Chapter Thirty-Three

The Comforting Delights of Beulah Land

A. The Fair Features of this Outer Suburb of Heaven.

Now I saw in my dream that by this time the pilgrims, having traversed the Enchanted Ground, then entered into the country of Beulah [Married]. With the way passing directly through it, the air in that place was found to be very sweet and pleasant, so they rested and took comfort there for a time. Yes, here they continually heard the singing of birds, while every day they enjoyed the blooming of various flowers in the land, and also listened to the voice of the turtle-dove. In this country the sun shines day and night.

Therefore it is beyond the influence of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, as well as the reach of Giant Despair. In fact from this vantage point, Doubting Castle was quite out of view. Here the pilgrims were in sight of the Celestial City to which they were going; here also they were able to meet some of the inhabitants of that place. For in this land some of the Shining Ones walked quite frequently, because it was located upon the very borders of Heaven. In this land also the contract between the bride and the bridegroom was renewed. Yes here, “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so did their God rejoice over them.”

Here they had no lack of corn and wine, for in this place they began to reap in abundance what they had been seeking for throughout their pilgrimage. Here they heard voices wafting across from the City, loud voices proclaiming, “Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold your salvation comes, behold his reward is with him.” Here all of the inhabitants of the country called them “the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, sought out,” etc.

Though the Apostle John wrote Revelation as a mere mortal, yet he declares: “And he [an angel] carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:10). So Bunyan comments here:

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1 S. of S. 2:10-12; Isa. 62:4.
2 Ps. 107:28-30.
3 Angels.
4 Isa. 62:4-12.
5 Frequent biblical expression for material and spiritual blessing. Gen. 27:28, 37; Deut. 33:28; Ps. 4:7; Zech. 9:17.
7 Isa. 62:11-12.
As a man must have much of the Spirit that sees much of God, and his goodly matters; so he must be also carried away with it; he must by it be taken off from things carnal and earthly, and taken up into the glory of things that are spiritual and heavenly.  

Such is the thinking of Christian and Hopeful at this advanced stage in their pilgrimage.

1. Introduction.

Cheever writes:

The land Beulah, lovely as it is, is only one stage in our pilgrimage, and that a very advanced stage. And it is observable how Bunyan makes his pilgrims go from strength to strength, by a gradual progress, from one degree of grace, discipline, and glory to another. The coloring is that of heaven in the soul, and Bunyan has poured his own heaven-entranced soul into it. With all its depth and power there is nothing exaggerated, and it is made up of the simplest and most scriptural materials and images. We seem to stand in a flood of light poured on us from the open gates of Paradise.

a. Christian and Hopeful have now become sunset pilgrims.

In Grace Abounding, Bunyan relates his overhearing, as an unbeliever, of some poor Christian women conversing in the sunshine about their pilgrim experiences which cause him to feel so spiritually destitute. Their discussion about the new birth and the life of God in their souls thoroughly perplexed him in his ignorance. He further observed that,

they spake as if joy did make them speak: they spake with such pleasantness of Scripture language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new world, as if they were people that dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned among their neighbors (Num. 23:9).  

But the Bedford pastor has himself now entered into the sunshine that these women sat in and portrayed this maturity in the rapturous hope of Christian and Hopeful.

(1) The eye of flesh is dim while the eye of faith is clear.

Pilgrim experience has taught these travellers much, especially concerning the weakness of this earthly body and its ongoing decay; it groans and increasingly complains, though its lusting power has lost its edge through many a conflict with the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:17-18). On the other hand, the vision of the soul is now more clear than ever, that is with regard to the features of their heavenly destination. The whole environment of the Celestial City seems to be wafting in upon them; imagination is now close to realization.

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8 John Bunyan, Works, III, p. 400.
9 George B. Cheever, Lectures on Bunyan, p. 288.
10 Bunyan, Works, I, § 38, p. 10.
Mature spiritual age brings anticipation of the Celestial City.

The advanced state and ripeness of these two is not simply a matter of earthly years; Ignorance is just behind and we wonder how he will respond to the delights of this new territory. Rather, for Christian and Hopeful, the sun and splendor of this world is fast setting so that it gives way to the infinitely greater rising of the glory of God’s dwelling place. They really are convinced with the Apostle Paul that, “to depart and be with Christ . . . is very much better” (Phil. 1:23).
b. Bunyan now draws from Jerusalem’s future glory described in Isaiah 62.

