

## Chapter Twenty-Six

### Christian and Hopeful at the Delectable Mountains

#### A. The Fellowship of the Hospitable Shepherds.

Earlier viewed as pleasant mountainous country from the roof of the Palace Beautiful, the pilgrims now begin to scale this region belonging to the Lord of the Hill, and enjoy its gardens, orchards, vineyards, fountains, and pastoral hospitality. Here then is another perspective of the separatist local church which Bunyan pastored at Bedford. However, as Kelman explains,

the former (representation at the Palace Beautiful) was elementary and preparatory: this is advanced enlightenment and guidance among spiritual heights. It is a place of contemplation such as is possible only after ripe experience.<sup>1</sup>



The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains

<sup>1</sup> John Kelman, *The Road*, II, p. 67.

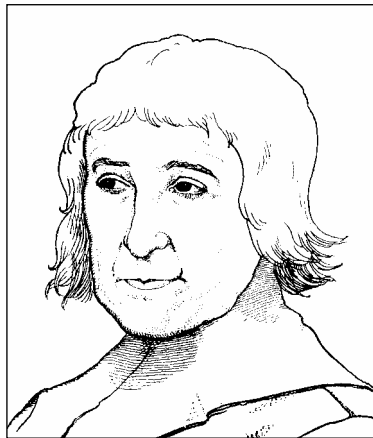
## 1. They oversee the Delectable Mountains.

THEN they went forward until they came to the *Delectable Mountains*, which belonged to the *Lord* of that *Hill* about which we have spoken before. Thus they drew nearer to the *Mountains* so as to look more closely at the gardens, the orchards, the vineyards, and the fountains of water, where they also drank, and washed themselves, and freely ate of the fruit of the vine. Now on the tops of these *Mountains* there were *Shepherds* feeding their flocks and standing alongside of the highway.<sup>2</sup>

Their “oversight” is from the tops of these peaks; it involves the care of flocks that graze by the side of the highway. In Part Two, they welcome Mr. Great-heart and his large company and, having invited both weak and strong to enjoy their entertainment, “had them to the Palace door.”<sup>3</sup> Bunyan clearly identifies this gathering as a fellowship in association with the Palace Beautiful.

## a. Here were gardens, orchards, vineyards, fountains.

In other words, a local church is a garden of the Lord for rest, an orchard of the Lord for sweet food, a vineyard of the Lord for new wine, and a fountain of the Lord for cleansing and the satisfaction of thirst.



Watchful



Experience

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<sup>2</sup> *Luke 2:8.*

<sup>3</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 230.

- b. Here were the pilgrims refreshed in their salvation.

They have become weary through their trials at Doubting Castle and on account of the climb up the mountains. Leaning heavily on their staves they cry out with exhaustion: “Restore to us the joy of our salvation, and sustain us with a willing spirit” (Ps. 51:12).

2. They are asked a variety of questions.

Therefore the pilgrims approached them and, as is customary when such travelers are weary and pause to talk, they leant on their staves and enquired, “To whom do these *Delectable Mountains* belong? And who owns the sheep that are feeding here?”

SHEPHERDS: These *Mountains* are *Immanuel’s Land* and they are within sight of his *City*; the sheep are also his and he laid down his life for them.<sup>4</sup>

CHRISTIAN: Is this the way to the *Celestial City*?

SHEPHERDS: You are going in the right direction.

CHRISTIAN: How much farther do we have to go?

SHEPHERDS: It is too far for any except those who shall certainly arrive there.

CHRISTIAN: Is the way ahead safe or dangerous?

SHEPHERDS: It is safe for those for whom it is to be safe; but transgressors shall undoubtedly fall along the way.<sup>5</sup>

CHRISTIAN: Is there a place here where pilgrims who are weary and faint may find temporary rest?

The pilgrims are rightly concerned with the legitimacy and functioning of this apparent clone of the Palace Beautiful. Their weariness does not dull a necessary sense of caution. Bunyan could well have introduced a scene in which a spurious local church was encountered.

- a. To whom do these mountains belong?

They are “Immanuel’s Land” (Is. 8:8) located within sight of the Celestial City. A local church ought always to have a forward heavenly vista (II Tim. 4:18).

- b. Whose sheep are those being fed?

They also belong to Immanuel since he redeemed them with the offering of his own life (John 10:11). Clearly this is not the territory of hirelings (John 10:12).

- c. Is this the way to the Celestial City?

Yes, though narrow and precipitous, this is the right way. The forward vision will eliminate any doubt.

<sup>4</sup> Ezek. 34:20-31; Matt. 1:23; John 10:11, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Hos. 14:9; John 6:37; II Tim. 2:19.

## d. How far ahead is the Celestial City?

The surprising answer turns the pilgrims' focus from responsible perseverance to God's sovereign decree. Both aspects are true, but here the indication is that responsible perseverance is ultimately based upon God's sovereign decree (John 6:37). For God's elect the Celestial City is not too far ahead; for others it is impossibly distant. Hence, presumption is challenged, sovereign grace is upheld, and for the assured pilgrim there is hope even in weakness.

