

~Other Speakers S-Z: Alexander Whyte:

'Ho, ye that have no money, come and buy in the poor man's market.'—Rutherford.

It makes us think when we find two such men as Samuel Rutherford and John Fergushill falling back for their own souls on a Scripture like this. We naturally think of Scriptures like this as specially sent out to the chief of sinners; to those men who have sold themselves for naught, or, at least, to new beginners in the divine life. We do not readily think of great divines and famous preachers like Rutherford, or of godly and able pastors like Fergushill, as at all either needing such Scriptures as this, or as finding their own case at all met in them. But it is surely a great lesson to us all—a great encouragement and a great rebuke—to find two such saintly men as the ministers of Anwoth and Ochiltree reassuring and heartening one another about the poor man's market as they do in their letters to one another. And their case is just another illustration of this quite familiar fact in the Church of Christ, that the preachers who press their pulpits deepest into the doctrines of grace, and who, at the same time, themselves make the greatest attainments in the life of grace, are just the men, far more than any of their hearers, both to need and to accept the simplest, plainest, freest, fullest offer of the Gospel. If the men of the house of Israel will not accept the peace you preach to them, said our Lord to His first apostles, then take that peace home to yourselves. And how often has that been repeated in the preaching of the Gospel since the days of Peter and John! How often have our best preachers preached their best sermons to themselves! 'I preached the following Lord's Day,' says Boston in his diary, 'on "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" and my sermon was mostly on my own account.' And it was just because Boston preached so often in that egoistical way that the people of Ettrick were able to give such a good account of what they heard. Weep yourselves, if you would have your readers weep, said the shrewd old Roman poet to the shallow poetasters of his Augustan day. And the reproof and the instruction come up from every pew to every pulpit still. 'Feel what you say, if you would have us feel it. Believe what you say, if you would have us believe it. Flee to the refuge yourselves, if you would have us flee. And let us see you selling all in the poor man's market, if you would see us also selling all and coming after you.' The people of Anwoth and Ochiltree were very well off in this respect also that their ministers did not bid them do anything that they did not first do themselves. The truest and best apostolical succession had come to those two parishes in that their two pastors were able, with a good conscience before God and before their people, to say with Paul to the Philippians: 'Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me do; and the God of peace shall be with you.'

As to the merchandise of the poor man's market, that embraces everything that any man can possibly need or find any use for either in this world or in the next. Absolutely everything is found in the poor man's market—everything, from God Himself, the most precious of all things, down to the sinner himself, the most vile and worthless of all things. The whole world, and all the worlds, are continually thrown into this market, both by the seller and by the purchaser. The seller holds nothing back from this market, and the purchaser comes to this market for everything. Even what he already possesses; even what he bought and paid for but yesterday; even what everybody else would call absolutely the poor man's own, he throws it all back again upon God every day, and thus holds all he has as his instant purchase of the great Merchantman. The poor man's market is as far as possible from being a Vanity Fair, but the catalogues and the sale-lists of that fair may be taken as a specimen of the things that change hands continually in the poor man's market also. For here also are sold such merchandise as houses, lands, trades, places, honours, preferments, pleasures and delights of all sorts; wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, gold, silver, and what not. All these things God sells to poor men every day; and for all these things, as often as they need any of them, His poor men come to His market for them. And, as has been said, even after they have got possession of any or all of these things, as if the market had an absolute fascination for them, like gamblers who cannot stay away from the wheel, they are back again, buying and selling what, but yesterday, they took home with them as the best bargain they had ever made. Yes, the things that, once possessed, either by inheritance or by purchase or by gift, you would think they would die rather than part with—a patrimony in ancient lands and houses, a possession they had toiled and prayed and waited for all their days, Christ on His cross, their own child in his cradle—absolutely everything they possess, or would die to possess, they part with again, just that they may have the excitement, the debate, the delight, the security, and the liberty of purchasing it all over again every day in the poor man's market.

Over all this merchandise God Himself is the Master Merchant. It all belongs to Him, and He has put it all into the poor man's purchase. He owns all the merchandise, and He has opened the market: He invites and advertises the purchasers, fixes the prices, and settles the conditions of sale. And the first condition of sale is that all intending purchasers shall come to Himself immediately for whatever they need. All negotiation here must be held immediately with God. There are no middlemen here. They have their own place in the markets of earth; but there is no room and no need for them here. The producer and the purchaser meet immediately here.

He employs whole armies of servants to distribute and deliver His goods, but the bargain itself must be struck with God alone. The price must be paid directly to Him; and then, with His own hand, He will write out your right and title to your purchase. Let every poor man, then, be sure to draw near to God, and to God alone. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Ho, ye that have no money: incline your ear, and come to Me: hear, and your soul shall live!

Now, surely, one of the most remarkable things about the purchasers in this market is just their fewness. We find Isaiah in his day canvassing the whole of Jerusalem, high and low, and glad to get even one purchaser here and another there. And Rutherford, looking back to Anwoth from Aberdeen, was not sure that he had got even so much as one really earnest purchaser brought near to God. And thus it was that, while at Anwoth, he was so much in that market himself. Partly on the principle that preachers are bidden to take to themselves for their trouble what their proud people refuse, and partly because Rutherford was out of all sight the poorest man in all Anwoth.