The consummate future glory of Jerusalem, that is the brightness of her righteousness which will be acknowledged throughout the earth (Isa. 62:4-5, 8, 11-12), is portrayed by Bunyan as that overflow of the glory of heaven that reaches those who will shortly become its citizens. This protective atmosphere, which sharply contrasts with the seductive and dangerous vapors of the Enchanted Ground, is a holy intoxicant that only increases the pilgrims’ desires for arrival at the Celestial City. They yearn for that encouraging welcome: “Go through, go through the gates; clear the way for the people” (Isa. 62:10).

c. Drawing near to heaven’s gates should be with great desire and longing.

For Bunyan, this longing for heaven was no mere theoretical expression of his doctrinal beliefs but rather the very panting and craving of his soul. His passing at a friend’s home in London, during August of 1688, lasted ten days. John Brown describes this period thus:

One who was there, probably . . . Bunyan’s friend, George Cokayn, tells us that he bore his sufferings “with much constancy and patience; and expressed himself as if he desired nothing more than to be dissolved and to be with Christ, in that case esteeming death as gain, and life only a tedious delaying of felicity expected; and finding his vital strength decay, having settled his mind and affairs, as well as the shortness of his time and the violence of his disease would admit, with a constant and Christian patience, he resigned his soul into the hands of his most merciful Redeemer, following his pilgrim from the City of Destruction to the New Jerusalem; his better part having been all along there, in pantings, and breathings after the hidden manna and water of life.”

(1) Illustration.

Many an immigrant to the United States, having almost completed a long and tempestuous voyage, has suddenly been overjoyed to catch a glimpse of the approaching coastline. Then the Statue of Liberty is recognized and the Manhattan skyline and finally the disembarkation point of Ellis Island. The struggles and pain of the past recede as the anticipation of a new life looms large. So the child of God, having almost completely traversed this earthly wilderness, ought to long for the “better country” (Heb. 11:16).

(2) Illustration.

The Apostle Paul, while wrestling with the conflicting demands of duty as against desire, yet longs for the fulfillment of his greatest hope, and that is to be transported, unfettered by the flesh, into the presence of Christ’s heavenly glory, and to be welcomed by Him (Phil. 1:23). He much prefers to be “at home with the Lord” (II Cor. 5:8), to receive from Him “the crown of righteousness” (II Tim. 4:6-8). The Apostle John had the same hope (I John 3:2-3). The Apostle Peter encouraged suffering saints to look forward to, an

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inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4).

(3) Illustration.

Twelve days before the passing away of David Brainerd in October of 1747, Jonathan Edwards quotes the young missionary’s heavenly interest as follows:

Oh, “why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?” I am very willing to part with all: . . . I am almost in eternity. I long to be there. My work is done: I have done with all my friends: all the world is nothing to me. I long to be in heaven, praising and glorifying God with the holy angels. All my desire is to glorify God.”

(4) Illustration.

Dr. Edward Payson, a leading New England preacher during the early part of the nineteenth century, declared several weeks before his death:

I used to read . . . Bunyan’s description of the land of Beulah, where the sun shines, and the birds sing day and night, [and] doubt whether there were such a place. But now my experience has convinced me of it, and it infinitely surpasses all my previous conceptions. . . . [Shortly after, he dictated a letter to his sister as follows:] Were I to adopt the figurative language of Bunyan, I might date this letter from the land of Beulah, of which I have been for some weeks a happy inhabitant. The Celestial City is full in my view. Its glories beam upon me; its breezes fan me; its odors are wafted to me; its sounds strike upon my ear, and its spirit is breathed into my heart.

(5) Illustration.

In December of 1899, evangelist D. L. Moody being near death and slipping away, he declared:

Earth recedes; heaven opens before me. . . . No, this is no dream, Will [his son, . . . It is beautiful. It is like a trance. If this is death, it is sweet. There is no valley here. God is calling me and I must go. . . . This is my triumph; this is my Coronation Day! I have been looking forward to it for years.

2. It is a place of restored union or marriage named Beulah.

In Isaiah 62:4, the land of Israel, formerly abandoned by God and known as “desolate” or “Shemamah,” will once again become united to God, or “married” to Him, and known by the new name of “Beulah.” Further, the inhabitants of “Beulah” will then be called “Hephzibah,” meaning “My [God’s] delight is in her.” Thus for Bunyan here, the Country of Beulah belongs to God who resides just across the River of Death.

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nearby. For this reason it is specially protected territory; and Christian and Hopeful, as those who God “delights in,” are also under His particular luxuriant providence and protection.

3. It is a place to be compared with spring time after winter.

Up to this point the weather, with periodic bright patches, yet has shown more signs of dark clouds, storms, darkness, and coolness. But now the sky has cleared and the prospects ahead seem to be calm with pleasant breezes, light, and warmth (Ps. 107:28-30; S. of S. 2:11).

a. Sweet air.

