

A DREAMER AND HIS WONDERFUL DREAM

The Story of John Bunyan and The Pilgrim's Progress

by

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Chapter 11

THE BATTLE THAT EVERY CHRISTIAN MUST FIGHT

THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION

After Christian had been thus armored, he was escorted by Discretion, Prudence, Piety and Charity down the hill on which the Castle was built, into a valley called the Valley of Humiliation. Christian found it a very difficult thing to descend into this valley, and remarked to the sisters that it was more difficult to go down than it had been for him to ascend the hill of difficulty. "Yes," replied Prudence, "it is an hard matter for a man to go down into the Valley of Humiliation as thou art now, and catch no slip by the way: therefore we have come out to accompany thee down the hill."

The valley, as the name indicates, represents the necessity for Christians to humble themselves under the mighty hand of GOD. This self-humbling is anything but pleasant to the flesh, but it is an essential thing to the spiritual life, and leads to the place where GOD can use us in His service. The way up in the Christian life is always down. The way of exaltation always lies through the Valley of Humiliation. Our blessed Lord humbled Himself as none other has ever done, for we read, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye, through his poverty, might be rich" (II Corinthians 8:9). It was the Lord JESUS Himself who said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Again the Scriptures enjoin us to "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves."

Presently they reached the bottom of the hill, and after they had bidden him farewell, and had given him some refreshments for the way, the sisters left him and returned to the Castle again. Christian then went on his way, thanking GOD for all he had seen and heard in the Castle Beautiful.

APOLLYON

As he proceeded he saw coming towards him a hideous looking object whose name was Apollyon. The monster was fearful to behold. He was clothed in scales like a fish which were his pride. He had wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, a head like a lion, while from his body there came flame and smoke. Then Christian began to be

afraid, but remembering that he had no armor for his back, he stood his ground in the middle of the King's highway and waited until Apollyon met him.

When Apollyon came up he eyed Christian with hatred and asked him who he was, and whence he had come. Christian replied, "I am from the City of Destruction which is the place of all evil, and I am going to the City of Zion." At this Apollyon hissed, "Then you are one of my subjects, for all that country is mine, and I am the prince and god of it."

Christian bravely retorted, "I was born in your dominion, but your service was hard, and your wages such as a man could not live on; for the wages of sin is death."

When Apollyon heard this, he adopted a different attitude, and tried to bribe Christian to go back and serve him once again, and promised he would be given the best that the City of Destruction could afford; but Christian replied that he had sworn allegiance to Another, and would not turn back from his present Lord and MASTER, for he loved His service, His wages, His servants, His government, His company and His country better by far than Apollyon's.

Apollyon then adopted another method of attack, and pointed out that the Christian path was a dangerous one, and that tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and the sword, with a shameful death was the lot of many who trod the Celestial highway.

Christian likewise remained unmoved at this, and reminded his enemy that everlasting glory lay at the end of the believer's life on earth.

Once more Apollyon changed his tactics, this time pointing out the faults, failings and sins of Christian. He accused him of trying by wrong ways to rid himself of sin's burden. He reminded him of his laziness in the arbor, and of his sinful sleep. He charged him with having been fearful at the sight of the lions, and of being of a vain-glorious disposition.

To this Christian replied, "All this is true, and much more which thou hast left out, but the Prince Whom I serve and honor is merciful and ready to forgive."

Then Apollyon could contain his anger no longer and shrieked, "I am an enemy to this Prince: I hate His Person, His laws and His people. I am come out to withstand thee!" With this, he straggled over the King's highway and yelled, "Prepare to die, for I swear by my infernal den that you shall go no further!"

Then hurling a flaming dart at Christian's breast, he began the savage attack.

CHRISTIAN DOES BATTLE WITH APOLLYON

Christian now bestirred himself, and catching the dart on his shield of faith quenched it. Then drawing his sword he proceeded to defend himself as best he could. Amidst the shrieks and hissing of Apollyon, and the cries, groans and prayers of Christian the fight went on. What a fight it was!

