

Chapter Twenty-Five

Christian and Hopeful are Captured by Giant Despair

A. The Refreshment that Precedes a Deceptive Detour.

THEN I saw that they went on their way and reached a pleasant river which *King David* called the *River of God*, but *John the Apostle*, the *River of the Water of Life*.¹ Now their way went directly alongside the bank of the *River*. Therefore here *Christian* and *Hopeful* walked with great delight; they also drank of the water of the *River*, which they found to be invigorating to their weary spirits. Furthermore, on either side, the banks of this *River* had green trees that bore every variety of fruit; and the leaves of the trees had good medicinal value.²

Now they were particularly delighted with the fruit of these trees, and they also ate the leaves to prevent surfeiting [*gluttony*], and other diseases related to hot bloodedness [*misplaced passion*] in their travels. On either side of the *River* there was also a meadow beautifully adorned with lilies; and it remained green all the year long.³ So in this meadow they lay down and slept, for here it was a safe place to rest.⁴ When they awoke, again they ate of the fruit of the trees and drank of the water of the *River*. Then they lay down to sleep once more. And this they did for several days and nights. Then they sang:

Behold you, how these Christal [*crystal*] streams do glide
(To comfort pilgrims) by the highway side;
The meadows green, besides their fragrant smell,
Yield dainties for them: and he that can tell
What pleasant fruit, yes leaves, these trees do yield,
Will soon sell all, that he may buy this field.⁵

So when they felt it right for them to move forward (for they were not yet at their journey's end), again they ate and drank, and then departed.

After the manner in which *Christian* partook of a refreshing spring immediately preceding his ascent of the Hill Difficulty,⁶ so according to the good providence of the Lord of the Way, similar provision of necessary nourishment is again offered to pilgrims. Insufficient

¹ Ps. 1:1-3; 46:4; 65:9; Jer. 17:7-8; Ezek. 47:1-12; John 4:13-14; 7:37-39; Rev. 22:1-2.

² Ezek. 47:12; Rev. 22:2.

³ Ps. 23:2, 4-5; Isa. 14:30.

⁴ Ps. 23:2; Isa. 14:30; Heb. 4:9-10.

⁵ Matt. 13:44.

⁶ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 104.

drink, food, and rest will leave the pilgrim vulnerable to a variety of delusions and temptations.

1. At a pleasant river they drink and are revived.

This montage of several biblical passages (Ps. 1:1-3; 65:9; Jer. 17:7-8; Ezek. 47:1-11; John 4:13-14; 7:37-39; Rev. 22:1-2) describes the stream or fountain of spiritual life which the child of God not only imbibes at birth (conversion), but also of necessity must continue to drink from when on pilgrimage. This stream has its source in God and winds through the ministry of David and John the Apostle, and on through the present Church age. As Horatius Bonar has written:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 “Behold, I freely give
 The living water; thirsty one,
 Stoop down, and drink, and live”:
 I came to Jesus and I drank
 Of that life-giving stream;
 My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
 And now I live in Him.

2. From trees along the river bank they eat and are restored.

Whereas the thirst quenching water speaks of the life and power that God imparts through the Holy Spirit., both the fruit and leaves here describe the substance of good and healthy food that provides cleansing, strength, growth, and resistance (Matt. 4:4; Heb. 5:12-14; I Pet. 2:2).

- a. The fruit is good for nourishment.

It satisfies the appetites of the righteous; it provides the spiritual vitamins of growth and grace in the Lord Jesus Christ that stimulate growth (Ezek. 47:12; II Pet. 3:18; Rev. 22:2a).

- b. The leaves are good for healing.

Travel in a foreign culture and climate often results in overindulgence (surfeiting), viral infection, and resulting fever. Hence, a medicinal purgative is usually needed to rid pilgrims of remnant desires for the likes of Vanity Fair and the Silver-Mine (Rev. 22:2b; Ezek. 47:12).

3. On the surrounding green meadow they gain rest.

Perennially lush, green, full-flowered with lilies, sweet-scented, and soft for reclining to the weary traveler, the pilgrims enjoy this meadow of authentic spiritual luxury to the full, perhaps even to excess. For in these circumstances, sin did not involve participation in this temporary season of respite from worldly trials in itself, but rather the expectation that such relaxation in holy circumstances ought to now continue till the end of the journey (Ps. 23:2, 4-5). It is also likely that once again, Bunyan has in mind here the pastoral luxury that a faithful local church affords.

4. For several days they are strengthened.

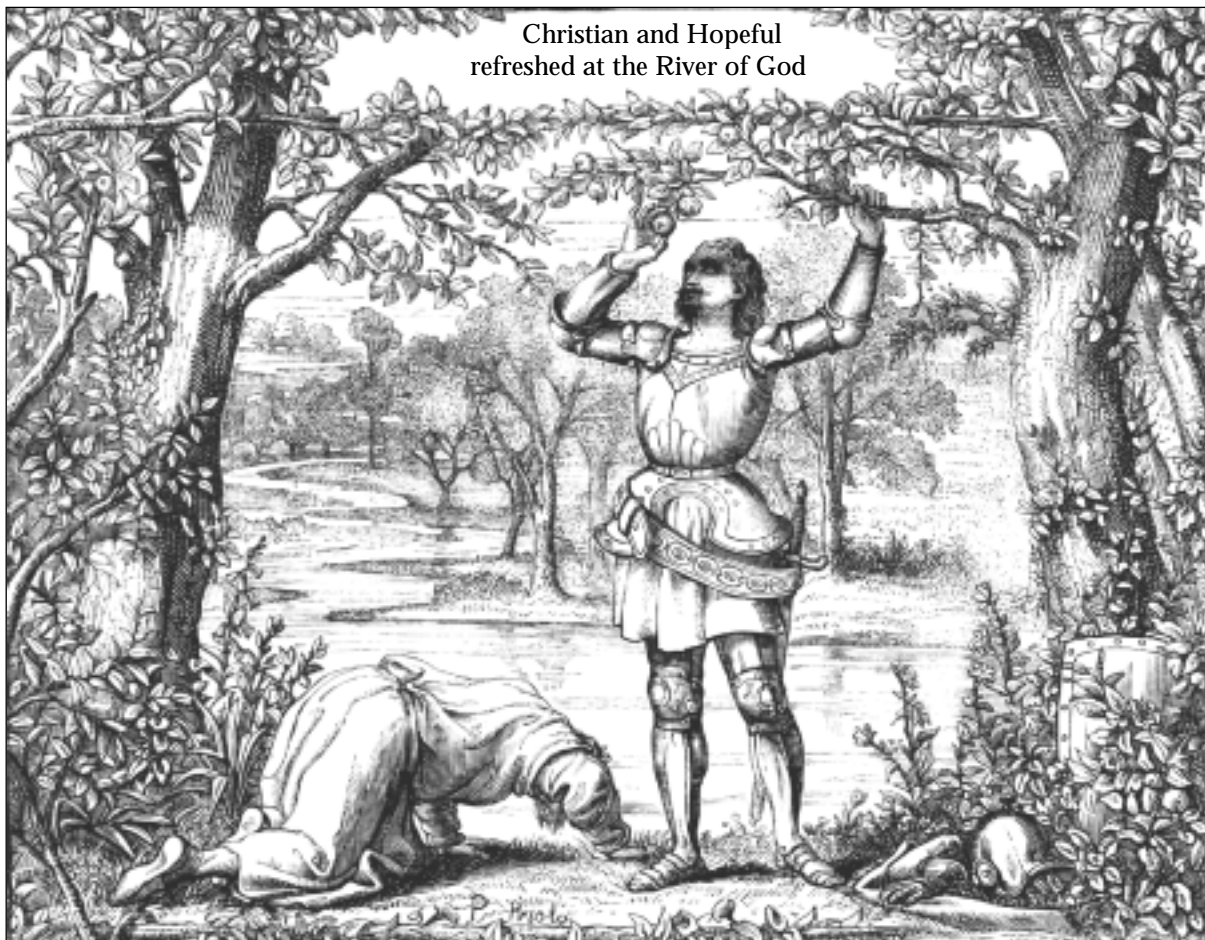
There are times when Christians need spiritual convalescence even as weary soldiers need periodic rest and relaxation. However, the vacation that Bunyan envisages here is that of a pause with regard to offensive ministry, not a short time of slight capitulation to worldly overtures.

a. By sleeping.

