

Chapter Fourteen

Christian meets Lion-sized Opposition

A. Christian Advances with both Hope and Fear.

SO I saw in my dream that *Christian* hurried along toward the *Palace* since he hoped to obtain lodging there. Now before he had gone very far, he entered into an extremely narrow passage which was only a furlong away from the porter's lodge. And carefully proceeding along this restricted part of the highway, he perceived, not far ahead, two lions that seemed to stand in his way. Then *Christian* realized, "Now I see the danger that caused *Mistrust* and *Timorous* to turn back and flee," (though he did not detect the chains that restricted these ferocious beasts). As a result he was filled with fear and contemplated going back with them, for at that moment he thought that nothing but death was ahead of him.

There is general agreement that Bunyan intends the approaching Palace (or House) Beautiful to be understood as a representation of a biblical, nonconformist, independent, Puritan church, in contrast with the inclusive Church of England wedded to the State. Yet there is also considerable significance in the fact that Christian's eager desire to enter into fellowship at the Palace Beautiful is now interrupted by purposed and aggressive opposition. Hence, it is of considerable importance to now discover what Bunyan really intends by his portrayal of such fearful and savage antagonism.

1. The distant prospect of the Palace Beautiful generates hope.

Christian not only feels the need of rest in the face of weariness and surrounding darkness, as well as fellowship, but he also senses that this stately house belongs to the Lord of the way. Hence, he longs for such a holy residence in an unholy world (Col. 1:18-23).

2. The immediate prospect of two lions generates fear.

Yet while proceeding gingerly with the warning of Timorous and Mistrust in his ears, about five hundred feet before the Palace Beautiful appears a lion on either side of the way. To be faithful, Christian must pass between them both, even though he is not presently aware that these beasts are in fact restrained with chains. Believing that certain death is ahead, his immediate thought is to return to the City of Destruction (Ps. 57:4).

B. Christian is Encouraged by Watchful, the Palace Beautiful Porter.

But the porter named *Watchful*¹ at the *Palace* lodge, in noticing that *Christian* hesitated, as if contemplating a retreat on account of the prospect of death ahead of him, called out to him saying, “Are your strength and courage so small? Don’t be so afraid of the lions since they are in fact chained; their being there is for the purpose of testing your faith at this point in your journey, as well as for the discovery of those who are faithless.² So keep in the middle of the path and you will not be harmed.”

Watchful (Mark 13:14) probably represents a local church leader or elder. Note that one of the four guiding shepherds at the Delectable Mountains ahead, also an allegorical description of pastoral care within a nonconformist church, is likewise called Watchful.



¹ Mark 13:34-35; Heb. 13:17.

² I Pet. 1:7.

1. He challenges the pilgrim to test his faith.

The hesitancy of Christian alludes to the stigma that adhered to those who attended an independent church in Bunyan's day. It took strength of faith to align with a Nonconformist fellowship, with the price often involving ostracism, a fine, or even imprisonment.

2. He informs concerning restraint upon the lions.

If Christian keeps to the middle of the narrow way he will not suffer any harm since the lions are chained on either side. They may snarl and rage, and even wound the unwary, but never devour any pilgrim who maintains his proper course. For the most ferocious opponent that a Christian may encounter is yet under the restraining dominion of God (Job 1:12; 2:6; John 19:10-11).

3. He explains the testing purposes of these beasts.

They prove the faith of true pilgrims (Jas. 1:2-3; 1 Pet. 1:6-7), and the faithlessness of false pilgrims (Matt. 13:20-21). Though it must be admitted that some apostates do know how to make transit through this region during certain seasons when such beasts as these are subdued.

C. Christian Warily Moves Ahead with Trembling and Gladness.

Then I saw that *Christian* went forward on his way, though trembling because of his fear of the lions; yet he was careful to follow the directions of the porter. Yes, the lions roared and snarled, but they were unable to harm him. As a result, he joyously clapped his hands and went on till he stood before the *Palace* gate where the porter awaited him.

What is the essence of the Porter's instruction? "Keep in the midst of the path." That is, maintain a straight course according to the directions of Christian's book and Evangelist.

1. He hears the opposition roar and yet is unharmed.

Being so close to the enemy, he sees the whites of their eyes and even feels the heat of their breath (II Tim. 4:17), and yet passes by unscathed.

2. He rejoices in the deliverance of faith, and arrives.

His clammy hands become clapping hands; his dejection turns to delight (Phil. 1:25); his cringing in terror turns to the joy of a pilgrim eagerly standing before the gates of the Palace Beautiful.

D. Application.

What then is the real identification of the lions who are so intent on prohibiting Christian's entrance into the Palace Beautiful, that is a faithful local church? Kelman provides six suggestions,³ none of which are very persuasive. Certainly for Bunyan these beasts were extremely militant in their efforts, and it is for this reason that a far more likely proposal is given.

1. The lions of Bunyan's day speak of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny.

From where did the greatest opposition come concerning the functioning of independent Nonconformist churches such as those with which Bunyan was associated? The answer hardly needs to be stated. It was that amalgam of the Church of England and the English Monarchy.

a. The evidence of John Bunyan.

In the Preface to *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan addresses his Christian friends as follows: "I thank God upon every remembrance of you; and rejoice, even while I stick between the teeth of the lions in the wilderness [present imprisonment?]"⁴ Moreover, in Part Two, the lions gain the support of Giant Bloody-man, obviously a personification of persecution.⁵

b. The evidence of George Offor.

The most recent editor of the complete works of Bunyan makes the following comment:

The two lions, civil despotism and ecclesiastical tyranny, terrified many young converts, when desirous of joining a Christian church, here represented by the Beautiful Palace. In the reign of the Tudors they committed sad havoc. In Bunyan's time, they were chained, so that few suffered martyrdom, although many were ruined, imprisoned, and perished in dungeons. When Faithful passed by they were asleep. It was a short cessation from persecution.⁶

2. The lions of today speak of ideological and personal tyranny.

While the following list of modern beastly opponents is by no means exhaustive, yet every item can restrict a Christian's participation in the spiritual health-giving fellowship of an authentic local church.

³ John Kelman, *The Road*, I, pp. 90-91.

⁴ John Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III, p. 195.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

a. The ideological tyrants.

So many of these concepts have been formed through the stimulus of institutions of higher learning that have departed from a godly heritage. Many others have originated on account of man's bloated sense of his own importance and ability.

- (1) Sects, cults, religious novelties.
- (2) Theological liberalism, philosophy, rationalism.
- (3) Political causes, social activism, philanthropy.
- (4) Evolution, secular utopianism, materialism.

b. The personal tyrants.

Alexander Whyte asks:

Now, who or what is the lion in your way? Who or what is it that fills you with such timorousness and mistrust, that you are almost turning back from the way of life altogether? The fiercest of all our lions is our own sin.⁷

- (1) Pride, self-sufficiency, intellectualism.
- (2) Ungodliness, carnality, guilt.
- (3) Mistaken priorities of family, vocation, recreation.
- (4) Worldliness, counting the cost, ambition.



Watchful

⁷ Alexander Whyte, *Bunyan Characters*, I, pp. 143-144.