

# The Pilgrim's Progress

A Devotional by Timothy Darling

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## Foreword

John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* during his 12 year imprisonment for preaching the gospel without authorization from the sanctioned church in England. The nation was still reeling from the English civil war so political concerns were applied to every other concern. The story is filled with Bunyan's contemporary doctrinal concerns, theological digressions, and his biases. The intensity with which he applies his apologetics reflects the fortitude of a man willing to suffer for his convictions. His prison walls must have given him vivid experience from which to depict the dungeon of the Giant Despair.

Bunyan lived and wrote in the 1600s, immediately after the time of Menno Simons, Martin Luther, and Shakespeare. His book was right alongside the Bard's plays in popularity and sales for most of history since its publication. Some may remember it as the story dramatized in *Little Women* as



a family entertainment. Only in the last century has it's popularity waned. In the last 50 years it has become more obscure, but it has never gone out of print. It's original language is dated, although some have translated it to modern language. Still, as timeless as it is, there remains no standard, contemporary version of the book.

The allegory begins with Christian who is burdened by his sin and by impending judgement. All alone in his distress he flees his home and travels

to find relief. *The Pilgrim's Progress* follows Christian as he moves from one discovery to the next. He finds relief from his burden but also finds the life he has chosen is full of challenges to be met and overcome. He eventually makes his way to the Celestial City where his struggles are at last completed and vindicated.

*The Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory, somewhat like Jesus' parables, but with more open symbolism. Christian's quest reflects the journey all believers in Jesus undertake from our past to eternity. The character names in the book are Biblically inspired, names like: Faithful, Mercy, Mr. Worldly Wise, Obstinate, Pliable, and the Giant Despair. Bunyan is unambiguous. He has a view of right and wrong and he wants to make sure his readers don't miss the point.

As is often the case, I have designed this devotional aide with the thought in mind that we do not always read materials like this every day. So, there are four entries per week (designated a, b, c, and d). The reader need not be concerned about getting behind. At the

same time, the entries are longer than some I have written in the past. Hopefully this provides the reader with a roadmap through *The Pilgrim's Progress* and a somewhat more extensive treatment of the topics covered.

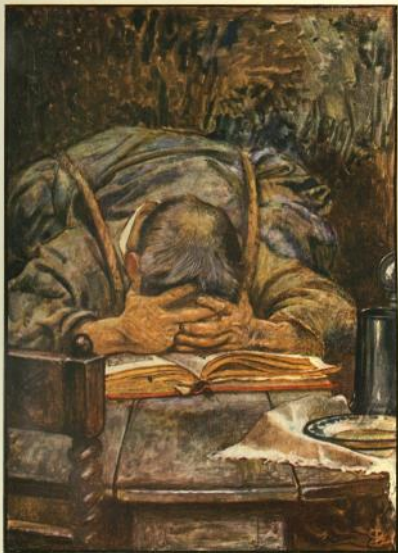
Each week begins with a summary of the section of the book being covered. Each day includes a quotation from the book. Please find scriptures scattered throughout and take the time to look up references when full quotations are not included.

Christian's journey is not easy, as ours are not easy. He faces obstacles and he makes bad choices and mistakes. He is weak, but God's grace, his faith, and his companions help him come to the Celestial City at last. Let us follow.

(Milton, Pennsylvania, Autumn, 2025)

*The text of The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan and all included artwork are in the public domain.*

## What Must I Do?



The story opens with Christian casting about, lost and aimless. He wears a heavy burden on his back and carries a book in his hand. From time-to-time he reads from his book and cries out in distress, "What must I do?" His family and his neighbors do not understand.

# What Must I Do?

## Week of Sept 7.a — Why is Christian distressed?

*“I dreamed, and, behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. I looked, and as he read, he wept and trembled.*

Bunyan begins the story with a mystery. Who is this man? What is this burden? Why is he so distressed? The man explains to his wife:

*... this our city will be burnt with fire from heaven; in which fearful overthrow, both myself, with thee my wife, and you my sweet babes, shall miserably come to ruin ...*

In short, he is afraid. He has read in his book of a catastrophe to come. His relations think him first sick, then insane. Sleep does not help. He wanders about day and night reading, praying, and crying out.

Bunyan does not call Christian's book "The Bible" but he does include

references alongside the story to give us snippets of what Christian is reading.

The sound of battle comes from the city; the sound comes from the temple! It is the sound of the LORD paying back his enemies. (Isaiah 66:6 NET)

Bunyan is leading his reader along. Surely Isaiah's words apply most directly to an Old Testament context, but Bunyan, through Christian, is drawing images from the Bible to apply to spiritual realities. The Bible speaks repeatedly of God's judgement on individuals and on the world in general.

In Bunyan's day it was much more common to speak of God's wrath than it is today. The idea of God getting Divine payback seems out of keeping with the loving Jesus the modern, western church emphasizes. But the Bible is clear, even Jesus Himself speaks of the eternal destruction that awaits the enemies of God.

As a minister and as a man I am uncomfortable with presenting God as wrathful Judge disconnected from His merciful Savior aspect. But our culture



has softened our view of God's character to the point that His wrath is a neglected truth. When people begin speaking of His wrath, expressions like, "God is not an angry ogre" begin circulating. The use of terms like "ogre" to describe God's wrath defuses the underlying truth and gives us implied permission to dismiss it as irrelevant, maybe even inaccurate.

But God's wrath is not irrelevant. While I do not advocate frightening people into salvation, judgement is an indispensable element of God's plan. He promises to punish sin and to hold the sinner accountable, sometimes angrily. We dare not ignore it.

- What is your take on God's wrath?
- How does it fit in your theology?
- Do you ever sit uncomfortably with the realization that the God of creation is also the God of destruction?
- Can you think of other Scriptures that highlight this fearful and neglected truth?

# What Must I Do?

## Week of Sept 7.b — What is this burden?

*“I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave and I shall fall into Tophet.” (p. 11)*

The word Tophet may be unfamiliar. It is a biblical reference to the valley of Ben Hinnom near Jerusalem, a dump that burned perpetually. An awful place and the biblical visualization of Hell. It is this fate to which Christian fears his burden has doomed him.

Bunyan never tells us exactly what Christian's burden is. He only indicates it by a reference from his book, the Bible:

For my sins overwhelm me; like a heavy load, they are too much for me to bear. (Psalm 38:4 NET)

The connection between sin and utter destruction is unmissable in Christian's behavior. Possibly one of the reasons *The Pilgrim's Progress* has declined is the unpopularity of its themes. Sin is not a fashionable concept. Even Christians

do not speak of sin as much as we speak of mistakes, missteps, flaws, and weaknesses. No doubt these are all realities in our moral lives, but sin is what the Bible calls any infraction against God's character.

Just as giving a negative representation to God's wrath renders the idea less serious, so softening the idea of sin makes it less burdensome. Christian is clearly affected by his burden.

"I cannot go so fast as I would, by reason of this burden that is upon my back."

Sin slows us down. Some believers describe an acute sense of overwhelming guilt preceding their salvation. That guilt was only relieved by coming to Jesus for forgiveness, and that relief was sometimes palpable.

- How do we see our sin?
- Is it a burden to us or is it a negligible problem relegated to a compartmentalized spirituality?
- When were you last grieved or troubled by sin in your life?

Perhaps as we focus on Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress* you are finding that you are like Christian in this regard. Perhaps you have been experiencing a heightened moral sensitivity and some of your past behavior has begun to trouble you.

If so, keep reading and walk alongside Christian. There are answers here.

Perhaps as a believer in Jesus your relationship with sin is different. You are not so consumed by it because you understand forgiveness. But sin in your life continues to haunt you. You too can find answers here.

Christian runs into people from time to time. Some of them lead him astray. When he follows them, he finds himself in trouble. Others bring correction into his life. They lead him to a richer understanding of his journey and help him keep on the right path.

These path corrections become a regular part of Christian's quest. Keep reading to see what path corrections you may be in need of.

# What Must I Do?

## Week of Sept 7.c — Flee!

*Then said Evangelist, If this be thy condition, why standest thou still? He answered, Because I know not whither to go. Then he gave him a parchment roll, and there was written within, Flee from the wrath to come.*

An Evangelist is a person who shows another the way to salvation. Christian has expressed his fear that his burden will be his undoing and Evangelist is giving him the best advice he can. If the City of Destruction is doomed and Christian's burden will eternally condemn him, he should run away.

This sounds bad in the way we think about problems, but we are discussing problems too big for humans to deal with. The problem of sin (Christian's burden) is not limited to a single person but to all humanity. The sin we are born with and the sin of others that we generally cannot avoid has an effect on us. These are out of our control and out of our power to do anything about. At the end of time the whole world will be

taken in Divine judgment. Bunyan draws the words of Christian's scroll from John the Baptist:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

(Matthew 3:7 WEB)

The Baptist would have considered the religious leaders of his day too hard-hearted to heed any such warning. Christian is not hard hearted. He obviously wants to avoid destruction.

Paul tells Timothy to "flee youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22). Even temptation is often beyond our power to resist. This whole milieu of temptation, sin, and Divine judgment is a cosmic force. Our enemy, the Devil, is of supernatural origin. Even some other angels did not feel up to battling him, but left repulsing him up to God Himself.

Especially when we deal with addictions we feel the power of evil in our lives. But even less compelling temptations can overpower us in our weakness. God is powerful to save, and He is

powerful to forgive. Jesus alone is recorded in the Bible as facing down Satan and prevailing. We can distance ourselves from it, resist it, and we must call on God to help us against it.

In doing this we flee the wrath to come. God opens the way to life with Him to anyone who will come. Rejecting the life of sin and opposition to God is the necessary first step.

- What sin in your life troubles you most?
- Have you experienced a distance from God in the wake of sin?
- What has been your experience in resisting temptation?

