

A DREAMER AND HIS WONDERFUL DREAM

The Story of John Bunyan and The Pilgrim's Progress

by

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Chapter 6

MORE OF THE INTERPRETER'S HOUSE

THE UNQUENCHABLE FIRE AND ETERNAL SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER

After this, the Interpreter led Graceless into another room where he witnessed a still more remarkable spectacle.

He saw a fire burning against a wall, and a man pouring bucket after bucket of water upon it in order to quench the fire; but strange to say, instead of putting it out, the fire rose higher and higher and became hotter and hotter.

This puzzled Graceless very much, so he asked the Interpreter to explain why the fire did not go out. Accordingly his guide conducted him to the other side of the wall, and now Graceless perceived that the fire went right through the wall, and that a person stood there pouring oil on it continually. Not only did this oil prevent the fire from being extinguished, but actually caused it to rise higher and become hotter than before!

Graceless now inquired, "What means this?" The Interpreter replied, "This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart. He that casts water upon it is the Devil, but the Person on the other side of the wall is CHRIST, Who, with the oil of His grace and intercession, maintains the work He has begun in the heart. Inasmuch as He stands on the other side of the wall, so the child of GOD finds it difficult to realize how this work of grace is maintained."

What a splendid picture we have here of the believer's security!

The moment a person is saved, GOD kindles within him the fire of grace. This is the new birth which makes the believer a new creation in CHRIST JESUS. Has this event happened in your life yet?

But no sooner has the fire of grace been kindled than the Devil seeks to put it out.

Perhaps he attempts this first with a bucketful of difficulties and seeks to make the Christian life so difficult that the believer will be willing to give it up. Does this cause the fire to be quenched? - No!

He next tries a bucketful of temptations, that he knows the believer is most susceptible to, so that he will be

tripped up and disgrace his profession and the Name he bears.

He causes all sorts of fierce temptations to sweep across the soul. Will this extinguish the fire? - No! Following this he takes a bucketful of doubts. Doubts of the truth of the Word of GOD, doubts of the ability of GOD to keep, and doubts of salvation, until the child of GOD is bewildered by the countless perplexities. Does this put out the fire of grace? - No!

Lastly, Satan tries a bucketful of persecutions. He stirs up the Christian's old time friends against him, and causes his enemies to threaten until it seems as though he hasn't a friend in the world! Does this quench the fire of grace? - No!

Why does this fire remain unquenchable? It is due to the fact that, unseen to the believer, within the veil of Heaven, is the Lord JESUS CHRIST, the One Who has died for his sins and risen again because of his justification.

What is the Lord JESUS doing in Heaven? He is doing what the man on the other side of the wall was doing. He is continually maintaining the work He has begun by His ceaseless intercession for us with the Father.

The same One Who died to save the believer, ever lives at the right hand of the Father to keep the believer. The devil may rage, and the child of GOD may sin, but the blessed Lord JESUS, the great HIGH PRIEST, is always interceding on his behalf, and thus is continually maintaining the fire of grace He has kindled.

Listen to GOD's Word which declares, "**Wherefore he [the Lord JESUS] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them**" (Hebrews 7:25). And again, "**He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it [or complete it] until the day of Jesus Christ**" (Philippians 1:6).

Has He begun a good work in you, my reader? If so, you may be certain that He will complete that work.

Perhaps someone is afraid to trust the Lord JESUS CHRIST as his Saviour because he fears that he will not be able to hold out to the end.

Let this beautiful illustration of the keeping power of the Son of GOD encourage you to trust Him, for it is not the Christian's holding on to CHRIST that makes him secure, but CHRIST's holding on to him! Hearken to His Own words, "**I give unto them [my sheep] eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand**" (John 10:28). Paul could say, "**I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I committed unto him against that day**" (II Timothy 1:12)

Remember that when the Lord JESUS is received as Saviour and Lord, He also becomes the INTERCESSOR, ADVOCATE, GREAT HIGH PRIEST and FRIEND of the believer. Our feelings and experiences may fluctuate, but He remains the same. A believer has well expressed himself thus -

"My love is oftentimes low, my joy still ebbs and flows,
But peace with Him remains the same --
No change JEHOVAH knows!

"I change, He changes not, for CHRIST can never die;
His love, not mine, the resting place,
His truth, not mine, the tie!"