The enemy rained down his fiery darts as thick as hail - darts of doubt, pride, anger, malice, envy, hatred and lust were hurled time and time again at him, until Christian was wounded in the head and hand and foot, and began to

weaken and give back before the terrible onslaught.

This sore combat lasted almost half a day and Christian was almost overcome, for his wounds caused him to grow weaker and weaker.

Then Apollyon, spying his opportunity, began to wrestle with him, and soon the two were locked in a deadly grip.

Christian was no match for his foe in this unequal struggle, and was soon thrown to the ground. As he fell, his sword slipped from his grasp. At this Apollyon with a fiendish laugh shouted, "I am sure of you now!" Lifting up his javelin, he was about to deliver the death blow, but Christian reached quickly for his sword saying as he did, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, for when I fall, I shall rise again!" With this he plunged his sword into the body of his antagonist, who now gave back with a fearful groan of agony.

Christian seeing this, thrust his sword into him again, this time exclaiming, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us!" With a shriek of mortal anguish, Apollyon now lifted up his wings and flew away leaving Christian the victor in this fearful combat. Then did Christian give thanks to the One Who, by His grace, had enabled him to triumph over the dread enemy of his soul. A hand then appeared with leaves of the tree of life, which, when Christian placed on his wounds, were immediately healed. After this he seated himself and partook of the refreshment that the sisters of the Castle Beautiful had given him.

As a result he was strengthened with might and power by His SPIRIT in the inner man, and thus invigorated, recommenced his journey with drawn sword in his hand.

A LESSON FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN

John Bunyan has given to us in this thrilling story of the pilgrim's fight, a picture of what every Christian can expect from the adversary of his soul, the Devil.

Every Christian believes in a personal Devil, possibly not the Apollyon pictured by Bunyan, for Satan does not always appear in the same guise. Sometimes he goes about as a "roaring lion seeking whom he may devour," at other times he comes as an "angel of light and his servants as ministers of righteousness."

One thing is certain, however, the moment a person becomes a Christian, the Devil will be up against him, and will seek by all means in his power to hinder his progress and cause him to lose his usefulness in the Master's service, and the joy of the Lord which is his strength.

We are told in the Bible that the Christian does not "Wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

There is thus arrayed against the child of GOD all the forces of the Satanic host. The Christian life is not a joke, or a picnic, but a FIGHT without any truce or armistice, until the believer goes to be with the Lord.

The sooner the Christian realizes and recognizes the forces arrayed against him, the better he will be prepared to meet the opposition. As one army studies the methods of the opposing forces, so the Christian should study the person, power, purpose and plans of Satan, and his fearful host. Remember, Satan is a person, and our Lord

said of him, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

GOD's word to the believer is, "Resist the Devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

How can the Christian resist? By using the armor that GOD has provided in view of the conflict:

- "Put on the whole armor of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil" (Ephesians 6:11).
- Meet the Devil's temptations to sin by the "breastplate of righteousness."
- Meet the Devil's lies with "the girdle of Truth."
- Meet his false systems of religion by the "shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace."
- Combat his evil suggestions concerning CHRIST's Person and work, and the doctrines once for all delivered to the saints, by putting on the "helmet of salvation."
- Resist his darts of doubt as to the promises of GOD and of His providence and love, by quenching them on the "shield of faith."
- Meet the enemy's open opposition with the "sword of the Spirit which is the word of God."
- Meet the Devil's invisible and subtle forces with the mighty weapon of "all Prayer."

The Lord JESUS has met Satan and was tempted by him for forty days, but to all his temptations CHRIST used the sword and replied, "It is written." If CHRIST was tempted, you may be certain that you will be treated likewise.

There are certain things to remember when resisting Satan.

- First, Satan is a defeated foe, for the Lord JESUS by His death and glorious resurrection has forever annulled his power (see Hebrews 2:9).
- Second, tell the Devil this, in an audible tone if need be. Claim, in the name of the Lord JESUS, the victory, He won for you, and say as did the Lord Himself, "Get thee behind me, Satan."
- Thirdly, use the Word of GOD on him. The Devil hates it, and cannot stand this deadly sword. To do this, the Word of GOD needs to be studied and used.
- Lastly, remember that the Lord JESUS is in you, is with you and is for you. Yield yourself wholly to Him for a righteous life (Romans 6:13); and for active service (Romans 12:1-8) and you will be "more than a conqueror through him who loves you."

