Chapter Nine

Christian Arrives at the Place of Deliverance

A. The Straight Highway is Walled with Salvation.

Now I saw in my dream that the highway along which Christian was to proceed was fenced in on both sides with a Wall, and that Wall was called Salvation. Therefore burdened Christian ran up this way, though not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back.

For Bunyan, salvation is both momentary and progressive. Christian has been saved at the Wicket-gate (momentary justification), he has continued in being saved at the house of the Interpreter (progressive sanctification), though now, in a distinctive rather than normative experience, he is saved at the Place of Deliverance (momentary sanctification).

1. It is a way of directing walls.

The highway of the King becomes walled on either side (Is. 26:1; 60:18). Here pilgrims, retaining some uncertainties after initial conversion, are given sovereign and secure guidance as they seek relief from their burdens; they are unfailingly directed, while distraction is eliminated, toward the only true healing balm for sin-burdened souls (Jer. 46:11; I John 2:1-2; 4:10).

2. It is a way of burdensome difficulty.

Since the highway gradually ascends, the degree of difficulty increases for burdened pilgrims; nevertheless Christian strives to run! His conflict is between the corruption of the flesh and the righteous desires of his renewed soul. He is also driven by the promise of Good-will, the porter at the Wicket-gate, who told him of an imminent place of deliverance, now not very far ahead.

3. It is a way to new-found stability.

As more fully explained in Pilgrim’s Progress, Themes and Issues, pp. 121-142, this experience is a description of Christian coming to a point of stability following a period of spiritual turbulence and uncertainty subsequent to his conversion. Refer also to the commentary on pp. 98-108. Bunyan’s own experience distinctively parallels this sequence. In Grace Abounding he describes his own conversion, followed by approximately three years of spiritual unrest and ambivalence. Then Bunyan comes to

1 Isa. 26:1; 35:8.
3 Ibid., §§ 117-228, pp. 20-35.
a clear understanding of Christ's substitutionary righteousness which results in him being joyously settled in his assurance.⁴

B. The Straight Highway Becomes the Way of Emancipation.

So he ran in this direction until he came to a place where the way ascended up a small hill; and at the top stood a Cross while below it was a sepulcher [stone tomb]. So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up to the Cross, his burden fell from off his back; then it continued to tumble down the hill until it fell into the mouth of the sepulcher and was seen no more.

At this, Christian felt glad and overjoyed,⁵ and in his excitement he exclaimed, “He has given me rest by means of his sorrow, and life by means of his death.” Then he stood still for a while to look with wonder and amazement; for it was so surprising to him that the sight of the Cross should accomplish the release of his burden. Therefore he looked again and again, even until inward springs of water flowed down his cheeks.⁶ Now as he stood looking and weeping, behold three Shining Ones [angels] approached and saluted him with the benediction, “Let peace be upon you.”⁷

So the first Shining One said to him, “Your sins have been forgiven.”⁸ The second stripped Christian of his rags and clothed him with a complete change of garment.⁹ The third also set a mark upon his forehead,¹⁰ and gave him a scroll with a seal on it,¹¹ which he directed should be looked at as he ran and handed in upon arrival at the gate of the Celestial City. So these messengers went their way. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing:¹²

When a sinner is first truly converted, his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior is simple and intense, though by no means comprehensive in terms of its grasp of all aspects of the glory of conversion, election, justification, redemption, adoption, etc. such as is revealed in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Hebrews. So here we see Christian awakening to many new aspects of his inherited blessings (Eph. 1:3).

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⁴ Ibid., §§ 114, 229-235, pp. 35-36.
⁵ When God releases us from the burden of our guilt, we are as those who leap for joy.
⁷ John 20:19, 21, 26.
⁸ Mark 2:5.
⁹ Isa. 61:10; Zech. 3:4-5; Phil. 3:9.
¹¹ Eph. 1:13.
¹² Christian can sing even when alone because God has given to him the joy of his heart.
1. Christian looks at the cross and is lightened.

His comfort will greatly multiply as he looks outside of himself and focuses upon Jesus Christ’s objective atonement. Jonathan Edwards comments:

The sweetest joys and delights I have experienced, have not been those that have arisen from a hope of my own good estate; but in a direct view of the glorious things of the gospel. When I enjoy this sweetness, it seems to carry me above the thoughts of my own estate. It seems, at such times, a loss that I cannot bear, to take off my eye from the glorious pleasant object I behold without me, to turn my eye in upon myself, and my own good estate.\(^\text{13}\)

a. His burden is brought to the cross.