They strengthen the rest of their faith in their “great high priest” (Heb. 4:9-16).

b. By eating.

They digest the meat of Christian’s book; Christian recalls the instruction imparted by the Interpreter and at the Palace Beautiful.



c. By drinking.

They spend time in prayer asking God for greater vitality and closer union and communion with Christ (Phil. 3:7-14).

d. By singing.

They praise a guiding God and the richness and abundance of His satisfying table. They could well have also sung:

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven!
Feed me now and evermore.
Open Thou the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream shall flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong Deliverer!
Be Thou still my help and shield.



By the River of the Water of Life

B. The Delusion of By-Path Meadow that Leads to Captivity.

While a present vital experience of deliverance by God and rest in God may seem burned into our soul, yet but a short while passes and we are so easily overtaken with forgetfulness. In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan relates how he could so intensely embrace a precious truth that he felt it was certain to be engraved on his soul for forty years. Yet, he adds, “alas! within less than forty days I began to question all again.”⁷ So here, following both deliverance and rest, yet Christian and Hopeful are so obviously forgetful of past lessons.



Christian and Hopeful at the Stile

⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, I, § 92, p. 17.

1. The hardening of the way tempts the pilgrims to wander.

Now I beheld in my dream that they had not journeyed very far ahead when the *River* and the way divided and began to go in separate directions. For this reason they were very displeased, though at the same time they were also fearful of leaving the straight path. However as they went on they continued to wish for an easier way. And now that the straight path was heading away from the *River*, it also became more rough and troublesome while at the same time their feet were becoming more tender on account of their travels. So the souls of the pilgrims became increasingly discouraged on account of the harshness of the way.⁸

Now a little ahead of them there was on the left hand side of the road a meadow,⁹ and a stile giving access to it over a fence; and that meadow was called *By-Path-Meadow*.¹⁰ Then *Christian* said to his companion, "If this meadow runs alongside of our way, then let us cross over to it." So he went to the stile to investigate, and behold, a pathway on the other side of the fence seemed to run parallel with their way. "This is exactly as I had hoped for," said *Christian*. "Here the going is much easier; so come, my good *Hopeful*, and let us cross over."¹¹

HOPEFUL: But what if this new path should lead us out of the way?

CHRISTIAN: That is not likely. Look, does it not run alongside our way, except on the other side of the fence? So *Hopeful*, being persuaded by *Christian*, followed him over the stile.¹²

Now when they had gone over and began to travel along this new path, they found it much easier on their feet. Moreover, on looking ahead of them, they caught sight of a man walking in the same direction as they (and his name was *Vain-confidence*). So they called out to him and asked him where this way led.¹³ He then replied, "To the *Celestial Gate*." "Look," said *Christian*, "did I not tell you so? With this advice you can be sure that we are going in the right direction." So they followed and *Vain-confidence* went ahead of them.¹⁴

The river with its parallel meadows now winds away from the pilgrims' straight pathway. Further, the narrow highway becomes rough and painful to tender feet. Tension and conflict immediately arise. Satan whispers to Christian and Hopeful, "But why ought you to endure this hardship any longer? Look around for a way of ongoing comfort, perhaps a detour or alternative route to your destination."

a. With blistering feet, they complain of the way.

⁸ Num. 11:4-6; 21:4-5.

⁹ Eccles. 10:2; Matt. 25:33.

¹⁰ At By-Path-Meadow one temptation makes way for another. Prov. 4:25-27.

¹¹ Rom. 14:23.

¹² Strong pilgrims, even a Peter (Gal. 2:11-14), may lead weak ones out of the way.

¹³ Ps. 118:8.

¹⁴ See what happens to those who quickly listen to the advice of strangers.

Their murmuring and complaining is alike to the discontent of the nation of Israel when it wandered in the Arabian wilderness; God's people "was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses" (Num. 21:4-5 KJV). They lusted after former luxuries, "the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic" (Num. 11:5). No doubt the pilgrims here also lusted after former prosperity and comfort.

- b. With wandering eyes, a greener field attracts them.

In *The Heavenly Footman* Bunyan writes:

Thus have I done with directing thee how to run to the kingdom; be sure thou keep in memory what I have said unto thee, let thou lose thy way. But because I would have thee think of them, take all in short in this little bit of paper. 1. Get into the way. 2. Then study on it. 3. Then strip and lay aside everything that would hinder. 4. Beware of bye-paths. 5. Do not gaze and stare too much about thee. . . .¹⁵

Yet Christian and Hopeful do let their discontented eyes wander, particularly to the "left" side of the way which is representative of the destiny of fools and goats (Eccles. 10:2; Matt. 25:33). And then they notice a similar fenced green meadow that looks so inviting, so soft to the feet. But all green meadows are not the same, nor do they have the same owners!

- (1) Christian notices a stile leading to a smoother pathway.

The steps over the fence seem so inviting. Hence he is enticed into further investigation and in so doing is guided, not by the direction of Evangelist, but rather human reason. Closer inspection reveals a pleasant path on the other side that seems to head in the right direction. Christian is elated.

- (2) Christian calms hesitant Hopeful so that they cross over.

Sense of direction cautions Hopeful, but he does not offer any concrete exhortation based on truth. Christian is all too eager. Both pathways appear parallel so that both pilgrims are fully persuaded to cross over, that is according to sight and feeling rather than faith.

- (3) Application.

How easy and rational this transition seems, and yet how fatal are its consequences. The distance may seem small, but in fact the move has been from the righteousness which is of faith to human righteousness, which leads to captivity, misery, even death! (Prov. 14:12; Rom. 6:23). Notice that when the soul is downcast, then it is also prepared to entertain sin which it would normally identify and reject (Matt. 4:2-3; 27:40). Yes, there is immediate relief, but only for a short season (Heb. 11:25).

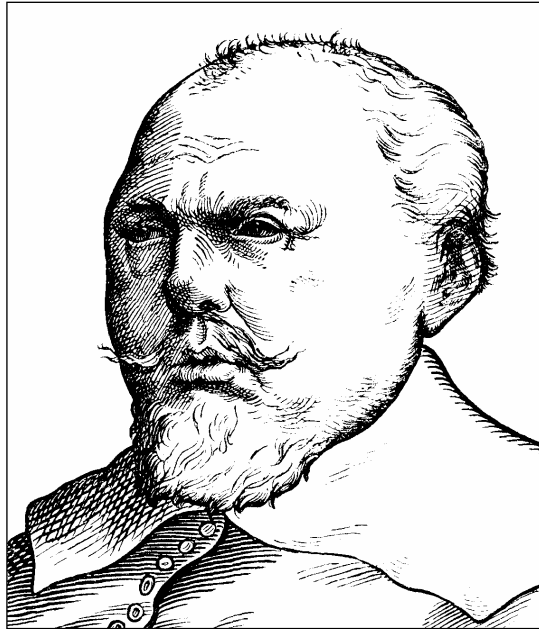
¹⁵ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 389.

2. The easing of the way leads the pilgrims to Vain-confidence.

But behold, the night began to overtake them so that it grew very dark. As a result, they who were behind lost sight of he who was ahead. Therefore he that was ahead of them, being *Vain-confidence* by name, because he could not see the way ahead of him, fell into a deep pit; it was a trap specially prepared by the prince of that region for the purpose of catching vain-glorious fools so that they might be dashed to pieces in their fall.¹⁶ Now *Christian* and his companion heard him fall. So they called out to learn how *Vain-confidence* was doing; but there was no reply except for some groaning.

Then said *Hopeful*, "Where are we now?" But his friend was silent, for he was now pondering if he had led his brother out of the way.¹⁷ And now it began to rain, with thunder and lightning, in a fearful manner, so that rising water began to flood the path. Then *Hopeful* inwardly groaned while declaring, "If only I had kept in the way I was going!"

So Christian and Hopeful are at ease once again in another lush green meadow. But not all experiences of comfort are the same. Some ease, as here, is the delusion of a calm before a storm. Nor are all green pastures the same. Some such meadows, as here, are Satan's domain. His intent here is to snare the unwary, especially boastful fools such as one named Vain-confidence just ahead. His confident bearing seems to indicate a pilgrim who knows exactly where he is going.



