

## Chapter Thirty-Five

### Christian and Hopeful are welcomed into heaven

#### A. The Reassuring Welcome Safe on the Other Side.

Now have the pilgrims reached the very heights of heaven, well almost, that is. The geography here suggests that this spiritual realm is not heaven as a whole, but rather that region where heaven is located. For hell too is in this spiritual region. Protection is still needed; glorification is not yet complete, although the pilgrims have lost their earthly carnal dress. Thus Christian and Hopeful have still to climb to the highest heights to gain entrance into the Celestial City that there reigns over all. However, new anticipations are before them for they can now hear the voices of their kinsmen, and quite possibly they identify the jubilation of Faithful.



Christian and Hopeful are escorted to the Celestial City

## 1. The procession toward the heavenly Jerusalem.

NOW upon the bank of the *River* on the other side, *Christian* and *Hopeful* again saw the two shining men waiting to welcome them. Therefore, having come up out of the *River*, these men saluted and greeted them saying, "We are ministering spirits sent forth to serve those who shall be heirs of salvation."<sup>1</sup> Thus they proceeded towards the gate. Now you should note that the *City* stood upon mighty *Hill*,<sup>2</sup> though the pilgrims ascended that *Hill* with ease because they had these two men to lead them up by holding their arms; also they had left their mortal garments behind them in the *River*, for though they went in with them, yet they came out without them.<sup>3</sup> Therefore they continued to climb here with much agility and speed, even though the foundation upon which the *City* was built was higher than the clouds. So they went up through the regions of the air, sweetly talking as they went, being comforted because they had safely crossed the *River* and were being escorted by such glorious companions.

## Cheever comments:

Bunyan has thus, in this blissful passage from the river to the gate, done what no other devout writer or dreamer or speculator that we are aware of has ever done; he has filled what perhaps in most minds is a mere blank, a vacancy, or at most a bewilderment and mist of glory, with definite and beatific images, with natural thoughts, and with the sympathizing communion of gentle spirits, who form, as it were, an outer porch and perspective of glory, through which the soul passes into uncreated light. Bunyan has thrown a bridge, as it were, for the imagination over the deep, sudden, open space of an untried spiritual existence, where it finds ready to receive the soul that leaves the body, ministering spirits sent forth to minister unto them who are to be heirs of salvation [Heb. 1:14].<sup>4</sup>

## a. The pilgrims are warmly saluted by the two welcoming angels.

These two messengers, the same who had directed the pilgrims on the earthly shores of the River of Death, appear to have taken the same route as did Enoch and Elijah, though Bunyan maintains mystery here. Suffice to say that in the Bible angels are often portrayed as bridging the gap between heaven and earth (Luke 2: 13-15; John 1:51); they are "ministering spirits [Heb. 1:14]" who rejoice at these converted sinners' safe arrival (Luke 15:10).

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 16:22; Heb. 1:14.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-2.

<sup>3</sup> I Cor. 15:53-57; II Cor. 5:1-10.

<sup>4</sup> George B. Cheever, *Lectures on Bunyan*, p. 290.

- b. The pilgrims are led up to the City on a great hill.

This is “the mountain of the house of the Lord,. .. the chief of mountains” (Is. 2:2-4, cf. Mic. 4:1-2). This is the “holy mountain” at the top of which is Mt. Zion, the “City of Truth,” also known as “[the New] Jerusalem” (Zech. 8:1-3). This is the “city set on a hill [that] cannot be hidden” (Matt. 5:14). This is the “city of the living God” (Heb. 12:22).

- c. The pilgrims are enabled to ascend through the clouds.

This is the beginning of a triumphant ascension that will surely make the observant believer to be covetous of such a glorious destiny. In a world where the most bizarre and carnal science fiction fantasies are portrayed, here is a representation of transcendent biblical reality that has such a holy attraction about it. While groaning and travail are the present status quo, here is an emancipating hope that does have the solid underpinning of truth. For Jesus Christ said to his disciples: “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).



Christian and Hopeful near the Celestial City

- (1) They are assisted arm in arm.

Sensing that this “last mile of the way” will be exhausting, since these pilgrims have still not yet arrived at their place of rest, gracious and uplifting help is provided in time of need (Heb. 4:16). These angels are experts in providing assistance where the frailty of God’s elect are concerned.

- (2) They have shed their mortal garments.

Having been clothed with decaying flesh that has now been shed in the River of Death, Christian and Hopeful aspire to be clothed with incorruptible garments of glory that will be awarded upon their entrance into the Celestial City. For a brief period, the allegory does allow for a time of nakedness, which idea the Bible does not support (II Cor. 5:1-4). Bunyan would probably agree here, yet simply defend the text on the ground of literary license.