Instead of being subtly toxic as was the air at the Enchanted Ground, this gentle health-giving breath blows in from across the river nearby. It invigorates the soul and sweetens the pilgrim’s whole being; it cleans out preciously accumulated pollutants.

b. Singing birds.

Along with the turtledove’s loving and gentle cooing, other birds provide melody and a sense of concord that suggest a blissful environment. Here was the perfect setting for renewal of pilgrim fellowship and preparation for river crossing (S. of S. 2:10-12).

c. Scented flowers.

Again contrast is intended for whereas the Enchanted Ground was mostly overgrown with briars and thorn bushes, and subject to darkness, mist, and mire, here heaven’s influence, even from across the River of Death, produces beauty, pleasant aromas, and fruitfulness.

4. It is a place of constant sunshine and no backward vista.

Traveling conditions are ideal, as if encouraging progress. In particular the light now shines endlessly and gives added strength; it seems increasingly brighter and has greater attraction as progress is made along the way ahead. A backward glance, by way of comparison, has nothing to commend it.

a. The Valley of the Shadow of Death is out of reach.

In other words, the threatenings of darkness, mire, the mouth of hell, flame, smoke, hideous noises, doleful voices, fiends, blasphemies, hobgoblins, satyrs, dragons, snares, traps, nets, pits, blood, mangled bodies, paganism, and popery, have lost their influence. They are not permitted to invade this realm.

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b. The terror of Giant Despair cannot influence this region. Why is this so? Because hope is so alive in this region. The Celestial City is so near that none can doubt or forget the promises of God. Here life and glory and rest and peace are so prospective. Further, Giant Despair could not so much as tolerate the endless intensity of the light which would so incapacitate him.

c. The dismal outline of Doubting Castle is lost to view.

The captivity that it represents is so far behind the pilgrims that it dips below the backward horizon. Therefore memories of that dark experience, the maliciousness of Diffidence, the remains of hopeless captives, the soul-freezing anguish and misery, have all faded from view because of the surpassing glory ahead.

5. It is a place of encouragement with its forward vista.

Compared with the hazy sight that Christian and Hopeful had at the Hill Clear, this close-up vision of the Celestial City is positively dazzling. However, Ignorance, who is just behind, thinks it is dazzling too! Bunyan suggests that all men will attempt to enter heaven, though relatively few will actually gain entrance.\(^{16}\) The natural man, the hypocrite, and the cold formal professor will all make their claims, but only the truly righteous will succeed.\(^{17}\)

\[\text{The pilgrims are in sight of the Celestial City}\]

\(^{16}\) Ibid., I, pp. 378-379.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., pp. 764-766.
6. It is a place of heavenly fellowship with Shining Ones.

Here the border patrol of heaven mingles with would-be entrants into heaven. Bunyan adds:

This is an excellent comfort at any time, to have the holy angels of God to attend a poor man or woman; but especially it is comfortable in the time of distress, at the time of death, when the devils beset the soul with all the power that hell can afford them. . . . The angels do always appear at the last, and will not fail the soul, but will carry it safe into Abraham’s bosom.  

7. It is a place where Christ’s rejoicing and covenant love hovers.

Christ’s love for his bride, represented by Christian and Hopeful, is ratified by means of various endearing indications that anticipate an imminent union. These various expressions of love are drawn from Isaiah 62:5, 8, 11-12.

a. The bridegroom is committed to the bride.

At the Father’s request (Heb. 10:7) the Son has contracted to save certain sinners (John 6:37; 17:6, 12) and present them as faultless before His throne (Jude 24-25). For this reason, the bridegroom rejoices over his bride (Isa. 62:5).

b. The bridegroom lavishes food upon his bride.

Here now a great abundance of “corn and wine” from across the river is poured out, and that exclusively, upon the desirous bride. She has been longing for this fullness for an extended period of time (Isa. 62:8).

c. The hosts of heaven sing the praises of the bride.

The salvation of the bride, that is Christian and Hopeful as representatives, is near at hand; her reward is soon to be bestowed; the travail of journeying is now more fully appreciated as being worthwhile (Isa. 62:11).

d. The inhabitants of heaven declare the character of the bride.

They delight to welcome their own kind, that is entrants who are holy, or morally set apart for God, redeemed, that is judicially presentable to God, and elect, that is chosen in grace for God (Isa. 62:12).