Trust then in the finished work of the Lord JESUS and accept Him as your Saviour, and He will see to it that all who trust Him will be kept eternally secure.

THE PLEASANT PALACE

Graceless was next taken into a pleasant place where he beheld a beautiful palace. On the top of this palace many persons were walking, each one of whom was clothed in gold. Graceless then inquired, "May we go in thither?" At this the Interpreter led him to the door of the door of the palace.

At the entrance sat a man at a table with ink and pen, ready to take the names of all those desirous of entering. Guarding the door were many men strongly armed, ready to resist any who should attempt to enter. As Graceless watched he saw a man of brave countenance come forward and give his name to the man at the table. Then, taking a helmet and sword, he commenced to fight his way through the guards, giving and receiving many blows, until at last he succeeded in gaining an entrance into the beautiful palace. As he did so those standing on the ramparts sang most sweetly,

"Come in, come in, eternal glory thou shalt win."

So he went in and was clothed with the garments of gold. At this Graceless smiled and said, "I think I know what this means."

Have we, too, learned the lesson of the valiant man? The Palace is a picture of the reward of faithful service. Those that barred the way into the palace can represent all those things that would seek to hinder the Christian from being faithful to his Lord; such as pride, love of popularity, love of wealth and ease, selfishness, fear of man, persecution, shame, and such like. All these things combine and seek to prevent the believer from winning the crown promised to the faithful.

GIFTS AND REWARDS

We need to distinguish between gifts and rewards. A gift is that which is offered to us and becomes ours when we receive it; but a reward is something that must be earned.

Every believer possesses eternal life as a free gift the moment he receives CHRIST, for "**the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**" (Romans 6:23).

Every believer, however, will not have the crown of life. This is only promised to the one "**that endureth temptation**" (James 1:12).

Again, every believer is clothed with a perfect righteousness given to him by God: "**Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference**" (Romans 3:22); but every believer will not receive the Crown of Righteousness.

This is the reward of faithful service: **"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"** (II Timothy 4:7-8).

Once more, each believer will be in glory with his Lord, but not every believer will be given a crown of glory. This is given to the faithful shepherd of souls who seeks continually the welfare of the flock of GOD: **"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away"** (I Peter 5:2-4).

Lastly, all believers in CHRIST will be made eternally joyous in Heaven, but every believer will not have bestowed upon him the Crown of Rejoicing. This is the soul winner's reward: **"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?"** (I Thessalonians 2:19)

We need ever to remember that no Cross means no Crown.

If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him. If we would merit the **"Well done, thou good and faithful servant"** of our Lord, then we must "fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on the life that is life indeed."

The Christian life is not a flowery bed of ease; but a fight, a warfare against three enemies; the world, the flesh, and the devil. Paul could say at the end of his earthly career, **"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to my only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."**

WHO MAY FIGHT THIS WAR?

Remember, only an enlisted person can fight this fight.

The unsaved, lost and guilty sinner has no lot in this matter. What GOD requires of him is that he receives as a free gift, the salvation, pardon, and eternal life purchased by the blood of His Dear SON. Then, having received the Lord JESUS, he is enjoined to serve Him faithfully, sincerely, lovingly and obediently, looking for His coming. We need to ponder the solemn words of CHRIST, **"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown"** (Revelation 3:11).

It is possible for the Christian to lose the full reward: **"Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward"** (II John 8).

It is possible for the Christian's crown to be taken (Revelation 3:11)

It is possible for the Christian to be ashamed at His coming: "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (I John 2:28).

It is possible for the Christian to miss the abundant entrance: **"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to**

make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Peter 1:10-11)

It is possible for the Christian to miss the "**well done**" of the Lord JESUS (Matthew 25:21).

It is possible for the Christian to have his works burned up: "**If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire**" (I Corinthians 3:15).

It is possible for the Christian to be disapproved as a servant: "**But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway**" (I Corinthians 9:27).

May it be the desire and aim of each Christian who reads these pages to so live for the Lord JESUS, and so serve Him that at His coming He may give him His commendation and say, "**Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.**"

It has been well observed that the reward is not to the successful, but to the faithful servant.

THE MAN IN AN IRON CAGE

The next scene to which Graceless was conducted was a very sad one.

He was shown into a very dark room where he saw a man in an iron cage. The man was groaning as though his heart would break so Graceless was moved to ask him, "What art thou?"

The man replied, "I am what I was not once."

Then Graceless inquired, "What wast thou once?"