- (3) They are comforted with sweet talk.

The agreeable conversation reflected upon the fact of further conquest having been made over death by means of grace. They exulted in the defeat of the enemy; they warmed, one to another, because of the truth and holy desires they held in common; they all spoke with delight concerning the person of their King, while the angels, no doubt, added much more information because of their frequently being close to His person.

## 2. The glorious prospects of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The conversation that they had with the *Shining Ones* was about the glory of the place, who told them that the beauty and glory of it was simply inexpressible. They further explained that there is to be found *Mount Zion*, the *Heavenly Jerusalem*, the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, they explained, “You are now going to the paradise of *God*, in which you shall see the *Tree of Life* and therefore eat of its never-fading fruit.<sup>6</sup> And when you arrive there you shall be given white robes, and every day you shall walk and talk with the *King* for all the days of eternity. There you shall not see former things such as you saw when you inhabited the lower region upon *Earth*, that is sorrow, sickness, affliction and death, for these former things will have passed away.<sup>7</sup> Rather you are now going to reside with *Abraham*, *Isaac*, *Jacob* and the prophets, men who *God* took away from the evil to come, for they are resting upon their beds, each one walking in his righteousness.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Heb. 12:22-24; Rev. 2:7; 3:4.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 3:22-24; Rev. 22:2.

<sup>7</sup> Rev. 21:1-4.

<sup>8</sup> Isa. 57:1-2; 65:14; Matt. 7:11.

The pitch of expectation now reaches exquisite heights because the portrait of the Celestial City is now painted in spiritual dimensions never before experienced by these ex-mortals. Features previously known about are now described by the angels with such holy color and vividness that the pilgrims seem to be imbibing almost more than their swelling hearts can contain.

- a. The company of angels and just men made perfect.

Some time following his conversion, when Bunyan was delivered from a bout of depression that lasted several days, he relates how the passage now quoted (Heb. 12:22-24), was “a blessed Scripture that came bolting in upon me.” As a result, he joyously revived and added that: “These words also have oft since this time been great refreshment to my spirit.”<sup>9</sup> Hence, the messengers speak to the desires of the pilgrims’ hearts, that is declaring that what they have longed for is about to be realized. The “just men made perfect” are those who, having been justified and sanctified, are now glorified (Rom. 1:17; 5:1-5; 8:30).

- b. The paradise of God and the fruit of the tree of life.

This is a promise for overcomers (Rev. 2:7) which suggests that the Celestial City will possess features which distinguished the Garden of Eden before the fall of Adam (Gen. 3:22-24; Rev. 22:2). However, the removal of the curse through Christ (Gal. 2:13; Rev. 22:1-3) and the future availability of fruit from the tree of life are manifestations of grace which was not evident at Eden.

- c. The apparel of robes fitting for the King’s presence.

For those who possess the dress of Christ’s imputed righteousness, such as the pilgrims here, there comes to them in heaven a different set of clothes. Here is the assurance that glorification, that is the putting on of an incorruptible body in the place of that which is corruptible (I Cor. 15:53-54) is imminent (Rev. 3:4). The pilgrims will partake of the likeness of Christ (I John 3:2), that is they will partake of the likeness of his glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21).

- d. The fellowship of the King for all of eternity.

God regularly walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, that is until sin ruptured their relationship (Gen. 3:8-10). But these reconciled children of Adam are to enter into that former intimacy in a manner that has been enhanced by grace. If “having not seen Him we love Him, . . . with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (I Pet. 1:8), then how multiplied will be the rapture of regular face-to-face fellowship with Him. As Charles Wesley has written:

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<sup>9</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, I, §§ 262-264, p. 40.

And if our fellowship below  
In Jesus be so sweet,  
What heights of rapture shall we know  
When round His throne we meet.

- e. The absence of former earthly troubles.

A former world of sin, suffering, and sorrow will be a distant memory. Whatever recollection of this distant evil kingdom there may be, it will chiefly magnify the greatness of God's saving power in the eternal present (Rev. 21:1-4). This difficult to conceive of future righteous economy, though less so for the pilgrims now, will become the pervasive reality; then the former kingdom of evil will become more difficult to conceive of.



The rewards of Heaven

f. The holy company of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God's patriarchs and prophets faced the onslaught of evil, but they were eventually delivered across the River of Death (Matt. 23:37) and appointed to the Celestial City (Isa. 57:1-2; 65:14); now they enjoy high rank and participation in the administration of righteousness. The pilgrims can look forward to feasting with them (Luke 13:28-29), as well as with other notable witnesses such as Faithful.