## e. Is the way ahead safe or dangerous?

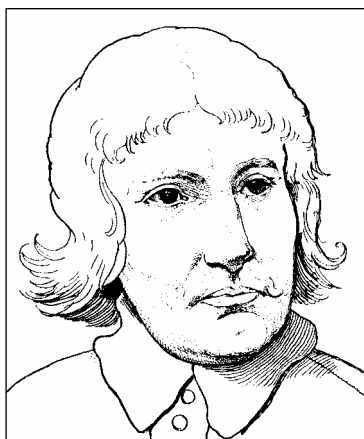
Stuart Sim is entirely correct when he comments here:

There is an entire theological system encapsulated [here]. . . . one unmistakably based on the Calvinist doctrines of election and justification by faith, that is central to Bunyan's narrative practice."<sup>6</sup>

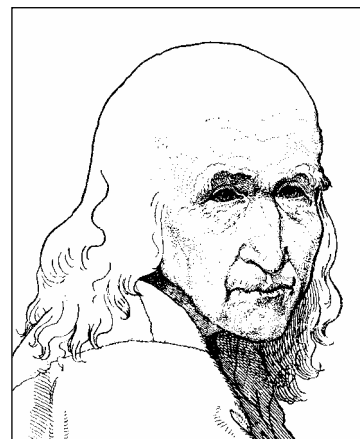
Yet in typical modern fashion, he does not so much as mention one passage of Scripture with reference to his study of Bunyan's understanding of the sovereignty of God. On the other hand, were Bunyan alive to respond, he would undoubtedly refer to countless passages of Scripture, including Hosea 14:9 as he does here, to uphold his belief that God's elect will be preserved to the end of their earthly pilgrimage.

## f. Is there hospitality here for weary pilgrims?

As Christian recalls his former refreshing lodging at the Palace Beautiful, he now longs for a repeat experience on account of his present feeling of near exhaustion. However, the Shepherds have been careful to anticipate the needs of strangers such as these (Heb. 13:1-2).



Sincere



Knowledge

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence, Owens, and Sim, *John Bunyan and His England*, p. 149.

3. They respond with cautious investigation.

SHEPHERDS: The *Lord* of these *Mountains* has given us orders that we should not neglect the provision of hospitality for strangers.<sup>7</sup> Therefore the refreshing and good features of this place are at your disposal.

I also saw in my dream that when the *Shepherds* recognized that they were wayfaring men [*travelers*], they put some questions to them which were answered as in other places; for instance, "From where have you come?" and, "How did you enter the way?" and, "What means have you used to persevere thus far?"<sup>8</sup> For they understood that few pilgrims who first set out and travel a distance yet show their face at these *Mountains*.<sup>9</sup> But when the *Shepherds* heard their answers and were pleased with them, they looked upon them very lovingly and said, "Welcome to the *Delectable Mountains*."

Now the *Shepherds*, whose names were *Knowledge*, *Experience*, *Watchful*, and *Sincere*, took them by the hand and conducted them to their tents where they partook of a prepared feast.

Moreover they said, "We would like you to stay here for a while and become acquainted with us, though even more we recommend that you comfort yourselves with the good health that these *Delectable Mountains* provide."<sup>10</sup> The pilgrims indicated that they would be happy to stay, and so they retired to a restful sleep because it was now very late.

Again we see the care with which a seventeenth century separatist church received members into its fellowship. The concern here is not so much comprehensive knowledge as evident genuine conversion.

a. The pilgrims are questioned about their journey.

Like the damsels at the Palace Beautiful, the shepherds carefully investigate these travelers since few that are authentic reach this distance. Many defect earlier on account of persecution, the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches (Matt. 7:14; 13:21-22).

b. The pilgrims are welcomed to the delectable Mountains.

A plurality of eldership is suggested here, and collectively they represent those spiritual qualities which an individual elder ought to possess.

<sup>7</sup> Heb. 13:1-2.

<sup>8</sup> *I Pet. 3:15.*

<sup>9</sup> *Luke 13:23-24.*

<sup>10</sup> *Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:11-16.*

## (1) By the shepherd Knowledge.

He is mighty in his understanding of the Word of God, and thus “able to teach” (I Tim. 3:2).

## (2) By the shepherd Experience.

In not being “a new convert” (I Tim. 3:6), he is mature in Christian living and thus better able to be a truth model.

## (3) By the shepherd Watchful.

He jealously guards against wolves, apostates, Satan's angels clothed in false light, snares, etc. (Acts 20:28-30).

## (4) By the shepherd Sincere.

With single-mindedness and purity of purpose, he stimulates trust in the flock as they follow (I Pet. 5:2).

