

## **A DREAMER AND HIS WONDERFUL DREAM**

The Story of John Bunyan and The Pilgrim's Progress

by

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### **Chapter 9**

#### **THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE PILGRIM WAY**

Christian, in spite of the hard going, continued to ascend the hill, first running, then walking, until it became so difficult that he had to climb on his hands and knees. But he kept at it, and made progress gradually. The Hill of Difficulty, as its name indicated, is a picture of the difficulties and trials that await the Christian. Many have the idea that when a person becomes a child of GOD, all his difficulties are over for ever; but it is then that the believer realizes that his difficulties are more formidable than ever before. There will be testings, temptations, trials, and hardships that will appear as difficult to overcome as the Hill of Difficulty was hard to climb.

#### **TIMOROUS AND MISTRUST**

You will have noticed that Christian first refreshed himself at the spring.

This spring is a picture of the fountain of GOD's truth which refreshes the pilgrim, and gives him strength to go on for GOD, and to be strong in the grace that is in CHRIST JESUS.

As the Christian faces his difficulties in the strength of the Lord GOD, he will discover that every obstacle can be turned into a pedestal; and that spiritual muscle is developed that will stand him in good stead for the future.

The believer is enjoined to endure hardness as a good soldier of JESUS CHRIST. The words of that well-known hymn are fitting at this point:

"Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin;  
Each victory will help you some other to win;  
Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue,  
Look ever to JESUS, He will carry you through."

However great the difficulty, however severe the trial, it is good to know that the Lord JESUS is ever with the Christian, and will never leave nor forsake those who have put their trust in Him. He is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother through all the changing scenes of life.

As Christian struggled on his upward way, he presently came to a pleasant arbor, or shady resting place, that had been built by the Lord of the hill for the refreshment of weary travelers. This arbor was about midway to the top of the hill.

Into this beautiful place Christian entered, and seating himself on a bench, rested his weary body.

After a while he felt quite refreshed, but instead of getting up and continuing his journey, he began to examine his roll and the garment that had been given him by the Lord, and this gave him great pleasure. As he continued to be thus occupied with his blessings, he began to get quite drowsy, and by and by sank into a deep slumber. During his sleep the roll fell unnoticed from his hands, but Christian slept on until he was awakened by a voice sounding in his ears, "**Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise!**" Thus awakened, and realizing that he had slept so long in the arbor, Christian rushed out and ran as fast as he could up the remainder of the hill.

When he had almost reached the summit, he saw two men, wild eyed and fearful, running down the hill as hard as they could go.

Their names were Timorous and Mistrust.

When they came up to Christian, he stopped them and cried, "Sirs, what is the matter? You are running in the wrong direction!"

At this, Timorous and Mistrust told him that as far as they could see, the further one went along this road, the more difficulties and dangers increased. Then concluded by telling Christian that some little distance off they had just seen, right in the middle of the road, two great lions; so they had turned and run away as fast as they could, lest they should be torn in pieces by these dreadful creatures. With this, they ran down the hill and left Christian alone.

## THE MISSING ROLL

Christian now began to feel afraid also, but he did not want to go back to the City of Destruction, and yet to go forward, according to Timorous and Mistrust, seemed certain death!

What should he do? He felt for his roll so that he might comfort and assure himself, but to his consternation he could not find it though he searched all his pockets.

Then was Christian in great distress, for he could not venture forward without this. At last he remembered his sleep in the arbor, and falling down on his knees, he asked GOD's forgiveness for his foolish act and prayed as had David long before; when he had lost his roll: "**Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit; then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee**" (Psalm 51:12-13).

Then Christian arose and made his way back to the arbor, looking carefully this side and that, and all the while bemoaning his folly in having wasted his time sleeping, instead of using the arbor for a little refreshment from his weariness; "**O wretched man that I am,**" he cried, "that I should sleep in the day time; that I should sleep in the midst of difficulty! That I should so indulge the flesh, as to use that rest for ease to my flesh which the Lord of the hill hath erected only for the relief of the spirit of pilgrims . . . I am now made to tread with sorrow where I might

have trodden with delight . . . O that I had not slept!"

At length he came to the arbor where he sat down and wept, but at last, looking under the bench on which he had slept, he spied the missing roll. Trembling, and with haste, he took it and placed it in his bosom, and thanked GOD for having thus restored to him his assurance and joy of his salvation.

