

A DREAMER AND HIS WONDERFUL DREAM

The Story of John Bunyan and The Pilgrim's Progress

by

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Chapter 17

IT'S ALWAYS DARKEST JUST BEFORE DAWN

FLATTERER

As they continued their journey, the pilgrims came to a place where they saw a path put itself into their way, which seemed to be as straight as the path on which they were traveling. It was, as it were, a way within a way, and as they did not know which path to take, for they both seemed straight before them, they stood still to consider.

As they did so, a man approached them clothed in a light robe who asked them why they stood thus. When the pilgrims informed him of their predicament, the man said, "Follow me, for I too, am going to the Celestial City, and am well acquainted in these parts."

Accordingly, they followed him, for he seemed a pleasant man and was full of compliments and fine sayings.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the road on which he was taking them turned away from the straight and narrow path; but being absorbed in listening to the fine things their companion was saying about them, they did not notice this deviation, and soon their faces were turned away from the Celestial City.

Suddenly, before they were aware of it, he led them into the compass of a large net in which they were so entangled that they could not, in spite of all their efforts, extricate themselves. Then the robe fell from the man, and they perceived he was a dark man whose name was Flatterer.

As they lay crying in the net, Christian groaned, "Now do I see myself in an error! Did not the Shepherds bid us beware of flatterers? As in the saying of the wise man, so we have found it this day: '**A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet.**'"

Hopeful cried, "Here David was wiser than we; for saith he, '**Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer?**'" Thus they lay helpless in the net, bemoaning their folly, and rueing the day they had ever listened to the blandishments of the Flatterer.

Presently there came a shining one to them with a whip in his hand who asked them who they were and how they came to be in the net.

Christian replied by telling him frankly the story of their deception. At this, the Sinning One said, "Flatterer is a false apostle that hath transformed himself into an angel of light." He then tore the net and let them out saying, "Follow me that I may set you in your way again."

When he had brought them to the place from which they had been turned aside, he commanded them to lie down, upon which he gave them both a good thrashing with the whip, saying as he did, "**As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore and repent.**"

This done, he bade them go on their way and take good heed to themselves, so the pilgrim's went on their way singing in a chastened tone

"Come hither, you that walk along the way;
See how the pilgrims fare that go astray;
They caught are in an entangling net,
'Cause they good counsel lightly did forget.
'Tis true they rescued were, but yet you see
They're scourged to boot: Let this your caution be!"

The lesson of the Flatterer is obvious.

A Christian needs to beware of the person who is always complimenting him, and trying to make him believe he is a very extraordinary specimen of humanity, and one of the very few perfect people in the world! The Devil will see to it that the Christian never suffers from an overdose of humility. On the contrary, he will compliment him on every sermon he preaches, on every prayer he prays, on every deed he does on every gift he gives until puffed up by these foolish notions, the poor pilgrim is soon entangled in a net.

It is a good thing sometimes to get into the net, for the net lets the Christian down to earth, and he realizes what a fool he has been in thus imagining himself to be better than others. He discovers that the only extraordinary thing about him is his foolishness. GOD's chastening that follows such an experience, helps to complete the lesson that GOD would impress upon His children; so that in the school of experience they learn the necessity for the injunction of GOD's Word, "**Be not wise in your own conceits!**"

Self-confidence, self-assertion and self-advertisement are evils that carry their own condemnation, and of such the Christian should beware.

MR. ATHEIST

After a while they saw a man coming towards them with his back to the Celestial City. His name was Mr. Atheist.

When he was come up to them he inquired where they were going, and when they told him they were going to the Celestial City he burst into laughter. On being asked the reason for his laughter he replied, "I laughed to see what ignorant persons you are to take such a tedious journey all for nothing." He then told them that there was no

such place as the Celestial City, for he had been seeking it for twenty years but had found no trace of it. He was therefore going back, and advised them to give up all hope of ever seeing such a place, for no such place existed.

"But," Christian exclaimed, "we have both heard and believe that there is such a place to be found."

This amused Atheist the more, and he went on his way laughing at the simplicity of their faith.

The class of persons represented by Atheist is still with us in this day and the Bible warns us of such. These unbelievers, infidels, skeptics and agnostics are quite busy at the present time. In fact, there is in this country a society known as "The American Association for the Advancement of Atheism." It has been formed for the express purpose of denying the truth of GOD's Word and the very existence of GOD Himself.

Atheism masquerades as many garbs these days. We see it in what is called the "Evolutionary Hypothesis" which denies that the world of nature came into existence by the direct act of GOD as revealed in Genesis; but substitutes for it a theory that man has evolved from the lower forms of life by gradual processes until he has attained to his present status. This has no foundation in the facts of science, but yet is taught as though it were a fact. Many of the young men and women of our country, in their ignorance and credulity, are believing this false conception and rejecting the Divine revelation.