# What Must I Do?

## Week of Sept 7.d — See Him Run

*So I saw in my dream that the man began to run.*

*Now, he had not run far from his own door, but his wife and children, perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, Life! life! eternal life! So he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain.*

*The neighbours also came out to see him run; and, as he ran, some mocked, others threatened, and some cried after him to return ...*

Already, before he is fully connected to God, Christian is subjected to the pull of the world. His old life calls to him: the familiarity of his family, the stigma of mockery, the tenacity of spiritual inertia, even threats. The spiritual resistance we encounter when we wholeheartedly invest ourselves in following God is



immense. The Devil uses every inducement, but Jesus is clear:

“If anyone comes to me, and doesn’t disregard his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can’t be my disciple. (Luke 14:26 WEB)

The idea Bunyan is highlighting is that Jesus requires our first and highest loyalty. When He called the fishermen to follow him, they left their father at the boat, and Jesus became their leader. This does not imply a complete, callous abandonment, we know the Apostles continued in their family lives, but it does spell a new life priority.

Bunyan depicts Christian’s neighbors as predators and nay-sayers. They want nothing more than to see Christian fail in his endeavor and return to his old, complacency.

I hear many whispering words of intrigue against me. Those who would cause me terror are everywhere! They are saying, “Come on, let’s publicly denounce him!” All my so-called friends are just watching for something that would lead to my

downfall. They say, "Perhaps he can be enticed into slipping up, so we can prevail over him and get our revenge on him. (Jeremiah 20:10 NET)

*The Pilgrim's Progress* depicts Christian's neighbors as a spiteful lot. They as quickly denounce a man for beginning a new life as denounce him for abandoning the effort. In our culture parents have been known to discourage their children because of the emotion involved in salvation. They warn them that it's a fleeting feeling. Most commonly we encounter the condescension of friends and associates. The world hates Jesus. He told us that and warned us that His followers would be hated on His account (John 15:18-19). We must steel ourselves to resist that emotional, relational, and spiritual hardship.

- Have you experienced discouraging attitudes directed at your faith from people you know?
- How do you deal with the stigma of our faith?

## The Wicket Gate



After leaving the City of Destruction, Christian's first goal is the Wicket Gate. The King's Highway is, at the beginning, walled on either side and the only way in is through a wicket gate. Only this way can Christian be relieved of his burden and begin his journey to the Celestial City.

# The Wicket Gate

## Week of Sept 14.a — Hard to find

*The man ... said, Whither must I fly? Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder Wicket-gate? The man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto: so shalt thou see the gate: at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.*

As Christian casts about for where to run, Evangelist gives him direction, go to the Wicket gate. Christian cannot see it. In Christian's book it says:

“Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. How narrow is the gate and difficult the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it! (Matthew 7:13-14 NET)

This is the first hint the man has that his path will be hard. To date, his primary concern has been relief from his burden and escape from destruction. Now he has a destination but it is obscure. All he has to go by is a light.

Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:105 WEB)

There is much about God's kingdom we do not know. We live by faith. The way is hard and entry is restricted, but by no means inaccessible. He gives us light in His word. We get guidance there just as Christian gets guidance from his book.

God also places people in our lives, like Evangelist, who point reliable ways to go. They help us navigate things that may not be otherwise obvious. The more experienced among us have traveled the road and they know the way.

We have our book, we have our guides, and we have the impulses God places inside us, but faith is essential to our journey. One thing we do not have is direct proof that what we pursue is real. Our hope is our proof:

But now they desire a better country,

that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:16 WEB)

This is one reason the entry gate to the kingdom is so hard to find, especially in the “enlightened” West. The evidence of our senses, even eye-witness accounts (which are less reliable than solid evidence) are more trustworthy to most than hope. But hope is the substance of our faith. We have been told wonderful things and the way to obtain them, and we have to believe and rely on the hope that information generates to continue giving shape to our goal.

- Is faith enough for you?
- Does the prospect of “no direct evidence” cause you to struggle with following Jesus?
- How do you feel about pursuing a place you cannot see?

# The Wicket Gate

## Week of Sept 14.b — Detractors and determination

*... two that resolved to fetch him back by force. The name of the one was Obstinate, and the name of the other Pliable. ... [however, on Chrisitan's refusal and his inducements to join him] let us turn again, and go home without him; there is a company of these crazed-headed coxcombs that, when they take a fancy by the end, are wiser in their own eyes than seven men that can render a reason.*

Simply put, Obstinate and Pliable are out to discourage Christian in his choice. In keeping with their names, Obstinate will not listen to Chrisian and Pliable is easily swayed by him.

However, the bulk of the exchange is taken with Christian's refusal to return and his persuasions for the men to join him. His refusal is simple:

I have laid my hand to the plough. (p. 13)

This concept is in Christian's book:

But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for God’s Kingdom.” (Luke 9:62 WEB)

Obstinate is ready to allow Christian to go on his misguided way, but Pliable listens:

Don’t revile; if what the good Christian says is true, the things he looks after are better than ours: my heart inclines to go with my neighbour.

And so he and Christian continue on. This story highlights one of the problems with faith. Some do not naturally have it and can only gain it through long nurturing. Others may have it fairly easily, but, as shall be seen, do not keep it. Christian regales Pliable with the wonders of the world to come:

- An endless kingdom
- Everlasting life
- Crowns of glory
- Garments that make us shine like the Sun
- No more crying nor sorrow



And Christian's description goes on into more specialized and esoteric wonders. These descriptions intrigue Pliable, but when the struggle intensifies, he quickly turns away.

- Can your faith embrace the whole package?
- Can you endure the discouragements of people and hardship?
- Can you keep your hand on the plough even when it seems more popular and more reasonable to turn back?

These are important questions both for people who are just beginning their faith-journey and those who have been long embarked upon it. Determination like Christian's must become a life-long companion.

# The Wicket Gate

## Week of Sept 14.c — Mired Down

*just as they had ended this talk they drew near to a very miry slough, that was in the midst of the plain; and they, being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was Despond. Here, therefore, they wallowed for a time, being grievously bedaubed with the dirt; and Christian, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire.*

Getting caught in what amounts to quicksand promptly makes Pliable change his tune. He instantly dismisses everything Christian said to him about good things to come. He renounces the quest, struggles a little, makes his way out and goes home. Christian still struggles toward his goal. But not for long before *Help* shows up to ... well ... help him. *Help* has a brief conversation with Christian from the bank of the pit, asking him what he is doing there.

Christian is regretting his lack of

vigilance. He was so afraid of the impending danger that he completely missed the steps designed to help him across the slough. After this brief conversation, Help gives him a lift and they continue the conversation on *Terra Firma*.

According to Help, the slough is composed of the “fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions” (p.18) that accompany conviction. When we are truly and deeply convicted of sin, we begin seeing spiritual ramifications of sin. The eventuality of judgement and eternal damnation weighs on us. The larger implications of small sins like dishonesty, gossip, stealing, abuse, can create in us a hint of their true enormity. Sin spreads tendrils into the world and even the ones we think are secret can affect other people. We begin feeling remorse and dread over those effects.

Like children trying to hide our misdeeds dread grows and overtakes our minds. It weaves fear of getting caught or unintended consequences. It demands assurance that we have covered our tracks well enough so that we will not be found out. We begin

fearing the moment of discovery. In a spiritually sensitive person, this dread can take on a frightening image of God as all-powerful judge. We might like to dismiss this image, but it is part of the truth. But God also is Love, even though we are less likely to see that aspect while plagued by guilt.

Do not let guilt's negative emotions slow your progress toward God. Our spiritual enemy has inspired sin in your life and he will also inspire a dread of that sin's power over you. The truth, though, is that God will free us of sin if we will but look for the steps past the apprehension and continue our efforts to enter at the wicket gate.

- What sin is in your past?
- What are some of the natural consequences of that sin if it ever had its full effect?
- Can you imagine that God is infinitely bigger than your sin?

# The Wicket Gate

## Week of Sept 14.d — The Gate

*So, in process of time, Christian got up to the gate. Now, over the gate there was written, 'Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'*

*"He that will enter in must first  
without*

*Stand knocking at the Gate, nor  
need he doubt*

*That is A KNOCKER but to enter in;  
For God can love him, and forgive  
his sin."*

*He knocked, therefore, more than once  
or twice,*

A wicket gate is a small door in a wall or set within another larger gate. It is designed for a person to pass through individually. Bunyan's choice of this passage is in keeping with the biblical image:

"Enter through the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is spacious that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. How narrow is the gate

and difficult the way that leads to life,  
and there are few who find it! (Matthew  
7:13-14 NET)

Christian's quest to find relief for his burden leads him to the difficulty of the situation. All his missteps, all his false leads, all the bad advice did not keep him from finding the gate. And while the gate is restrictive, it is freely accessible.

This is our state. We have our burden of guilt. We have sin that is in our distant past, and we can do nothing about it except encounter the guilt it produces. We know that God is merciful and kind and we want to get to Him, but He is accessible only on His own terms. While those terms are generous and gracious, they are unbending.

We encounter the gate. We must knock to get in. The gate will be opened to us, but we must ask for admittance. There is a humility and a solitude to entry to the kingdom. We must make the choice for ourselves, nobody can make it for us. We must seek entry on our own, nobody can let us in the back way. We must come to God on His terms, we cannot fudge.

And, as it says above the wicket gate, God will open and grant you entry.

If you have an awareness of the sin in your life, whether it's recent or in your distant past, be comforted. While God is a just judge, He is also merciful. Fear of judgment may keep a person away from God, but this is the opposite of the necessary action. Rather, His grace invites us closer. The name of the gate keeper in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is Good Will. This is the spirit with which God receives all who come to Him. Christian's book says:

Everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never send away.

(John 6:37 NET)

Take your burden to Jesus. He freely receives everyone. No work you can do will suffice, no price you can pay. His good will is boundless. Forgiveness is free.

# The Cross



The first key place for Christian is the Cross. After choosing to pursue Evangelist's solution to his burden, after enduring the Slough of Despond, after finding the small narrow gate, he finds the cross. This is the key to all his needs and the heart of his quest.