A NOTE TO THE UNSAVED

And now just a word to the unsaved reader. The Devil will never fight with you until you seek to be delivered from

his grasp, for "the whole world lieth in the arms of the wicked one" (I John 5:19).

Satan doesn't worry those whom he has securely in his power. "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace" said the Lord JESUS (Luke 4:20). The strong man is Satan, his palace the heart of the unsaved, his goods, the unsaved reader.

Are you content to remain thus, or do you long for deliverance from such a master? Rest assured that if you are not a servant of CHRIST, with Him as your Lord and Master; then Satan has you in his possession, and by all his subtlety, guile and deceit, will seek to keep you thus.

If you would be delivered from his tyranny, turn from him with all your sins and need. Believe that GOD's dear Son bore your sins and took your place and died for you. Trust Him as your Saviour and accept now the "gift of God which is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

The chains that so long have bound you will be snapped. You will be delivered from the kingdom of darkness and translated into the marvelous light, life and liberty of the children of GOD. May it be yours even now through receiving CHRIST as your own personal Saviour to say:

"My chains are snapt, the bonds of sin are broken --
And I am free!
O, let the triumphs of His grace be spoken,
Who died for me!"

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

As Christian proceeded on his way along the Valley of Humiliation he discovered that at the end of it was another valley called the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

As the way to the Celestial City led right through it, he prepared to go right on. Now this valley was a lonely place, and the prophet Jeremiah described it as "A wideness: a land of desert and of pits; a land of drought, and of the shadow of death" (Jeremiah 2:6).

As Christian approached its borders, two men suddenly rushed out from the darkness that enshrouded it and cried to him, "Go back! Go back if you value your life!" When Christian asked them why they thus bade him return, they replied, "This valley is as dark as pitch! We saw the hideous creatures of darkness! We heard the continued howling and yelling as of a people under unutterable misery, who sat there bound in affliction and iron! Over this valley hangs the discouraging clouds of confusion. Death also does always spread his wings over it."

Christian's reply to this was to point out that as the way to his eternal home led right through it, he must needs keep to the path. Then the two men, who were descendants of the spies who brought an evil report of the land departed, leaving Christian alone.

With drawn sword, the pilgrim proceeded cautiously, and soon the light of day faded.

The road on which he walked became very narrow and he found it most difficult to keep his feet. As he journeyed,

he dimly descried on his right hand a deep ditch, into which the blind of all ages had led the blind and miserably perished. This speaks of error in principle. On the other side was a dangerous bog, into which, if a man fell, he could find no bottom for his feet. This speaks of error in practice. Added to this, the intense darkness made the going very dangerous, but Christian remembered the promise, "He will keep the feet of his saints," so he looked to the Strong One for help.

In the midst of the valley was as it were, the very mouth of hell. Flame and smoke filled the air, while hideous noises struck terror to his soul. Perceiving his sword to be of little avail in emergency, Christian took the weapon of "all prayer" and prayed, "O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul!"

Thus he went on, with traps and snares on every hand threatening him with disaster. At one time, he heard a company of fiends coming to meet him, and wondered what he should do. He was tempted to go back, but resisted the inclination and resolved rather to press on. As the fiends came nearer, he cried in a most vehement voice, "I will walk in the strength of the Lord GOD!" They then gave back, and came no further.

Furthermore as he went on, one of the wicked ones got behind him, and began to whisper awful thoughts into his mind. He caused evil suggestions and even blasphemies to come into his thoughts so that he imagined they came from his own mind. This distracted him a great deal, and he was sore amazed at the fearful plight into which he was plunged. As he traveled on he heard the voice of someone who was in the valley ahead of him, and this is what he heard the person say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

CHRISTIAN FINDS A REASON TO BE GLAD

Then was Christian glad for three reasons.