We have in this incident a much needed lesson for to-day.

Many a child of GOD has become spiritually asleep because of his carelessness in the things of GOD. He has neglected his prayer life. He has failed to continue his private study of the Scriptures. He has ceased to witness for CHRIST before his unsaved companions. He has left off his self denial. Consequently a spirit of lethargy has crept over his soul and he has lost the spiritual alertness he once possessed. In fact there are thousands today who could be termed "sound Christians." They are sound, very sound indeed - sound asleep! Asleep to their privileges and responsibilities as children of GOD in an unbelieving world! You will have noticed it was while Christian was examining his roll and his robe; in other words, while he was occupied with his standing in CHRIST which was perfect, that he forgot all about his state, and thus fell asleep.

- It is possible for a Christian to get so engrossed with his blessings in CHRIST, such as his sanctification, justification, redemption, and glorification, that he forgets the BLESSER.

- It is possible for him to be so taken up with his position in CHRIST, that he forgets all about his condition or state.

- Again, it is possible for the believer to be so wrapped up with his believing, that he neglects his behaving, and thus falls asleep.

A curious thing about a sleeping Christian is that he can talk in his sleep, preach in his sleep, walk in his sleep and criticize others in his sleep. In fact, he is best at this when soundest asleep. He can fight in his sleep, and backbite in his sleep, and create no end of trouble in the company of Christians with whom he gathers.

### **What did Christian lose in his sleep?**

Was it his salvation or his eternal life? O no! No Christian can lose this, for his life is hid with Christ in God. Christian did not have to get saved all over again.

### **What then did he lose as he slept in that arbor?**

He lost the joy and assurance of his salvation - a vastly different thing. We need ever to remember that relationship depends on birth, but fellowship depends on behaviour. It is one thing to be a child of your father, and an entirely different thing to be the happy child of your father. David is an illustration of this. In his prayer of penitence in Psalm 51, he prayed for the restoration of the joy of his salvation which had been lost through his sin.

What is the child of GOD to do when he loses the joy and assurance of his salvation through sloth and spiritual sleepiness? Just what Christian did.

He must confess his sin to his heavenly Father, hating the sin that has interfered with his fellowship with the One Who has done so much for him. What will GOD then do? GOD will do what He has promised in His Word - "If we

confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

### **Where will the joy of salvation be found again?**

Just where it was left when the believer fell asleep. As Christian had to return to the place where he had left off to watch and pray; so the believer must return to that prayer life, to that study of GOD's Word, to that witnessing for CHRIST, to that whole-hearted devotion to the Son of GOD that first he had. Then the joy of the Lord will once again fill his soul, and the assurance of his salvation will give him confidence to go boldly forward in the Name of the JESUS CHRIST, in spite of all the opposition of the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

Let us never forget that a sleeping Christian is a danger and menace to other believers, and a stumbling block in the way of the unsaved.

The unsaved man sees that the sleeping Christian is indifferent to eternal things, and he argues that if this person represents what salvation does for a man, then he doesn't want any of it. GOD has a message for the sleeping Christian. Listen to it: "**Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!**" (Ephesians 5:14). And again, "**It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed!**" (Romans 13:11).

If the reader is amongst those who have lost their joy of salvation, be frank and open with GOD, and judge your carelessness and sin in His presence. Confess it, and put it away from you, and once again communion, fellowship and joy will be restored to you, and you will again be privileged to be of use and service to the One Who bought you by His blood. He is coming soon, and the privilege of witnessing will then be over.

"Hark, 'tis the watchman's cry: 'Wake, brethren, wake!  
JESUS our Lord is nigh; Wake, brethren, wake!  
Sleep is for sons of night, ye are children of the light;  
Yours is the glory bright; Wake, brethren, wake!'"

### **THE CASTLE BEAUTIFUL**

As Christian reached the summit of the hill, he saw in the distance a stately Castle called Beautiful. It had shapely towers and great walls, while the surrounding country seemed dark and dangerous. Christian was encouraged by the sight, for he knew that this castle existed for the sole purpose of entertaining strangers and pilgrims heavenward, so he hastened on.

But before we proceed further, let us find out what this castle represents.