3. The variety of activities in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Then *Christian* and *Hopeful* asked, "What will we be occupied with in such a holy place?" To this was given the answer, "There you will receive the comfort that results from your toil, and have joy in place of your sorrow; you must reap what you have sown, even the fruit of all your prayers and tears and sufferings for the *King* along the way.<sup>10</sup> In that place you will wear crowns of gold and enjoy the perpetual sight and visions of the *Holy One*, for there you shall see him as he is."<sup>11</sup>

There also you shall continually serve him with praise, with shouting and thanksgiving, that is he whom you desired to serve in the world, though with much difficulty, on account of the weakness of your flesh.<sup>12</sup> There your eyes shall be delighted with seeing, and your ears with hearing, the pleasant voice of the *Mighty One*.<sup>13</sup> There you shall enjoy your friends again, that is those who arrived before you; and there you shall also joyfully welcome everyone who follows after you into this holy place. There also you will be clothed with glory and majesty, and appropriately equipped to ride forth with the *King of Glory*."

When he shall come with the sound of trumpets in the clouds, as upon the wings of the wind, you shall come with him; and when he shall sit upon the throne of judgment, you shall sit next to him; yes, and when he shall pass sentence upon all the workers of iniquity, whether they be angels or men, you shall also have a voice in that judgment because they were his and your enemies.<sup>14</sup> Also when he shall again return to the *City*, you shall go with him, with the sound of trumpets, and be with him forever."<sup>15</sup>

As the Bible avoids giving details of the exact duties of future citizens of the glorious Kingdom of God, so Bunyan is likewise restrained in the description that follows. Though clearly choir singing, harp playing, and snoozing under a fig tree will not be the main occupations! (Matt. 19:27-28; I Cor. 6:3).

<sup>10</sup> Gal. 6:7.

<sup>11</sup> I John 3:2.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. 19:28; 26:41; Rom. 6:19; Gal. 4:13.

<sup>13</sup> Isa. 30:29; 60:16; 64:4; I Cor. 2:9.

<sup>14</sup> Dan. 7:9-10; I Cor. 6:2-3; I Thess. 4:13-16; II Tim. 2:12; Jude 14.

<sup>15</sup> Rev. 22:5.

- a. They shall receive comfort, joy, and reaping.

In other words, their earthly testing and training will have fitted them for rewarding heavenly occupations. If we have been faithful on earth, then in heaven the King will declare, “I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:21). Hence, “in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary” (Gal. 6:9).

- b. They shall receive crowns of gold.

That is, they shall be elevated to positions of rulership since, “if we endure [on earth], we shall also reign with Him [in heaven]” (II Tim. 2:12, cf. Ps. 21:3; Gal. 6:7-8). Thus, they “will reign with Him [Christ] for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6) and “forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5).

- c. They shall perpetually behold Christ with joy.

In their earthly pilgrimage they saw him from many perspectives (refer to Chapter 11, *Themes and Issues*), but mostly through the veil of his human flesh. Now they “shall see him as he is (I John 3:2), his unveiled glory, his kingly glory rather than that of a servant (Phil. 2:6-11), his holy glory (Isa. 6:3, cf. John 12:39-41).

- d. They shall perpetually serve Christ with gladness.

As they accomplish tasks, as they administer programs, as they speak truth, as they reign over subjects, it will not be with grief due to resistance and rebellion, as was formerly the case on earth. Rather there will be cooperation and eager obedience that will cause the ruling pilgrims to rejoice and praise the King of such a blessed kingdom.

- e. They shall delight to see and hear of the Mighty One.

The title of God as “the Mighty One” is but a synonym for the glory of God as described in Isaiah 30:29-33 (cf. Isa1:24; 49:26; 60:16). However, while the enemies of God and His people will hear the terror of His voice and feel his breath as “a torrent of; brimstone” (vs. 27-28, 30-33), the pilgrims will delight in His holy radiance, they will find His voice pleasing, and they will sing with rejoicing concerning his discriminating salvation (v. 29).

- f. They shall be reunited with friends.

Faithful will welcome him, and so will many of the saints that he learned about when visiting in the library at the Palace Beautiful. And they will exchange accounts of their travels. But then Christian will in turn become a welcomer. There will be his wife Christiana to greet, and later on his four sons. Also some from Vanity will be expected, as well as some others, even from the City of Destruction, who will prove to be a complete surprise.

- g. They shall have glory and ride with the King of Glory.

Not only will they receive a glorious body, but also they will be invested with the distinctive glory and honor of judicial office that is suitable for their accompaniment of the King. Christ has redeemed for himself a kingdom of royal priests (I Pet. 2:9) suitable for his royal person.

- h. They shall sit with Christ and share in his judgment.