The relationship between the teaching received at the house of Interpreter and a more clear understanding of the heart of the gospel ought not to be neglected here; new truth grasped is about to result in greater enlightenment and stability in Christian’s soul.

(1) The attitude of his gaze.

Approaching the crest of a hill, Christian fixes his eyes upon a cross, below which is an open sepulcher. His look is intense and serious. No doubt he recognizes a scene that he has read about in his book. But how can an instrument of punishment yet deliver him from his burden? And for whom has this cross been raised? And why should this person be crucified?

(2) The object of his gaze.

Strictly speaking, this cross, like any other Roman cross, is not distinctive in itself. But does Christian see a man on this cruel instrument of death? Some have suggested “No”, since Bunyan was a Protestant and therefore he would not countenance even the suggestion of a crucifix. Yet a short way ahead, while enjoying fellowship at the Palace Beautiful, Christian recalls how at this place, “I saw one, as I thought in my mind, hang bleeding upon the tree; and the very sight of him made my burden fall off my back.”\(^\text{14}\)

b. His burden is loosed as he looks.

The portrayal of faith as “looking” recalls the beholding of the uplifted brazen serpent by the smitten Israelites (Num. 21:4-9; Is. 45:22; John 3:14-16). So Christian’s burden is loosed by another burden bearer (Matt. 11:28-30). However, this faith, through which comes true emancipation, is totally works-renouncing.

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\(^{13}\) Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening*, p. 214.

c. His burden is buried as he looks.

The emphasis here is upon a risen Christ who, on that cross, provided a once-and-for-all, finished atonement (Heb. 9:24-28). However, the open tomb that receives Christian’s burden, presumably being empty, is demonstrable proof that his sin has really been dealt with (Rom. 1:3-4; 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:17). Hence, Bunyan’s gospel incorporates the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

2. Christian looks at the cross and is enlivened.

Here is the resultant fruit of this pilgrim’s well focused perception of Christ’s objective and satisfactory atonement. It involves both experiential and declarative benefits. Christian now understands the work of the cross in a far more comprehensive and profound way, as if he had begun to really understand the heart of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Hebrews.

a. His experiential benefits.

In the right apprehension of the gospel, it is objective perception that leads to subjective response. This was the point of Jonathan Edwards’ earlier comment (p. 142). The cross rightly perceived outside of Christian becomes the basis of his inward transformation by the cross. These subjective blessings include:
(1) A glad, restful, and animated heart.

Sensing relief from his burden, Christian awakens to his liberated condition (Isa. 61:10-11). In a similar manner following his post-conversion wrestlings, Bunyan finds joyous stability and exclaims:

Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed, I was loosed from my affliction and irons, my temptations also fled away; now went I also home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God. . . . I saw that the man Christ, as he is distinct from us, as touching his bodily presence, so he is our righteousness and sanctification before God [in heaven]. Here, therefore, I lived for some time, very sweetly at peace with God through Christ; Oh methought, Christ! Christ! there was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes. 

(2) Wonder and astonishment at the power of the cross.

It was steadfast gazing, that is earnest faith, upon the cross that gave linkage to its power (Rom. 16:17; I Cor. Col. 1:19-20). When Bunyan grasped his union with Christ, he concluded that,

if he and I were one, then his righteousness was mine, his merits mine, his victory also mine. Now could I see myself in heaven and earth at once: in heaven by my Christ, by my head, by my righteousness and life, though on earth by my body or person. . . . Ah, these blessed considerations and scriptures, . . . were in those days made to spangle in mine eyes.

(3) Springs of living water flowing from within.

Now did Christian richly appreciate God's outpoured Spirit of grace and supplication which the man with the crucified hands had purchased for him (Zech. 12:10). Now did he recall the words of his book that seemed to echo from the cross before his eyes: “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:14; cf. 7:38-39).

(4) Peace from God.

Here is the divine communication to Christian that God is at peace with him, that is Spirit generated assurance concerning “this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:1-2).

b. His declared benefits.

The three angels are ambassadors from God's throne; they mediate and affirm His glorious dealings with Christian (Rom. 8:31-39). Again, these objective provisions bring about subjective consequences.