**The Castle Beautiful is a picture of the visible Church of GOD on earth; that is, an assembly or gathering of believers, who have met in His Name alone, for the purpose of worship, praise, prayer, or the study of GOD's Word. It is GOD's purpose that every believer should seek to meet with a company of born again Christians, and thus enjoy the benefits of blessing of this fellowship together.**

We read in Acts 2 that "**They that gladly received the word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine and**

**fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."**

Here we see the divine order in the beginning.

- First, there was a reception of the Word of GOD;
- next, they obeyed the Lord by being baptized;
- following this, they were added to the company of believers already gathered;
- and finally they went on to know GOD's will and doctrine, and kept the feast of remembrance that the Lord had instituted the night in which He was betrayed.

This is GOD's order for today, for we have no more right to alter GOD's order of gathering than we have to alter GOD's way of salvation.

If the reader is saved by the grace of GOD, he should seek to meet with GOD's people who gather according to the plan revealed in the Scriptures; who own no name but the Name above every name; who have no rules for reception except those rules contained in the Bible, namely: regeneration, soundness of life and soundness of doctrine; who practice only those ordinances given by the blessed Lord, namely: baptism and the Lord's supper; who have room for the ministry of all the gifts given by the risen Head to the Church which is His body; (Ephesians 4:10-12) and who give liberty for the Spirit of GOD to minister through whomsoever He will.

The Bible enjoins us to **"forsake not the assembling of ourselves together."**

There are many Christians today who look upon the visible church, all split up in many parties and factions, each claiming to be right and they ask, "Where shall we go?" "With whom shall we meet?" Many of them go nowhere; some go everywhere. The question is, where should they go? Let the Scripture that has assured them of their soul's eternal welfare, also settle their minds as to where He would have them go.

The Word of GOD is the believer's all-sufficient guide. The Lord JESUS said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This gathering together of believers unto Him constitutes a local church, whether it is held in a barn, kitchen, or the open air. Only believers can thus gather. No one, unless he is born again, has any right to admittance to such a company; and no one, who has been born again and is sound in life and doctrine, has any right to be kept out of such a gathering.

With such a scripturally gathered company of believers all Christians should seek to associate themselves and thus enjoy the blessing that comes through obedience to His word, apart from the ecclesiastical forms invented by men.

Let each Christian reader search his New Testament, and give himself no rest until he is satisfied that the company with whom he meets, or intends to meet, gathers in the Name of the Lord JESUS alone; has room for all the children of GOD; liberty for the Spirit of GOD; openness of heart for all the truth of GOD, and are thus seeking to carry out the simple pattern revealed in GOD's own guide book.

## **THE PORTER NAMED WATCHFUL**

As Christian proceeded, on his way in the dusk of the evening, he suddenly perceived the two great lions that had scared Timorous and Mistrust so much. Then was Christian very much afraid, for he dared not go ahead, but at

the same time did not desire to go back, so he stood still in the middle of the path, trembling in every limb, for the lions filled the air with their roaring.

As he thus stood not knowing what to do; the porter of the Castle, a man named Watchful, seeing his dilemma, shouted to him, "Is thy strength so small? Fear not the lions, for they are chained. They are placed there for the trial of faith, and for the discovery of those that have none. Keep in the middle of the path and no hurt shall come unto thee."

With such words Christian was reassured and made his way cautiously in their direction.

Sure enough, he now perceived that a strong chain was attached to each lion which allowed them to go thus far and no farther. Carefully keeping right in the middle of the King's highway, Christian at length passed between the lions and was safely received by Watchful.

The lesson of the lions is a very necessary one for the child of GOD.

When the Christian, guided by the Word of GOD, seeks to meet with a scripturally gathered company of the Lord's people, there is bound to be opposition. Satan knows full well the value of Christian fellowship, and the strength, comfort, and courage that such fellowship imparts to the believer. He thus seeks by all the means in his power to hinder it. This accounts for the lions in the path of the Christian's life. very often that which hinders becomes so great in the eyes of the believer, that it seems to close the road and make further progress impossible. All the pilgrim has eyes for are the lions that apparently bar the way to complete obedience to GOD.

Watchful is a picture of a godly shepherd of souls who is on the watch for obedient pilgrims, and it is he who points out to the Christian that the lions are limited in their activity; and that providing the child of GOD keeps right on in the middle of the path of obedience to GOD's will and word, they will not be able to harm him.

