

## The Loveliness of Christ

E. Calvin Beisner  
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Perhaps the most beloved figure of the second Scottish Reformation, that amazing time of revival and purification that transformed Scotland from top to bottom in the first half of the seventeenth century, was the Reverend Samuel Rutherford. Born about 1600 to a farmer, in 1627 Rutherford became pastor of the little parish church of Anwoth, in the stewartry of Kirkcudbright, in southwestern Scotland. He labored diligently there for nearly nine years, passionately tending his little flock, directing them to Jesus, whom He presented to them as sweet and lovely. In 1636, first by publishing in Latin a defense of the doctrines of grace against Arminianism, and then by writing and preaching in defense of Christ's kingly office, he offended the bishops of the then-episcopally governed Kirk of Scotland. He was tried before the Court of High Commission, deprived of his pastorate, and ordered to live in Aberdeen, the center of Arminianism and of support for episcopacy in the country. Thus he was deprived of his greatest joy: preaching Christ to the people. His internal exile there, which he likened to being in prison, ended after the 1638 General Assembly meeting in Glasgow overthrew episcopal rule of the Kirk and, in renewing the National Covenant, firmly reasserted the Calvinism and presbyterianism bequeathed to Scotland by John Calvin through John Knox. Although his beloved parish of Anwoth petitioned to have him restored, it had competition; he was wanted as pastor in Edinburgh and as professor at the University of St. Andrews. His fellow presbyters deemed it best for the health of the whole Kirk of Scotland that he be assigned to the professorship, where he began in 1639, eventually becoming also principal of the New College there. But he showed his pastor's heart by insisting, while negotiating the position, that he be allowed to preach every week on the Lord's Day; as things turned out, he not only preached in St. Andrews weekly, but also preached frequently in surrounding towns. Great scholar that he was, he was first a preacher of the Word of God. And he was that because he so deeply loved the living Word and the people for whom that Lamb of God had died.

Rutherford's preaching was known throughout Scotland, indeed throughout Britain and even on the continent of Europe—where he was several times offered pastorates and professorships—not first for its erudition, but for its loveliness—or rather, for the way in which he presented Christ as lovely:

An English merchant said of him, even in days when controversy had sorely vexed him and distracted his spirit, 'I came to Irvine, and heard a well-favoured, proper old man (David Dickson), with a long beard, and that man showed me all my heart. Then I went to St. Andrews, where I heard a sweet, majestic-looking man (R[obert] Blair), and he showed me the majesty of God. After him I heard a little, fair man (Rutherford), and he showed me *the loveliness of Christ*.

The loveliness of Christ was the focus not only of Rutherford's preaching but indeed of his every effort to minister to the sheep of whom he was the undershepherd. In hundreds of letters to

individuals, the loveliness of Christ arises as the most frequent and fervent theme. And Rutherford urged his listeners and readers to respond to that loveliness of Christ by “closing with Him,” as the old Scots would have put it—drawing ever nearer to Him, locking their hearts to Him in an unbreakable embrace. His love of Christ evidenced itself in both in his own devotional life and in his intimate love for and service to the members of his flock.

He has time to visit, for he rises at three in the morning, and at that early hour meets his God in prayer and meditation, and has space for study besides. He takes occasional days for catechising. He never fails to be found at the sick-beds of his people. Men said of him, ‘He is *always* praying, *always* preaching, *always* visiting the sick, *always* catechising, *always* writing and studying.’ He was known to fall asleep at night talking of Christ, and even to speak of Him during his sleep. Indeed, himself speaks of his dreams being of Christ.

Reading his letters makes it clear that one of the chief sources of Rutherford’s conception of the loveliness of Christ—a loveliness that encompassed all that Christ was and did for His people—was the one book of the Bible perhaps most thoroughly given to portraying Him, the last book, aptly titled “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” Look there, and you will see much about Jesus that endeared Him to Samuel Rutherford. Today time permits us no more than the merest beginning in the study of the Christ of the Revelation, but perhaps it will suggest why the “little, fair man” of Anwoth and St. Andrews was so consumed with His loveliness.

Let us begin with a rapid survey of some of the more prominent titles and descriptions of the Lord Jesus in the Book of Revelation. After that, we shall focus on just one of them.