# The Cross

## Week of Sept 21.a — The Gate

*CHR. Sir, since I am informed that by this gate is the way thither, would know if you are willing to let me in?*

*GOOD-WILL. I am willing with all my heart, said he; and with that he opened the gate.*

*So when Christian was stepping in, the other gave him a pull.*

This sequence of events is interrupted by Christian's visit to the Interpreter. Before he finds the cross, he must go through that house, but before he does that, we have seen, he must enter at the wicket gate. This is the very gate Evangelist directed him to find and above it is written the legend,

“Knock and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:8)

Bunyan's portrayal of Christian's entry at the gate, after repeated knocking and insistent entreaties, reflects the determination needed to walk the narrow way. It is a life-long posture, a

serious and permanent choice. During the Middle Ages this image was seen often outside the gates of monasteries. *The Rule of Saint Benedict* states the method used to admit new monks and nuns to the order:

Let her not be granted an easy entrance; but, as the Apostle says, "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God." If the newcomer, therefore, perseveres in her knocking, and if it is seen after four or five days that she bears patiently the harsh treatment offered her and the difficulty of admission, and that she persists in her petition, then let entrance be granted her, and let her stay in the guest house for a few days. (Chapter 58: "On the Manner of Receiving Sisters")

So many find entry to the Narrow Way of Christ difficult for various reasons, not the least, their own misgivings and hesitation. Some of these are born of the seriousness of the choice, others are from the enemy who would not like to see such a decision embraced.

However, once the choice is made, the gatekeeper fairly yanks Christian

through the gate to avoid the enemy's attacks. This is a picture of the drawing experienced by all who come to Christ:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44 NET)

A person coming to Christ may experience this paradox. They will sense the difficulty and perhaps even obstacles to the choice. At the same time they may sense an inexorable attraction to the choice. The key is to persist, to keep seeking, to keep knocking.

Is God drawing you? Are you feeling the struggle? Don't stop now, you are so close.

# The Cross

## Week of Sept 21.b — The Walled Path

*Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back.*

Christian is first sent to the Interpreter's House where his understanding of the way of Christ is clarified. We will look a little later at the lessons Christian learns at the Interpreter's House. However, let us follow him out that door and to the goal ahead of him.

The name of the wall that surrounds Christian as he runs forward is drawn from a reference to Christian's book:

In that day, this song will be sung in the land of Judah: "We have a strong city. God appoints salvation for walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation may enter: the one which keeps faith. You will keep

whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in you.

(Isaiah 26:1-3 WEB)

Thus the wall is there for protection. Christian is secure in his approach to his immediate goal, relief from his burden. His persistence and belief is bearing fruit.

That is not to say Christian will no longer face struggles and obstacles. He will. The enemy will accost him, wayward people will misdirect him, circumstances will discourage him. But the wall is the ultimate truth. It is God's overarching protection.

If a person wants to come to God, to continue with God, to find God at any given time, God will make a way. Appearances may be misinterpreted. The difficulty of the way should not be seen as a lack of interest or help on God's part. He knows our hearts and He knows what we need better than we do. Even if we are attacked, misled, or discouraged, God is there. Our view of Him may be obscured, but clouds do not alter the radiance of the sun.

Also, we may misread the presence of

the wall. It may seem restrictive, and in a way that impression is correct. Freedom is not the limitless, unbounded openness we sometimes think it is. Real freedom acknowledges limitations and may explore their margins, but cannot safely violate them. For Christian to wander from the path, especially at this stage of his journey, would be quite perilous. He would likely miss his goal altogether.

So, in your search for freedom from your burden of sin, persist when it's difficult and receive the path with it's simple straightness and apparent restriction. Know that a wall protects, and God is doing that for you every step of the way.

# The Cross

## Week of Sept 21.c — The Cross Brings Deliverance

*He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.*

The message could not be clearer. The cross relieves Christian (and us) of the burden of sin. The tomb swallows his (and our) sin forever. It is never seen again. We learn from later portions of the book that Christian's encounter with the cross includes a vision of a suffering man upon the cross. Jesus is the one who paid the price for the forgiveness of our sin with his own willing, sacrificial death. The penalty is paid.

Because He died and was buried and rose from the tomb, he holds the key to

death but chooses to use it on our sin rather than to inflict it upon us. At the end of this life we must die, but that death is not the end. Our lives persist in eternity.

Have you come to the cross. This is the first goal of your faith. If you've been confronted by your sin. If you've been struggling to find what may be done to address its ongoing hold on your life. If you've confronted obstacles and discouragement, missteps and struggle, the cross is where all that ends.

In the educated West it is difficult to go through life without some awareness of Christian concepts. The very presence of a book like *The Pilgrim's Progress* is both a product of that fact and a contributor to it. We've all seen crosses. We've heard the jargon: saved, born again, baptized, forgiven. This event, the death of Jesus on the cross, is what gives these expressions their meaning. Without the truth of His sacrifice they are cliché's, meaningless aphorisms. But when combined with the truth that gave them life, we see a moment of redemption held out to us. The God who gave us life and suffered the loss



of our sinful choices, pursues us and makes provision for our reclamation.

If you believe Jesus is the Son of God. If you believe He died on the cross to secure your forgiveness. If you've accepted His forgiveness and His call on your life to follow His way. If it is your firm intention to continue in that way no matter what, to the end of your life and beyond, then like Bunyan's protagonist, you too are a Christian. The "beyond" portion of the above declaration holds a profound promise, the hope of eternity in the presence of God, relieved forever of the burden of sin, drawn forever into His goodness and love.

Do you believe?

# The Cross

## Week of Sept 21.d — The Gifts of Life

*Now, as he stood looking and weeping, behold three Shining Ones came to him and saluted him with "Peace be unto thee". So the first said to him, "Thy sins be forgiven thee"; the second stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with change of raiment; the third also set a mark on his forehead, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bade him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the Celestial Gate. So they went their way.*

Bunyan uses the description "shining ones" when he wants to speak of angels. In this case the angels come and greet him with peace and then confer upon Christian the marks of his salvation: forgiveness, new clothes, a mark on his forehead, and a scroll to present as his entry pass to the Celestial City.

The first, forgiveness, is a reference to Jesus' blessing on a paralytic (Mark 2:5). In so saying Jesus elevates forgiveness

to a higher form of healing than physical healing.

The second, new clothes, represents the fitness God confers on His servants to stand in His presence (Zechariah 3:4).

The third, a mark, is reminiscent of the gold plaque given to the High Priest to consecrate him Holy to the LORD (Exodus 28:36-38).

The last, the scroll, is in two parts. The first part is the scroll itself which represents Christian's name as one who is coming to the LORD (Psalm 40:6-8). The scroll implies a record of God's will set down for us to fulfill. The second part is the seal, emblematic of the Holy Spirit who reserves him and stands as a promise of ultimate redemption (Ephesians 1:13).

These marks of salvation are spiritual possessions belonging to all who stand forgiven. We too are clothed in righteousness before God, sealed with the promise of the Spirit, written in His book of Life. He knows us as His own and we are consecrated to Him, just as a priest is set apart for His service.

These are marks of God's ownership.

Just as sheep are owned by their shepherd, we belong to the LORD. He is our shepherd and our king. We do not live for ourselves, to do as we wish, but we live to do His will.

The marks of the LORD's ownership are of course, spiritual in nature. They are there to remind us we have been bought with a price. They are also there to remind the enemy that his domain does not extend to us. He is not permitted to rule where God's seal of ownership is intact.

## Interpreter's House



Between his entry at the Wicket Gate and his arrival at the cross, Christian is directed to Interpreter's House. Here he is shown images of the spiritual truths beneath his quest. Interpreter increases Christian's understanding of what he is attempting.

# Interpreter's House

## Week of Sept 28.a — The portrait

*Then said the Interpreter, Come in; I will show that which will be profitable to thee. So he commanded his man to light the candle, and bid Christian follow him: so he had him into a private room, and bid his man open a door; the which when he had done, Christian saw the picture of a very grave person hang up against the wall; and this was the fashion of it. It had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind his back. It stood as if it pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over his head.*

The man in the picture is one who leads others to God. He nurtures them like children. In the words of the Interpreter he gives them birth and nurses them toward heaven. The book in his hand is “the best of books”. The image is so symbolically charged that it is difficult for the reader to realistically envision the portrait. What does a picture of the

Law of Truth written on a man's lips look like? It is clearly fraught with emotion. The man is resolute, intensely pleading. He is heedless of the things of this world and driven by the glory of the next. He longs for the good of men's souls and the reward of a job well done.

What the man in the portrait represents is the care for the good of men's souls in light of their ultimate mutual goal: the rightness of the way that leads to the reward of the king. There are all kinds of false paths, but only one right one. This man is the key to treading that path.

For though you may have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, because I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (1 Corinthians 4:15 NET)

The placement of this vignette between the entry of the wicket gate and the cross is strategic. The hallmarks of the man in the portrait are of primary importance:

- Words of truth
- Adherence to the Scripture

- Rejection of the world
- Drawing toward the things of Heaven
- Longing for the reward of the One True God
- Love for the Master's service

Christian may have seen a hint of Evangelist in this portrait. Seek out the people in your life who nourish your spiritual walk. They may speak difficult truths to you at times, but if you stick with them, you will grow.

Make no mistake, most things can be counterfeited. The enemy is looking for any deception. For my part, when I reflect on my spiritual mentors, I look to the love of the master and the book in the man's hand. These two show me both a desire for truth and a motivation that goes deeper than mere fastidious obedience.

Confer with your mentors

Cherish the truth

Love the Master

Yearn for Eternity



# Interpreter's House

## Week of Sept 28.b — The sweeper

*Then he took him by the hand, and led him into a very large parlour that was full of dust, because never swept; the which after he had reviewed a little while, the Interpreter called for a man to sweep. Now, when he began to sweep, the dust began so abundantly to fly about, that Christian had almost therewith been choked. Then said the Interpreter to a damsel that stood by, Bring hither the water, and sprinkle the room; the which, when she had done, it was swept and cleansed with pleasure.*

Nobody sprinkles water on the floor to settle the dust anymore. If we had enough dust to be raised into a choking cloud, we'd just use a Swiffer or a vacuum cleaner. It's an image harder to imagine with its unfamiliar action.

