity, and you have now some plenishing up in heaven. Build your nest upon no tree here, for God hath sold the whole forest to death' (Letter 4). 'Madam, when you are come to the other side of the water and have set down your foot on the shore of glorious eternity, and look back to the water and to your wearisome journey, and shall see in that clear glass of endless glory nearer to the bottom of God's wisdom, you shall then be forced to say, "If God had done otherwise with me than He hath done.

I had never come to the enjoying of this crown of glory"' (Letter 11). 'Madam, tire not, weary not; for I dare find you the Son of God caution that when you are got up thither and have cast your eyes to view the golden city and the fair and never-withering Tree of Life that beareth twelve manner of fruits every month, you shall then say, "Four-and-twenty hours' abode in this place is worth threescore and ten years' sorrow upon earth "'(Letter 19). 'Your ladyship goeth on laughing and putting on a good countenance before the world, and yet you carry heaviness about with you.

You do well, madam, not to make them witnesses of your grief who cannot be curers of it' (Letter 20). 'Those who can take the crabbed tree of the cross handsomely upon their backs and fasten it on cannily shall find it such a burden as its wings are to a bird or its sails to a ship' (Letter 69). 'I thought it had been an easy thing to be a Christian, and that to seek God had been at the next door; but, oh, the windings, the turnings, the ups and downs He hath led me through!' (Letter 104) 'I may be a book-man and yet be an idiot and a stark fool in Christ's way!

The Bible beguiled the Pharisees, and so may I be misled' (Letter 106). 'I find you complaining of yourself, and it becometh a sinner so to do. I am not against you in that. The more sense the more life. The more sense of sin the less sin' (Letter 106). 'Seeing my sins and the sins of my youth deserved strokes, how am I obliged to my Lord who hath given me a waled and chosen cross! Since I must have chains, He would put golden chains on me, watered over with many consolations.

Seeing I must have sorrow (for I have sinned, O Preserver of men!), He hath waled out for me joyful sorrow--honest, spiritual, glorious sorrow' (Letter 206). There are hundreds of passages as good as these scattered up and down the forty-seven letters we have had preserved to us out of the large and intimate correspondence that passed between Samuel Rutherford and Lady Kenmure.

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