Mr. Vain-confidence

¹⁶ *Prov. 14:12; Isa. 9:16.*

¹⁷ *I Cor. 10:12.*

- a. The pilgrims seek advice from an unproven traveller.

Vain-confidence's advise is sought and his assertive reply leads Christian and Hopeful to gain empty confidence for themselves (Matt. 15:14). Notwithstanding the reassurance they have received, this pathway in fact does not lead to the Celestial Gate.

- (1) They ignore the name of Vain-confidence.

His name does not even appear to be sought. He is just some anonymous traveler, a nobody who qualifies to bolster the dubious sense of direction of Christian.

- (2) They ignore the background of Vain-confidence.

A cloud of forgetfulness seems to envelop them. The lessons of the past such as concerning Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, Talkative, and By-ends and friends, seem to have completely vanished from their memories. Does not Christian recall the caution that was exercised at the Palace Beautiful before he was allowed to gain entrance into that fellowship?

- b. The pilgrims follow Vain-confidence into the night.

The prospect of darkness is bad enough when a pilgrim continues along the straight way, although the Lord of that way does provide the compensating light of fellowship. The Palace Beautiful was one such provision. However, deviant pilgrims do not enjoy such protection and restful accommodation. Had Christian and Hopeful not succumbed to this present temptation, it is likely they would have arrived at the delectable Mountains, inhabited by hospitable shepherds, well before sunset.

- (1) When darkness comes, Vain-confidence is lost.

For all his confident strutting and authoritative tone of direction, Vain-confidence proves to be a most unstable guide in the midst of overwhelming darkness; he has no objective means of guidance himself in this territory, only failing senses, particularly his sight (Is. 9:16). As a consequence he is destroyed by a snare devised by Giant Despair. He perishes utterly without hope!

- (2) When darkness comes, Christian is speechless.

On hearing the sudden fall of Vain-confidence and his fading, despairing groans, Hopeful questions his "learned" companion. But Christian is too struck dumb with remorse over his foolishness to reply (Job 40:4-5).

- (3) When darkness comes, it is followed by a storm.

The pleasure derived from indulgent disobedience has now all but disappeared. In its place the less desirable bitter fruitage is beginning to roll

in like a thunderous storm that brings swirling, engulfing floods. The dark night of the wayward soul has arrived.

(4) Application.

How varied and often fragile is Christian experience. Both of these pilgrims have recently overcome Vanity Fair, By-ends and his friends, Demas and the Silver-Mine, and heeded the warning of Lot's wife, yet now they are defeated. Christian is especially a contradiction here since he was stronger at the Silver-Mine but now is humiliated. Let "mature" Christians, "knowledgeable" Christians, "leading" Christians beware (I Cor. 10:12).

3. The terror of the way brings sorrow and exhaustion.

CHRISTIAN: Who could have thought that this path would lead us out of the way?

HOPEFUL: From the beginning I was afraid that this would happen, and therefore that is why I gave you a gentle warning. I would have spoken more plainly, but you are older than I [*in the faith*].

CHRISTIAN: Good brother, do not be offended; I am ever so sorry that I have led you out of the way and exposed you to such impending danger. I earnestly ask you to forgive me; I did not act out of evil intent.

HOPEFUL: Be comforted, my brother, for I forgive you; I also believe that this seeming tragedy shall work out for our good.¹⁸

CHRISTIAN: I am so glad that I have such a merciful brother traveling with me. But let us not stand here any longer; we must try to return to the right way.

HOPEFUL: In that case, my good brother, let me lead the way.

CHRISTIAN: No, if you please, do let me go first. Then if we encounter any danger I can first deal with it since I am responsible for our getting out of the way.

HOPEFUL: No, you shall not go first because your mind is troubled, and for this reason you may lead us out of the way once again.

Then for their encouragement they heard the voice of one saying, "Let your heart be set toward the highway, even the way that you formerly went along; go back there."¹⁹ But by this time the flood waters had risen much higher and made the way back more dangerous. (Then I understood that it is easier going out of the way, when we are there, than going into the way, when we are out.) Still they made every effort to go back; but it was so dark, and the flood waters had risen so high, that in such an attempt they could have easily been drowned nine or ten times.

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¹⁸ Rom. 8:28.

¹⁹ Jer. 31:21.

Weariness born of all-too-evident foolishness leads to regret on Hopeful's part and guilt in Christian. Had they earlier consulted with each other more honestly, they might have rightly identified Vain-confidence and had better opportunity to retrace their steps (Prov. 11:14).

a. Christian awakens to his foolish leadership.

To begin with he attempts to make excuse on account of the outward appeal of the by-path. It seemed such a reasonable course to take, that is quite apart from any consideration of divine revelation (Prov. 14:12).

(1) He is repentant.

However, when Hopeful points out his companion's elder responsibility, to which he deferred, Christian is more honest and willing to confess his fault. He was not intentionally evil, though his greater concern for personal comfort rather than obedience was plainly wrong; out of selfish interest he was careless and misleading to his brother.

(2) He is forgiven.

Hopeful is very ready to forgive his friend and, true to his name, believes that God will work out good from a bad situation (Rom. 8:28).

b. Christian calls for a return to the narrow way.

The principle expressed is excellent, but the practice may not be as easy to fulfill. To carelessly fall into a pit is one thing, but to accomplish climbing out of that same pit is quite another. To allow doubt to lead to despair is one thing, but to conquer that same doubt and despair is quite another.

(1) They dispute about leadership.

Both remain jittery about the future and lapse into a friendly dispute about who will lead the way back. Hopeful seems to prevail, though he will be the imprudent one when they arrive at the Enchanted Ground!

(2) They hear a beckoning voice.

It may be the pastoral voice of Evangelist who watches from a distance (Jer. 31:21). Whatever the case may be, this call is for the two pilgrims to get their priorities straight, that is to stop arguing and get going as quickly as is possible back toward the narrow way since darkness is about to fall.

(3) They struggle against the rising tide.

Now the consequences of their sin and faithlessness mount up against them. Rising floodwater and darkness seem to engulf them; they nearly drown; recovery seems so difficult.

- (4) They find it more difficult to return.

Actually it is Bunyan's injected observation here that concludes that the pilgrims' return to the narrow way is much more difficult to accomplish than their original waywardness. Recovery from a sickness requires more than personal awareness that one is sick; rather new health must be obtained. So the loss of faith requires than a confession of faithlessness; it also requires the recovery of faithfulness.

- (5) They sleep in a shelter till morning.

Sad to say, there is no attempt here to make use of means of grace. They sit for a while at a small shelter, but being overcome with weariness fall asleep with their minds depressed on account of their being restricted to foreign territory.

c. Application.

Four elements have set the stage here for imminent captivity by despair, namely self-interest, carnal leadership, vain-confidence, and neglect of the means of grace. However, while the man in the iron cage at the house of the Interpreter was denied repentance, this is not the case here. Even so, we learn from the shepherds at the Delectable Mountains that some walk this way never to return to the narrow way. This intensely dramatic scene deals with a perennial human problem, not exclusively related to those having religious convictions. Job despising his birth (Job 3: 1-4), David lamenting God's silence (Ps. 28:1; 35:22), Asaph neglected of God (Ps. 7-10), Luther overcome with "Anfechtung," Cowper failing in his attempted suicide, Spurgeon too depressed to preach, are all represented here. Early in *Grace Abounding*, at the first stirrings of sin in Bunyan's life and the attending frustration, he writes:

I well remember, that presently this kind of despair did so possess my soul, that I was persuaded, I could never attain to other comfort than what I should get in sin; for heaven was gone already, so that on that I must not think; wherefore I found within me a great desire to take my fill of sin.²⁰

²⁰ Bunyan, *Works*, I, § 24, pp. 8-9.

4. The strangers of the way are captured by Giant Despair.

Neither were they, with all of their skill and determination, able to return to the stile that night. Therefore, having at last found refuge in a small shelter, they sat down there awaiting daybreak, but being weary, they soon fell asleep.

Now not far from this place where they slept there was a castle called *Doubting-Castle*, the owner of it being *Giant Despair*,²¹ and they were lying asleep in his territory. Therefore, having arisen early in the morning, while walking up and down in his fields this *Giant* caught *Christian* and *Hopeful* asleep in his realm.