Judgment of the world and angels by God at the end of this age will be delegated to glorified Christians who reside in heaven (I Cor. 6:2-3). At the time appointed He shall gather these deputies and bring them with Him to the judgment arena (Jude 14-15). Then will the objects of judgment be resurrected and raptured into the presence of the King and His saintly judicial subordinates (Dan. 7:9-10; I Thess. 4:13-17).



He musical welcome

- i. They shall reside with Christ forever.

Following the casting of death and hell into the lake of fire where the devil, the beast, and the false prophet, and then the Great Assize (Rev. 20:10-15), the King will return to His City accompanied by his holy judiciary; there they shall actively live with Him forever. His settlement and vindication of human history will be followed by the holy perfection of eternal heavenly society.

## B. The Jubilant Welcome from Heaven's Advance Guard.

Since heaven is aware of the drawing near of two pilgrims seeking entrance, according to the watchmen on the City walls, there is excitement amongst the populace that never diminishes at such a time as this (Luke 15:8-10). Hence, preparation for a royal reception begins; it is the King's intention that new arrivals should be welcomed with great celebration. Therefore, an angelic contingent, trained for this purpose, is dispatched so as to guide Christian and Hopeful toward a grand reception.

1. Their praises are sounded.

Now while they were drawing near to the gate, behold a company of the heavenly host came out to meet them. To this multitude the *Shining Ones* spoke, "These are the men that have loved our *Lord* when they were in the world, and have left all for his holy name, and he has sent us to fetch them, and thus far have we brought them on their desired journey, that they may now go in and look their *Redeemer* in the face with joy."<sup>16</sup> Then the heavenly host gave a great shout saying, "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the *Lamb*."<sup>17</sup>

At this time there also came to meet them, several of the *King's* trumpeters, clothed in shining white apparel, who, with loud melodious noises, made even the heavens to echo with their sound. These trumpeters saluted *Christian* and his companion with ten thousand welcomes from the world; and this they did with shouting and the sound of trumpets.

No little pre-reception is engaged in here; rather there is the employment of word of mouth acclaim, choral jubilation, and instrumental cacophony in recognition of these pilgrims. However, the praise here is that glad acknowledgement of faithfulness and perseverance through grace, and not the applause of human accomplishment (Luke 19:17).

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<sup>16</sup> I Cor. 13:12.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. 19:9.

- a. A company of the heavenly host receive a good report.

So the angelic involvement increases. Cheever adds:

The angels receive his [Bunyan's] pilgrims as they come up from the river of death, and form for them a bright, glittering, seraphic, loving convoy, whose conversation prepares them gradually for that exceeding and eternal weight of glory which is to be theirs as they enter in at the gate."<sup>18</sup>

And so the two shining ones provide this delegation with their assessment.

- (1) These men loved the King in the world.

They declared his lordship, witnessed to his truth, proclaimed his atonement, and as a result were "slandered" and treated as "the scum of the world" (I Cor. 4:13) in spite of their reflection of the graces of Christ (II Cor. 2:15-16).

- (2) These men have left all for the King's name.

They did not count their lives as dear to themselves (Acts 20:24), nor did they compromise their ministry for the sake of sordid gain (I Pet. 5:2). Rather they regarded the values and aspirations of this world as refuse so that they might know Christ (Phil. 3:8).

- (3) These men desire to behold the King.

For sometime they have dimly perceived him as if looking through cloudy glass, as if seeing a mere shadow. But now they joyously look forward to beholding him face to face with his unclouded glory (I Cor. 13:12), even as the apostles but fleetingly did on the mount of the transfiguration (Matt. 17:11-2).

- b. A heavenly chorus shouts a great invitation.

Here is the call, duly authorized by the King, for part of Christ's bride to make ready and haste to "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:6-9). It is a summons to the throne of Christ that Bunyan himself seems to relish in one of his dying sayings: "How will the heavens echo of joy, when the Bride, the Lamb's wife, shall come to dwell with her husband forever?"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cheever, *Lectures on Bunyan*, p. 290.

<sup>19</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 66.

- c. A band of King's trumpeters sounds a thousand welcomes.

In contrast with the music of the world, which the pilgrims were repulsed by, this new melody was truly heavenly (Ps. 40:3; 149:1). The holy trumpeting instrumentalists played with such harmony and suitability to the soul that Christian and Hopeful were tempted to join in with themselves singing. But they held back since the waves of choral refrain were simply constant personal welcomes.

2. Their persons are surrounded.

This completed, they surrounded them on every side; some went ahead, some behind, and some on the right hand and some on the left, as a guard through the upper regions, continually sounding as they went with melodious noise in lofty notes. So this sight appeared, to any who could observe, as if *Heaven* itself had come down to meet them. Therefore they walked on together, and as they walked these trumpeters would often, with joyful sound, the composition of their music, and looks and gestures, signify to *Christian* and his friend just how welcome to them was their company, and how happy they were to have met them. And now were these two pilgrims as if in *Heaven*, in fact before they came to it, being consumed with the sight of angels and the hearing of their melodious notes.