But we've all seen a dust cloud raised. A motorcycle comes down the dirt road, A car moves too fast. Just after it rains you get a reprieve from the dust. The same car can come by and ... no dust.

How dusty are our hearts? How do we cope with the guilt that comes from trying so hard to do the right thing and failing? In actuality that's the dust, not the sin so much as the trust in our own efforts to overcome sin. The Bible clarifies that the Law, while it identifies and creates an awareness of sin, is powerless to eradicate it from our lives. When we rely on effort-driven, legalistic adherence to rules, all we do is raise dust, increase our guilt.

The Gospel is different. It teaches us to rely on a grace-driven love for holiness to overcome sin. The advantage of this is that the mercy of God is also grace-driven, so when we don't measure up, we're not left with our own guilt and sense of failure. We're left with forgiveness. That gracious, merciful, forgiveness is like water sprinkled on the dust. It settles our guilt instead of allowing us to be choked in it.

Jesus clarifies that our state of cleanliness is already accomplished in the Gospel.

You are clean already because of the word that I have spoken to you. (John 15:3 NET)

Christian does not reference Titus, but he affirms:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (Titus 3:5 KJV)

We must retrain our spiritual impulses to trust God instead of ourselves.

In the wake of sin in our lives, do we wallow in guilt? Or do we go to Christ for His grace? The gospel is grace, not condemnation.

After confession of sin, go to the gospel to renew your familiarity with Jesus who loves you.

# Interpreter's House

## Week of Sept 28.c — The fire by the wall

*Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the fire burn higher and hotter. ... This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the Devil; ... the backside of the wall, he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast, but secretly, into the fire.*

It had to be frustrating for the Devil to be trying to quench an oil fire with water when it was being perpetually fed by Jesus. That is, of course, the identity of the man with the vessel of oil. Grace is that wonderful gift given by God to maintain the fervor in our hearts. From grace flows forgiveness for sin, strength to withstand it, conviction to confess it, and the perspective of God on the world so that we may when we wish to, see

sin the same way He sees it, and extend compassion to those enslaved by it.

But the Devil's bucket of water is filled with legalism, doubt of God's love or forgiveness, shame, and pride. He combats our awareness of God's grace to enslave us again to himself. If we neglect our awareness of grace, we will live enslaved to the various facets of the power of sin.

- When we neglect embracing God's grace, sin and its effects can undermine our confidence in God.
- When we live in the shame of past sin instead of the forgiveness that is ours in Jesus
- Or we reject confession because of the defeat of repeated failure to overcome temptation
- Or we neglect confession because of our preference to live in sin instead of resisting temptation
- And when we stand in judgement on others instead of acknowledging and promoting their need for salvation to be delivered

We forget that the supply of grace is

endless, even for the most depraved person. Even in our most profound weaknesses, Jesus' grace is poured out in an endless supply. As Christian's book says:

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV)

Remember that whatever the Devil may use to dampen your awareness of God's grace, it is powerless to quench that grace itself. It is sufficient even in the face of opposition from the enemy. Remember the way grace expresses itself to us.

- God loves us
- He did, and continues to save us
- He forgives our sin (even repeatedly)
- He bears with us in our weakness

Warm yourself the glow of that grace

# Interpreter's House

## Week of Sept 28.d — The Palace

*Interpreter took him again by the hand, and led him into a pleasant place, where was builded a stately palace, beautiful to behold ... in the doorway stood many men in armour to keep it, being resolved to do the men that would enter what hurt and mischief they could. ... he saw [a stout] man draw his sword, and put a helmet upon his head, and rush toward the door upon the armed men*

The Interpreter shows Christian this paradoxical threat and invitation. Only those brave enough to face the danger can themselves inhabit the keep. This image is one that the Interpreter does not interpret. Instead Christian simply says he knows the meaning and they move on.

Those at the top of the keep are the redeemed. The armed men below are the trials through which the redeemed must pass to obtain the reward. Christian's book says

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, (Acts 14:22 NIV)

Jesus affirms and the whole history of the Faith warns that that believing and following the path of Christ will be fraught with hardship. These hardships are of various kinds.

Some may think that coming to Jesus should make their lives easier than they would be otherwise, less sickness and fewer commonplace obstacles that most people face. We are not rescued from the human condition. We must still face these struggles, but we face them with the help of the Holy Spirit and the hope of God's ultimate saving grace.

We may think that since we are saved from sin, temptation will no longer trouble us. But this is also not true. If Jesus Himself faced temptation we cannot expect to be exempt. No, we are given added strength to withstand temptation, godly resources with which to understand right from wrong, and forgiving mercy in the instance of failure, but temptation will not go away.

Finally we will face the additional



hardship of resistance to our faith from those who are opposed to it. There are people who will hate us or find us objects of ridicule. Their own lack of faith renders the expression of other people's faith foolish to them. It is not enough that they are different from the faithful, they often are compelled to vocally or even physically combat the effects of faith on others. Some of this stems from evil intent, and sometimes it is the result of a lack of understanding or insecurity. In any case, those who resist are among those we are called to reach. And their resistance contributes to our struggle to remain faithful, but that we must. We go through the trials to reach the goal.

## Vanity Fair



Christian travels in the company of Faithful. As they go they are met by Evangelist who warns them that they must go through Vanity Fair. They will encounter temptation and tribulation, perhaps even death, but they may not avoid it. The trial they face is inevitable.

# Vanity Fair

## Week of Oct 5.a — What has gone before

*The way to the Celestial City lies just through this town where this lusty fair is kept; and he that will go to the city, and yet not go through this town, must needs go out of the world. The Prince of princes himself, when here, went through this town to his own country, and that upon a fair day too ... but he had no mind to the merchandise, and therefore left the town, without laying out so much as one farthing upon these vanities.*

The fair appears to Christian and Faithful as one of the Charter fairs of medieval England. Many cities hosted a fair for several weeks to attract trade from other villages and towns. The fairs were sponsored by churches on holy days, splitting the profits with the crown. Some cities became quite well known for their huge fairs. At these fairs all sorts of very useful and good things could be found, clothing, cookware, farming tools. But these fairs also

attracted the unscrupulous and criminals. They were sometimes dangerous or sources of temptation as well as legitimate trade.

This fair is a festival of sin, selling every immoral distraction from human traffic to ill-gotten gain down to the most degrading kind of sin.

Christian's book tells the story of Jesus and the temptations He faced when He was confronted by Satan:

“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.” ... the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the highest point of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. ... the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur. And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you throw yourself to the ground and worship me.” (Selections from Matthew 4:1-11 NIV)

Jesus, as is well known, mastered the situation and overcame the Devil's temptations to abuse His power.

We are not immune. Bunyan presents Vanity Fair as an inevitable eventuality for everyone. The only way to avoid it is to bypass life itself:

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. In no way did I mean the immoral people of this world, or the greedy and swindlers and idolaters, since you would then have to go out of the world. (1 Corinthians 5:9-10 NET)

If Jesus Himself could not avoid temptation, neither will we. The Bible often alerts us to the likelihood.

Forewarned is forearmed. Like Jesus, we can resist. He saw through the deceptions at the root of temptation and relied on scripture to bolster His mind. We too can and should deeply familiarize ourselves with God's Word as a defense against that which we will surely encounter.

# Vanity Fair

## Week of Oct 5.b - Culture clash

*One chanced mockingly, beholding the carriage of the men, to say unto them, What will ye buy? But they, looking gravely upon him, answered, "We buy the truth." At that there was an occasion taken to despise the men the more; some mocking, some taunting, some speaking reproachfully, and some calling upon others to smite them. At last things came to a hubbub and great stir in the fair, insomuch that all order was confounded.*

As the travelers pass through the fair they are set apart by their clothes, their speech, and their refusal to browse the wares of the fair. Their differences made them seem to the residents to be foreigners. As is often the case, they are threatened by that which they do not understand and resort to abuse.

We too are called to be misunderstood. We too must be set apart by our clothing, our speech, and our refusal to browse the world's goods.

For example, in a world of immodesty

and ostentatious dress, we must be modest, not giving in to showiness in our appearance or to sexually provocative cuts of clothing. It is the vain impulse of pride to dress to pursue attention, some of it to inspire envy, some to inspire intimidation, some to inspire desire.

Another example: we are called to talk differently, to season our speech with grace and goodness. The world finds pleasure in the profane. We are to glorify God in our speech. We are not to speak words that berate or degrade others but rather to lift them up and encourage them and draw them to Christ. We are not to indulge in crass expressions, but rather to say only that which we would willingly say in God's presence, knowing that we are, in fact, always in His presence.

We are called to separate ourselves from the world as Christian made efforts to bypass the temptations of the fair, knowing, as Christian's book says:

Our citizenship is in heaven – and we also eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,  
(Philippians 3:20 NET).

Our modes of dress, our speech, and the desires we cultivate will set us apart from the world. Like the denizens of the fair, the citizens of this world will not understand, some will come to despise us for the differences we embrace.

we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to people. We are fools for Christ ... (1 Corinthians 4:9-10 NET)

But all this is what it means to be a pilgrim. We are not locals. We are outsiders, travelers, sojourners. As we pass through this world we keep before our eyes the customs of the King we serve and seek to obey and please Him.



# Vanity Fair

## Week of Oct 5.c — Having an affect

*Some men in the fair that were more observing, and less prejudiced than the rest, began to check and blame the baser sort for their continual abuses done by them to the men; ... for aught they could see, the men were quiet, and sober, and intended nobody any harm; and that there were many that traded in their fair that were more worthy to be put into the cage, yea, and pillory too, than were the men they had abused.*

Christian and Faithful are interrogated, beaten, and confined in a cage where the public hurls abuse at them. They are patient and do not retaliate, instead speaking gently and truthfully. The abuse increases, but, as we can see, some take a different view.