## c. The pilgrims are offered pastoral hospitality.

The local church is now identified with tents that offer warm fellowship that features instruction, comfort, and rest (S. of S. 1:8). For these and other reasons true pilgrims find this residency to be so delectable, that is tasty to the redeemed soul. In *The Desire of the Righteous Granted Bunyan* writes:

Church fellowship, rightly managed, is the glory of all the world. No place, no community, no fellowship, is adorned and bespangled with those beauties as is a church rightly knit together to their head, and lovingly serving one another. . . . Hence the church is called the place of God's desire on earth (Ps. 132:13-16).<sup>11</sup>

## d. Application.

It does not detract from the import of Bunyan's portrayal here to point out that this is an ideal representation. The blemishes and skirmishes that presently scar Christ's body are only all the more shameful in the light of this biblical scenario. Further consider the following poetic description of an authentic local church, and especially its “conveniences,” as Bunyan puts it in his *A Discourse of the Building of the House of God*:

So situate it is, so roomy, fair,  
 So warm, so blessed, with such wholesome air,  
 That 'tis enticing: whoso wishes well  
 To his soul's health, should covet here to dwell.  
 Here's necessaries, and what will delight  
 The godly ear, the palate, with the sight  
 Of each degree and sex; here's everything  
 To please a beggar, and delight a king.

<sup>11</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, I, pp. 757-758.

Chambers and galleries, he did invent,  
 Both for a prospect and a retirement.  
 For such as unto music do incline,  
 Here are both harps and psalteries divine:  
 Her cellars and banqueting-house have been,  
 In former days, a place for a queen.  
 O house! what title to thee can be given,  
 So fit as that which men do give to heaven!<sup>12</sup>

## B. The Hill called Error.

Then I saw in my dream that, in the morning, the *Shepherds* invited *Christian* and *Hopeful* to walk with them upon the *Mountains*. So they joined them and were escorted for a while with a pleasant view on every side. Then the *Shepherds* said to one another, "Shall we show these pilgrims some of the wonders that are to be seen here?" So upon agreeing that they should do this, the guests were first taken to the top of a hill called *Error*, which was very steep on the farthest side; there they were told to look down to the bottom. So *Christian* and *Hopeful* peered down and there at the bottom they saw several men all dashed to pieces having fallen from the top. Then said *Christian*, "What does this mean?" The *Shepherds* answered, "Have you not heard of those who were led into error through their listening to *Hymenaeus* and *Philetus* with regard to the faith [*doctrine*] of the resurrection of the body?"<sup>13</sup> They answered, "Yes." Then the *Shepherds* replied, "Those who you see lying dashed to pieces at the bottom of this *Mountain* are they; and to this day they have remained unburied, as you can see, being an example to others to take care lest they clamber too high, or come too near the brink of this *Mountain*."

The rest of faith well disposes the pilgrims to the reception of necessary instruction. In turn, the *Shepherds* consider what instruction will be most suitable in view of past trials and present need. The conclusion is that past deception and present weariness call for warning about delusive error.

### 1. The invitation to an informative walk.

This peripatetic instruction is intended to protect the pilgrims in the heights of holy fellowship while preserving them from the unholy depths of shipwrecked faith.

#### a. The hill *Error* has a dangerous steep side.

On top of this hill is a dangerous precipice; even sound Bible doctrine has a perimeter beyond which glorious truth becomes damning error. Hence, those enjoying pure fellowship in these holy heights are yet susceptible to error spawned

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 578-579.

<sup>13</sup> II Tim. 2:16-18; II Pet. 3:17.

within the assembly of God's people. And should they fall over the edge, their fall is both swift and irrecoverable.

- (1) Deluded pilgrims are dashed below.

One fatal misstep results in the complete dismemberment of the former church adherent. Error does have its logical consequences. To deny the truthfulness of Scripture leads to a thousand resultant infidelities.

- (2) Deluded pilgrims are left exposed.

The Shepherds are careful to leave these remains for the sober viewing of passing pilgrims. Residency in a local church is not a guarantee against misadventure. But residency in a local church ought to include plain warning concerning the subtle invasion of error. Paul constantly warns local churches of insidious and cancerous error that invades authentic fellowships (I Cor. 4:14; Gal. 6:12-13; Phil. 3:2; Col. 1:28; I Thes. 5:14; II Tim. 3:1-13).

- b. The hill Error has some puzzled observers.

Using a familiar biblical expression, "What meaneth this?" (I Sam. 15:14; Acts 2:12), the pilgrims express perplexity at the tragedy of the valley below as they look down from the heights of fellowship above.



Looking for Hymenaeus and Philetus

2. The explanation that soberly warns.

In conformity with the Pastoral Epistles of Paul, Bunyan places considerable stress on negative warning concerning false doctrine that emanates from false teachers (I Tim. 1:3-4, 18-20; 4:1-3; 6:3-5, 20-21; II Tim. 3:1-13; 4:3-4; Tit. 1:10-16; 3:9-11). So the Shepherds minister as Bunyan learned to minister from his mentor, John Gifford.

a. The resurrection error of Hymenaeus and Philetus.