In front, behind, and on both sides, the angelic band provided full protection for the pilgrims since even the upper regions of that realm could be dangerous with Satan not yet cast into the lake of fire. Nevertheless, spiritual camaraderie, even if but introductory, was totally captivating.

- a. The fellowship in melodious convoy entralls them.

Now the whole procession joyously ascended toward the gate. The trumpeters, by means of their kindly manner and thrilling melody, conveyed such spontaneous delight in their appointed task. The sweetest communion of saints on earth could not compare with this.

- b. The fellowship with a heavenly presence entralls them.

Back in the world they had sung, "Heaven came down and glory filled my soul." But that experience then paled beside their appreciation now of heaven truly reaching down to them from such close quarters. No church music and singing could equal this.

## 3. Their presence is expected.

Here also they were now able to view the *City* itself, and they thought they heard all the bells inside pealing to welcome them inside;<sup>20</sup> but above all was their rapturous anticipation, the warm and joyful thoughts that they had about their dwelling there with such heavenly company, and that for ever and ever. Oh, with what tongue or pen could their glorious joy be sufficiently expressed! And thus they came up to the gate.

The Bible clearly teaches that heaven is very much aware of human events upon earth, and especially as they involve the gospel and the salvation of God's elect (Matt. 18: 10; Luke 15:10; Heb. 13:2; I Pet. 1:12). It is no wonder then that full details concerning imminent arrivals at the Celestial City are known about when they draw near to the entrance gate for new citizens. Heaven is never surprised with regard to its newly appointed residents since the King only receives those who he has personally invited by name (John 10:3).

## a. Ringing bells anticipate their arrival.

Bunyan's earlier love/hate relationship with bell-ringing<sup>21</sup> finds its happy resolution in the fact that heaven is portrayed as giving a prominent place to this form of instrumental music (Zech. 14:20). Here the tolling is rapid and joyful, announcing to all of heaven that more redeemed sinners are about to be received into its community. At the same time the King is praised: "Worthy art Thou, . . . for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. . . . Worthy is the Lamb that was slain. . . [To him] be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev. 5:9, 12-13).

## b. Joyful thoughts anticipate their arrival.

The hearts of both pilgrims now pulsed at such a rate; their souls were now so smitten with rapture on account of the culmination of this divine romance that they had to be carried along for the last few paces. But the angels understood as they gently stood the two in front of the very gate of heaven itself. Cheever pens their thoughts at this point as follows:

There is my house and portion fair;  
My treasure and my heart are there,  
And my abiding home;  
For me my elder brethren stay,  
And angels beckon me away,  
And Jesus bids me come!<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *This is reminiscent of Bunyan's early experience as a bell-ringer.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, §§ 33-34, p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Cheever, *Lectures on Bunyan*, p. 306.

### C. The Royal Welcome at the Gate of the City.

While Bunyan clearly relates the Wicket-gate to the “narrow gate” (Matt. 7:13-14, cf. Luke 13:24) of conversion, yet in his *The Strait Gate* published in 1676, that is prior to the publication of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, he expounds upon Luke 13:24, with George Offer being in agreement, as primarily being concerned with entrance into heaven. He describes two major gates for the pilgrim: “There is the door of faith. . . . This door is Jesus Christ. . . . By this door men enter into God’s favor and mercy, and find forgiveness through faith in his blood, and live in hope of eternal life. “There is another door or gate and that is the passage into the very heaven itself; . . . that is the gate mentioned in the text.”<sup>23</sup> This being so, and in deference to Bunyan here, the arrival now of the pilgrims at “the narrow door” does not presuppose a ready entrance. It is the final difficulty, as recently described. Why is this so? Because the pilgrims’ King has also declared: “For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24). The welcome will only be realized when the gate is opened for entrance.

#### 1. The King investigates the pilgrims.

Now when they had come up to the gate, there was inscribed over it, in letters of gold, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have rightful access to the *Tree of Life*, and may enter in through the gates into the *City*.”<sup>24</sup> Then I saw in my dream that the *Shining Ones* directed the pilgrims to call out at the gate, which, having done so, some from above looked over the top, namely *Enoch*, *Moses*, and *Elijah*.<sup>25</sup> The angels then addressed them: “These pilgrims have come from the *City of Destruction* for the love that they have for the *King* of this place”; and then each one of the pilgrims delivered up his certificate [*scroll*], that which he had received at the beginning; these therefore were brought before the *King* who, when he had read them, said, “Where are these men?” In reply it was explained, “They are standing outside the gate.”