We are called to be different, but not simply for difference sake. Our differences are meant to serve as a message to those who don't know Jesus. Paul says:

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunities. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer everyone. (Colossians 4:5 -6 NET)

Salt is a strong image in the New Testament. It speaks of the residual affect our presence is to have to the people around us. Salt enhances, improves, sharpens the taste of food. We are meant to influence the world around us in a similar way. Where ever we go we should leave the flavor of Christ in our path.

We should not be discouraged by the disdain of the world, but challenged. Our differences show the change Jesus makes in our hearts. As the world notices, they too may be attracted and challenged to follow Him.

Jesus too endured the contempt of the people around Him, but not from everyone around Him. Many followed Him, some closely. Think of the Woman at the Well. At first she resisted His unusual approach and His difficult words. As His truth became clear,

though, she saw its underlying value. She embraced it fully.

The differences we embrace will strike many as disagreeable, but some will see them for what they are, the way we are truly created to be. There is a rationality in our faith that rises above the baser inclinations of sin. The customs of the Kingdom call all of humanity to our native nobility, to the excellence and beauty in which we were created. That nobility can only be fulfilled when we are in harmony with our King, living by the pattern He created within us. Sadly, that pattern is marred by sin.

This is testifying to the goodness of God by the lives we lead, not necessarily in proclamation, but always in the way we present ourselves. It will have an affect. We might not always see it, but it will.

# Vanity Fair

## Week of Oct 5.d — Faithful's Martyrdom

*Then said Mr. Implacable, Might I have all the world given me, I could not be reconciled to him [Faithful]; therefore, let us forthwith bring him in guilty of death. And so they did; therefore he was presently condemned to be had from the place where he was, to the place from whence he came, and there to be put to the most cruel death that could be invented.*

The travelers have been put into a cage where they await trial. But this is a mock trial. Biased witnesses were called to support a predetermined outcome. The jury and the city very much reflect the world's approach to Christianity, that because the Christian faith and teachings oppose sinful license it is therefore to be hated.

In Bunyan's day, the global West, as in parts of the East today, practiced public execution more frequently. Criminal and Christian courts had power to sentence people to death and then to carry out

the sentences with alarming brutality. We read about Faithful being burned at stake and think it outlandish. The original readers would not have been shocked or surprised. In 1645 Bunyan lived through the beheading of the English King, Charles I to make way for a puritan dominated government. On all sides of the religious conflict: Catholic and Protestant, moral and religious causes for execution were commonplace, public spectacles.

Bunyan himself, a protestant and a puritan, had been a supporter of the party that killed the king to set up Oliver Cromwell as an alternative, protestant oriented government. When the tide turned again, the Monarchy was reestablished and it was in this atmosphere that Bunyan was imprisoned. It was suspected that as a popular preacher he could incite anti-crown sentiment.

In the world today, Christianity is less and less tolerated. In parts of the East Christians are fairly routinely persecuted, sometimes killed. Bunyan compares Faithful's execution to

## Babylon's fiery furnace:

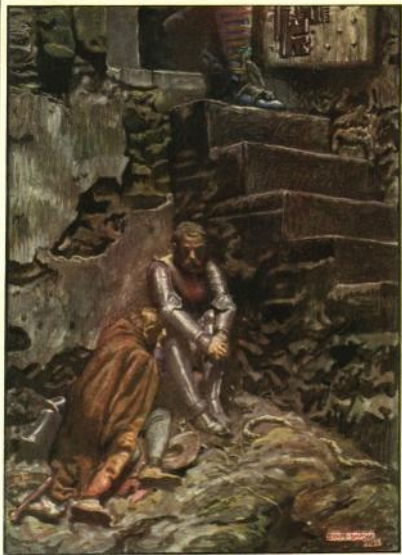
Whoever doesn't fall down and worship shall be cast into the middle of a burning fiery furnace the same hour." (Daniel 3:6 WEB)

In our part of the world, where we have freedom of religion and speech, persecution is less violent, but takes the shape of ridicule and contempt. Some may experience prejudice. Some may be victims of job discrimination. Public malign from celebrities is commonplace. Classrooms often are the setting for ideological bullying.

Faithful was faithful to death. He is a portrait of many who came before, the accounts of the martyrs are full of their stories.

- What will we embrace for Jesus?
- What will we willingly endure?
- How will we condition ourselves to joyfully suffer shame for the sake of the gospel?

## Doubling Castle



Leaving Vanity Fair, Christian finds himself with a new friend. Beaten down and discouraged by his ordeal, he is tired and looks for relief. He chooses to leave the prescribed path to get more pleasant footing. His choice leads to bad results, nearly fatal.

# Doubting Castle

## Week of Oct 12.a — Hopeful

*Now I saw in my dream, that Christian went not forth alone, for there was one whose name was Hopeful (being made so by the beholding of Christian and Faithful in their words and behaviour, in their sufferings at the fair), who joined himself unto him ... This Hopeful also told Christian, that there were many more of the men in the fair, that would take their time and follow after.*

As one chapter closes for Christian, another opens. This new friend, Hopeful is the representative of the fruit of Christian and Faithful's perseverance. Just as the pilgrims' mistreatment attracted the attention of some, Faithful's ultimate martyrdom sealed the impression that what he died for was certainly a powerful and worthwhile thing.

So Hopeful comes to Christian and assures him that others have also seen the path and would follow in their own time.



Hopeful is well named. When we suffer the stigma of Christ, and persevere in the assurance that our suffering has purpose, we endure because of the hope given us by Jesus. That hope is multi-faceted. It includes the assurance of His second coming, of our ultimate redemption, and of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and in the world.

The work of salvation permeates everything. We are forgiven our sin. We are given power over sin. The world is influenced toward the realization of God's love. In all this we know that from our own perspective our salvation is yet to be completed. Like Faithful, we will find our way to the completion of our union with Jesus.

We should remember that for others we sometimes serve as a conduit of hope.

remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father. (1 Thessalonians 1:3 WEB)

And so Hope travels with us on our journey. Regardless of the apparent

disadvantages we endure, we are in a position of advantage. Our good end is assured. The good results of our current work is assured.

The world defines hope differently than the Christian. While the Christian may be interested in a legacy, what we leave behind on this earth is not what gives us hope. What we know God is holding in His hand does. The world sees children, lasting business ventures, buildings, charitable foundations, and other vehicles with ongoing meaning in the world as important legacies.

All that is good, but not as important as the spiritual legacy of Christ which is largely immeasurable and unobserved. We are part of that legacy. The whole movement of the Christian Church is part of that legacy. But it is His legacy and ours is important only inasmuch as it connects with His. Worldly legacies are impressive and not to be dismissed, but the best legacies are eternal. And that too is a source of hope.

- What are you carrying forward into Eternity?

# Doubting Castle

## Week of Oct 12.b — Bypath Meadow

*Now the way from the river was rough, and their feet tender, by reason of their travels; so the souls of the pilgrims were much discouraged because of the way. Wherefore, still as they went on, they wished for better way. Now, a little before them, there was on the left hand of the road a meadow, and a stile to go over into it; and that meadow is called By-path Meadow. Then said Christian to his fellow, If this meadow lieth along by our wayside, let us go over into it.*

Hopeful is reluctant to leave the prescribed path, but Christian persuades him and they cross over to Bypath Meadow where the way is more pleasant. The way seems to go directly alongside their own path. A misguided traveler assures them that it arrives at their destination, but the misguided one falls to his death. It starts to rain. Night descends. They hear a gentle voice:

keep in mind the road you took when you were carried off. Mark off in your

minds the landmarks. Make a mental note of telltale signs marking the way back. Return, ... (Jeremiah 31:21 NET)

So they try to turn back to the main road but the darkness and the flooding thwart them and they cannot find their way. So they find a little shelter in which to sleep and wait out the night.

They are found next morning by the Giant Despair whose ground they have trespassed. He drives them ahead and throws them into his own stinking dungeon at Doubting Castle.

Other paths may seem to be similar to the one given us by God. They may even seem easier and appear to arrive at the same goal. Others may assure us it is true. But, as Christian discovered, when trouble comes and you are off the right path, the means of coping with that trouble are not readily at hand. The doubt that led us to take a different path in the first place hounds our steps and entraps us.

In many faith circles doubt is decried as wicked. I contend that doubt itself is not wicked if it is fueled by curiosity and honest searching for the truth along

God's lines of faith. However, when doubt draws us away from the Narrow Way He ordained, we can wind up in trouble indeed.

The giant Despair represents the end of that kind of doubt. It is a prison of certainty. The certainty that contains us, though, is the certainty that there is no hope. Keith Green used to sing "You're so proud of saying you're a seeker, but why are you searching in the dark?" Life is full of boundaries. We deceive ourselves if we think the loving boundaries given us by God are keeping us from something preferable to Him. Doubting Him and His path takes us outside His boundaries and into directions that lead to destruction. We may and even should question, but we must do so with Faith that our loving and all wise God will respond with the truth. We cannot find the truth apart from Him.

- If doubt, questioning and curiosity have led you away from faith, think back to the hints and errors that led you away from God and retrace your steps. You must find your way back.

# Doubting Castle

## Week of Oct 12.c — The Giant Despair

*When morning was come, he goes to them in a surly manner as before, and perceiving them to be very sore with the stripes that he had given them the day before, he told them, that since they were never like to come out of that place, their only way would be forthwith to make an end of themselves, either with knife, halter, or poison, for why, said he, should you choose life, seeing it is attended with so much bitterness?*

The Giant Despair is intent on crushing the travelers. At first he merely beats them, but with the advice of Diffidence, his wife, he begins suggesting that suicide is their only way out. For days, Christian wrestles with this impulse to take his own life. He nearly succumbs, but Hope brings him back from the edge.

To insist that there is no hope is to express a lack of faith in God's goodness and wisdom. It insists that His plan is less certain and less

desirable than one we can devise with only one, limited, solution: death. Suicide is a solution of despair, hopelessness, and faithlessness.