- First, that others who feared GOD were also in the valley.
- Second, if that person could realize the presence of CHRIST with him, why should not he?
- Third, Christian had a desire to catch up to him and enjoy his company; but this could not be, for all who passed through this valley must go alone.

Yet he was no longer alone, for now he had the sweet consciousness of the presence of the Lord JESUS with Him according to His own promise, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

Presently the day broke and the shadows fled away.

Then said Christian, "He hath turned the shadow of death into the morning." As the sun rose and flooded the valley with its warm rays and brilliant light, Christian looked behind, not with any desire to go back, but to see the path he had so lately trodden. As he saw the narrow pathway with the ditch on each side, and the fearful traps and snares that abounded on every hand, he thanked GOD and took courage.

But now he was in that part of the valley that was even more dangerous than the other. The traps at this point were more cunningly set, nets and pitfalls abounded on every hand, also great holes and narrow defiles with scarcely a hand's grip to pass by; but bye and bye he came to the end of the valley, and thanked GOD once more

for His preserving and protecting care and exclaimed, "His candle shineth on my head, and by his light I go through darkness" (Job 29:3).

How glad he was that at last this terrible experience had come to an end!

WHAT DOES THIS VALLEY REPRESENT IN THE LIFE OF A BELIEVER?

This valley of the Shadow of Death is a picture of an experience in the life of a Christian that all believers do not pass through. GOD allows, for some wise reason known only to Himself; to let some of His children walk in the darkness by removing from them the conscious reality of His presence.

He does this in order to test the reality of their faith, love and obedience. It illustrates the difference between temptation and testing. The fight with Apollyon illustrates what temptation is, for the Devil tempts. GOD never tempts (James 1:13). Christian's experience in the valley shows us what testing is.

GOD allows the believer to be tested in the darkness oftentimes, and there fulfils His promise to give him "the treasures of darkness." This experience is spoken of in Isaiah 50:10 where we read, "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his Servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light?" What is the child of GOD to do in such a case? Hear the answer: "Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God!"

GOD allowed Job to go through this experience. For no reason that Job knew, GOD allowed him to be stripped of his wealth, family and health, and he was left in complete darkness as to why GOD thus allowed him to suffer. Added to this, he was taunted by his so-called friends. What did Job do? In the midst of the valley he exclaimed, "He knoweth the way I take, and when I am tried, I shall come forth as gold!" Once again he cried, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him!" Abraham went through this valley as he took his son, his only and well beloved son Isaac, and bound him on the altar and raised the knife to slay him. It was pitch darkness spiritually for Abraham, but he trusted GOD in that darkness. Many of GOD's choicest saints have passed through the same experience, and have emerged from it with a spiritual discernment and strength they never knew before. The refining fire of trial burned the dross, in order that the gold of faith may shine more brilliantly.

Perhaps, the reader may even now be passing through this valley. GOD, in His infinite wisdom, has allowed some bereavement to come to you, some loved one has been taken, and all seems dark. Perhaps it is some financial loss or ill health afflicts you, and you are wondering why all these things have been allowed to come into your life. Rest assured, beloved child of GOD, that your Father knows best.

GOD is testing you, proving you, refining you in the furnace of affliction, so that you, too, may come forth as gold; a better Christian, a stronger soldier of the Cross, a more experienced saint, and able to sympathize and help those in a similar position.

May it be yours to say as did another pilgrim through this ballad:

"So on I go not knowing,
I would not if I might,
I'd rather walk in the dark with GOD
Than go alone in the light.

I'd rather walk by faith with Him,
Than go alone by sight."

Rest assured that "God worketh all things together for good to them that love him" (Romans 8:28). You are not alone in the valley. Others are there, and they are proving the truth of GOD's promises. He will bring you into the light again, and you shall thank GOD for all eternity for the experience.

"In the way that He will choose
He will lead us,
Not a lesson we shall lose,
All will reach us.
Strange and difficult indeed
We may find it;
But the blessing we all need
Lies behind it.
All the lessons He shall send
Are the sweetest,
And His training in the end
The completest."

~ end of chapter 11 ~