By delegation, the pilgrims are scrutinized according to their justifying faith and their resultant justifying works. The former is mandatory at the Wicket-gate while the latter is an additional requirement at the Gate of the Celestial City. Bunyan explains in *The Strait Gate*:

There are two errors in the world about the law; one is, when men think to enter in at the strait gate by the righteousness of the law; the other is, when men think they may enter into heaven without the leave of the law. Both these, I say, are errors; for as by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified; so without the consent of the law, no flesh shall be saved.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, I, p. 365.

<sup>24</sup> Rev. 22:14.

<sup>25</sup> These saints identify the three who walked at the top of the Palace that the Persevering Valiant Pilgrim strove to enter.

<sup>26</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, I, pp. 367-368.

Neither legalists nor antinomians shall be received into heaven.

- a. The inscription is read over the Gate.

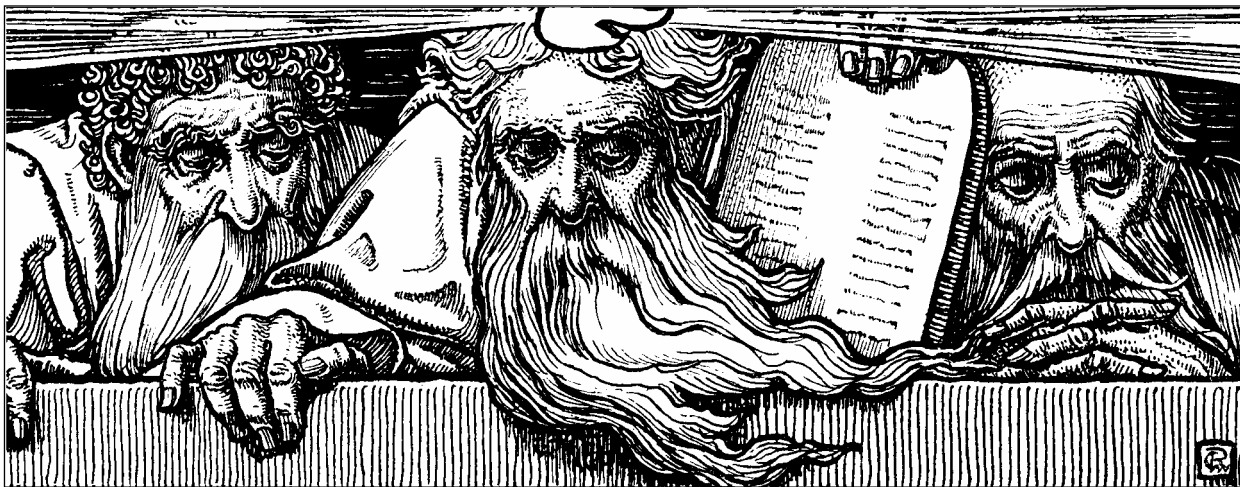
This golden engraving (Rev. 22:14, KJV) indicates that only those “saved by grace through faith” who are “God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph. 2:8-10) are welcome. Other pretenders may seek entrance who are the workmanship of man or Satan, but they will unfailingly be unmasked and rejected.

- b. The angels encourage them to call out.

With importunate cries, Christian and Hopeful plead for entrance. To help them be heard, the trumpeters and vocal chorus are hushed for a while, though the bells keep pealing and there seems to be a flurry of activity inside. The two messengers appear hopeful, though the pilgrims seem a little unsure.

- (1) They recognize faces peering over the gate.

Christian seems to remember these three radiant personalities from his visit to the house of the Interpreter. There they appeared on top of the stately palace which the persevering valiant man fought to enter. They are Enoch, Moses, in spite of his harsh treatment of Faithful, and Elijah, all men of faith (Heb. 11:5, 24-28, 32).



Enoch, Moses, and Elijah look over the gate of the Celestial City

- (2) They are spoken for by the shining ones.

Here a good report is given of the pilgrims concerning the holy manner of their traveling from the City of Destruction. Many reports had been accumulated from various sources that told that in spite of their failures and trials, yet they faithfully endured for their King.

- (3) They deliver their certificates.

These gave evidence of their original and genuine regeneration, also their sealing through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). Such certification gave assurance of their being bona fide pilgrims both to themselves (Rom. 8:16) as well as to the gatekeepers.

2. The King invites the pilgrims to enter.

The *King* then commanded that the gate be opened so that, as he declared, "The righteous nation that keeps the truth may enter in."<sup>27</sup>

Access to any earthly potentate is not usually an easy matter, nor is it the case with the holy God of Israel given man's unholy condition. Even so, man does usually presume to attempt such an encounter being ignorant of his filthy condition (Job 15:14; 25:4). Little does he realize that except he approach on God's terms, his attempt will be considered as an affront that merits disposal to hell (John 3:36). Certainly one pilgrim will soon discover this to be true.