***My friend, Suicide is not a solution!***

Suicide is a frightful word. Statistics say it is and has been for a long time, on the rise, even among younger people. The church for all of history has spoken against it as an unforgiveable sin. The logic goes something like this: "We are commanded not to murder, and that includes murdering ones self. Murder is a sin. God can forgive all sin, even murder, but how can you ask forgiveness after you are no longer living?" The question has a certain logic.

I will walk a fearful balance. What if I say it can be forgiven am I encouraging a terrible choice? I contend that this deterrent has not worked in the past and will not work better in the future. It is fruitless and contrary to other sound theology to insist that Christian loved ones we have known who died of suicide are now in Hell without hope. God saves eternally, and even if a person believes salvation can be

forfeited, at least in most Protestant thinking, it is not due to a single, technically unresolved sin.

In most cases, a person who finds themselves inclined to take their own life is not thinking rationally. Is it inside the character of a loving and merciful God to forever condemn those whose mental and emotional state drives them to unreasonable and irrational extremity?

That said, what happens if a Christian dies of suicide? All other considerations aside, it is still unconfessed murder. Some think Christians will not stand judgement. This is not biblical. Paul says to Christians:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:10 NET)

The Judgement Seat of Christ will not end in the eternal condemnation of Hell, but it will insist an on accounting for every action we have taken. For sin, we will suffer loss as if by fire, like investing



in straw ash when we might have invested in refined gold.

Ultimately, it is not a weak return on investment we should fear. It is the limitless power and wrath of a God who loves you, who was executed for you, and will judge our actions with truth. I do not know how Jesus redresses sin we have not resolved with confession and active repentance, but I do not really want to find out either.

As long as there is life we can seek God, and God does not fail. In the end Christian remembers, our God is a God of promise: truth will prevail, goodness will endure, His reward will outweigh all the struggle we encounter.

Fear of living in darkness drives some to take their own lives

A stunned awe of God, and faith in the hope only He fully understands invite us to seek Him instead.

# Doubting Castle

## Week of Oct 12.d — Escaping Despair

*Christian, as one half amazed, brake out in passionate speech: What a fool, quoth he, am I, thus to lie in a stinking Dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty. I have a Key in my bosom called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any Lock in Doubting Castle. Then said Hopeful, That's good news; good Brother pluck it out of thy bosom and try. Then Christian pulled it out of his bosom, and began to try at the Dungeon door, whose bolt (as he turned the Key) gave back, and the door flew open with ease*

This key is humorous for a couple reasons. When we see Christian remembering the key, which of us (even with our keys) has not searched and endured ridiculous inconvenience searching for them, and all the while they were in our hand, or right where we left them? So we see a bit of ourselves in Christian. But also, this key is a mystery. It has not been mentioned in the book before. It was not a gift of

the Shining ones or of the Graceful ladies of the Palace Beautiful. It simply appears and Christian remembers that he has it.

But it is certainly a residual artifact of Christian's book.

seeing that his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue; by which he has granted to us his precious and exceedingly great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world (2 Peter 1:3-4 WEB)

We too have wonderful promises: of the life to come, of abundant life here, of strength for the day, of Jesus' perpetual and unfailing love. These promises can help us overcome the commonplace struggles of our lives: despondency, temptation, frustration, and confusion.

Some problems are overcome not by solutions, but by attitudes. Our perspectives influence our approach. Do we see obstacles or challenges? Do

we see setbacks or opportunities? Are we dismayed because God seems distant or do we press in that much firmer to finding Him. After all, He has promised that He would be found if we look with all our hearts.

- What godly promise is a key to overcoming the difficulty you currently face? Is it a matter of embracing the motivation you need for action? Is it accepting that which is out of your control with an attitude of courage or contentment? Is it familiarizing yourself with God's goodness?

Commit yourself to "remembering" the promises He extends to you.

## Many Meetings



Scattered throughout *The Pilgrim's Progress* are conversations Christian had with travelers on the road. Most of them were opposed to the true path. These are long and sometimes tedious exchanges but Bunyan wanted to pick out good theology and share it.

# Many Meetings

## Week of Oct 19.a — Atheist

*His name was Atheist, and he asked them whither they were going.*

*CHR. We are going to Mount Zion.*

*Then Atheist fell into a very great laughter.*

*CHR. What is the meaning of your laughter?*

*ATHEIST. I laugh to see what ignorant persons you are, to take upon you so tedious a journey, and you are like to have nothing but your travel for your pains.*

This traveler going in the opposite direction goes on to say that he has been on his search for a long time, longer than Christian and Hopeful and he has traveled further than them. Having found nothing for his trouble he is now returning to his home to reclaim all the things he gave up for the search. He does not believe in rewards for the journey or in a life to come. Christian's book highlights this verse:

Look at what they are saying to me,  
“Where are the events in the LORD’s  
message? Let’s see them happen,  
please!” (Jeremiah 17:15 NET)

The discussion with Atheist ends  
without epilogue and the pilgrims walk  
at first asking the obvious question, “is  
he right?” Then they dismiss the  
thought and determine anew to  
embrace faith.

Atheism is nothing new. David spoke of  
it back in the Psalms and it’s been with  
us ever since. Almost always the  
defense against Christianity asserts the  
intellectual inferiority of the believer.  
Penn Gillette says not that he doesn’t  
believe in God, but that he assertively  
believes there is no God. The first  
statement admits the possibility of  
God’s existence and only a personal  
stance of unbelief. His more active  
statement boldly asserts that God does  
not exist. As such, his or anyone else’s  
belief is a question of accepting truth.

Gillette is quite right. As much as my  
belief in God would not matter if He did  
not exist, so Gillette’s assertion of  
God’s non-existence does not matter  
since God actually does exist.

The new atheism is more assertive, more aggressive than the quiet atheism of the past. In former days, to state there was not a God was to place one's self against a stronger current of popular belief. The newer version perceives that this strong current has weakened. Fewer people hold strong religious belief, so it is less of a risk to state a position loudly and more in keeping with society's sensitivities to plurality. That done, the atheist claims equal standing with those who disagree.

The claim of atheism, that there is no God, would seem to relieve one of accountability for sin, but it only obscures it. Atheists have the logical conclusions of naturalism to back them up as surely as we have our Bible. Belief is faith. Both Christianity and atheism take faith, it's simply a question of where belief is invested.



# Many Meetings

## Week of Oct 19.b — Mr. Worldly Wiseman

*WORLD. But why wilt thou seek for ease this way, seeing so many dangers attend it? especially since, hadst thou but patience to hear me, I could direct thee to the obtaining of what thou desirest, without the dangers that thou in this way wilt run thyself into; yea, and the remedy is at hand. Besides, I will add, that instead of those dangers, thou shalt meet with much safety, friendship, and content.*

*CHR. Pray, Sir, open this secret to me.*

*WORLD. Why, in yonder village--the village is named Morality*

The solution of Mr. Worldly Wiseman involves an intricate knowledge of moral certainty and a legalistic and decorous observance that a person does what is right. Christian follows Mr. Worldly Wiseman's advice and tries to go to this village called Morality only to find that it is situated at the top of a very tall and dangerous cliff, hard to climb and treacherous to attempt. He turns back

when Evangelist confronts him with his error.

This is one of the most recurring wrong impressions to be found in the church.

Whole denominations buy into it.

Evangelist clarifies that this is a worldly way of thinking that completely nullifies the purpose and grace of the cross. We cannot earn salvation with our own morality. Mr. Worldly Wiseman offers an easier route, one without the struggles Christian has already faced:

Now when they are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction comes on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will surely not escape. (1 Thessalonians 5:3 NET)

Paul is making sure his hearers know that the perceived untroubled way of the wicked is an illusion, that they will meet with an even more drastic end than the believer who faces struggles willingly and for godly reasons.

Jesus repeatedly confronted the religious leaders of his time with their tendencies toward a morality without heart. He wanted His hearers to find the

spirit of the laws God had given and not to follow them for the sake of form or technical, box-ticking reassurance. Our goal as Christians is to pursue God's mercy and grace to relieve us of the burden of sin, because no amount of technical observance can remove the sin that infects our spirits.

We should be doing what's right, no doubt about it. But we do so out of love for God not out of a misguided sense that it will atone for the wrong we've done. Only supernatural intervention can accomplish that. So learn the shape of godly holiness, but always know that our flesh is weak and when we fail it is not our own efforts that will cleanse us. It is going to God in humble confession of the sin and turning from it. It is a sincere pursuit of His will and growing to be more like His Son, transforming us from the inside out.

# Many Meetings

## Week of Oct 19.c — Apollyon

*APOL. Then Apollyon broke out into a grievous rage, saying, I am an enemy to this Prince; I hate his person, his laws, and people; I am come out on purpose to withstand thee.*

*CHR. Apollyon, beware what you do; for I am in the King's highway, the way of holiness; therefore take heed to yourself.*

*APOL. Then Apollyon straddled quite over the whole breadth of the way, and said, I am void of fear in this matter: prepare thyself to die; for I swear by my infernal den, that thou shalt go no further; here will I spill thy soul.*

His meeting of Apollyon took place not long after Christian left the Palace Beautiful. He is the manifestation of a prince of Hell. Apollyon confronts and accuses Christian of all his missteps along the way, citing them as evidence of his lack of faith. He claims dominion over all the country and as such claims Christian as his own unfaithful subject.

The two are in a pitched mortal battle, Apollyon armed with flaming darts and Christian suited in the new armor from the Palace Beautiful. For most of the conflict Apollyon gains the advantage, till at the very end, Christian regains the sword that has been knocked from his hand and he mortally wounds his foe.

Apollyon is a name from the book of Revelation. The pit of Hell is populated by fearful beasts:

They have as king over them the angel of the abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. (Revelation 9:11 NET)

The name means Destroyer and is associated in the Old Testament with physical death. In Revelation Death and Sheol (the place of the dead) are personified and Apollyon rules.