GOD has given us a description of an atheist in Psalm 14:1 where it is stated, "**The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'**"

To the intelligent person, who uses the faculties GOD has given him, there can be no doubt of the existence of GOD. Creation demands a Creator. The wondrous design in creation demands an infinite DESIGNER. "**The heavens declare the glory of GOD and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.**" Just as a book demands an author so the fact of the Bible demands an AUTHOR. The AUTHER is GOD Who, through the sixty-six books that comprise the Bible, has revealed the state of man and his need of salvation through faith in the death and resurrection of His beloved Son; and the eternal doom of those who wilfully reject His proferred grace.

Let not any man, calling himself by any name, turn you away from the holy Word of GOD which has stood the test of centuries. In spite of the countless attacks against the Bible, it has emerged triumphant in every case, and shall continue to do so, for the Lord JESUS said, "**Heaven and earth shall pass away but my word shall never pass away!**" Rather, "**let God be true and every man a liar.**"

It is important to remember that faith, though always unreasoning, is never unreasonable. GOD's Word can bear the closest investigation, and has, for many, many years. The closer it is scrutinized the greater its perfection is realized.

The Atheist has been well likened to an owl, which, with its eyes tightly closed, looked up into the face of the sun shining in its strength and screech, "I see no sun!" The attacks of unbelievers on the Bible remind one of the dog who barked all night at the moon, but the moon seemed quite unaffected by it and kept shining just the same! Cowper, the Christian poet, expressed it beautifully when he sang,

"A glory gilds the sacred page,
A glory like the sun;

That gives its light to every age
It gives but borrows none."

THE ENCHANTED GROUND

The pilgrims now entered into a certain country called the Enchanted Ground, whose air was calculated to make one feel very heavy and drowsy.

Here Hopeful began to be very sleepy and said, "I now begin to grow so drowsy that I can scarcely hold up my eyes. Let us lie down here and take a nap."

But Christian refused to do this, and reminded Hopeful that the Shepherds had warned them to beware of sleeping on the Enchanted Ground. He further pointed out the grave danger of sleeping there, lest he should awake no more. This opened Hopeful's eyes to his position and he thanked Christian for his good counsel. In order that they might be kept alert, they began to converse with each other of their spiritual experiences.

The Enchanted Ground illustrates that period in the Christian life when everything seems to be going well. Business is prospering, good health is being enjoyed and family relationships are quite harmonious. The sun shines brightly and everything is going fine. It is at such a period as this that the Christian is exposed to a subtle danger. David, when passing through this experience, confidently asserted, "I shall never be moved." Peter said to the Lord, "**Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I.**" But alas, both David and Peter were very soon asleep to their responsibilities and privileges, and when the temptation came, they had not the strength to stand against it.

It is comparatively easy for the pilgrim to fall into the sleep of formality, and perform all the duties of the Christian life from a mere matter of form.

He can go through the routine of Christian service, prayer, preaching, etc., all in a mechanical manner, while fast asleep spiritually and with no heart in it for the Lord.

The peculiar thing about a sleeping Christian is that he can talk in his sleep, walk in his sleep and fight with the brethren in his sleep. In fact, he can do this best when fastest asleep! He can criticize others, and create a tremendous amount of mischief while asleep. The pilgrim needs to keep a strict watch upon himself, lest sleep come upon him, and he lose the keen edge of his spirituality.

It would be a good thing if each Christian would ask himself periodically,

- "Am I as eager to win souls for CHRIST as I used to be?
- Do I study GOD's Word with the same zest and enjoyment as before?
- Am I enjoying communion with my heavenly Father and my Lord and Saviour as once I did?
- Is the world less attractive to me now than previously,"

These questions will all help to keep the child of GOD awake to his condition and on the alert for the dangers that continually beset his path.

While Christian and Hopeful traversed the Enchanted Ground, they conversed with each other. Hopeful began to

tell Christian of his spiritual awakening, his conviction of sin and of his ultimate conversion in the city of Vanity. This conversation is well worth the careful attention of the reader of "*Pilgrim's Progress*," for it unfolds in a very forceful way the experiences of a soul aroused to a sense of his need of CHRIST and of his vain efforts to save himself; until at last, weary, worn and sad, he finds in the Lord JESUS CHRIST all he needs for his salvation; past, present and future.

IGNORANCE

Presently they came to a place where they saw a crooked road which led from a far off town called Conceit and joined the straight and narrow path. Along this road they saw a young man walking, who presently entered the narrow way and continued his walk toward the Celestial City. When they asked him his name and where he was going, he told them his name was Ignorance and that he hoped that he was going to the Celestial City.

When they pointed out to him that there was only one way to enter the narrow way and that was through the door, CHRIST JESUS; Ignorance stated that in his town none knew of such a door, but they had constructed this little way all of their own which led into the narrow path, and that this was good enough for them.