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15 Ibid., I, §§ 230-231, p. 36.
16 Ibid., I, §§ 233, 235, p. 36.
(1) Negative justification, the forgiveness of sins.

Here is God’s judicial declaration concerning Christian’s burden. He is at peace with this pilgrim (Rom. 5:1) for Christ’s sake (Col. 1:20). The burden of guilt and condemnation has been removed (Rom. 8:1), not in a fictitious sense but really, because acceptable satisfaction has been made (Mark 2:5; Rom. 4:7-8; Eph. 1:7; Philem. 18).

(2) Positive justification, the garment of Christ’s righteousness.

Here is God’s judicial declaration concerning Christian’s standing. The rags of his unrighteousness (Is. 64:6), having been taken away, are replaced with new clothing, that is “a robe of righteousness” (Is. 61:10; Zech. 3:4-5). This garment represents the imputation of Christ’s righteousness (Rom. 4:6, 22; 5:17; I Cor. 1:30; II Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; Philem. 17). This doctrine was crucial for Bunyan.

So then, the righteousness of Christ covereth his [the believer], as a man’s garments cover the members of his body, . .. as the child is lapped up in its father’s skirt, or as the chicken is covered with the feathers of the hen. . .. This is of absolute necessity to be known, and to be believed. For without this no man can be counted righteous before God.¹⁷

(3) A mark on his forehead.

Here is God’s distinguishing declaration concerning Christian being set apart. The signification is most likely a reference to that “mark on the forehead” which is given to true children of God who sigh and moan over unrighteousness in the world, and as a consequence are preserved from divine judgment (Ezek. 9:1-7; cf. Rev. 22:4).

(4) A sealed roll for his journey.

Here is God’s sealing declaration concerning Christian being marked out as belonging to God. He has the insignia of the Holy Spirit engraved upon his soul (Eph. 1:13-14), and is encouraged to frequently reflect upon this truth as the ground of his assured sonship (Rom. 8:9, 16). Further on at the Hill Difficulty we are told: “For this Roll was the assurance of his life, and acceptance at the desired Haven.”¹⁸ Consider also Bunyan’s lines in his A Discourse Of The Building, Nature, Excellency, And Government Of The House Of God:

But bring thou with thee a certificate,
To show thou seest thyself most desolate;
Writ by the master, with repentance seal’d,
To shew also that here thou would’st be heal’d,

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 748.
¹⁸ Ibid., III, p. 115.
By those fair leaves of that most blessed tree,
By which alone poor sinners healed be;
And that thou dost abhor thee for thy ways,
And wouldst in holiness spend all thy days;
And here be entertained; or thou wilt find
To entertain thee here are none inclin’d.  

C. The Straight Highway Becomes the Way of Rejoicing.

Thus far did I come laden with my sin,
Nor could anyone ease the grief that I was in,
Until I came here. What a place is this!
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?
Must here the burden fall from off my back?
Must here the cords that bound it to me crack?
Blessed Cross! Blessed sepulcher! Blessed rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me.

Christian has now begun to possess his possessions, to claim his inheritance (Eph. 1:18-20). Should his burden have remained, how greatly disadvantaged he would have been when meeting such future savage foes as Apollyon and Giant Despair. However, he is now able to increase his pace as once he had vainly attempted to do at the suggestion of Pliable (p. 63).


Shortly after the redemption of Israel, Moses led God’s people in exultant song (Ex. Similarly, just before Israel’s entrance into the promised land, Moses again led God’s people in confident singing (Deut. 32:1-43). Likewise David, having experienced God’s deliverance, was spontaneously moved to sing “a new song... of praise to our God” (Ps. 40:3). So Christian bursts forth in song, as has normally been the case in Church history when the glories of redemption in Christ Jesus are personally appropriated (Col. 3:16; Acts 16:25).


The words of this song are not general in religious sentiment, but specific with regard to adoration of Jesus Christ’s particular redemption. This has always been the hallmark of the best in Christian hymnody, and it shall even be characteristic of worship in heaven (Rev. 5:1-14).

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

19 Ibid., II, p. 580.
Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which at the mercy-seat of God
For ever doth for sinners plead,
For me, even for my soul, was shed.

- Nicolaus von Zinzendorf

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

- Charles Wesley