Bunyan's message is quite clear. The weapons of the enemy are accusation, deceit, promises of power and protection. His offers are like those given to Christ in his own temptation in the wilderness. In the end Christian overcomes him with the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. He

quotes several passages to bolster his strength: Romans 6:23; Micah 7:8; Romans 8:37; and James 4:7.

Our enemy is not flesh and blood. Even though people may oppose us and even oppose our faith and our good ministry, the real enemy is in the spiritual realm and we fight him with God's word, protecting ourselves with our salvation, with righteousness, and faith.

But the non-physicality of the battle does not make it less fearsome or vital. Satan wants nothing less than our being. He will first battle for our hearts and failing that will accost us however he can. He has an army at his bidding.

Make no mistake, the spirit world is as real as the one you can see and more substantial. Every temptation you face, every discouragement, every misdirection that takes you away from the cultivation of your faith is a weapon in his arsenal. God's word and prayer are your ready defense ... God's word and prayer.

# Many Meetings

## Week of Oct 19.d — Talkative

*TALK. To talk of things that are good, to me is very acceptable, with you or with any other; and I am glad that I have met with those that incline to so good a work; for, to speak the truth, there are but few that care thus to spend their time, (as they are in their travels), but choose much rather to be speaking of things to no profit; and this hath been a trouble for me. ... I like you wonderful well, for your sayings are full of conviction; and I will add, what thing is so pleasant, and what so profitable, as to talk of the things of God?*

Before Faithful's death, he and Christian encounter this person called talkative. He loves to talk about the things of God. He is well versed in the niceties of theology. He likes to address difficult questions endlessly. As the conversation wears on and on and on, Faithful and Christian begin to understand that this Talkative is all talk, and his actions do not reflect the

goodness of the subjects he likes to discuss.

Christian's book has much to say about this:

And if I have prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:2 NET)

and

"If you love me, you will obey my commandments. (John 14:15 NET)

The Bible indicates often that we need more than knowledge. That what we say is held up alongside what we do. Even then, what we do is held up alongside our connection with Jesus. Talk is less substantial than either.

Knowing all the right words and the proper way to put them together can be a trap. We become proud and enjoy our own knowledge. We deceive ourselves into thinking we have mastered important things. But truthfully, those important things are not mastered till they inform our walk with Christ and demonstrated in what we do.



Of course nothing we do can save us, and doing good things is not the same as loving Jesus. While doing the will of Jesus is an expression of love for Him, we can get the cart before the horse. No. The appropriate progression of our behavior is

- Who am I? (an active child of God and disciple of Christ)
- What do I know? (as much as I can of the things Jesus taught and commanded)
- What am I doing? (that grows out of my authenticity and passion for knowing what God wants)

We dare not try to isolate these virtues or get them out of proper perspective. We can run a risk of being all talk with no relationship beneath it and no actions corresponding with it.

# The Delectable Mountains



Escaping Despair and finding their way through the Delectable Mountains, the pilgrims enter the Enchanted Ground. They are warned of this place. Here they find deception and misdirection. They meet many who are misguided and downright evil.

# The Delectable Mountains

## Week of Oct 26.a — Error Hill

*They had them first to the top of a hill called Error, which was very steep on the furthest side, and bid them look down to the bottom. So Christian and Hopeful looked down, and saw at the bottom several men dashed all to pieces by a fall that they had from the top. Then said Christian, What meaneth this? The Shepherds answered, Have you not heard of them that were made to err by hearkening to Hymeneus and Philetus as concerning the faith of the resurrection of the body?*

Fleeing Doubting Castle the pilgrims find their way to a place of rest. When they rise they are shown wonders by the resident shepherds. Among these wonders is the precipice called Error. They refer to Paul's warning against a particular kind of error rampant in Ephesus during the days of Timothy:

men who have erred concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is

already past, and overthrowing the faith of some. (2 Timothy 2:18)

The ancient church suffered under many false teachings that today seem to us obscure and even absurd in some cases. How could anyone believe the final resurrection already happened? And yet some did. Some believed Jesus was not a flesh and blood human. Some believed they could become gods themselves.

It's happened in recent centuries. How could people believe it godly to own and mistreat other human beings? How could someone think praying to a piece of cloth or wood could have virtuous power?

As we consider the unusual heresies of the past, let us also reflect on those of our own time. Someday they may seem just as odd to those who follow us. But it is our necessity to always go back to the Scripture. The precipice called Error has more than one ledge. How can we believe what the Bible calls sin is really of no concern? But many believers hold that human sexuality is not important to God. How can we believe that the miracles of the New Testament are

merely symbolic and not real? If Jesus did not do these miraculous acts then what was he referring to when he said they could be the basis of true belief?

Even worse are the corruptions of the faith with elements of pagan religions. Are the LORD God and Allah the same person? Can we achieve deep spirituality by chanting the Ohm? What are these teachings of Santeria or Rastafarianism and what do they have to do with Christianity?

One of the reasons to constantly read scripture is to thoroughly saturate ourselves with its truth. We are less likely to fall for a counterfeit if we know intimately what the authentic article looks like.

# The Delectable Mountains

## Week of Oct 26.b — Ignorance

*IGNOR. Sir, I was born in the country that lieth off there a little on the left hand, and I am going to the Celestial City.*

*CHR. But how do you think to get in at the gate? for you may find some difficulty there.*

*IGNOR. As other people do, said he.*

*CHR. But what have you to show at that gate, that may cause that the gate should be opened to you?*

*IGNOR. I know my Lord's will, and I have been a good liver; I pay every man his own; I pray, fast, pay tithes, and give alms, and have left my country for whither I am going.*

Ignorance approaches Christian and hopeful from a little crooked lane. He did not come to the path through the wicket gate. His expectations of entering the Celestial City are far removed from the journey the pilgrims have endured.

Trusting good works, even good works associated with a godly life-style, is the way of Ignorance. He has no scroll. What he has is the vague idea followed by so many. This alongside the impression that which religion one follows is merely a matter of opinion.

One of the most popular notions of gaining entrance to Heaven is the weighing of the balance. If my good works outweigh my bad works, I'll be ok. To this end, I'll emphasize the good works in my life. The reality is, in the Bible, God is rarely associated with weights and scales, except to say that people should use them honestly.

The idea finds a very early expression in the pagan practices of ancient Egypt. *The Book of the Dead* explains how in the afterlife a man's heart will be weighed against a feather and if it is heavier than the feather he would meet with a sticky end. Apparently the idea of a person's morality being weighed in the afterlife is a natural way for people to think.

And God is just. Our image of Justice in courtrooms everywhere is a blind

arbiter holding a scales. But with God as judge, we know He sees all and His scales can be adjusted.

If we put our good deeds on one side and our bad deeds on the other, including all thoughts and intentions, I doubt many of us would fare well. But that's not what God does. He puts all our actions good and bad on one side and the love of Jesus on the other. If we have not embraced His grace, there will be nothing over there. If we have, it will outweigh everything, from our worst to our best. It is not the weight of the good we do that matters, it is the weight of the good He has done.

Ignorance is named for the lack of understanding he displays when it comes to the way into the City. He refuses to listen to the wisdom of the pilgrims and so Christian's book observes:

Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 26:12)



# The Delectable Mountains

## Week of Oct 26.c — Flatterer

*They answered they were going to the Celestial City, but knew not which of these ways to take. Follow me, said the man, it is thither that I am going. So they followed him in the way that but now came into the road, which by degrees turned, and turned them so from the city that they desired to go to, that, in little time, their faces were turned away from it; yet they followed him. But by and by, before they were aware, he led them both within the compass of a net, in which they were both so entangled that they knew not what to do;*

This deceiver is called Flatterer. He is double robed, wearing his true colors underneath and is only discovered after the net ensnares the travelers. The flatterer does not say much, just enough to take the pilgrims off their path. Christian's book warns him:

The one who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his steps. (Proverbs 29:5 NET)

Aptly, the flatterer misguides the pilgrims at a crossroad. Solomon's word in the original language has a sense of smooth division. In the way the Flatterer lied to the pilgrims and deftly took them off their intended course, flattery does the same thing. It smoothly tells us what we want to hear by slightly deviating from the truth.

- While you may be attractive, you may not be super-model material
- While you may be tough, you may not be the world's greatest athlete
- While you may be smart, you may not be a genius
- While you may be kind, you may not be comparable to Mother Theresa

A realistic view of ourselves requires that we take every strength we possess with a healthy dose of humility. This may mean that we accept things that are not so much fun, and might even mean we have to admit our weaknesses. Shakespeare went both routes with

Shall I compare thee to a Summer's

Day?

Alongside

My Mistress' eyes are nothing like the Sun.

I'm sure the first lady found her description more edifying than the second, but flattery leads us to deceive ourselves and worse, to embrace the pride that is fed by many compliments.

While there is no sin in owning our strengths and using them to God's Glory with confidence, but grace is the virtue that must accompany such endeavors. In all things we must view others as better than ourselves, seek to serve all, and to approach our faith like a child.

# The Delectable Mountains

## Week of Oct 26.d — Enchanted Ground

*They went till they came into a certain country, whose air naturally tended to make one drowsy, if he came a stranger into it. And here Hopeful began to be very dull and heavy of sleep; wherefore he said unto Christian, I do now begin to grow so drowsy that I can scarcely hold up mine eyes, let us lie down here and take one nap.*

*By no means, said the other, lest sleeping, we never awake more.*

Several times in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian's downfall has been sleep. It is in sleeping he lost his scroll. In sleeping he was captured by the Giant. At the same time he has tried to warn others away from sleep. Now Hopeful is tired and would like a rest and Christian remembers the danger.

The shepherds they met upon entering the Delectable Mountains warned them about sleeping on the Enchanted Ground, that if they did they may not

awaken. Christian reminds Hopeful of what it says in the book:

So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. (1 Thessalonians 5:6 ESV)

Paul's warning is against the deeds associated with spiritual darkness contrasted with those of the light. He is encouraging his disciples to treat their moral awareness like a night and day proposal: knowing and doing good is staying awake. Pursuing sin is sleeping, that is, willfully inhibiting an awareness of the eternal, divine consequences of living outside God's plan. Jesus also pressed into this thought, encouraging people to stay awake and stay ready. The danger is in being unprepared when Jesus comes again or calls us to account.