Now, what made Isaiah and Rutherford and Fergushill such poor men themselves, was just this, that they came out of every money-making enterprise in the divine life far poorer men than they entered it. There are some unlucky men in life who never prosper in anything. Everything goes against them. Everything makes shipwreck into which they adventure their time and their money and their hope. They go into one promising concern after another with flying colours and a light heart. Other men have made great fortunes here, and so will they; but before long their old evil luck has overtaken them, and they are glad that they are not all their life in prison for the uttermost farthing. And so on, till at last they have to go to the poor man's market for the last decencies of their death and burial; for their winding-sheet, and their coffin, and their grave. And so was it with the ministers of Anwoth and Ochiltree; and so it is with all that poverty-stricken class of ministers to which they belonged. For, whatever their attainments and performances in preaching or in pastoral work may do to enrich others, one thing is certain: all they do only impoverishes to pennilessness the men who put their whole life and their whole heart into the performance of such work. Their whole service of God, both in the public ministry of the word, and in their more personal submission to His law, has this fatal and hopeless principle ruling it, that the better it is done, and the more completely any man gives himself up to the doing of it, the poorer and the weaker it leaves him who does it. So much so, that while he leads other men into the way of the greatest riches, he himself sinks deeper and deeper into poverty of spirit every day. Till, out of sheer pity, and almost remorse 'that His service should entail such poverty on all His servants, Christ sends them out continually less with an invitation to their people than to themselves, saying always to them, Take the invitation to yourselves; and he of My servants who hath no money let him buy without money and bear away what he will.' 'My dear Fergushill, our Lord is not so cruel as to let a poor man see salvation and never let him touch it for want of money; indeed, the only thing that commendeth sinners to Christ is their extreme necessity and want. Ho, he that hath no money, that is the poor man's market.' When James Guthrie was lying ill and like to die, he called in his man, James Cowie, to read in the Epistle to the Romans to him, and when Cowie came to these words, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,' his master burst into tears, and said, 'James, I have nothing but that to lippen to.'

Look now at the prices that are demanded and paid in the poor man's market. And, paradoxical and past all understanding as are so many of the things connected with this matter, the most paradoxical and past all understanding of them all is the price that is always asked, and that is sometimes paid, in that market. When any man comes here to buy, it is not the value of the article on sale that is asked of him; but the first question that is asked of him is, How much money have you got? And if it turns out that he is rich and increased with goods, then, to him, the price, even of admittance to this market, is all that he has. The very entrance-money, before he comes in sight of the stalls and tables at all, has already stripped him bare of every penny he possesses. And that is why so few purchasers are found in this market; they do not feel able or willing to pay down the impoverishing entrance-price. As a matter of fact, it is a very unusual thing to find a young man who has been so well taught about this market by his parents, his schoolmasters, or even by his ministers, that he is fit to enter early on its great transactions. And increasing years do not tend of themselves to reconcile him to the terms on which God sells His salvation. The price in the poor man's market is absolutely everything that a rich man possesses; and then, when he has nothing left, when he has laid down all that he has, or has lost all, or has been robbed of all, only then the full paradox of the case comes into his view; for then he begins to discover that the price he could not meet or face so long as he was a rich and a well-to-do man is such a price that, in his absolute penury, he can now pay it down till all the market is his own. Multitudes of poor men up and down the land remember well, and will never forget, this poor man Rutherford's so Isaiah-like words, 'Our wants best qualify us for Christ'; and again, 'All my own stock of Christ is some hunger for Him.' 'Say Amen to the promises, and Christ is yours,' he wrote to Lady Kenmure. 'This is surely an easy market. You need but to look to Him in faith; for Christ suffered for all sin, and paid the price of all the promises.' 'Faith cannot be so difficult, surely,' says William Guthrie in his Saving Interest, 'when it consists of so much in desire.' Now, both its

exceeding difficulty and its exceeding ease also just consist in that. Nothing is so easy to a healthy man as the desire for food; but, then, nothing is so impossible to a dead man, or even to a sick man, as just desire. Desire sounds easy, but how few among us have that capacity and that preparation for Christ and His salvation that stands in desire. Have you that desire? Really and truly, in your heart of hearts, have you that desire? Then how well it is with you! For that is all that God looks for in him who comes to the poor man's market; indeed, it is the only currency accepted there. Isaiah's famous invitation is drawn out just to meet the case of a man who has desire, and nothing but desire, in his heart. All the encouragements and assurances that his evangelical genius can devise are set forth by the prophet to attract and to win the desiring heart. The desiring heart says to itself, I would give the whole world if I had it just to see Christ, just to be near Christ, and just, if it were but possible, that I should ever be the least thing like Christ. Now, that carries God. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, cannot resist that. No true father could, and least of all a father who loves his son, and who has such a son to love as God has in Christ. Well, He says; if you love and desire, honour and estimate My Son like that, I cannot deny Him the reward and the pleasure of possessing you and your love. And thus, without any desert in you—any desert but sheer desire—you have made the greatest, the easiest, the speediest, the most splendid purchase that all the poor man's market affords. No, William Guthrie; faith is not so very difficult to the sinner who has desire. For where desire of the right quality is, and the right quantity, there is everything. And all the merchandise of God is at that sinner's nod and bid.

Ho, then, he that hath no money, but only the desire for money, and for what money can, and for what money cannot, buy, come and buy, without money and without price. Instead of money, instead of merit, even if you have nothing but Rutherford's only fitness for Christ, 'My loathsome wretchedness,' then come with that. Come boldly with that. Come as if you had in and on you the complete opposite of that. The opposite of loathsomeness is delightsomeness; and the opposite of wretchedness is happiness. Yes! but you will search all the Book of God and all its promises, and you will not find one single letter of them all addressed to the abounding and the gladsome and the self-satisfied. It is the poor man's market; and this market goes best when the poor man is not only poor, but poor beyond all ordinary poverty: poor, as Samuel Rutherford always was, to 'absolute and loathsome wretchedness.' Let him here, then, whose sad case is best described in Rutherford's dreadful words, let him come to Rutherford's market and make Rutherford's merchandise, and let him do it now. Ho, he that hath no money, he that hath only misery, let him come, and let him come now.