8. Application.

Sadly, we would not suggest that all believers alike depart this earthly life as the Country of Beulah tends to suggest; but yet these blessings are the pilgrim’s privilege (Rom. 8:23-25; cf. Stephen’s departure, Acts 7:54-56, 59-60). Nevertheless, Bunyan well understood the problem here and so comments:

\[18\] Ibid., III, p. 680.
Suppose the poor Christian is now upon a sick bed, beset with a thousand fears, and ten thousand at the end of that; sick-bed fears! and they are sometimes dreadful ones; fears that are begotten by the review of the sin, perhaps, of forty years’ profession; fears that are begotten by dreadful and fearful suggestions of the devil, the sight of death, and the grave, and it may be of hell itself; fears that are begotten by the withdrawing and silence of God and Christ, and by, it may be, the appearance of the devil himself; some of these made David cry, “O spare me” a little, “that I may recover strength before I go hence, and be no more” (Ps. 39:13). “The sorrows of death,” said he, “compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow” (Ps. 116:3). These things, in another place, he calls the bands that the godly have in their death, and the plagues that others are not aware of. “They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men” (Ps. 73:9). But now, out of all these, the Lord will save his people; not one sin, nor fear, nor devil shall hinder; nor the grave nor hell disappoint thee. But how must this be? Why, must thou have a safe-conduct to heaven? What conduct? A conduct of angels: “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb. 1:14).

B. The Near Radiance of Heaven brings Overwhelming Rapture.

Now as they walked in this land they experienced more rejoicing than in other parts that were more remote from the kingdom to which they were headed. But now drawing nearer to the City, they had a much more perfect view of it. It was built of pearls and precious stones, while the streets were paved with gold. As a result of the natural glory of this City, and the reflection of the sunbeams upon it, Christian became sick with longing; Hopeful also suffered periodic bouts of the same disease. Therefore they lay for a while in front of this vista, and continued to cry out, because of recurring pangs, “If you see my beloved, tell him that I am sick by reason of love.”

Yet being strengthened a little, and thus more able to endure their sickness, they walked along the way and came nearer and nearer to the City. On either side were orchards, vineyards, and gardens with their adjacent entrances being open to enable easy access from the highway.

So Christian and Hopeful continue along the narrow way in the midst of lush and scenic countryside. Yet what overwhelm them the most are the spectacular heights of the approaching Celestial City. More glorious than glistening alpine peaks, they soar into the heavens with the Kingdom seated on top. However, the air is so clear and the light so revealing that details of the City ramparts are easily visible. The effect of all this upon the pilgrims is overpowering; they become speechless with delight.

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19 Ibid., I, pp. 340-341.
20 Rev. 21:18-21.
21 Prov. 13:12.
22 S. of S. 2:5; 5:8.
1. As the City draws near, features abound.

No earthly metropolis could remotely compare with the richness of this architecture; every aspect had a purity and sense of perfection about it that was best described in Christian's book, which he still carried with him (Isa. 54:11-12; Rev. 21:10-27). Now realization was infinitely more wonderful for the pilgrims than anticipation.

a. The vision is more clear.

When men choose to live away from God, such as in the City of Destruction, it is not surprising that they find it difficult to view even a faint image of the glory of God's kingdom since they are so remote from it. At that home town location, Christian could not even see the Wicket-gate in the distance. But what a difference in sight these two pilgrims now possess. With pollution almost eliminated, they see with a clarity that is truly eye-opening.

(1) Of precious buildings.

While the basic structural substance was gold, yet the supporting materials included jasper and a great variety of precious stones (Rev. 21:18-21). To merely look was to be enthralled.
(2) Of golden streets.

These were paved with a radiant gold that possessed a seeming inner light; they led to the main city gates, each appearing as a lustrous pearl (Rev. 21:21). To walk here would surely be spiritually exhilarating.

(3) Of dazzling glory.

This was unlike any earthly radiance since it came from the very throne of God and had a moral quality about it. For this reason it attracted Christian and Hopeful, though aliens were known to be repulsed by it at close quarters (Rev. 21:22-23).

b. The heart increases with desire.

Both Christian and Hopeful nearly swooned with desire at the sight of such a prospect. Being so close to what they had striven for made them sick with longing. Only the welcoming presence of Christ could now cure them (Matt. 25:21). So they cried out to the Lord that he might quickly grant them entrance (S. of S. 5:8).

2. As the City draws near, strength increases.

Here was a strange effect, namely that gazing intently at the looming Celestial City produced not only a type of homesickness, but also a sense of reinvigoration that increased their pace. Perhaps this experience might be described as the pilgrims’ first encounter with dying grace, so necessary in terms of what is immediately ahead.