For Christian and Hopeful the danger is allegorical. For us it is not, even though Jesus uses parables to speak His warnings. For us the danger is quite severe. Either when Jesus returns, or when we die, we will face judgement.

And just as people are appointed to die once, and then to face judgment,

so also, after Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many, to those who eagerly await him he will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation. (Hebrews 9:27-28 NET)

Jesus' offer is to save us from the severe judgment and condemnation that awaits the sleeping, but it is for those who "eagerly await him." That is, those who are awake. If we're asleep things get a little less optimistic.

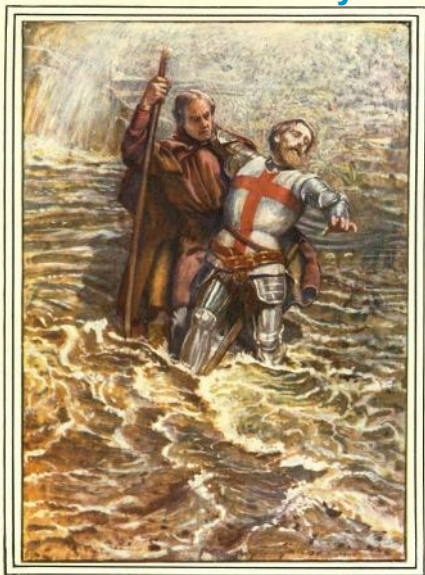
What do you do to remain awake?

Many engage in

- Daily spiritual disciplines
- Bible reading
- Prayer
- Meditating on scripture
- Self-monitoring to maintain a persistent moral sense

What do you do to make sure you don't fall asleep?

## The Celestial City



Christian finally reaches his goal, the Celestial City. His arrival there, though is more complicated than he expected. He finds he must pass through the final river and be received at the gate with proper credentials. The idea of another method occurs to him and to others, but no other way will do. But Christian has persevered on the path set by the King.

# The Celestial City

## Week of Nov 2.a — Ignorance again

*Now while I was gazing upon all these things, I turned my head to look back, and saw Ignorance come up to the river side; but he soon got over, and that without half that difficulty which the other two men met with. For it happened that there was then in that place, one Vain-hope, a ferryman, that with his boat helped him over; so he, as the other I saw, did ascend the hill, to come up to the gate, only he came alone; neither did any man meet him with the least encouragement.*

Taking the story slightly out of order, we see Ignorance who thought he could enter the city by his own means come up by boat. But, everyone must swim the river and the ferryman's very name, Vain-hope, is a signal to Ignorance's aspirations. He arrives by a wayward route, without a scroll, and with no escort. He trusts the



appearance of his life to gain entry. He makes no distinction between one religion and another.

We do not often like to consider the fate of those who try to come to a good end aside from the path given by Christ. Jesus is the only way. Bunyan pulls no punch. Ignorance's final path takes him to Hell as directly as if he'd never left home.

For all of history people have attempted to enter a heavenly state in the afterlife through means other than those given by Christ:

- Other religions
- Ecstatic experiences
- Good works
- Avoiding harm to others
- Nominal Christian observance
- Benevolence and philanthropy
- Even apparent Christian spirituality

But none of these will suffice. Entering by the way of the cross is the only way given us.

Ignorance is the vice Bunyan describes this as. At the root of the word is the word ignore. We think of ignorance as a problem of not being informed, but the way it's used here it is rather rejecting the good information received.

The story of Christian and his progress to the Celestial city has been a tale of following God's way and not one's own. We cannot take alternative paths, easy paths, or our own paths. We must take His path His way.

Caution! We have been given the information from God's word about how we are to proceed toward eternity. We cannot go our own way. We cannot bypass His direction. To do so is eternally fatal.

# The Celestial City

## Week of Nov 2.b — The river at the end

*So I saw in my dream that they went on together, until they came in sight of the gate. Now, I further saw, that betwixt them and the gate was a river, but there was no bridge to go over: the river was very deep. At the sight, therefore, of this river, the Pilgrims were much stunned; but the men that went in with them said, You must go through, or you cannot come at the gate. ... They then addressed themselves to the water and, entering, Christian began to sink ...*

In this episode, Christian and Hopeful are at their final stage. They are crossing to the Celestial City. They are informed that the ease of their crossing will depend on their belief. Hopeful passes through with ease, but Christian struggles, and suspects that he is being judged for his shortcomings and he will never arrive at the City.

Hopeful helps him along, shouting encouragements to him, reminding him of his past belief and the good things in his book. The shining ones have confirmed to them that this is the only way. Everyone must pass.

The river, is of course and emblem of death. Every person confronts it not necessarily alone, but certainly as an individual. Christian throughout his journey has wavered and struggled with remaining on the right path and now he cannot get his footing. Hopeful reminds him that this is his final test and if he was to be abandoned by the King, he would not confront it. Hopeful says, "Be of good cheer. Jesus Christ heals you." This truth gives Christian clarity.

Many factors accompany us at death: the failure of our bodies, the pain we may experience, the emotional turmoil arising from the sum total of our lives. The failure of our bodies includes the working of

our brain, that wondrous muscle of the mind. People may enter their deaths conscious, or not; in confusion, or not; in excruciating pain, or not; and many other factors in play. I've known people to be concerned about loved ones who passed through death in a troubled frame of mind. And I've also known some who were at peace.

Christian was not going through a test. Death is the final passage from this life to the next and we all must go. It is a goal of the Christian life to end it with faith. It is the very real event for which other tests prepare us. The purpose of those tests is to condition our deepest heart in faith. It is to transform us thoroughly so that if we, like Christian, falter at the end, the truth of our being in Christ is what carries us. The Hope He both provides and substantiates.

# The Celestial City

## Week of Nov 2.c — Scrolls of entry

*Then I saw in my dream that the Shining Men bid them call at the gate ... to whom it was said, These pilgrims are come from the City of Destruction, for the love that they bear to the King of this place; and then the Pilgrims gave in unto them each man his certificate, which they had received in the beginning; those, therefore, were carried in to the King, who, when he had read them, said, Where are the men? To whom it was answered, They are standing without the gate. The King then commanded to open the gate ... Now I saw in my dream that these two men went in.*

The certificate Christian hands over at the gate is the scroll given to him at the cross when he first unloaded his burden. He has carried it all this way, lost it, found it, and kept it for this very purpose. The certificate shows that he came in at the gate

and followed the path from the cross onward.

All through the story Christian has held many conversations, some of them quite long and tedious, and has expounded again and again on the means for entering the Celestial City. He has refuted repeatedly that works can have anything at all to contribute to entry. It is only by the way of the cross, the forgiveness and forbearance of Christ that anyone gains entry. The ways of other wayfarers led to destruction. The way of Ignorance led to dismissal, but the way of the cross stays true.

Christian's book directs us to the prophet Isaiah:

We have a strong city. God appoints salvation for walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation may enter: the one which keeps faith. You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace,

because he trusts in you. (Isaiah 26:1-3 WEB)

Salvation is free, but it is not a free-for-all. The gates are guarded against those who trust themselves more than they trust God.

We all must ask ourselves, from time to time, what we are trusting. Self-deception is a powerful force. Jesus is the way, the only way. Trusting Him is the only method of divesting ourselves of the sin that keeps us out. We cannot work it off, make amends for it, or atone for it. Even if we could in our limitations and flaws the work would be marred. It is already done by Jesus, and it is only by trusting His perfect work that it can be done perfectly.

- Do you trust Him?
- Do you have a scroll?
- Is His grace your certificate of entry?



# The Celestial City

## Week of Nov 2.d — The King's City

*The City shone like the sun; the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal.*

*There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord."*

*And after that they shut up the gates; which, when I had seen, I wished myself among them.*

This is the culmination of the journey. Many speak of going to Heaven when they die, but it is often a distant prospect. We certainly do want to do so, but how urgent is that desire?

We are detached from the images we have of Heaven in Bunyan and in the Bible. They are foreign to our experience. Some see the image as

perhaps boring, accustomed as we are to conflict to provide the interest in our lives. Some relish the fight so much that the idea of peace leaves them feeling restless. Certainly Bunyan's palate of white and gold accompanied by harp music might come across to some as a little bland.

But the atmosphere does not come from the landscape or trappings. It is built around the welcome Christian and Hopeful receive. They are held in high honor, heralded by thousands of trumpets. As they proceed through the city they are presented to all they pass as dignitaries of importance. They are surrounded by people with crowns and angels with wings and with exuberant joy.

Christian's and Hopeful's dearest hope of Heaven is in this reception and in the thought that the people who treat them so well are the very company they will be welcomed into

as a natural and equal part among them.

above all, the warm and joyful thoughts that they had about their own dwelling there, with such company, and that for ever.

Bunyan, having spent so much time in jail for doing God's work must have acutely felt rejection and humiliation. And we, in this world where respect is so rare and insecurity so rampant, also have a latent desire to be held in honor and to fit naturally among the honorable, to be elevated by God among others who are elevated by God. To be the person we'd be impressed by. Oh to be respected and liked by people we also respect and like, that we would know ourselves as faithful and good, owned as equals in the company of the faithful and the good.

Forever in the company of the faithful and the good ...

## Afterword

*The Pilgrim's Progress* is a towering example of literature's quest motif. That is, it builds its plot around a purposeful journey, its challenges, and the heroes' solutions to them. Christian is that persevering questor who makes mistakes but corrects them, goes astray but finds his way back. He is confident and sometimes stupid, but willing to learn. And through great difficulty he finds what he seeks and is satisfied. Bunyan makes no attempt to hide the hardship of the quest.

This is our journey too. We begin at the cross and walk through mistakes, temptation, despondency, lethargy, discouragement, and opposition, but also determination, confidence, and hope. We are an inconsistent lot, but God knows our mutability and, using everything around us, and the book He gave us, guides us in the right way, if we will pay attention and go.