These heretics spread infectious teaching that produced spiritual gangrene and culminated in spiritual death. They perverted biblical Christianity at its roots by denying the future substantial and bodily resurrection of the dead (II Tim. 2:16-18). Hendriksen aptly comments: "They resembled those present-day liberals who, while refusing to be caught saying, 'There is no resurrection,' allegorize the concept".<sup>14</sup>

b. The shattered examples of the too a venturous.

These torn remains represent the strewn wreckage of sectarian folly (Rom. 16:17), scholastic worship (II Tim. 3:7), and fascination with doctrinal novelty (Acts 17:21) that is scattered throughout the centuries of church history. Notice how Bunyan describes these rebels, in the face of pastoral warning, as either attempting to scale forbidden and impossible heights or dangerously edging toward the limits of revealed truth.

The view from  
the Hill Caution



<sup>14</sup> William Hendriksen, *I & II Timothy and Titus*, p. 265.

### C. The Mountain called Caution.

Then I saw that the *Shepherds* took them to the top of another *Mountain* named *Caution*, and directed them to look some distance away. Having done this, the pilgrims thought that they could discern several men walking up and down among a number of tombs.<sup>15</sup> And they noticed that the men were blind because they sometimes stumbled over these tombs, and were unable to find their way out from among them. Then said *Christian*, “What does this mean?”

So the *Shepherds* answered, “Did you not notice, a little below these mountains, a stile that led into a *Meadow* on the left-hand side of this way?” They answered, “Yes.” Then said the *Shepherds*, “From that stile there goes a path that leads directly to *Doubting Castle* which is owned by *Giant Despair*. And these men (pointing to those wandering among the tombs) were once on pilgrimage even as you now are, that is until they came to that same stile. And because the right way was rough on their feet in that place, they chose to leave the way and cross over to the *Meadow*, and there they were taken captive by *Giant Despair* and cast into *Doubting Castle*.

Now after they had been kept in a dungeon for a while, the *Giant* eventually put out their eyes and led them to the tombs; there he has left them to wander to this very day, that the saying of the wise man might be fulfilled, “He who wanders out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.”<sup>16</sup> Then *Christian* and *Hopeful* looked at one another while tears streamed down their faces; yet they said nothing to the *Shepherds*!<sup>17</sup>

Here is a further example of how Bunyan considers continuity in his allegory to be of great importance. Added light is now given concerning the fearful problem of despair and suicide. These were serious conditions in Bunyan's day though, contrary to the opinion of Stachniewski,<sup>18</sup> this writer believes they were no more so than the seeming epidemic of psychotic conditions which is so pervasive in this twentieth century.

#### 1. The somber valley of stumbling blind men.

Taken to another mountain named Caution, the pilgrims are directed to look backward and downward. Before them is a most chilling scene. Men blindly stumble and fall amongst tombs, gashing themselves, being unable to rescue themselves. Bunyan obviously felt that pastoral instruction should be serious and convicting as well as joyous and restful.

<sup>15</sup> *Mark 5:2-5.*

<sup>16</sup> *Prov. 21:16.*

<sup>17</sup> *I Cor. 15:10.*

<sup>18</sup> John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination*, pp. 27-61.

- a. They are the living amongst the dead.

As foundering corpses, they seem captive to the world of death; their countenances are strained and full of misery.

- b. They are the blind amongst the dead.

As aimless corpses, they appear to have had their eyes plucked out; their capacity to see now appears to be utterly hopeless.

2. The terrifying interpretation of the informed shepherds.

While the hill Error had touched a gruesome chord of warning in general, the degree of personal conviction is now greatly heightened to a point where the souls of these pilgrims writhe with intense pain. The Lord of the Hill has a grave lesson for those who have recently escaped from captivity born of disobedience.

- a. There is a nearby stile leading to Doubting Castle.

But how embarrassing it now is that the Shepherds should ask the pilgrims whether they could remember seeing this detour. Their affirmative response must surely have been timid. Probably guilt causes their eyes to turn away.

- (1) The despotic Giant Despair imprisons pilgrims there.

They know this fact to be all too true. But shame seals their lips. Now they recall the grisly remains they had been forced to witness in the Castle-yard. The alternative to the rough way, though apparently smooth, had turned into the most treacherous of ways.

- (2) The despotic Giant Despair blinds pilgrims there.

Here is further confirmation that this bullying fiend yet cannot directly put pilgrims to death, but rather he brings pressure to bear so that his captives might self-destruct.<sup>19</sup> Now did Christian and Hopeful begin to adore that sovereign grace which preserved them from this irremediable condition (I Tim. 1:15-17).

- (3) The despotic Giant Despair buries pilgrims there.