The man replied, "I was once a fair and flourishing professor of religion, both in my own eyes and in the eyes of others. I once was, as I thought, on my way to the Celestial City, but now I am a man of despair, shut up in the cage and unable to get out." With this, the man groaned again.

Graceless next inquired how he came to be in the cage of despair, and the man told him that he had sinned against the light of GOD's Word and the goodness of GOD; that he had so resisted the HOLY Spirit of GOD that He no longer strove with him; that he had so hardened his heart that he could no longer repent; and that he had yielded to the Devil, and the Devil was come into him.

Then said Graceless, "Is there no hope for you? must you always be kept in this iron cage of despair?" The man sadly replied, "There is no hope at all." Then Graceless, moved with compassion, exclaimed, "Why is there no hope? The Son of GOD is very pitiful." The man answered, "I have crucified Him to myself afresh. I have despised His Person. I have despised His righteousness. I have counted His blood an unholy thing. I have done despite to the SPIRIT of Grace. Therefore I have shut myself out of all the promises, and there now remains to me nothing but threatenings, dreadful threatenings of certain judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour me as an adversary."

THE HOPELESSNESS OF THE SEARED CONSCIENCE

Graceless next inquired how he had brought himself into this fearful state, to which the man replied, "For the lusts, pleasures, and profits of this world in the enjoyment of which I promised myself much delight; but now everyone of these things bite me and gnaw me as a burning worm."

"But cannot you repent?" urged Graceless, and the man rejoined, "GOD hath denied me repentance. His word gives me no hope; yea, He Himself hath shut me up in this iron cage of despair; nor can all the men of the world get me out." Then clasping his hands in despair he cried in notes of agony, "O eternity! eternity! How shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in eternity!"

Then said the Interpreter to Graceless, "Let this man's misery be remembered by thee, and be an everlasting caution to thee."

To which Graceless awestricken, exclaimed, "GOD help me to watch and be sober that I may shun the cause of this man's misery!" This man that once proclaimed, "I am light!" is now in the darkest of soul - and he has yet to leave his physical life.

What a fearful picture this is of the dreadful consequences of continually rejecting the SPIRIT's striving, and hardening the heart to the message of the Gospel of GOD's grace!

There are people today who are in the same condition in GOD's sight, that they were lost and guilty sinners, deserving only the righteous wrath of GOD. They have heard the wonderful story of GOD's great love in the gift of His beloved SON, and of the grace of the Lord JESUS Who came to seek and save the lost and guilty sinner. They have heard time and again of the One Who died on Calvary's cross that all GOD's righteous claims against the sinner might be met. They have heard that all the work necessary to save the sinner has been done completely and to GOD's entire satisfaction; and that because of the finished work of CHRIST, salvation full and free is offered to "**whosoever will**."

The Spirit of GOD has convicted them of their sins, and they have been moved to think of their eternal welfare; but time and time again they have resisted the strivings of the SPIRIT, and sought to quench the conviction of their guilt by plunging into the pleasures of sin deeper and deeper, until at last their hearts, long-hardened, have become cold and silent, and they no longer have any desire for salvation.

- This class of people have no time for the Lord JESUS;
- no time for the Gospel message;
- no time for the friendly word;
- no time for the faithful tract distributor;
- no time for eternal realities.

Their hearts, once tender and susceptible to the knock of the Lord JESUS; once strangely moved at the story of Calvary are now indifferent, either to the wooings or the warnings of Scriptures.

May this be a warning to the unsaved reader. Do not trifle with the SPIRIT's convictions. Do not ignore the solemn warnings of GOD's Words; but

"Hark, sinner, while GOD from on high doth entreat thee,
And warnings with accent of mercy doth blend
Give ear to His voice, lest in judgment He meet thee,
The harvest is passing, the summer will end!"

Remember that GOD has said, "**He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy**" (Proverbs 29:1).

- The same sun that melts ice hardens clay.
- The same Gospel that would melt the heart will, if rejected, neglected, and despised, because of the deceitfulness of sin, cause the heart to be hardened.

How sad will it be after having heard the way of salvation, to have to confess, "**The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved**" (Jeremiah 9:30).

Will you not, just where you are and as you are close in with GOD's offer of salvation, and accept His dear SON to be your own personal Saviour, lest perchance the fate of the Man of Despair be yours also!

~ end of chapter 6 ~