Chapter Thirteen

Christian is approached by Timorous and Mistrust

A. Surprised Christian is Confronted with Two Returning Pilgrims.

Now when Christian arrived at the top of the Hill, two men came running toward him in full flight from the opposite direction. The name of one was Timorous, and the name of the other Mistrust. To these Christian enquired, “Sirs, what is the matter since you are both running the wrong way?” Hence Timorous replied “We were making our pilgrimage toward the City of Zion and had reached beyond this Hill Difficulty; but then the further we went the more danger we encountered. As a result we decided to turn about and return home; so we are now fast on our way.”

Then Mistrust added, “Yes, this is true, for just ahead of you lying directly in the way is a couple of lions. We were not sure if they were awake or asleep; nevertheless the prospect

Although Christian obtained newfound stability and confidence at the Place of Deliverance, this does not at all exclude the possibility of the subsequent loss of assurance. Such is the experience of Christian here as he confronts, sans his Roll, Timorous and Mistrust. They are obviously running scared as quitters, such as were Phygelus and Hermogenes (11 Tim. 1:15), and Demas (11 Tim. 4:10).

1. Timorous tells of increasing danger ahead.

They were once hot for the City of Zion, but now they have been cooled by one trial too many just ahead, namely the threat of being severely savaged. Repression from the union of church and state was a very real threat for Nonconformists in Bunyan’s day. Refer to the case of John Child, a Baptist pastor and friend of Bunyan, who did not stay the course.2

2. Mistrust describes two fierce lions that lie ahead.

At a distance it was not possible to tell if they were asleep and unlikely to be of trouble or awake and ready to pounce upon pilgrims. Even so, their presence generated great fear. But who do these discouraging beasts represent? In commenting on Psalm 34:10, Bunyan explains that, “the lions are the wicked people of the world that fear not God.”3 George Offor comments: “The saints of those days comforted one another with a proverb:- ‘It is better that the body should die to this world by the lions without, than that body and soul should die eternally by our lusts within.’ . . . the lions so thinned the

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1 II Tim. 1:15.
2 John Bunyan, Works, III, pp. 72-73.
3 Ibid., I, p. 469.
number of pilgrims [in Bunyan’s day] that the grass grew upon the road, and the monster was very rampant.”

Christian encounters Timorous and Mistrust

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*Ibid., III, p. 72.*
B. Prudent Christian Reasons that it is Safer to Press on Ahead.

CHRISTIAN: You make me afraid, on the other hand where else shall I run to for safety? If I return to my home in the City of Destruction, which region is destined for the judgment of fire and brimstone, then I will certainly perish. However, if I can eventually reach the Celestial City, then my safety is assured there. Therefore I must press forward, in spite of risks and perils. To go back is to certainly suffer death; but to go forward, though fear of death will threaten along the way, is yet to have the prospect of everlasting life beyond. So I will definitely go forward.

So Mistrust and Timorous ran down the Hill, while Christian went on ahead.

Here is sanctified wisdom indeed in the face of a fearful report. It is akin to that which God solicits when he declares, “Now therefore, O kings, show discernment” (Ps. 2:10; cf. Is. 1:18).

1. To return is to face certain destruction.

Why is this so? Because the book in Christian’s hand is true. The delay of this judgement is no good reason for returning to the City of Destruction any more than a prisoner who is comforted with the delay of his certain execution.

2. To press ahead through danger yet offers the hope of life.

Let it be granted that the pilgrim may be mauled even seriously, yet “it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into eternal fire. . . . It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the hell of fire” (Matt. 18:8-9).

3. To return down hill is to sprint as fools.

The descent is now easy for Timorous and Mistrust, the trials are eliminated, and there are welcoming friends ahead and other returning pilgrims. Yet such a way, which seems right and comfortable, inevitably leads to death (Prov. 14:12).

4. Application.

When, in the crucible of affliction, you are tempted to abdicate from the narrow way, first look back to where you came from and contemplate whether you really want to return to the pigpens of the far country. Then, in contrast, muse upon the future glory of “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (II Pet. 3:13), and consider if these are not worth persevering for.

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5 Christian shakes off fear.
C. Neglectful Christian awakens to the loss of his Roll.

Feeling the pangs of anxiety that have been sown by Timorous and Mistrust, he seeks for relief and does not immediately find it. Again, although Christian has progressed with greater stability since his arrival at the Place of Deliverance, yet this by no means guarantees that he will have no further bouts of uncertainty, depression, and satanic assaults. In Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, following that earlier prolonged period of spiritual wrestling (Paragraphs 117-228), Bunyan also describes further times of travail in his soul. These occurred after he had joined in membership with the Nonconformist church at Bedford (Paragraphs 253-264), also when he had become the pastor of that fellowship (Paragraphs 293-294), and again during his, imprisonment of twelve years (Paragraph 333).^{6}

1. Christian’s lack of assurance and consequent distress.

   Even so, in remembering what he had just heard from these men, he felt for his scroll in his chest pocket so that he might read it and be comforted. But to his great surprise, the scroll was not to be found. As a result Christian became very distressed, and did not know what to do; this token was his means of gaining relief from his fears, as well as being his pass for entering into the Celestial City. Therefore at this point the pilgrim was perplexed in not knowing what he should do.

   Then he recalled his sleeping at the Arbor [Shady Resting-place] halfway up the Hill Difficulty and suspected what had happened. So falling down on his knees, he asked God for forgiveness due to his foolish neglect, and commenced to return down the Hill looking for his scroll. But oh, who could imagine just how sorrowful of heart he was every step of the way? Sometimes he sighed, and sometimes he wept, and often he rebuked himself for his being so foolish as to sleep at length at that place which had only been erected for the purpose of modest refreshment from weariness.