He is the Amen, the faithful witness, holy and true (1:2, 5; 3:7, 14; 19:11), seated on a white horse and coming, as the Word of God (19:13; 1:16; 2:12, 16), to judge and make war. He is the firstborn of the dead (1:5), whose victory over the grave paves the way for ours. He is the master (1:1), the ruler of the kings and nations of the earth (2:26-27; 3:21; 12:5), triumphing over all His and our enemies as King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16), even giving to those who overcome “power over the nations” with Him. He is the Son of man (1:13; 14:14), the very embodiment of the temple of the New Jerusalem (21:22), clothed in priestly garments to present Himself the perfect sacrifice, yet standing in judgment over all history (1:7, 13, 18; 2:23; 3:7; 19:11). He is Alpha and Omega, First and Last, Beginning and End (1:17; 2:8; 22:13), the One of whom and from whom and to whom are all things.

He is the Living One (1:18), who lives, and was dead, and is alive forevermore, and has the keys of Hades and of Death. He is the Morning Star (2:28; 22:16), whose shining brings light into a dark world; indeed, He Himself is the light of the heavenly city, New Jerusalem, which has no need of sun or moon because of Him (21:23). He is the *Arche*, the Prince, of all creation (3:14), upholding and ruling the universe by the Word of His power. He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (5:5), redeemer (5:9) and protector of the Church (3:10), victor over Satan the accuser (12:7-11), giver of righteousness to all who believe in Him (2:17), who therefore is their advocate, clothing them in white garments just like His own, confessing their names before His Father and before His holy angels (3:5). He is the lover of Christians (1:5; 3:9), their deliverer from sin (1:5), the Head and Prince of the Church (1:16, 20; 2:1), to every member of which He gives the crown of life (2:10). He is the bread of life who gives Himself as bread to all who hunger and thirst after righteousness (2:17). He is the Bridegroom of the

Church (19:7-9; 21:9), who intimately knows His Bride (2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15, 19)—yes, who knows all about her sin and corruption, and who responds not only with judgment, discipline, and chastisement, but also with compassion, pity, and even adoration.

Several passages in the Book of Revelation convey the *appearance* of the Savior in especially memorable terms. We join the Apostle John in witnessing His glory in 1:12-17:

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands [the churches], and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars [the angels, or pastors, of the churches], out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword [the Word of God], and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. . . .”

We see His majesty, strength, and victory in 10:1-3:

And I saw still another mighty angel [Christ] coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud [in the Psalms, a picture of judgment]. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun [the brightness of perfect knowledge], and his feet like pillars of fire [signifying the purity that gave Him the right to judge]. And he had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land [signifying His triumph over all His enemies, including the beasts from sea and land and the dragon that gave them their power], and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. And when he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices.

We see Him as conquering warrior leading forth the armies of His saints in 19:11-16:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood [not His own, but the blood of His enemies], and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Do you see now why the Book of the Revelation is called the revelation of Jesus Christ? Here we meet Him more fully than anywhere else in Scripture. All these names and titles and descriptions are meant to exalt Him in our eyes, to fill us with praise and wonder and adoration and love and gratitude to our wonderful Savior.

But now let us turn to the one title and description under which we most clearly see our Savior revealed in this great book. It is the title that best declares *how* the Lord of glory achieves all He has come to do in redeeming, subduing, ruling, and protecting His elect. We meet Him by this title first, in Revelation 5, when the Apostle is at the point of despair:

And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside

and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?”

The scroll would reveal and—because of the creative, effectual power of the Word of God—pour forth the judgments of God in history for the building, rescuing, and protecting of His people and the condemnation and defeat of His enemies. Unless it were opened, none of these things, for which John and all the saints of God hope, would occur.

“Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.” And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns [a symbol of omnipotence] and seven eyes [a symbol of omniscience], which are the seven Spirits of God [the Holy Spirit; Zechariah 4] of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” [This, by the way, gives us the heavenly pattern for a loud and hearty corporate “Amen!” at the end of every prayer of the gathered church.] And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

*The Lamb of God.* That is the chief title of our Lord in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is as the Lamb of God that He reveals to us most clearly who He is and what He has done for us. Like that definitive passage in the gospels, Matthew 20:28, in which Christ said, “. . . the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many,” here we see what gave Christ the right to be and to do all else that is revealed of Him not only in the Revelation but in all of Scripture. As Lamb of God He was worthy to take the scroll and not only to look upon it—which no one else could do—but open it and read it, causing all its contents to become historical reality—or, rather, causing history to conform to its heavenly reality. The main body of the rest of the Book of Revelation recounts the results of the opening of each of the seals on that scroll, and the

summation of it all is that Satan and his hosts are defeated and the Lamb of God is seated on the throne of God in heaven (Revelation 22:1, 3).