Then with a grim and surly tone to his voice, he ordered them to awaken and tell him where they were from and what they were doing on his property. They replied that they were pilgrims who had lost their way. Then said the *Giant*, "You have trespassed against me by trampling upon and lying on my grounds; therefore, you must come with me." So they were forced to go with the *Giant* because he was stronger than they. And as they went along, they had very little to say because they knew that this circumstance was their own fault. Therefore the *Giant* drove them in front of him, and eventually secured them in his *Castle* by locking them in a very dark dungeon that was so foul and stinking to the spirits of these two prisoners.

As illustrated here and commonly experienced in human life, the morning dawns only to offer a shroud of gloom and despondency. As the eyes of the pilgrims are rudely awakened, they behold the gruff and brutal Giant Despair. He is the personification of a malady, sometimes prompting suicide, which the Puritans of Bunyan's day were particularly sensitive about. Some modern critics have suggested that this morbid condition was born of a strict Calvinism that caused people to despair of being assuredly elect.²² However, such an analysis of the seventeenth century, while being instructive of many aberrations, yet studiously avoids any comparison with the equally aberrant twentieth century as evidenced by the monolithic proportions of psychotic disease and the attending industry of psychology and psychiatry. As Cheever well states:

Despair will never die so long as unpardoned sin remains, or a sense of it burdens the conscience; nor is there any security against falling into its hands but in the care and mercy of One who is mightier than it, even Jesus Christ.²³

a. They slept in the fields of a plundering despot.

Giant Despair is an early morning prowler who assiduously guards his territory; he will not suffer the intrusion of any hopefulness, and especially any alien such as *Hopeful*! On the other hand, the pilgrims, being out of the way and continuing to neglect the means of grace, are unconscious of their great danger.

²¹ *II Cor. 1:8*.

²² John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, 400 pp.

²³ George B. Cheever, *Lectures on Bunyan*, p. 250.

- b. They are aroused and led away as trespassers.

It is significant that Christian, the great victor over Apollyon, is yet a wimp in this situation. He does not so much as draw his sword. But those who wander out of the way do become impotent. Furthermore, despair is such a withering condition.

- c. They are imprisoned in a dungeon of Doubting Castle.

Here is a contrast in hospitality when compared with the Palace Beautiful, at least for Christian. Instead of bountiful hospitality and encouragement, here is a dark, nasty and stinking cell without food and water. Now did Christian's spirit rapidly fall on account of his feeling responsible for their plight. Since leaving the narrow way there has only been a continual descent toward abysmal confinement. Yet there is consolation in companionship.



Giant Despair discovers Christian and Hopeful

d. Application.

It may seem incongruous that these two pilgrims, having fasted and rested well on the banks of the River of the Water of Life should so soon after find themselves so weak and downcast. Certainly Bunyan draws upon his own experience here, and therefore in Grace Abounding there is some explanation of this perplexity.

- (1) Later in his autobiography Bunyan writes of “that time also the Tempter did beset me strongly . . . laboring to hide from me my former experience of God’s goodness.²⁴ He has earlier attributed his despondency and its causative reasoning to the work of the Devil.²⁵ It is often the case that when the believer is spiritually accomplished and triumphant, then he is subject to terribly fierce assaults from Satan (Matt. 16:13-23).
- (2) Bunyan mentions another occasion of spiritual ambivalence in which he fell from great bliss to Christless darkness in his soul. But he also adds: “At this time also I felt some weakness to seize my outward man, which made still the other affliction the more heavy and uncomfortable.²⁶ Notice as well in Paragraph 260, as quoted above, that he appears to have suffered a physical illness. So with Christian and Hopeful, it was physical discomfort, particularly with their feet, that contributed toward their wandering out of the way.²⁷

C. The Horror of Captivity in Doubting Castle.

The following period of incarceration lasts for four days, from Wednesday morning to Saturday evening, it being assumed that the pilgrims spent the previous Lord’s Day on the banks of the River of the Water of Life. The Puritans were sensitive, not only concerning a great variety of spiritual ailments of the soul, but in particular with regard to that of despair, which was more specifically understood as being abandonment by God of the non-elect and thus their consequent being without hope in time and eternity. The Despairing Reprobate in the Iron Cage has already represented this hopeless condition.²⁸ However, in this instance we face the problem of the elect being downcast to the point where they yet regard themselves as non-elect and abandoned by God. This is not an uncommon experience in the life of the genuine believer. Bunyan deals with this problem with great pastoral insight elsewhere in his Works; refer to *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*²⁹ and *Saved By Grace*.³⁰

²⁴ Bunyan, *Works*, I, § 260, p. 40.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, §§ 23-25, 60-61, pp. 8-9. 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, § 261, p. 40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, III, p. 138.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, III, pp. 100-101.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 67-103.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 335-361.

1. Distress confronts the pilgrims in every direction.

Here then they lay, from Wednesday morning until Saturday night, without receiving one bit of bread, a drop of drink, any light whatsoever, or even someone to ask how they were. Therefore they found themselves in an evil situation while being far from friends and acquaintances. So in this place, *Christian's* sorrow was multiplied because it was on account of his hasty advice that they had been brought into this distressing state of affairs.³¹

Now *Giant Despair* had a wife and her name was *Diffidence* [*reticence, mistrust*]; so when he went to bed that evening, he told his wife what he had done, that is how he had taken a couple of prisoners and incarcerated them for trespassing on his grounds. Then he sought her advice as to what he ought to do with them the following day. So she enquired as to who they were, where they had come from, and where they were going; and he told her. Then she advised him that when he arose in the morning, he should beat them without the slightest mercy.

So when he arose, having obtained a fearful crab-tree cudgel [*club*], he went down to the prisoners in their dungeon and began to beat them as if they were dogs, even though they never responded with any disrespect. Then the *Giant* lay into them with his cudgel most fiercely, so beating them that they were unable to protect themselves or even move on the floor.³² This done, he left them there to commiserate in their great distress and mourn over their calamity. So for the rest of that day they did nothing else but offer sighs and bitter lamentations.

The next night *Diffidence* talked further with her husband about the prisoners, and on learning that they were still alive, she advised him to recommend to them that they commit suicide. So the next morning he went to the dungeon with a bad-tempered manner as before; on noticing that the prisoners were very sore on account of their previous beating, the *Giant* told them that since they would never be released from their bondage, the only alternative way of escape was for them to commit suicide using either a knife, a noose, or poison.³³ "For why," said he, "should you continue to choose life seeing that it is filled with so much bitterness?"³⁴

But the prisoners asked that he let them go, at which the *Giant* scowled as if he was about to rush at them; undoubtedly he would have finished them off then and there, except that he fell into a fit (for sometimes in sunny weather these seizures overtook him whereby he temporarily lost the use of his hands).³⁵ Therefore he withdrew from the dungeon and left the captives to consider what they ought to do. Then the prisoners discussed amongst themselves whether it would be best for them to take the *Giant's* advice or not. So they entered into intense conversation.

³¹ Ps. 88:18.

³² On Thursday *Giant Despair* beats his prisoners.

³³ *Job 2:9-10*.

³⁴ On Friday *Giant Despair* advises his prisoners to commit suicide.

³⁵ *John 1:5; 8:12; 12:46*.

The possibility of such an experience, as well as its character, must have terribly shaken both pilgrims. They had known deliverance before, but now the circumstances here seemed to totally exclude any possible rescue. Following Bunyan's conversion,³⁶ yet he discovers that he is still not immune from periods of despondency, though they appear to be less frequent. So he recounts:

These thoughts would make place for themselves in my heart; . . . you have no part nor lot in this Jesus, you have but put him away from you, you have said in your heart, Let him go if he will. Now, therefore, you are severed from him; you have severed yourself from him. Behold, then, his goodness, but yourself to be no partaker of it.³⁷

So for the pilgrims here, there appears not to be the slightest glimmer of a hope. Nor do they at this stage even think to look to He who is their only hope.



Christian and Hopeful taken captive

³⁶ Bunyan, *Works*, I, § 115, pp. 19-20.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, § 183, p. 29.

a. Distress in hunger, deprivation, and remorse.

