Isaiah 43:2 (Samuel J. Rutherford) 161718

Letters of Samuel Rutherford, 7. The Fiery Trial (43:2)

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee... when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned.” Isa. 43:2

Who knoweth the truth of grace without a trial? Oh, how little getteth Christ of us, but that which He winneth (to speak so) with much toil and pains! And how soon would faith freeze without a cross!

Learn to make your evils your great good; and to spin comforts, peace, joy, communion with Christ, out of your troubles, which are Christ’s wooers, sent to speak for you to Himself.

I find it hard work to believe when the course of providence goeth crosswise to our faith, and when misted souls in a dark night cannot know east by west, and our sea-compass seemeth to fail us. Every man is a believer in daylight: a fair day seemeth to be made all of faith and hope. What a trial of gold is it to smoke it a little above the fire! but to keep gold perfectly yellow-colored amidst the flames, and to be turned from vessel to vessel, and yet to cause our furnace to sound and speak, and cry the praises of the Lord, is another matter.

I bless the Lord, that all our troubles come through Christ’s fingers, and that He casteth sugar among them, and casteth in some ounce-weights of heaven, and of the Spirit of glory that resteth on suffering believers, into our cup, in which there is no taste of hell.

Losses and disgraces are the wheels of Christ’s triumphant chariot. In the sufferings of His own saints, as He intendeth their good, so He intendeth His own glory.... We creep in under our Lord’s wings in the great shower, and the water cannot come through those wings.... We may sing... even in our winter storm, in the expectation of a summer sun, at the turn of the year. No created powers in hell, or out of hell, can mar the music of our Lord Jesus, nor spoil our song of joy. Let us then be glad, and rejoice in the salvation of our Lord; for faith had never yet cause to have wet cheeks, and hanging-down brows, or to droop or die.

Losses, disappointments, ill-tongues, loss of friends, houses, or country, are God’s workmen, set on work to work good to you, out of everything that befalleth to you. Let not the Lord’s dealing seem harsh, rough, or unfatherly, because it is unpleasant. When the Lord’s blessed will bloweth across your desires, it is best, in humility, to strike sail to Him, and to be willing to be led any way our Lord pleaseth.... Ye know not what the Lord is working out of this, but ye shall know it hereafter.

I am taught in this ill weather to go on the lee-side of Christ, and to put Him in between me and the storm; and (I thank God) I walk on the sunny side of the brae.

We take ill with it, and can hardly endure to set our paper-face to one of Christ’s storms, and to go to heaven with wet feet, and pain, and sorrow. We love to carry a heaven to heaven with us, and would have two summers in one year, and no less than two heavens. But this will not do for us: one (and such a one) may suffice us well enough. The man, Christ, got but one only, and shall we have two?

I am like an old crazed ship that hath endured many storms, and that would fain be in the lee of the shore, and feareth new storms; I would be that nigh heaven, that the shadow of it might break the force of the storm, and the crazed ship might win to land. My Lord’s sun casteth a heat of love and beam of light on my soul.

I see grace groweth best in the winter.... I shall think it mercy to my soul, if my faith shall outwatch all this winter-night, and not nod nor slumber till my Lord’s summer day dawn upon me.... God be thanked that Christ in His children can endure a stress and a storm, howbeit soft nature would fall down in pieces.

Christ’s enemies are but breaking their own heads in pieces, upon the rock laid in Zion; and the stone is not removed out of its place. Faith hath cause to take courage from our very afflictions; the devil is but a whetstone to sharpen the faith and patience of the saints. I know that he but heweth and polisheth stones, all this time for the New Jerusalem.

They are not worthy of Jesus who will not take a blow for their Master’s sake.