He can so blind his captives that they are permanently separated from the promises of God. As a result they eventually commit suicide, become represented by a tombstone, and then are succeeded by more foolish pilgrims. Bunyan elsewhere comments in *Israel's Hope Encouraged*:

Some retain the name of Christ, and the notion of him as a Savior; but cast him off in the very things wherein the essential parts of his sacrifice, merits, and priesthood consist. In this lies the mystery of their iniquity. They dare not

<sup>19</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 140-141.

altogether deny that Christ doth save his people, as a Priest; but then their art is to confound his offices, until they jostle out of doors the merit of his blood and the perfection of his justifying righteousness. Such draw away the people from the cross (put out their eyes), and lead them among the infidels.<sup>20</sup>

- b. There is a warning from the Word of the Lord.

In quoting Proverbs 21:16, Bunyan draws upon his own experience described in *Grace Abounding*:

By the strange and unusual assaults of the tempter, was my soul, like a broken vessel, driven as with the winds, and tossed headlong into despair, sometimes upon the covenant of works, and sometimes to wish that the new covenant, and the conditions thereof, might, so far forth as I thought myself concerned, be turned another way and changed. But in all these I was but as those that jostle against the rocks; more broken, scattered, and rent. Oh, the unthought of imaginations, frights, fears, and terrors that are affected by a thorough application of guilt, yielded to desperation! this is the man that hath “his dwelling among the tombs” with the dead; that is, always crying out and “cutting himself with stones” (Mark 5:2-5). But I say, all in vain; desperation will not comfort him, the old covenant will not save him; nay, heaven and earth shall pass away before one jot or tittle of the Word and law of grace shall fall or be removed. This I saw, this I felt, and under this I groaned; yet this advantage I got thereby, namely, a farther confirmation of the certainty of the way of salvation, and that the Scriptures were the Word of God! Oh! I cannot now express what then I saw and felt of the steadiness of Jesus Christ, the rock of man’s salvation; what was done could not be undone, added to, nor altered.<sup>21</sup>

3. The silent conviction of the tearful pilgrims.

While the Shepherds may have ‘thought the weeping visitors to be full of concern for the desolate reprobates amongst the tombs, yet they did not at all grasp the concealed horror of this situation. The gaunt and pallid expressions of Christian and Hopeful, accompanied with bodily tremors, shrowded the inner silent chorus of, “There but for the grace of God go we” (I Cor. 15:10). Now did they more fully realize to what degree they were the objects of sovereign distinguishing grace.

4. Application.

When Israel murmured about the harshness of the way in the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula, God gave his people the desires of their heart which turned out to be both loathsome and productive of a plague (Num. 11:1-34; Ps. 106:13-15). So the Christian in this present earthly wilderness pilgrimage is to endure God’s set course rather than seek a smoother passage which in fact leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). Therefore, pilgrims are to walk cautiously, circumspectly (Eph. 5:15-16), even if sorely, and avoid the delusion of seeming fairer avenues that actually result in captivity and despair (I Tim. 6:3-10).

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 145n.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., I, § 186, pp. 29-30.

## D. The By-way to Hell.

Then I saw in my dream that the *Shepherds* took them to another place located in a valley where there was a door in the side of a hill; so they opened the door and invited the pilgrims to look in. Therefore on looking inside they saw that it was very dark and smoky; they also thought that they heard there a rumbling sound like a fire, as well as the crying of some tormented souls, and in addition they smelt the stench of brimstone.<sup>22</sup> Then *Christian* said, "What does this mean?" The *Shepherds* told them in reply, "This is a *By-way to Hell* where hypocrites are able to enter, that is those like *Esau* who would sell his birthright, or like *Judas* who would sell his *Master*, or like *Alexander* who would blaspheme the gospel, or like *Ananias* and *Sapphira* who would lie and dissemble [*deceive*]."<sup>23</sup>

HOPEFUL: I notice that every one of these, at one time or another, put on a display of going on pilgrimage even as we are now doing. Is that not true?

SHEPHERDS: Yes, and they traveled for quite a great distance as well.

HOPEFUL: Exactly how far was it possible for pilgrims such as these to travel in their day, that is while appreciating the fact that they were miserably cast aside?

SHEPHERDS: Some can go even further, while others cannot reach as far as these *Mountains*.

Then the pilgrims spoke to each other, "We certainly have a need to cry to the *Strong* [*One*] for strength."<sup>24</sup>

SHEPHERDS: Yes, and you will need to use it when it is given to you.

In a valley against an unnamed hill, the pilgrims have their attention directed toward a formidable door that is yet opened to them by the Shepherds. Evidently Bunyan believed that pastoral exhortation for the saints ought to include warnings about the doctrine of hell. Why? Because true children of God will only all the more "gird up the loins of their minds [and] . . . keep sober" (I Pet. 1:13) while, as we shall soon see, apostates will be suitably warned (Jude 4, 10-13).