   Now he notices the emptiness of his bosom. His Roll is gone! Now he wonders if he will gain entrance into the Celestial City. Unsuitable fellowship, in combination with carelessness, certainly contributes toward spiritual perplexity.

   a. He recalls his slothful sleep.

      In reviewing his immediate past, he recalls his last look at his Roll, that is just prior to his sleepy turn at the shady nook. Suddenly the foolishness of his neglect overwhelms him like a great flood (Prov. 6:9-11).

   b. He seeks God’s forgiveness.

      Carnal indulgence by the authentic pilgrim always results in inward conflict (Gal. 5:17), and loss of sweet fellowship and assurance before God. So Christian makes

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While evidencing a desire for restoration of fellowship with God, he does not capitulate to his downcast condition. Rather, he is prepared to make efforts in seeking for his Roll, that is, use various means of grace.

a. In searching he regresses.

He is pained to go in the direction of Timorous and Mistrust, even if only for a short while. He is humbled in having to repeat his former difficulty.

b. In searching he sorrowfully weeps.

He sighs and weeps and groans and reprimands himself (I Thess. 5:6-8; Rev. 2:5) as he backtracks, crying out, “Oh wretched man that I am” (Rom. 7:24), because of the consequences of yielding to his flesh. The reappearance of the shady nook

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7 Christian bemoans his foolish sleeping. Rev. 2:4-5.
8 Rom. 7:24; I Thess. 5:7-8.
reminds him of his foolishness in sleeping in the midst of difficulty during the
daytime. It was intended only for the relief of the spirit rather than the flesh, for
“a little refreshment,” not a lot.

c. In searching he regrets wasted effort.

He must now walk three times over ground that he need only have raversed once!
How like Israel this is who, because of their grumbling and seeking of ease (Num.
11:1-6), were consigned to extended wandering in the wilderness. He also reckons
how much further ahead he might have been in the daylight if he had not
carelessly slept. But now he anticipates being “benighted,” that is overcome with
the darkness after sunset before suitable lodging appears.

d. In searching he finds and cherishes.

Bowed down with tears, yet he espies his Roll under the bench on which he sits.
Trembling, Christian then thrusts it into his bosom, at which his spirit revives
with rejoicing (Ps. 126:5-6).

3. Christian’s revived condition.

And who can possibly tell just how joyful this man was when he
had recovered his scroll? For this scroll was the assurance of his
life, and the token of his acceptance at the desired haven. Therefore
Christian, having returned his scroll to his chest pocket, offered
fervent thanks to God for His directing of his eyes to the place
where it had fallen. So with joy and tears he now focused upon
moving ahead in his journey.

His spirit erupts with a cry of praise to God. Doubtless he feels like singing, and what
better words could there be to express his awakened soul than those of Charles Wesley:

Away with our fears,
Our troubles and tears:
The Spirit is come,
The witness of Jesus returned to His home.
The pledge of our Lord
To His heaven restored
Is sent from the sky,
And tells us our Head is exalted on high.
Our heavenly Guide
With us shall abide,
His comforts impart,
And set up His kingdom of love in the heart.
a. He is joyful.

Now does he exalt in God, for “though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (I Pet. 1:8).

b. He is reassured.

Now we are explicitly told by Bunyan that, “this Roll was the assurance of his life, and acceptance at the desired Haven.” This experience of felt union and security with God is presented as the norm of every spiritually healthy believer (Eph. 1:13-14; I John :14). It is carnality that detracts from this sense of confidence (I Cor. 3:1-4).

c. He is prayerful.

Now he tearfully prays with thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15) for God’s sovereign guidance of his searching eye, even though he had foolishly stumbled (Ps. 37:23-24).

d. He is spiritually mobile.

Now he nimbly ascends the Hill (Ps. 18:33), that is overcomes difficulty through “walking by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16), and thus reaches the top just following sunset.


But oh how nimbly did he now go up the rest of the Hill! Yet before he reached the top, the sun began to set upon Christian; so again he was made to painfully recall the foolishness of his delaying sleep, for he ought to have been much farther ahead by now. For this reason he continued to condole [grieve] with himself: “Ah, how sinful you are, oh sleep! On account of you my journey in the light has been overcome by the night! Now I must walk without the sun while darkness covers my path; now I must hear the voice of doleful creatures because of my negligent sleep!”

Now he also remembered the account of Timorous and Mistrust, how they had told him of their fear at the sight of the lions. Then Christian mused with himself, “These beasts prowl in the night seeking their prey, so if they should meet with me in the dark, how can I possibly avoid being torn in pieces?” Hence he nervously went on his way; but while he was mourning over this fearful turn of events, on lifting up his eyes he noticed a very regal palace directly ahead of him. Now the name of it was the Palace Beautiful, and it stood just to one side of the highway.

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10 Ps. 48:2, 13.
He is still faced with certain troublesome circumstances that are aggravated on account of his lateness. Yet his heart is now strengthened in facing them. Moreover, an encouraging sight appears on the horizon.

a. He must press on in darkness.

Though newly reassured, yet he realizes that the trial of earthly darkness in the present is a price that must be paid for on account of sloth.

b. He must face savage beasts.

The ferocious lions that Timorous and Mistrust bewailed are now remembered. They are more likely to roam in the dark seeking prey to devour. Now Christian trembles at the thought of being torn in pieces!

c. He must arrive at the Palace Beautiful.

Suddenly in the dim darkness ahead there appears a stately palace named Beautiful. Located alongside the narrow way, it seems to be a most comfortable haven for weary travelers who prefer shelter in the night-time as preparation for travel in the light of day (I Thess. 5:5).