- a. He receives the certificates for approval.

The King examines the documents to confirm that they were issued with his authority. Some, with devilish craft, would even dare to present counterfeit papers that might deceive the gatekeepers, though never the King. However, these certificates prove to be genuine; they represent pilgrims in whom dwell the Spirit of God (I John 4:1).

- b. He commands that the Gate be opened.

The King's acceptance is immediate as is his command that the City Gate be opened. The result is that the full glory of heaven is now exposed to the pilgrims, and to the astonished Bunyan himself, in a manner of speaking. Then did the trumpeters and the chorus and the bells all break out with greater fervor than before in praise of the "righteous citizens" (Isa. 26:2).

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<sup>27</sup> Isa. 26:2.

## c. Application.

The natural man is not slow to pursue splendor and magnificence and glory on as large a scale as possible. Hence, even he finds this description of heaven here as very desirable, though the heavy moral emphasis is not to his liking. Still, he is moved by the richness of it all and would much prefer to reside in heaven than in in hell. But his problem is that entrance into the Celestial City is only possible on God's terms and not his own. For this reason and his insufferable pride, he will not only agonize in Satan's domain but also endure the torment of knowing about the beauty and grandeur of heaven which he rejected for Christ's sake.



The gates of the Celestial City are opened

### 3. The King invests the pilgrims with glory.

Now I saw in my dream that these two men went in through the gate; and behold, as they entered they were transfigured, and they were dressed with apparel that shone like gold.<sup>28</sup>

They were also met by those who gave them harps and crowns; the harps to add praise, and the crowns as tokens of honor bestowed.<sup>29</sup>

Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the *City* again rang out for joy; and that it was said to the pilgrims, "Enter into the joy of your *Lord*."<sup>30</sup> I also heard the men themselves sing, and that with loud voices saying, "Blessing, honor, glory, and power, be to him who sits upon the throne, and to the *Lamb* for ever and ever."<sup>31</sup>

Now just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them; and behold, the *City* shone like the sun; the streets also were paved with gold, and on them walked many men with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps with which to sing praises.<sup>32</sup>

Also among the inhabitants there were those that had wings, and they responded in praise one to the other without ceasing, saying "Holy, holy, holy, is the *Lord*."<sup>33</sup>

Having earlier received mere tokens of their heavenly inheritance (Eph. 1:14), now the pilgrims receive the fullness that has been "served in heaven" (I Pet. 1:4) for them. In particular they are to be made "partakers of the glory that is to be revealed" (I Pet. 5:1). Now they are to receive "the image of the heavenly" (I Cor. 15:49).

#### a. They are transfigured as they enter the Gate.

What was observed fleetingly on the mount of the transfiguration now becomes their own possession for eternity (Matt. 17:2). So "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," they put on an imperishable body, a body of glory and power and spirit (I Cor. 15:42-44; 51-53).

#### b. They receive heavenly tokens of citizenship.

As the tokens that they received at the Place of Deliverance were suitable for their earthly journey, so these items are fitting for their heavenly residency, that is they are princely and royal, appropriate for sons of God.

<sup>28</sup> I Cor. 15:42-44, 51-53.

<sup>29</sup> Rev. 4:4; 5:8.

<sup>30</sup> Matt. 25:23.

<sup>31</sup> Rev. 5:13-14.

<sup>32</sup> Rev. 7:9-10; 15:2-4.

<sup>33</sup> Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8.

## (1) Raiment of gold.

Glorified bodies require suitable clothing. So the heavenly apparel they are draped with shines with a golden hue that perfectly matches their holy complexion; it will never soil or wear out; it will never go out of fashion; its radiance will never dim.

## (2) Instruments of praise.

Melody and praise, to the accompaniment of harps under the the direction of the four and twenty elders, unite in the truth praise of the King. Moses is a popular composer while the theme of the Lamb predominates (Rev. 5:8-14; 14:2; 15:3).

## (3) Crowns of reward.

Paul will be there with his “crown of righteousness” (II Tim. 4:8). James will probably wear a “crown of life” (Jas. 1:12). Peter may have received a “crown of glory” (I Pet. 5:4). The four and twenty elders will have “crowns of gold,” yet all will follow their example of casting these awards before the feet of the King as an act of submissive and adoring worship (Rev. 4:4, 10).