Now they forlornly consider the absence of Evangelist and the residents of the Palace Beautiful. Each laments, “Thou hast removed lover and friend far from me; my acquaintances are in darkness” (Ps. 88:18). So Bunyan writes despairingly:

Oh! how this would add to my affliction, to conceit that I should be guilty of such a sin [against the Holy Spirit] for which he [Christ] did not die. These thoughts would so confound me, and tie me up from faith, that I knew not what to do.³⁸

The terror then of this scene is not the confining circumstances so much as the prisoners’ belief that they are beyond the reach of grace. They believe that God has deserted them.

b. Distress in pain and affliction via Diffidence.

The relationship between Giant Despair and his wife Diffidence is important here. Diffidence, meaning “shyness, reticence,” clearly an objectionable character like her husband, represents that attitude which hesitates in coming to Christ for mercy since such an approach would be unwelcome and entirely futile. Hence, such an attitude leads to the agony of despair. So here, Diffidence will mediate punishment, that is particular grounds for despair, by means of her husband.

(1) On Thursday, Diffidence recommends a beating.

That is, she contrives despair in the prisoners so that they conclude that they are beyond the reach of the mercy of God. Early in his Christian experience Bunyan wrestled with the tormenting thoughts that he was one of the non-elect, that he had sinned away the day of grace, and that he had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit.³⁹

(2) On Friday, Diffidence recommends they commit suicide.

While it may seem strange for a professing Christian to even consider for a moment self-murder since it in reality hastens consignment to hell, yet the appeal here is to the relief of present torment which suicide is supposed to offer. As Bunyan portrays the intense misery of these prisoners, even though he believes suicide to be a damning sin,⁴⁰ they face a very real temptation. Further, the instrumental means of self-murder are freely offered, being a knife, rope, and poison.⁴¹

c. Distress only relieved by Giant Despair in a fit.

While it may appear obvious, yet it needs to be pointed out that for Bunyan, though the faithless conduct of the pilgrims remains their own responsibility, yet

³⁸ Ibid., § 185, p. 29.

³⁹ Ibid., §§ 57-69, 72-76, 103, 147-148, 180, 200, pp. 13-15, 18, 24, 28, 31-32.

⁴⁰ Ibid., III, pp. 660-661.

⁴¹ Ibid., II, p. 37.

the temptation to despair is satanic in its origin. This is made abundantly clear in *Grace Abounding*.⁴² This is further implied in what follows since we now have Bunyan's first intimation that the condition of Christian and Hopeful is not absolutely hopeless. The light of sovereign grace suddenly appears.

(1) Giant Despair reacts to sunny weather.

The pilgrims feebly plead for release, but meet what appears to be a final assault. Yet in that dungeon at that very moment there must have appeared a sliver of morning sunlight that happened to fall on the raging captor. So "the light shone in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend [overpower] it" (John 1:5). Rather, the darkness, that is Giant Despair, was convulsed by the light.

(2) Giant Despair suffers temporary paralysis.

So this transfixing of Giant Despair ought to have suggested to the pilgrims that their despotic keeper was not omnipotent (Ps. 112:3). In *Grace Abounding* Bunyan recounts some of his own depressed feelings while in prison that yet gave way to comforting reassurance by means of the light of the Word of God. "I was once above all the rest in a very sad and low condition for many weeks, at which time . . . [11 had this lay much upon my spirit, That my imprisonment might end at the gallows." Yet after much wrestling with Scripture he confesses, "Now was my heart full of comfort."⁴³ Following his long confinement in the Bedford gaol, Bunyan published in 1674 *Light For Them The Sit In Darkness*. In the introduction to this work he describes as follows those who he seriously addresses.

Alas! how ordinary a thing it is for professors to fall from the knowledge they have had of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, and to be turned unto fables, seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils, through the intoxications of delusions and the witchcraft of false preachers.⁴⁴

2. Discussion between the pilgrims brings encouragement.

Despair flourishes when the soul experiences isolation. -Conversely, fellowship, the best antidote for Christian loneliness, also leads to the banishment of despair. Bunyan often relates in *Grace Abounding* concerning his private wrestling with inward doubt, such as when he declares: "I feared I was a reprobate. . . . Thus being afflicted and tossed about by my sad condition, I counted myself alone, and above the most of men unblessed."⁴⁵ But then he also declares the release that came when he shared his concern with John Gifford, pastor of the Bedford separatist fellowship, and members of his flock. He confesses that this man's ministry "was much for my stability."⁴⁶ The interaction now concerns a lesser emphasis upon introspective pain and a greater

⁴² Ibid., I, §§ 23-25, 60-61, 66, pp. 8-9, 13-14

⁴³ Ibid., §§ 333-339, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 392.

⁴⁵ Ibid., § 87, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Ibid., § 117, cf. 77, pp. 15, 20.

emphasis upon truth with regard to the legitimacy of suicide. Despair is still present, but now it is being questioned.

a. Christian contemplates suicide.

CHRISTIAN: My brother, what shall we do? The life that we now live is miserable. For my part, I do not know whether it is best for us to live as we are, or to die at our own hand. My soul chooses strangling rather than life, and the grave appears more desirable than this dungeon.⁴⁷ Shall we accept the *Giant's* advice?



⁴⁷ Job 7:15.

He identifies with Job who, not only had an opposing wife (job 2:9), but also for a time considered that death was preferable to present pain. The recommendation of Giant Despair now seems to have some appeal. George Offor adds an important historical comment here:

Dr. Donne, the celebrated Dean of St. Paul's, had recently published a thesis, to prove that suicide, under some circumstances, was justifiable. Hopeful answers all his arguments, and proves it to be the foulest of murders.⁴⁸

b. Hopeful counters with sound instruction.

Apart from his own torturous experience, the introspective emphasis of Puritan ministry, though by no means always unbiblical, had undoubtedly brought to Bunyan's attention both the despair and resultant suicide of many who had claimed to be beyond the reach of Christ's mercy. Hence, the Bedford preacher gives considerable prominence to these related problems in his writings. Suicide is, as depicted by the attempt on his life by the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:27), "murder, I say, and that of a high nature, even to have killed his own body and soul at once."⁴⁹ Despair is likewise roundly condemned since it

undervalues the promise, undervalues the invitation, undervalues the proffer of grace. Despair undervalues the ability of God the Father, and the redeeming blood of Christ his Son. Oh unreasonable despair! Despair makes man God's judge.⁵⁰

(1) The case against suicide.

HOPEFUL: It is a fact that our present condition is dreadful, and death does appear more welcome than this continual misery. But let us consider what the *Lord* of the country to which we are going has to say. He declares, "You shall not commit murder, no not to another man's person." How much more then are we forbidden to take the *Giant's* advice and kill ourselves.⁵¹

Besides, he who kills another can only commit murder upon his body; but for one to kill himself is to kill both body and soul at the same time. And moreover, my brother, you talk about ease in the grave; but have you forgotten the *Hell* where it is certain that murderers go? For no murderer has eternal life,⁵² and much more could be said here.

While Hopeful empathizes with his brother and admits that death would be preferable to the everlasting experience of their present torment, yet, true to his name, he rises to the conviction that their present trial is temporary (Rom. 12:12). Further, he changes the direction of their thoughts toward

⁴⁸ Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 141-142,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 315.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁵¹ *Exod. 20:13.*

⁵² *I John 3:15.*

what the Lord of the Celestial City has spoken. Since their departure from the narrow way, the Word of God has been completely neglected!

- (a) Suicide is prohibited by their Lord.

To slash, deface, and extinguish the life of a man made in the image of God is a heinous crime. But to disfigure that same image in ourselves is to offer even greater insult to God (Gen. 1:27; Ex. 20:13; Matt. 19:18). Hell is a certain reward.⁵³

- (b) Suicide kills the body and soul.

It is man self-destructing from the inside out. He hardens his heart to the mercy of God and so consigns his body to destruction. He usurps the government of God and claims omnipotence and omniscience with regard to his destiny. This form of homicide is seen to be far more arrogant and destructive when compared with the murderer who kills another, but cannot destroy his immortal soul (Matt. 10:28).

- (c) Suicide does not offer ease beyond the grave.

Since murderers inherit hell rather than eternal life (I John 3:15), it is a delusion to think that self-murderers will inherit ease. The King of the Celestial City resisted this temptation (Matt. 4:5-6) while Judas yielded to it (Matt. 27:3-5; Acts 1:16-18). Shall the betrayer of Christ who sought no mercy from Christ yet find ease beyond the grave (Matt. 26:24)?