### 1. The hillside door that is opened for inspection.

The following description of this entrance to hell is but one of many graphic portrayals in Bunyan's Works. Refer to his *The Greatness Of The Soul And Unspeakableness Of The Loss Thereof*,<sup>25</sup> *The Resurrection Of The Dead And Eternal Judgment*,<sup>26</sup> and A

<sup>22</sup> *Gen. 19:24; Luke 16:22-26; Rev. 20:10-15.*

<sup>23</sup> *Gen. 25:29-34; Matt. 26:14-16; Acts 5:1-11; I Tim. 1:20.*

<sup>24</sup> *Eph. 3:14-16.*

<sup>25</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, I, pp. 104-150.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 83-128.

*Few Sighs From Hell.*<sup>27</sup> The senses of sight, hearing, and smell are addressed in particular.

- a. There is the appearance of darkness.

This entrance view is only of the periphery of hell rather than its searing core. Hence “the blackness of darkness” (Jude 13) dominates apart from the reddish tinge of scorching smoke.

- b. There is the sound of torment.

“Rumbling [not lumbring],”<sup>28</sup> flame cannot drown out the piercing cries of the damned in their endless and hopeless torment (Luke 16:22-26; Rev. 20:10-15).

- c. There is the smell of brimstone.

This sulphuric stench, so choking to the lungs and reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24), is a constant reminder to the inhabitants of hell that they are the objects of divine judgment.



The byway  
to hell

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., III, pp. 666-724.

<sup>28</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, eds. Wharey and Sharrock, p. 333.

2. The chilling interpretation of the By-way to Hell.

Christian and Hopeful are probably not entirely ignorant of the identification of this place. What really disturbs them is the background of its inhabitants and particularly the reasons for their incarceration. The shepherds are well able, and consider it necessary, to identify and expose the marks of those hypocrites and apostates who have now entered into their reward (Matt. 24:48-51).

a. Esau the mercenary went this way.

He so despised his birthright, it having eternal significance, that he showed preference for material satisfaction, it having temporal significance (Gen. 25:27-34).

b. Judas the betrayer went this way.

He so depreciated the Lord of glory and slighted his grace that he betrayed him for the paltry price of thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 27:1-5; Acts 1:15-18).

c. Alexander the blasphemmer went this way.

He strenuously opposed both the Apostle Paul and his gospel message. Now his judgment, which Paul left to the Lord, has been equitably dispensed (II Tim. 4:14-15).

d. Ananias and Sapphira the deceivers went this way.

They outwardly endeavored to display sacrificial piety while inwardly, being void of true piety, they conspired to suffer no discomfiting loss (Acts 5:1-11).

3. The perplexing lesson of the endurance of apostates.

The pilgrims muse that all of these consignees to hell had come this far and thus had evidenced considerable endurance. Had they all resided at the Palace Beautiful? What was their experience in the Valley of Humiliation? How did they react to Vanity Fair?

a. They can persevere for great distances.

The Shepherds recount that some counterfeit pilgrims have progressed even further. Soon to be encountered Ignorance will even reach the very gates of heaven. Religious masquerade knows no bounds except for the fact that, "the Lord knows those who are His" (II Tim. 2:19).

b. They are a stimulus to prayer for strength.

The pilgrims reason that if some apostates can so advance through natural ability and yet be lost, then to actually enter the Celestial City they will need the distinguishing power of God (I Pet. 1:3-5). In view of trials that are known to be ahead, the Shepherds are in full agreement, both as to the need of this power and concerning prayer as the means of obtaining it (Eph. 3:14-16).

## E. The Telescopic View from the Hill Clear.

By this time the pilgrims had a desire to press forward, and the *Shepherds* agreed that they should do this. So they all walked together toward the end of the *Mountains*. Then the *Shepherds* said to one another, "Let us show the pilgrims here a view of the gates of the *Celestial City*, provided they have the skill to look through our perspective glass [*telescope*]." So the pilgrims gratefully accepted the invitation; hence they were led to the top of a high hill called *Clear* and given the *Shepherds'* telescope to look through. Then they essayed [*attempted*] to look ahead, but the remembrance of the previous sight that the *Shepherds* had shown them made their hands to shake; with this impediment they could not look steadily through the telescope; yet they thought they saw something like the gate and some of the glory of the place.<sup>29</sup> Then they went on their way and sang:

Thus by the *Shepherds*, secrets are revealed,  
Which from all other men are kept concealed.  
Come to the *Shepherds* then, if you would see  
Things deep, things hid, and that mysterious be.<sup>30</sup>

Some commentators have criticized Bunyan for thus far portraying the *Shepherds* as offering unpalatable fare at the "delectable" *Mountains*. However, it needs to be pointed out that for these pilgrims, while the "food" up to this point has not been so appetizing, yet it is the fellowship in the truth that paradoxically remains appealing. Even so, this final revelation must certainly have been appreciated as a spiritual course much sweeter to their taste.