## c. They hear the peal of bells in their honor.

Now they heard them with such a gentle and melodious chime, as had only been like an echo before, that as a result they began to regard their earthly counterpart as being quite crude. Now they learned that this joyous sound was in celebration of their safe arrival. Now they heard the inviting refrain: “Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt. 25:21).

## d. They join in singing the praise of the King.

With hearts so full demanding release, the pilgrims joined in singing with ability and enjoyment they had never known before. Thus the whole surrounding community became a glorious choir that sang the praise of the triune God, the Lamb of God, that is Abraham's God, as Thomas Olivers has written.

The whole triumphant host  
 Give thanks to God on high:  
 ‘Hail, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!’  
 They ever cry.  
 Hail, Abraham's God and ours!  
 We join the heavenly lays;  
 And celebrate with all our powers  
 His endless praise.

## 4. The King commands the closing of the gate.

And after that they closed the gates; and because of what I had seen of this glorious sight, I [*Bunyan*] wished myself to have been inside among them.

Bunyan the narrator, outside the Celestial City, has seen the procession retire into the welcoming throng within the walls of the holy metropolis. He has lost sight of his beloved pilgrims. Now his outside perspective seems deserted and lonely; all the activity is inside and he is on the outside. He sorrowfully anticipates that the gate will be shut in a brief moment.

## a. Bunyan's glimpse of the economy of heaven.

Like Paul, he is privileged to see vistas of heaven that it is not normally lawful for an earthly man to behold (II Cor. 12:2-4). Yet, with his literary aptitude and permission, the gifted tinker does seem to lift us up also to those realms where we may watch and wonder alongside of him.



Passing through the gates of the Celestial City

## (1) The shimmering inner glory of the City.

Like a beggar peeping in through the gate of a palatial mansion and coveting the sumptuous appointments and luxurious finery, so Bunyan, sensing his poverty, desires his promised wealth in the City of God (Rev. 7:9-10; 15:2-4). He groans in his earthly body longing to be clothed with heavenly garments (II Cor. 5:4); he longs for the society of heaven.

## (2) The throne of God surrounded by angels.

The angelic praise of the holiness of God is, for Bunyan, very desirable and in no way threatening (Is. 6:13; Rev. 4:8). The exaltation of the glory of God in such a setting is his supreme ambition. He can declare with Asaph: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Ps. 73:25).

## (3) The closed Gate conceals the glory.

The command of the King, who populates his City according to his own determination, calls for the Gate to be secured; heaven is not an open community. So the glory fades and the rejoicing becomes muffled. And for Bunyan, he has no alternative except to resume his own pilgrimage and travel with greater expectation than ever.

## b. Bunyan's yearning for residency in heaven.

This is an exquisite touch of empathy. The author is communicating that what he writes about is the passion of his heart. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is not art for art's sake. Bunyan has not written to satisfy literary gratification, or to provide quiet entertainment for a cold winter's evening. No, his own soul throbs with desire for he has, through the eye of faith, beheld the "eternal weight of glory" of the world to come. Therefore, everything in this life is "momentary, light affliction" (II Cor. 4:17). Such trials are not worth comparison with "the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). Thus the whole pilgrimage only has worthwhile significance when the glorious end is constantly kept in view. Thus Cheever writes:

The dangerous road I then pursue,  
And keep the glorious prize in view,  
With joyful hope elated;  
Strong in the Lord, in Him alone,  
Where he conducts I follow on  
With ardor unabated.

Lord, each day renew my strength,  
And let me see thy face at length,  
With all thy people yonder:  
With them in heaven thy love declare,  
And sing thy praise for ever there  
With gratitude and wonder.<sup>34</sup>

c. Application.

One of the common traits of notable Christians has been their heavenly mindedness, and Bunyan is undoubtedly an outstanding example. They sense the transitory nature of life and therefore “desire a better country, that is a heavenly one” (Heb. 11:16). They seek the Celestial City with a deadly earnestness that knows no earthly compromise for the simple reason that their vision of their desired destination is so gloriously overwhelming and real. For this reason, they want others to travel with the same sense of anticipation as they do, and thus their earthly ministry becomes intense and committed and futuristic. They become of great earthly good because they are so heavenly minded. Unfortunately, evangelical Christendom is not so heavenly minded today, notwithstanding its veneer of propositional declarations of faith. Rather its ethos is more of this world and man rather than heaven and God. It is life in this present age that dominates and not the future kingdom of Christ. And this being so, Bunyan’s conclusion here is so significant for us today. It reveals the shabbiness of our heaven-speak, the carnality of our eternal life in the here and now. We need a fresh awakening to the glory of heaven as *The Pilgrim’s Progress* presents it, or else we may find ourselves participating in the tragedy of the final scene which now follows.

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<sup>34</sup> Cheever, *Lectures on Bunyan*, p. 286.