Thus the believer's eyes, which before were occupied with the lions only, see GOD's provision and protection.

The two lions could represent the world on one hand, and the Devil on the other.

The world, with all its pleasures, pride, lust, popularity, power and riches, all seek to hinder the progress of the Christian.

Satan with his subtle wiles, threats and temptations stands on the other side sleeping to turn back the pilgrim.

But what saith the Scriptures? It declares, "**There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to men; but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it**" (I Corinthians 10:13).

Thus the lions test the reality of our faith, love, and obedience of the pilgrim. Mere empty professors, such as Timorous and Mistrust are scared away, and perhaps it is best that they should, for GOD desires reality and obedience, even in the face of dire opposition.

**ENTER THE CASTLE BEAUTIFUL**

Watchful now escorted Christian to the door of the Castle, and asked him his name, to which Christian replied, "My name is now Christian, but my name used to be Graceless."

The Porter next inquired the reason for the lateness of the hour of his arrival, so Christian told him frankly of his sleep in the arbor, and of the loss and recovery of his roll. Then Watchful said, "I will call out one of the virgins of this place, who will, if she likes your talk, bring you in to the rest of the family, according to the rules of the house."

With these words, Watchful rang a bell, upon which a grave and beautiful damsel named Discretion appeared and Christian was introduced to her. She asked him whence he was and where he was going, so he told her. She then inquired how he had got into the way, what he had seen, and what his name was. To all these questions Christian gave a clear confession. This delighted Discretion, who perceived from this that he was a truly born again Christian.

She then called three more of the family to have a talk with him. Their names were Prudence, Piety and Charity, and after a short conversation with them, he was taken into the Castle and given a very warm welcome by its inmates. They crowded to the threshold and gathered around him and welcomed him in these words: "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord. This house was built by the Lord of the hill on purpose to entertain such pilgrims."

At this, Christian bowed his head and entered the Castle, thanking and praising GOD for having brought him to such a place.

Here we have a beautiful picture of what it means to welcome a believer into an assembly or gathering of the Lord's people.

Discretion is an illustration of that godly care or discretion which should be used ere one is so welcomed. Those whose responsibility it is to interview the one who seeks to meet in a scriptural way, should exercise every care, and make certain, as far as is humanly possible, that he or she is truly a child of GOD who is sound in life, that is, who is living as a child of GOD should; and who is sound in the faith, that is, not holding false doctrines dishonoring to the Lord JESUS.

There are, alas, in many churches, those who are not really Christians.

How did they get in? Because godly care was not used. Of course, life in CHRIST, and not a mere knowledge of the Scriptures is the ground for welcoming a believer. All Christians who are thus sound in life and doctrine should be warmly welcomed into an assembly.

Perhaps there may be some reader, who, by giving assent to some doctrine or creed; or through passing through some ceremony, has "joined the church"; but who has never been really born again, and is therefore not in "**the Church of God which is the body of Christ**," and is consequently unfit to be in a local church.

What should be done in a case like this?

- First, there should be an acknowledgement of one's need of CHRIST.
- Then a simple belief in the truth of the Gospel that CHRIST died for the ungodly and therefore died for you.

Take your place as such, and believing CHRIST died for you, accept Him as your own personal Saviour. That very

moment, the Spirit of GOD will put you into the true Church, the body of CHRIST, of which He is the HEAD. Then seek the fellowship of those who meet in His Name alone and you will experience what Christian did, the joy of being happily associated with those who love the Lord JESUS.

The three sisters, Prudence, Piety and Charity, illustrate those graces that should adorn every assembly of believers.

- There should be prudence or common sense. Many divisions and quarrels amongst GOD's people would have been avoided if Prudence had been allowed to have her way.

- Then Piety or godliness should be prominent. Where there is a seeking to live godly in CHRIST JESUS, there is an atmosphere that will glorify the Lord JESUS.

- Then last, but by no means least, there should be Charity or love. Where love abounds there will be no room left for jealousy, envy, and strife. Love for the Lord JESUS and love for all who love Him, will make the children of GOD loath to injure or speak evil of one another.

Thus the assembly where Discretion, Prudence, Piety and Charity prevail, is one where GOD's people will find a welcome; where the Gospel goes forth in the power of the Spirit of GOD; where souls are saved, and believers built up in their most holy faith.

~ end of chapter 9 ~