Chains and remains
in the Castle yard

⁵³ Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 660-661.

(2) The alternatives to suicide.

Besides, he who kills another can only commit murder upon his body; but for one to kill himself is to kill both body and soul at the same time. And moreover, my brother, you talk about ease in the grave; but have you forgotten the *Hell* where it is certain that murderers go? For no murderer has eternal life,⁵⁴ and much more could be said here.

Also let us again consider that *Giant Despair* does not have authority over all the law of our *Lord*. So far as I can understand, others have been captured by him as well as we, and yet they have escaped out of his hand. Who knows if perhaps the *God* who made this world will cause *Giant Despair* to die? Or that at some time or other he may forget to lock us in? Or that he may shortly have another paralyzing fit right here and lose the use of his limbs? For if ever another seizure happens, for my part I am determined to pluck up manly courage and, with all the effort I can muster, attempt to escape from his hand. I was a fool not to try much earlier; however, my brother, let us be patient and continue to endure;⁵⁵ the opportunity may arise that will give us happy relief; but let us not be our own murderers.

Hopeful has not altogether forgotten that both he and his companion have given their allegiance to “the Prince of princes.” So that when Christian queries, “Shall we be ruled by the Giant [Despair]?” his stronger brother, at least on this occasion, responds with the assurance that “all the law is not in the hand of Giant Despair”.⁵⁶ That is, there is a more universal governance, and the “God that made the world may cause that Giant Despair may die?”⁵⁷ Faith is certainly beginning to revive in this pilgrim.

(a) The escape from Despair.

Where does it begin? In a godward direction of thinking, and these pilgrims have been bound by self-preoccupation. Then Hopeful exclaims, “Let us consider, the Lord of the country to which we are going.” Then follows the thought, “Others . . . have been taken by him [Giant Despair], as well as we; and yet have escaped out of his hand.”⁵⁸

(b) The death of Despair.

Now the thinking of Hopeful grows bolder for he proposes even the death of Despair, or at least his wounding. The thought is good, but it is couched in the language of a personal proposal rather than importunate

⁵⁴ *I John 3:15.*

⁵⁵ *Heb. 6:15; 12:5.*

⁵⁶ Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 141.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

prayer. But God is patient and continues to hold the tyrant in check until this ignited arousal begins to flame.

(c) The paralysis of Despair.

Hopeful further desires more light so that his captor might again be incapacitated. This pilgrim now recognizes the antidote for the poison both he and his companion have imbibed. Both have the means of light in their possession, but the crippling effects of their beatings by Giant Despair have, so far, restricted their movements.

(d) The resistance of Despair.

A more militant spirit now arises. Passive resignation gives way to active resistance. "I am resolved to pluck up the heart of a man"⁵⁹ is much closer to the earlier courage of Christian when he was confronted by Apollyon. His fervent apologetic for life rather than suicidal death has also added some steel to his soul.

(e) The endurance of Despair.

Spiritual depression is not to be regarded as an easy opponent. As with Bunyan's experience described in *Grace Abounding*, despair is a debilitating foe that resists with every sort of hellish whisper and death dealing suggestion. But Hopeful is now prepared to resist this same foe even over the long haul (Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1: 13).

(f) Application.

Bunyan would not for a moment justify despair in this present life. Its existence may be real, but those who yield to it insult "the God of all grace"⁶⁰ (I Pet. 5:10). He further exhorts:

'Tis a sin to begin to despair before one sets his foot over the threshold of hell-gates. For them that are there, let them despair and spare not; but as for thee, thou hast no ground to do it. What! despair of bread in a land that is full of corn! despair of mercy, when God goes about, by his ministers, beseeching of sinners to be reconciled unto him! (II Cor. 5:18-20). Thou scrupulous fool, where canst thou find that God was ever false to his promise, or that he ever deceived the soul that ventured itself upon him? He often calls upon sinners to trust him, though they walk in darkness, and have no light (Is. 50:10). . . . Despair! when we have a God of mercy, and a redeeming Christ alive! For shame, forbear. . . . O my soul! this is not the place of despair; this is not the time to despair in; as long as mine eyes can find a promise in the Bible, as long as there is the least mention of grace, as long as there is a moment left me of breath or life in this world, so long will I wait or look for mercy, so long will I fight against unbelief and despair. . . . The Lord take the yoke from off thy

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., I, pp. 358-359.

jaws, since he has set meat before thee (Hos. 11:4). And help thee to remember that he is pleased, in the first place, to offer mercy to the biggest sinners.⁶¹

c. Giant Despair rages afresh against his captives.

And with these words, *Hopeful*, for the present, did calm the mind of his companion; so that day they continued to endure the darkness together, while remaining sad and doleful. Well, towards evening the *Giant* went down to the dungeon once again to see if his prisoners had taken his advice. But when he saw them, they were still alive, though barely so. For on account of the lack of bread and water, as well as the brutal wounds received at their beating, they could now do little more than breathe. But, as I said, he found them alive; at which he fell into a furious rage and told them that, seeing they had disobeyed his counsel, it would now be worse for them than if they had never been born.

Tyrants such as Giant Despair and Apollyon are not quick to yield to those who oppose them, though they may retreat to fight again (Jas. 4:7). On the contrary, they only determine to fight all the more fiercely and devilishly. So the picture here is of encroaching darkness as the light wanes. In such conditions it is difficult to work the good (John 9:4; 12:35).

(1) He is furious that they remain alive.

Reminiscent of the scene at the house of the Interpreter, Giant Despair is enraged to discover that the flame of grace in the two pilgrims, though flickering through a lack of oil, is yet by no means fully extinguished. Of course the lack of the Bread and Water of Life indicates the exact spiritual nutrients that are urgently needed (John 4:10; 6:35; 7:37).

(2) He promises worse if they live.

In other words, Giant Despair increases his extinguishing ministry. The great snare of the temptation to commit suicide is the delusion that the future could not possibly be worse than the present, and this in spite of the explicit teaching of the Bible to the contrary (Matt. 26:24; 27:3-5; Heb. 9:27).

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 91-92.

- d. Christian swoons, revives, and sinks again.

At this the prisoners greatly trembled with terror, and I think that *Christian* fell into a swoon; but reviving himself a little, they renewed their conversation about the *Giant's* advice, and whether it might now be best to take it or not. Now *Christian* again seemed more inclined to heed this counsel, but *Hopeful* made his second reply as follows.

Was Bunyan himself tempted to commit suicide? Most likely Satan did assault him this way with the suggestion, although spurned, that to die, like Faithful, would be to be quickly transported to heaven. However, suicide is not the same as martyrdom. Knowing that at times Bunyan was depressed in his imprisonment,⁶² it is quite probable that a prison companion acted as an encourager as did Hopeful.

- e. Hopeful counters with sound recall.

HOPEFUL: My brother, remember how valiant you have been up to this point in our journey.⁶³ *Apollyon* could not crush you, nor, for that matter, could all that you heard and saw and felt in the *Valley of the Shadow of Death*. What hardship, terror, and confusion you have already experienced. So do all of these count for nothing in your present fearful plight? You understand that I am imprisoned with you, a far weaker man by nature than ever you were. Further, this *Giant* has wounded me as well as yourself, and he has deprived me of bread and water even as you; and along with you I detest this darkness. But still let us exercise a little more patience. Remember how you played the man at *Vanity Fair* and were not afraid of the shackles or cage, or even bloody death. Therefore, at least to avoid the shame that a *Christian* ought not to be associated with, let us bear up with patience as well as we can.⁶⁴

The marginal comment re “calling former things to remembrance” (Isa. 46:9) draws upon the prophet’s exhortation for Israel to recollect its earlier redemption and conquest of Canaan. So Hopeful encourages Christian to recall his former triumphs.

⁶² Ibid., §§ 327, 333, 335, pp. 48, 49.

⁶³ *Heb. 10:32*.

⁶⁴ *I Cor. 10:13: I Pet. 2:20*.

(1) The recall of past victories.

The remembrance of former spiritual conquests is a means to present spiritual endurance (Ex. 13:3; Deut. 5:15; Heb. 10:32; 12:1; II Pet. 1:12).