If ye were not strangers here, the dogs of the world would not bark at you. You may see all windings and turnings that are in your way to heaven out of God’s Word; for He will not lead you to the kingdom at the nearest, but you must go through “honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, and yet always rejoicing.” The world is one of the enemies we have to fight with, but a vanquished and overcome enemy, and like a beaten and forlorn soldier; for our Jesus hath taken the armor from it. Let me, then, speak to you in His words: “Be of good courage,” saith the Captain of our salvation, “for I have overcome the world.” You shall neither be free of the scourge of the tongue, nor of disgraces (even if it were buffetings and spittings upon the face, as was our Savior’s case), if you follow Jesus Christ. I beseech you in the bowels of our Lord Jesus, keep a good conscience, as I trust you do. You live not upon men’s opinion; gold may be gold, and have the King’s stamp upon it, when it is trampled upon by men. Happy are you, if, when the world trampleth upon you in your credit and good name, yet you are the Lord’s gold, stamped with the King of heaven’s image, and sealed by the Spirit unto the day of your redemption. Pray for the spirit of love; for “love beareth all things, it believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things.”

Be not afraid of men. Your Master can mow down His enemies, and make withered hay of fair flowers. Your time will not be long; after your afternoon will come your evening, and after evening night. Serve Christ.... Let His cause be your cause; give not an hair-breadth of truth

away; for it is not yours, but God’s. Then, since ye are going, take Christ’s testificate with you out of this life— “Well done, good and faithful servant!” His “well done” is worth a shipful of “good-days” and earthly honors.

I never knew, by my nine years’ preaching, so much of Christ’s love, as He has taught me by six months’ imprisonment.

Oh, what art is it to learn to endure hardness, and to learn to go barefooted either through the devil’s fiery coals, or his frozen waters!

Think it not strange that men devise against you; whether it be to exile, the earth is the Lord’s; or perpetual imprisonment, the Lord is your light and liberty; or a violent and public death, for the kingdom of heaven consisteth in a fair company of glorified martyrs and witnesses; of whom Jesus Christ is the chief witness, who for that cause was born and came into the world. Happy are ye if ye give testimony to the world of your preferring Jesus Christ to all powers.

Fear not men, for the Lord is your light and salvation. It is true, it is somewhat sad and comfortless that ye are your lone; but so it was with our precious Master: nor are ye your lone, for the Father is with you.

Think it not strange, beloved in our Lord Jesus, that Satan can command keys of prisons, and bolts, and chains. This is a piece of the devil’s princedom that he hath over the world. Interpret and understand our Lord well in this. Be not jealous of His love, though He make devils and men His under-servants to scour the rust off your faith, and purge you from your dross. And let me charge you, O prisoners of hope, to open your window, and to look out by faith, and behold heaven’s post (that speedy and swift salvation of God), that is coming to you. It is a broad river that faith will not look over: it is a mighty and a broad sea, that they of a lively hope cannot behold the furthest bank and other shore thereof. Look over the water; your anchor is fixed within the veil; the one end of the cable is about the prisoner of Christ, and the other end is entered within the veil, whither the Forerunner is entered for you. It can go straight through the flames of the fire of the wrath of men, devils, losses, tortures, death, and not a thread of it be singed or burnt: men and devils have no teeth to bite it in two. Hold fast till He come.... Enjoy your Beloved, and dwell upon His love, till eternity come in time’s room, and possess you of your eternal happiness. Keep your love to Christ, lay up your faith in heaven’s keeping, and follow the Chief of the house of the martyrs that witnessed a fair confession before Pontius Pilate. Your cause and His is all one.... Laugh ye at the giddy-headed clay pots, and stout, brain-sick worms, that dare say in good earnest, “This man shall not reign over us!” as though they were casting the dice for Christ’s crown, which of them should have it. I know that ye believe the coming of Christ’s kingdom; and that there is a hole out of your prison, through which ye see daylight.

My shallow and ebb thoughts are not the compass which Christ saileth by. I leave His ways to Himself, for they are far, far above me: only I would contend with Christ for His love, and be bold to make a plea with Jesus, my Lord, for a heart-fill of His love; for there is no more left to me. What standeth beyond the far end of my sufferings, and what shall be the event, He knoweth, and I hope, to my joy, will make me know, when God will unfold His decrees concerning me. For there are windings, and to’s and fro’s, in His ways, which blind bodies like us cannot see.

Your time is measured, and your days and hours of suffering from eternity were, by infinite wisdom, considered.

I seek no more, next to heaven, than that He may be glorified in a prisoner of Christ; and that in my behalf many would praise His high and glorious name who heareth the sighing of the prisoner.

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