### 1. The shepherds offer a view of the Celestial City.

While the pilgrims are eager to press forward, yet their pastoral counselors agree to give them added incentive, namely an enticing vista of heaven. Bunyan strongly believes that Christian perseverance is linked to, as Peter puts it, "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (I Pet. 1:4). John describes this heavenly goal as that time when "we shall be like Him [Christ], because we shall see Him just as He is" (I John 3:2).

### 2. The pilgrims are led to the top of the hill Clear.

In Bunyan's poetic discourse concerning *The Building, Nature, Excellency, And Government Of The House Of God*, he describes yet again an aspect of a faithful separatist seventeenth century church that on this occasion looks from earth toward heaven.

<sup>29</sup> The fruit of slavish fear. *I Cor. 13:12*.

<sup>30</sup> *Eph. 4:11-16*.

Such mountains round about this house do stand  
As one from thence may see the holy land.<sup>31</sup>

Under normal circumstances the forward perspective is clear, although certain unfavorable conditions do introduce cloud and haze. Then again the focus must be single and rightly directed by those who know the terrain.

- a. The telescope shakes through fear of the past.

Here is another of Bunyan's wry situations which frames a sober and penitent response with a hint of caricature. The pilgrims' trembling hands cannot hold the telescope (Perspective Glass) steadily because of the recent effecting encounter they had with the By-way to Hell. Perhaps the preceding vista from the mountain Caution also added to their tremors.

- b. The telescope shows a blurred image of heaven's glory.

While conflict amongst saints in a local church can cloud their vision of future glory, here the disturbance concerns conflict within the heart of the individual pilgrim. At even the very best of times the Christian has limited vision (I Cor. 13:12). However, resurrected guilt, indwelling sin, and even the contemplation of the fiendish terrors of hell can dim a believer's clear vision of his prospective heavenly home.



The view from the Hill Clear

<sup>31</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, II, p. 579.

3. The pilgrims sing the praise of the Shepherds' instruction.

Here Bunyan extols and upholds the uniqueness and importance of the pastoral office. Of course his assumption here is that such stewards (I Cor. 4:1) are ordained of God. And this being so, they will be gifted for the purpose of expounding the truth of God, both the bitter and the sweet. Further in his poetic discourse on *The Building, Nature, Excellency, And Government Of The House Of God*, Bunyan writes concerning the shepherd/steward:

This officer is call'd a steward too,  
Cause with his master's cash he has to do,  
And has authority it to disburse  
To those that want, or for that treasure thirst.<sup>32</sup>

F. The Parting Pastoral Exhortation.

When they were about to depart, one of the *Shepherds* gave them a note [*written instructions*] describing the way ahead.<sup>33</sup> Another of them advised the pilgrims to beware of the *Flatterer*.<sup>34</sup> The third told them to take care that they did not sleep on the *Enchanted Ground*.<sup>35</sup> And the fourth commended them to *God's* sustaining mercy as they traveled.<sup>36</sup> So I [*Bunyan*] awoke from my dream.<sup>37</sup>

Each Shepherd gives his own piece of farewell counsel. However, as an enticement with little difficulty attached, Bunyan leaves it up to the reader to decide which Shepherd provides which item of assistance. The pilgrims are about to venture forth into the world once again, and they will still need every means of grace to persevere in their journey. It is a vital part of faithful local church ministry to provide such spiritual sustenance.

1. The Shepherds' distinctive ministry of support.

Alexander Whyte gives full descriptions of these vital aspects of the one pastoral office.<sup>38</sup> Though it ought to be acknowledged that one faithful pastor may excel in one of these four characteristics more than another faithful pastor. "What one of those shepherds could not so well do in the tent or in the field or out on the hillside, some of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 581.

<sup>33</sup> *II Tim. 4:1-2*.

<sup>34</sup> *Prov. 29:5*.

<sup>35</sup> *Eph. 5:15-16*.

<sup>36</sup> *Acts 20:32*.

<sup>37</sup> *It may be indicated here that Bunyan was released from the Bedford County Jail for a short period of time, so that what follows is the fruit of further incarceration and renewed "dreaming."*

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Whyte, *Bunyan Characters*, I, pp. 237-281.

the others better did. And what one of them could do to any perfection all the others by one consent left that to him to do.”<sup>39</sup>

- a. Knowledge provides a map of the way ahead.

Whereas Christian has from the beginning of his journey held on to that book in his hand for his own study, that is the Bible, here this same truth of Scripture is that which a faithful local church, through its pastors, proclaims to its members (II Tim. 4:1-2). More specifically it is that truth of God which directs pilgrims closer to the gates of heaven.

- b. Experience warns of the Flatterer ahead.

This guide is not a novice (I Tim. 3:6) but rather a mature saint who has ripened through pitfalls concerning which he counsels others to avoid.