(2) The confession of present weakness.

Hopeful confesses spiritual debilitation on account of a lack of bread (Word?), water (Spirit?), and light (understanding?). While admitting to a younger and weaker nature, yet his spirit is evidently stronger than his brother's. Is he in effect telling his friend just how much he needs his guidance?

(3) The recall of past courage.

Christian has formerly "played the man" after the manner of the persevering valiant man depicted at the house of the Interpreter. However, Hopeful challenges his companion not to quit, but to maintain his honor as a noble, if sorely tried, pilgrim. Suicide involves cowardice and moral desertion. Rather, let him maintain his pursuit "of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14); let him patiently persevere (Rom. 5:3-4; Heb. 6:12; 1 Pet. 2:20).



Prison fellowship

3. Discussion between the captors brings discouragement.

Now night having come again, and the *Giant* and his wife being in bed, *Diffidence* asked him concerning the condition of the prisoners and if they had taken his advice. To this he replied, "They are sturdy scoundrels; they would rather choose all manner of hardship than take their own lives." Then she said, "Take them into the *Castle* yard tomorrow and show them the bones and skulls of those you have already dispatched; and promise them that before a week comes to an end, you will tear them in pieces just as you have done with other pilgrims like they."

So when the morning had come, the *Giant* went to the prisoners once again and took them into the *Castle* yard where he showed them the remains, just as his wife had directed him. "These," said he, "were once pilgrims as you now are; they also trespassed in my grounds as you have done; so when I thought fit, I tore them in pieces; and so within ten days I will do the same to you.⁶⁵ Now go, return to your dungeon once again." And with that he beat them all the way back to their cell. And there they lay all day Saturday in a most miserable condition, just as before.⁶⁶

Now when night had come, and *Mrs. Diffidence* with her husband the *Giant* had gone to bed, they began once again to talk about their prisoners. Moreover, the old *Giant* was amazed that all of his blows and counsel could not bring an end to their lives. To this observation his wife replied, "I fear that they live in hope that someone will come to deliver them, or that they have picklocks [*lock release tools*] hidden on them by means of which they hope to escape." "Yes, and since you say so, my dear," said the *Giant*, "I will search them first thing in the morning."

Now that night has fully come, Giant Despair and his wife Diffidence are aroused to exercise the fullness of their evil powers (Isa. 29:15). Perhaps these despots would have been better portrayed as sleeping during the day and working at night (John 9:4).

a. Giant Despair plots with his wife.

As before, Diffidence is the stimulus to Giant Despair and the root of his effectiveness. That is, she so generates a sense of hopelessness before God that he is enabled to well communicate this propaganda of supposed abandonment. Technically speaking, it may be that Giant Despair cannot directly destroy of himself; he can only bring pressure to bear for self-destruction.

(1) She suggests a view of the Castle-yard.

This depository of bones and skulls is the graveyard of those who have committed suicide. Giant Despair has only dispatched them indirectly. His direct slaying of them would, make them martyrs. While the pilgrims endure

⁶⁵ *Rev. 2:10.*

⁶⁶ On Saturday Giant Despair threatens that the prisoners will soon be torn in pieces.

their hardship, they prove the impotence of these despot's threatenings (Matt. 10:22).

- (2) She suggests agreement to suicide by Saturday.

Her husband must promise the most excruciating of deaths, to the pilgrims, namely bodily dismemberment. By this means the prisoners will be convinced that suicide is by far an easier form of death. However, Diffidence realises that this plan must be fulfilled before Saturday evening, otherwise Sunday will usher in paralysis for her husband and bread for the prisoners (Matt. 4:4).

- b. Giant Despair terrorizes his captives.

When Saturday dawns, he escorts the pilgrims to the gruesome Castle-yard. Yet, as fierce as the threatenings must have seemed, a chink of weakness appears in the blustering of Giant Despair. And the prisoners may well have gained some hope at this point.

- (1) He vainly threatens the pilgrims.

Within ten days, if the pilgrims have not committed suicide, he personally will destroy them. But wait a minute. Why the delay? Diffidence had recommended that they be done away with no later than that very evening. Could it be that Giant Despair can only huff and puff? It appears that he can wound, but not himself destroy.

- (1) He confesses his impotence to his wife.

The "old Giant" now appears to be shaken. He seems to have reached the limits of his ability, and Diffidence appears to agree that this is so. The only possible explanation then is a concealed "pick-lock," that is an opposing instrument of escape. Had they earlier discovered such a tool in the breas pocket of other captives? Providentially, they delay investigation while the prisoners groan at their latest beating.

D. The Merciful Escape from Doubting Castle and Giant Despair.

"Saturday about midnight" ushers in Sunday morning, and the fears of Diffidence are now realised. But what does Bunyan mean here? In general, that Sunday provides pilgrims with a resurgence of spiritual health, though unlike many of his Puritan contemporaries, not in any strict Sabbatarian sense.⁶⁷ As distinct from the seventh, day sabbath of Israel, he titles this day as the new Christian sabbath, the Christian holy day, or the Lord's day. Two specific inferences may be in mind here. First, that Sunday, being the remembrance day of Christ's resurrection is also a day of soul renewal through fellowship in resurrection life (Rom. 6:3-11). Second, and perhaps more likely -in view of Bunyan's strong pastoral interest, that

⁶⁷ Bunyan, *Works*, II, pp. 359-385.

fellowship in a faithful separatist local church provides all of the spiritual nutrients of bread (Word?), water (Spirit?), and light (understanding?).

1. Sunday dawns with an impulse to pray.

Well, on Saturday about midnight the prisoners began to pray; and they continued in prayer until almost the break of day.⁶⁸

This constraint to pray during these early hours must surely have been a response to the promptings of sovereign grace. Up to this point while captive, prayer has not been thought of in the slightest by the pilgrims. However, Bunyan likewise experienced similar barren periods for he writes in *Grace Abounding*:

I found it hard work now to pray to God, because despair was swallowing me up. I thought I was, as with a tempest, driven away from God, for always when I cried to God for mercy, this would come in, It is too late, I am lost, God hath let me fall; not to my correction, but condemnation; my sin is unpardonable.⁶⁹

But he also experienced subsequent personal revival as is likewise the case here.

2. Christian stirs with newfound understanding.

Now a short while before it was daylight, *Christian*, like someone suddenly amazed, broke out with a most passionate exclamation. “What a fool I have been, to lie like this in a stinking dungeon, when I could have just as well walked free. In my chest pocket I have a key called *Promise* that will, I am thoroughly persuaded, open any lock in *Doubting-Castle*.” “Then,” said *Hopeful*, “that is good news. My good brother, do immediately take it out of your chest pocket and try it.”⁷⁰

Modern literary analysts of Bunyan’s doctrine, and especially his experiential Calvinism, have been quick to disparage his earlier and frequent bouts of despair described in *Grace Abounding*, and at the same time they have been slow to acknowledge the triumph of his increasingly mature and assured spirit as the years pass by.⁷¹ However, here we see this same triumph portrayed as the influence of sovereign grace increases. Like Bunyan, *Christian*, having struggled with intermittent periods of depression, yet here commences, through grace, to be aroused to conquer such trials; he also vigorously exhorts *Hopeful* to be stimulated by the same means of grace so that they both might escape the torment of this universal human affliction. This scene now takes on the features of Peter’s release from prison in Acts 12:1-11.

⁶⁸ *Late Saturday evening through to Sunday morning the pilgrims are moved to pray. Acts 12:5; 16:19-25.*

⁶⁹ Bunyan, *Works*, I, § 163, p. 25.

⁷⁰ *Gen. 28:15; Heb. 13:5; Rev. 1:18.*

⁷¹ Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, Appendix J.

- a. He has the means to be free though imprisoned.

Fellowship on the Lord's Day is both illuminating and invigorating. Christian is enabled to perceive his foolish incarceration as being unnecessary since the means of his emancipation is readily available. The mercy of God continues to be freely offered, even to the biggest of sinners, or as Bunyan writes, even to "Jerusalem sinners."⁷²

- b. He recalls the key called Promise in his breast.