In the title “Lamb of God” Christ combines perfectly the law and the gospel, the justice and the grace, the truth and the mercy of God. In Him “Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85:10), for on Him fell the wrath of God for man’s sin, that the mercy of God might fall on all for whom He died; and from Him comes the wrath of God on all who reject that mercy because they refuse to own Him as the faithful and true witness. Hence “the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man” who have not bowed the knee to Him, hide themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains after He opens the scroll and breaks its seals, and cry out “to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’” (Revelation 6:15-17). Yet it is otherwise for those who embrace the Lamb. They see in Him not wrath but grace, so that John can write, in 7:9-17, “I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ And all the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’ And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ So he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

When the saints overcome Satan, it is “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony [who] did not love their lives to the death” (12:11). They are preserved from worshiping the beast because their names have been “written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (13:8). Their names written in the Book of Life of the Lamb, they stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion and have “His Father’s name written on their foreheads” (14:1). It is as the Lamb that Christ overcomes those who make war with Him, “for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful” (17:14). Because their names are in the Lamb’s Book of Life, they are spared the judgment of the dead “according to their works” and so are spared being cast, like all whose names are not written in the Book, “into the lake of fire” (20:12, 15) because “there shall by no means enter [heaven] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination, or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (21:27).

Samuel Rutherford knew well the Lamb of God. That knowledge awakened in him a deep longing to know the Lamb better day by day on earth, to be with the Lamb in heaven. So he wrote to a friend in one of his beautiful letters, providentially preserved to this day for us:

“O how sweet to be wholly Christ’s, and wholly in Christ; to dwell in Immanuel’s high and blessed land, and live in that sweetest air, where no wind bloweth but the breathings of the Holy Ghost, no sea nor floods flow but the pure water of life that

floweth from under the throne and from the Lamb, no planting, but the tree of life that yieldeth twelve manner of fruits every month! What do we here but sin and suffer? O when shall the night be gone, the shadows flee away, and the morning of the long, long day, without cloud or night, dawn? The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' O when shall the Lamb's wife be ready, and the Bridegroom say, 'Come?'" [Letter 334]

In "preaching in 1644, before the House of Commons in London, he exclaims, 'O for eternity's leisure, to look on Him, to feast upon a sight of His face! O for the long summer day of endless ages to stand beside Him and enjoy Him! O time, O sin, be removed out of the way! O day! O fairest of days, dawn!'" ["Sketch," 15] When summoned to Parliament in 1661 to answer charges for treason for his authorship of *Lex, Rex*—an attack on monarchical absolutism as antithetical to the rule of God through His Word and of Christ over His Church—Rutherford, on his death bed, replied "that he had got another summons before a superior Judge and judicatory, and sent the message, 'I behove to answer my first summons; and, ere your day arrive, I will be where few kings and great folks come'" ["Sketch," 20]. Also while on that bed, when asked, "What think ye now of Christ?" he replied, "I shall live and adore Him. Glory, glory to my Creator and Redeemer for ever. Glory shineth in Immanuel's land" ("Sketch," 21).

Because he knew Christ so well as the Lamb of God, Rutherford pictured Him always as lovely. "To four of his brethren, who came to see him [on his death bed], he said, 'My Lord and Master is chief of ten thousands of thousands. None is comparable to Him, in heaven or in earth. Dear brethren, do all for *Him*. Pray for Christ. Preach for Christ. Do all for Christ; beware of men-pleasing. The Chief Shepherd will shortly appear.' He often called Christ 'His Kingly King'." ["Sketch," 21]

Because he knew Christ so well as the Lamb of God, Rutherford could—indeed, found himself constrained to plead with others to close with Him, as he did in a letter to elder John Gordon of Cardoness:

Come in, come in to Christ, and see what ye want, and find it in Him. He is the short cut (as we used to say), and the nearest way to an outgate of all your burdens. I dare avouch that ye shall be dearly welcome to Him; my soul would be glad to take part of the joy ye should have in Him. I dare say that angels' pens, angels' tongues, nay, as many worlds of angels as there are drops of water in all the seas, and fountains, and rivers of the earth, cannot paint Him out to you. I think His sweetness, since I was a prisoner, hath swelled upon me to the greatness of two heavens. Oh for a soul as wide as the utmost circle of the highest heaven that containeth all, to contain His love! And yet I could hold little of it. O world's wonder! Oh, if my soul might but lie within the smell of His love, suppose I could get no more but the smell of it! Oh, but it is long to that day when I shall have a free world of Christ's love! Oh, what a sight to be up in heaven, in that fair orchard of the new paradise; and to see, and smell, and touch, and kiss that fair field-flower, that ever-green Tree of life! His bare shadow were enough for me; a sight of Him would be the earnest of heaven to me. Fy, fy upon us! That we have love lying rusting beside us, or, which is worse, wasting upon some loathsome objects, and that Christ should lie His lone. Wo, wo is me! That sin hath made so many madmen, seeking the fool's paradise, fire under ice, and some good and desirable things, without and apart from Christ. Christ, Christ, nothing but Christ, can cool our love's burning languor. O thirsty love! Wilt thou set Christ, the well of life, to thy head, and drink thy fill? Drink, and spare not; drink love, and be drunken with Christ!

Nay, alas! The distance betwixt us and Christ is a death. Oh, if we were clasped in other's arms! We should never twin again, except heaven twinned and sundered us; and that cannot be.

When Lord Kenmure asked him, "What will Christ be like when He cometh?" he replied, "All lovely." ("Sketch," 29) In the face of Christ's loveliness, Rutherford felt deeply his own inadequacies—yet also found comfort precisely because the loveliness of Christ was chiefly His grace and mercy:

I am pained, pained, that I have not more to give my sweet Bridegroom. His comforts to me are not dealt with a niggard's hand; but I would fain learn not to idolise comfort, sense, joy, and sweet, felt presence. All these are but creatures, and nothing but the kingly robe, the gold ring, and the bracelets of the Bridegroom; the Bridegroom Himself is better than all the ornaments that are about Him. Now, I would not so much have these as God Himself, and to be swallowed up of love to Christ. I see that in delighting in a communion with Christ, we may make more gods than one. But, however, all was but bairns' play between Christ and me till now. If one would have sworn unto me, I would not have believed what may be found in Christ. I hope that ye pity my pain that much, in my prison, as to help me yourself, and to cause others help me, a dyvour, a sinful wretched dyvour, to pay some of my debts of praise to my great King. Let my God be judge and witness, if my soul would not have sweet ease and comfort, to have many hearts confirmed in Christ, and enlarged with His love, and many tongues set on work to set on high my royal and princely Well-beloved. Oh that my sufferings could pay tribute to such a king! I have given over wondering at His love; for Christ hath manifested a piece of art upon me, that I never revealed to any living. He hath gotten fair and rich employment, and sweet sale, and a goodly market for His honourable calling of showing mercy, on me the chief of sinners. Every one knoweth not so well as I do, my woefully-often broken covenants. My sins against light, working in the very act of sinning [that is, the light working in me even while I sinned], have been met with admirable mercy: but, alas! He will get nothing back again but wretched unthankfulness. I am sure, that if Christ pity anything in me next to my sin, it is pain of love for an armful and soulful of Himself, in faith, love, and begun fruition.

But Rutherford was not satisfied with extolling the loveliness of Christ by himself. He urged his fellow ministers to do likewise. In a letter to the Reverend David Dickson he wrote, "O man of God, go on, go on; be valiant for that Plant of renown, for that Chief among ten thousands, for that Prince of the kings of the earth" (Letter 168). He ended that letter with these words: "My sorrow is, that I cannot get Christ lifted off the dust in Scotland, and set on high, above all the skies, and heaven of heavens. Yours, in his sweet Lord Jesus....."

Brethren, the task of the ministers of God, according to Revelation 8:1-6, is to blow the trumpets of God's judgments in history, proclaiming God's great acts of salvation and judgment by the Lamb. Exalt Him. Proclaim Him. Tell the world of His sweetness, His beauty, His loveliness, His mercy; warn it of His wrath; convince it of His power and majesty and victory. Raise up before it the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and, constrained by the love of God, cry out to it, "Be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).