Christian then asked him, "What have you to show at the gate of the Celestial City that it may be opened to you?"

Ignorance replied, "I know my Lord's will. I have always lived a good life. I pray, fast, pay tithes and give alms."

Then Christian in a very kind but faithful manner, pointed out to Ignorance his mistake and showed him from the Bible that "**being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish his own righteousness, he had not submitted himself to the righteousness of God.**"

- He read to him the Scriptures which declare that a man must be born again if he would ever enter the Celestial City.
- He unfolded to him that his own works of righteousness could never save him.
- He pointed out the fact that GOD declared him to be a sinner, lost and guilty, in spite of his best endeavors.
- He showed him that GOD, seeing and knowing this, had provided a salvation full, free and eternal for all who would, as sinners, receive His Son as their own Saviour, Who had put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself on Calvary's cross.

To all this good scriptural counsel Ignorance turned away and refused to listen. He was like many today who imagine that their religious exercises, good works, prayers, giving, church membership and ordinances will put them on to the Celestial highway. He imagined that because he was sincere in his belief that his sincerity would save him, little realizing that he was sincerely mistaken. In spite of Christian's loving and faithful counsel, he refused to hearken and at last exclaimed, "That is your faith, but not mine; yet mine, I doubt not, is as good as yours . . . You go so fast I cannot keep pace with you. You go on before, I must stay a while behind."

Thus they left him, and Christian turning to his companion exclaimed, "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceits? There is more hope for a fool than for him!"

This is not the last time we shall hear of Ignorance, for we shall yet be told of his awful doom. But ere we leave him, is there a reader who fits this description of Ignorance? If, up to this time you have been trusting in your morality, good works, church membership or religious activities for your salvation, stop right where you are and list

to the note of this solemn refrain, **"Ye must be born again!"**

GOD declares you to be a sinner, undone, unrighteous, and ungodly; and that if you die in that condition you will be eternally doomed. CHRIST has solemnly stated that you must be born again if you would see the kingdom of GOD. Your good works and good character, splendid though they be, can never take the place or regeneration. "For by the works of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (Galatians 2:16). Your own righteousnesses in His sight are but filthy rags if trusted in for salvation (Isaiah 64:6). They can therefore never merit His approval.

GOD, however, has provided for your need in the gift of His dear Son, Who, on the cross of Calvary, bare our sins in His Own body on the tree, and died to satisfy GOD's righteous and holy claims against the sinner. CHRIST, being raised from the dead for our justification, offers to you through the Gospel, forgiveness for past, peace for the present, and glory for the future. The one and only condition attached to this wondrous salvation is that you will own your need as a sinner, receive Him to be your own personal Saviour and confess Him as your Lord. If you are not yet saved, you may become so as you read this, and thus be fitted by the grace of GOD for entrance to the Celestial City.

TEMPORARY

As they proceeded on their way, Christian asked his companion if he remembered about a man named Temporary, who at one time had thought a great deal about starting on the pilgrim journey; but had not been heard of after he had become acquainted with a person called Save-self.

Hopeful replied that he had known him quite well, and that the reason for Temporary giving up his intentions of becoming a Christian were fourfold.

First, though his conscience had been awakened to a sense of his guilt before GOD, his mind was not changed. As soon as his conscience began to trouble him, he turned to something else, until he no longer felt anxious about his eternal welfare. This he did continually, until his conscience became seared as with a hot iron.

Secondly, he was afraid of the responsibilities that he would have to bear, of the difficulties he would have to face, and of the self-denial he would have to practice if he became a Christian. This caused him to hesitate and finally to reject the way of salvation.

Thirdly, he feared the shame, ridicule and scorn that would be heaped upon him by men of the world if he named the name of CHRIST.

Lastly, he loved his sins, and although he feared the wrath of GOD, yet he was secretly glad to turn his back on the conviction of sin, and give full play once more to his fleshly and sinful lusts.

Thus ends the history of Mr. Temporary. His descendants are with us today, and are doing exactly the same thing as he did.

Many, like him, are convicted of their need of the Saviour, but are allowing unbelief, pride, love of sin, fear of man and procrastination to keep them from starting on the journey. GOD's word declares that "The things which are seen are temporal; [or passing away] but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Temporary tried to serve both worlds and discovered it was an impossible task for the Saviour said, "No man can serve two masters, for he will either love the one and hate the other; or serve one, and despise the other."

If any reader is tempted to imitate Temporary, let him take warning from this. Choose ye this day who ye will serve; self, with its pleasures, pride, sins, and eternal doom; or CHRIST, with salvation, peace, service and eternal glory. Ponder will the question.

"Where will you be when earth is passed?
Where, when the dread hour comes at last?
Where, when to you time is no more,
When shut forever is the door.
Eternity! Eternity!
Where will you spend eternity?"

~ end of chapter 17 ~