The sovereignty of grace that led to several hours of prayer (Acts 16:25) now results in a heart revival and release from captivity for the pilgrims (Acts 16:26). Some have regarded Christian's sudden recovery of the key called Promise here to be "fictionally implausible."⁷³ However, it seems quite obvious that Bunyan, in drawing from his own experience, considered God's intervening mercy for His elect to be precious truth of great importance. In the same vein, when Christian seems about to be slain by Apollyon, we are told, "But as God would have it" he was enabled to recover his sword and give his opponent a deadly thrust.⁷⁴ Again, immediately following the martyrdom of Faithful, imprisoned Christian is enabled to escape through "he that overrules all things, having the power of their [the citizens of Vanity] rage in his own hand."⁷⁵ But what specifically is this key? It is a synonym for the truth of Christian's book or Bible embedded in his bosom or heart, though recently neglected. More particularly, it is the encouragement of Christ to those given to him by the Father (John 6:37; Rev. 1:18).⁷⁶

- c. He applies the key to the Dungeon door.

This first of three doors yields to the operation of the key. Bunyan vividly describes this process in *Grace Abounding* as follows:

I should in these days, often in my greatest agonies, even flounce towards the promise, as the horses do towards sound ground that yet stick in the mire, concluding, though as one almost bereft of his wits through fear, on this I will rest and stay, and leave the fulfilling of it to the God of heaven that made it. Oh! many a pull hath my heart had with Satan for that blessed sixth of John.⁷⁷

He elsewhere writes:

Despair undervalues the promise, undervalues the invitation, undervalues the proffer of grace. . . . As long as mine eyes can find a promise in the Bible, as long as there is the least mention of grace. . . . so long will I wait or look for mercy, so long will I fight unbelief and despair.⁷⁸

⁷² Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 67-103.

⁷³ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. N. H. Keeble, p. 275.

⁷⁴ Bunyan *Works*, III, p. 113.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I, §§ 249-251, p. 38.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, §§ 250, p. 38.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

3. Christian leads Hopeful in a hurried escape.

Then *Christian* took the key from his chest and began to try the lock of the dungeon door; and as he turned the key, the bolt unlocked and the door flew open with ease, so that *Christian* and *Hopeful* immediately came out.⁷⁹ Then he went to the outer door that leads into the *Castle* yard, and with his key this door also opened. After that he went to the [outer] iron gate for that needed to be unlocked as well.⁸⁰ Now this lock was damnably hard [devilishly tight], yet the key did eventually open it. So they thrust open the gate and made their escape with great speed. But as it opened, that particular gate made such a creaking sound that it awakened *Giant Despair* who, hurriedly arising to pursue his prisoners, suddenly felt a paralysis come over his limbs, for his seizures came on him once again so that it was impossible for him to chase after the escapees.⁸¹ Then *Christian* and *Hopeful* went on till they came to the *King's* highway once again, and here they were safe because they were out of the *Giant's* jurisdiction.



Christian and Hopeful
escape from captivity

⁷⁹ *Acts 16:26.*

⁸⁰ *Acts 12:10.*

⁸¹ *John 1:5.*

The subsequent two gates, recalling Acts 12:10, are also opened though the last was “damnable hard.” This expression, as Sharrock suggests, may be more of a “theological pun” than a reflection of Bunyan’s former vulgarity.⁸²

- a. Giant Despair awakens to pursue.

The creaking of the third or Iron Gate arouses Giant Despair so that in the darkness of Doubting Castle he swiftly pursues escaping pilgrims. Probably Diffidence loudly accuses him of incompetence.

- b. Giant Despair collapses with a seizure.

On entering the Castle yard, Giant Despair is smitten with the power of light; stumbling through the Iron Gate, the full force of daylight brings crippling paralysis (John 1:5). However, this despot’s final demise, and the demolition of Doubting Castle, must wait until Part Two when a troop headed by Mr. Great-heart is victorious in its assault of this whole evil complex).⁸³



Christian and Hopeful escape

⁸² John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, eds. Wharey and Sharrock, p. 332, cf. Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 562.

⁸³ Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 228-229.

4. Christian and Hopeful reach the King's highway.

Now when they had returned over the stile, they began to consider what could be done at that place to prevent further pilgrims from being deceived by this detour and thus fall into the hands of *Giant Despair*. So they agreed that a pillar should be erected there and plainly engraved with the following warning: "Over this stile is the way to *Doubting-Castle* which is kept by *Giant Despair* who despises the *King* of the *Celestial Country* and seeks to destroy his holy pilgrims." Therefore, many pilgrims that continued to pass by were able to read what was written and so escape this danger.

This being done, *Christian* and *Hopeful* sang as they continued on their way.

Out of the way we went, and then we found
 What it was to tread upon forbidden ground;
 And let them that come after have a care,
 Lest heedlessness makes them, as we, to fare;
 Lest they, for trespassing, his prisoners are,
 Whose *Castle's Doubting*, and whose name's *Despair*.

No longer hounded by Giant Despair, except for his fading groans, the two pilgrims sprint back toward the King's highway with all of the energy that their repentant hearts can generate. Suddenly the roughness of the regained narrow way becomes ever so comfortable to their feet!

a. They erect a warning at the Stile.

This Pillar is erected as a preventative in much the same way as *Grace Abounding* is written to enable pilgrims to avoid many of the trials of its author. So Bunyan exhorts us: "I do beseech thee, Reader, that thou learn to beware of my negligence, by the affliction that for this thing I did for days, and months, and years, with sorrow undergo."⁸⁴

b. They protect following pilgrims.

Certainly *Christiana* and her entourage later benefit from this engraved Pillar. While she and *Mercy* wait at the Stile, *Mr. Great-heart*, *old Honest*, and the four sons make an assault upon *Doubting Castle*. As a result, *Mr. Despondency* and *Much-afraid* are released from captivity, while *Giant Despair* is decapitated and his head put on display next to the warning Pillar.⁸⁵

c. They sing of their sorry detour.

As it was difficult for Israel to "sing the Lord's song in a foreign land" (Ps. 137:4), so *Christian* and *Hopeful* found nothing to sing about in *Doubting Castle*. But

⁸⁴ Ibid., I, § 239, p. 37.

⁸⁵ Ibid., III, pp. 228-229.

now that they have returned to the King's highway, song spontaneously breaks forth in the same way that David, formerly feeling abandoned by God, yet subsequently sings to God with a restored and joyful heart (Ps. 13:1-6). Here is one of the sure marks of not only a redeemed soul, but also a restored soul.

5. Application.

For a pastor today to publish a work such as *Grace Abounding* would be for him to probably find himself disqualified from many a pastoral vacancy. The assessment would perhaps be supplemented with psychological testing that indicated he evidenced too many symptoms of an unstable psyche. Yet what is it that has made the tinker's spiritual autobiography such a classic? Is it not the fact that Bunyan's scrupulous honesty has allowed him to bare his soul in a way that contrasts so sharply with popular religious pretense, and especially the masquerading testimonies of today? The fact is that we are neither as honest as he, nor do we enter into the joys of his reconciliation with God through the grace of Jesus Christ. The starting point for us, as Bunyan so obviously indicates, is a deeply humbled spirit that is not afraid to be honest with regard to our frequent poverty of soul. The current fad of openness and transparency is not in mind here; this usually has human relationships in mind, but not the more penetrating search of a holy God. Rather, Bunyan would encourage us to admit to our abysmal lack of confessing the struggles we have with Satan, assurance, and indwelling sin, and then discover the joys of reawakening to the keeping power of free and distinguishing grace. Consider one final illustration of this very basic principle from *Grace Abounding*.

At another time, though just before I was pretty well and savoury in my spirit, yet suddenly there fell upon me a great cloud of darkness, which did so hide me from the things of God and Christ, that I was as if I had never seen or known them in my life; I was also so over-run in my soul, with a senseless, heartless frame of spirit, that I could not feel my soul to move or stir after grace and life by Christ; I was as if my loins were broken, or as if my hands and feet had been tied or bound with chains. . . . After I had been in this condition some three or four days, as I was sitting by the fire, I suddenly felt this word to sound in my heart, I must go to Jesus; at this my former darkness and atheism fled away, and the blessed things of heaven were set within my view. . . . Christ was a precious Christ to my soul that night; I could scarce lie in my bed for joy, and peace, and triumph, through Christ."⁸⁶

The memorial



⁸⁶ Ibid., I, §§ 261-263, p. 40.