Whenever I hear a single unconventional, immediate, penetrating, overawing petition or confession in a minister’s pulpit prayer or in his family worship, I do not need to be told out of what prayer-book he took that. I know without his telling me that my minister has been, all unknown to me till now, at that same school of prayer to which his Master was put in the days of His flesh.<sup>40</sup>

In this instance, Experience has been confronted with many a flatterer, even within his own fold, who has deluded him with appeals to his vanity (Prov. 29:5).

- c. Watchful cautions against sleeping on the Enchanted Ground.

Like the “frog in the kettle” syndrome, the almost imperceptible gradualness of this snare will overcome careless pilgrims. Drowsiness along the way is best overcome through constant exposure to truth and the claims of righteousness that generate alertness (I Cor. 15:34). Such concern is the mark of a true shepherd oversees a flock. “The one essential and distinguishing mark of a New Testament minister is not that he is an able man, or a studious man, or an eloquent man, but that he is a pastor and watches for souls.”<sup>41</sup>

- d. Sincere prays that God will give them speed and safety.

This pastor is evidently genuine. The signals emanating from his character are all harmonious and holy. His motives are pure and single.

Such a minister is not tongue-tied with sinister and selfish intentions. His sincerity toward God gives him a masterful position among his people. His words of rebuke and warning go straight to his people’s consciences. His words are their own witness that he is neither fearing his people nor fawning upon his people in speaking to them.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

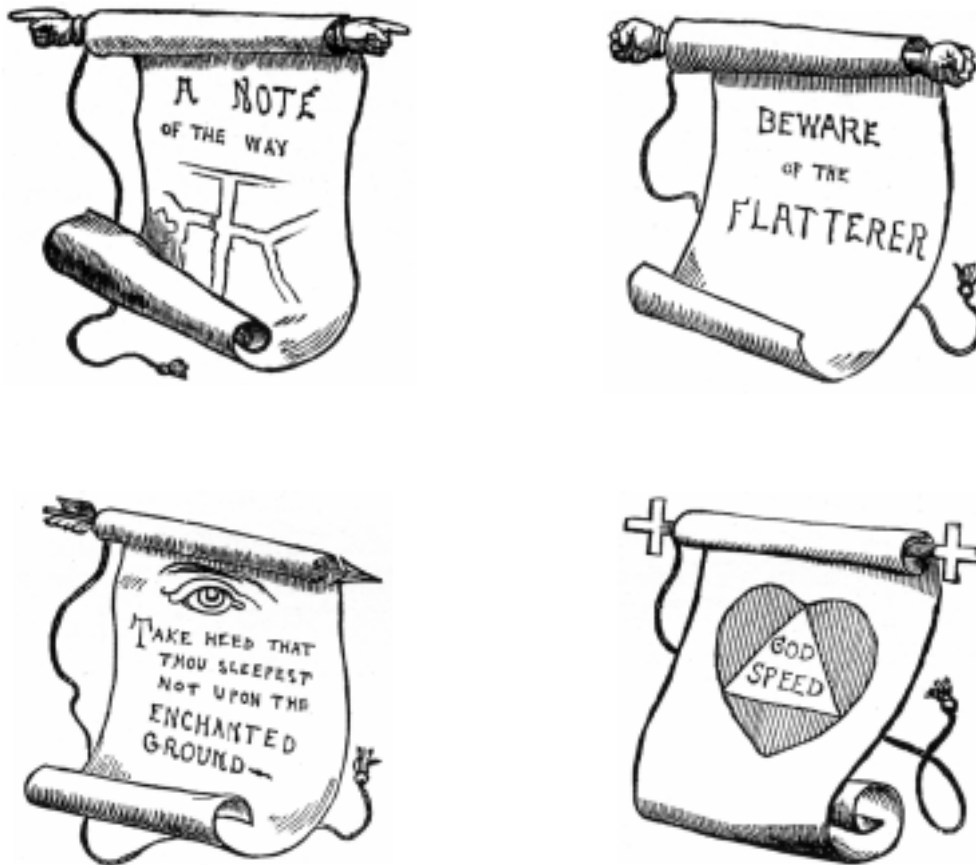
<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

And in his prayer, as here with Sincere, those who hear and are prayed for have greater confidence that in this instance, God has certainly been pleased to listen to this man (II Cor. 1:12; 2:17).

2. The author's brief awakening from his dream.

Most commentators believe that Bunyan here is obliquely indicating that he has just been released from prison.<sup>43</sup> The only problem here is the suggestion that the remainder of the allegory, also represented by a dream, is yet said to have been composed during Bunyan's subsequent freedom. Since the narrative as a whole does not seem to allow for any major division at this point, there remains real uncertainty as to exactly what Bunyan's intention was at this juncture.



The Four Scrolls

<sup>43</sup> John Brown, *John Bunyan*, pp. 247-248; John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, eds. Wharey and Sharrock, p. 333; John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. N. H. Keeble, p. 275.