C. The Gardener of the Land Gives an Escorted Tour.

Now having come closer to these places, the pilgrims noticed the Gardener standing in the way; so they asked him, “To whom do these good vineyards and gardens belong?” He answered, “They are the King’s, and have been planted here for his own pleasure as well as the comfort of pilgrims.”

So the Gardener led them into the vineyards and invited them to refresh themselves with the surrounding delicacies. He also pointed out the King’s walks and shady nooks which he so enjoyed. So there Christian and Hopeful paused and slept for a while.

Now I noticed in my dream that they talked more in their sleep at this time than they had ever done in all of their journey. So as I was deeply pondering the reason for this, the Gardener spoke even to me (Bunyan): “Why are you deep in thought about this matter? It is the nature of the fruit and grapes of these vineyards to be so sweet and digestible as to cause pilgrims such as these to talk and chatter in their sleep.”

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The identification of the King’s Gardener is that of another aspect of the pastoral office, as was the case with Evangelist. To minister to pilgrims who are drawing near to the River of Death requires considerable understanding of biblical truth as well as a tender regard for the soul when subject to its severest testing. In this instance the Gardener makes use of every available means of grace at his disposal for the preparation of these pilgrims who are about to confront this “last enemy” (I Cor. 15:26).

1. This land has orchards, gardens, and vineyards on either side.

The pilgrims would have quickly noted the similarity here with the restful features that surrounded the River of the Water of Life which they had previously experienced together. This provision then is symptomatic of their Lord’s kindness, though it is also necessary for strengthening prior to a severe trial.

2. This land has a Gardener who cultivates for the King.

This Gardener purposely stands in the midst of the way so as to intercept authentic pilgrims lest they eagerly press on unprepared. He offers a breadth of refreshments that include comfort, food, instruction, and rest. Unlike the situation at the Palace Beautiful where Christian was given supplies to carry with him, here no such transportable provisions are allowed (Deut. 23:24). No luggage of any sort can be carried across the River of Death. Hence, strengthening must be completed at this last place of refuge.

   a. The owner is the Lord of the way.

      This is another way of saying that a local church is God’s possession (I Tim. 3:15; Acts 20:28), Christ’s church (Matt. 16:18), or his body (I Cor. 12:27). It is for this reason that he frequently walks in this region.

   b. The purpose is his delight in pilgrims.

      The King is concerned for the welfare of his own when they are so close to home; he is not prepared to lose one of them (John 17:12). Hence, the design of this refuge is lavish with every amenity (Jer. 31:11-12).

3. This land provides pilgrim refreshment.

At this point it is designed especially to address the great challenge of the River of Death, which the pilgrims seem so oblivious of since their perspective has been constantly upward (Jude 21). How uncommon it is for churches today to directly address this topic which, studies appear to indicate, we think of daily.

   a. Comfort, for future distress.

      A local church ought to offer solace to those who face death, that is both physical and spiritual assistance by means of a spiritual hospice (I Thess. 5:11). Here the pilgrims were treated compassionately, both as to their bodies and souls.
b. Food, for future health.

A local church ought to feed those who face death with food that is appropriate to their needs, that is truth concerning the saint’s great future hope (I John 3:2-3). Here the pilgrims are fed with “dainties” that have been nurtured on the light that is reflected from heaven, and even possibly “angel’s food” (Ps. 78:25).

c. Meditation, for future assurance.

A local church ought to provide opportunity for digestion of that food which has been ingested, that is meditation upon that soul truth has been served (Col. 3:1-2). Here the pilgrims ambled along the “King’s walks”, musing over their enjoyable repast, and hoping that they might catch a glimpse of their Lord.

d. Rest, for future struggle.

At the Palace Beautiful, Christian was restrained from pressing forward too soon; the guides there knew that his encounter with Apollyon would require great strength and endurance. So the Gardener here similarly rests his guests. Their excited talking in their sleep provokes even surprise by Bunyan as he looks on. But the explanation is that the food eaten by the pilgrims, being good food, that is a stimulant concerning their hopes of heaven, has produced this effect (I Pet. 1:8). Hence, the Gardener’s ministry has proved to be most effective.

e. Illustration.

Perhaps the pilgrims were singing in their sleep, and if so, then the words of Anne Cousin’s hymn that follow would have been most suitable for their present situation.

The sands of time are sinking,
The dawn of heaven breaks;
The summer morn I’ve sighed for,
The fair, sweet morn, awakes.
Dark, dark hath been the midnight,
But dayspring is at hand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel’s land.
I’ve wrestled on towards heaven,
‘Gainst storm and wind and tide;
Now, like a weary traveller
That leaneth on his guide,
Amid the shades of evening,
While sink life’s lingering sand,
I hail the glory dawning
From Immanuel’s land.