

Bethel Christian Fellowship
Fair Lawn, NJ

The Story Of The Pilgrim's Progress (24):
The Enchanted Ground (Part One)

May 21, 2017

No sooner do the pilgrims leave the Flatterer and Atheist behind than they enter a certain country called the Enchanted Ground. It's "enchanted" because there's a magical power that casts a spell over the minds and hearts of unsuspecting pilgrims. It creates an overwhelming desire to fall asleep, but those who succumb to it may never wake up. Like carbon monoxide escaping into the air we breathe, the spiritual atmosphere in the Enchanted Ground is just as deadly. Here's how Bunyan introduces this next part of our story:

I saw then in my dream that they went on till they came into a certain country where the air naturally tended to cause drowsiness in those unaccustomed to it. Hopeful's mind began to grow dull, and he became very sleepy. He then said to Christian, "I'm getting so drowsy that I can hardly keep my eyes open. Let's lie down here and take a short nap."

"No way!" said Christian. "If we sleep here, we may never wake up."

"Why not, my brother? Sleep is sweet to one who is exhausted. We may be refreshed if we take a nap."

"Don't you remember that one of the Shepherds warned us to beware of the Enchanted Ground? He meant that we should beware of sleeping there, 'So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep but let us be alert and self-controlled'" [1 Thessalonians 5:6].

1. Q. What is Christian's remedy for keeping each other awake?

A. It's conversing about their spiritual experiences: "... to keep the drowsiness of this place from overcoming us, let's keep talking about those things that edify our spirits." Christian begins the conversation by asking Hopeful to tell how he was converted from the worldly indulgences in Vanity Fair to the pilgrim way. Thus begins the personal story of Hopeful's conversion to Christ:

"I will ask you a question," Christian said. "How did you first decide to begin this pilgrimage?"

"Do you mean, how did I first come to care about my soul's welfare?" asked Hopeful.

"Yes, that's what I mean."

"For a long time I continued to delight in those things that are seen, which were sold at our fair—things that I now believe would have drawn me into Hell and destruction if I had continued with them."

"And what were those things?" asked Christian.

"All the treasures and riches of the world. Oh, I also found great pleasure in riotous behavior, wild parties, drinking, swearing, lying, immorality, Sabbath-breaking, and other things that contribute to the soul's destruction."

2. Q. What will make Hopeful's testimony so special?

A. It's the clearest explanation of saving faith in the entire story, one which begins with how Hopeful came to see the inevitable consequence of his former sinful life.

"But I heard from you and also from beloved Faithful, who died in Vanity Fair for his faith and righteous living, that the consequence of the things I was doing is death. I heard that because of these things, the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. Then I considered these and other things pertaining to God."

"And did you at once fall under the power of this conviction?"

"No, I wasn't immediately willing to admit the evil of sin or to acknowledge the damnation resulting from it. At first, when my mind began to be shaken by the Word, I tried to shut my eyes to its light."

3. Q. What was it that led Hopeful to a renewed conviction of sin?

A. He continued to listen to the Word of God. Here's how he describes the impact of God's Word upon his soul:

"Oh, several things brought it upon me, especially such sayings as these: 'All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away' [Isaiah 64:6]. 'Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ' [Galatians 2:16]. 'So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty'" [Luke 17:10]. I heard many other sayings like this also. From these I began to reason with myself along this line: 'If all my righteous acts are like filthy rags, and if obeying the law can justify no one, and if, when we have done everything we can, we are still unworthy, then it is foolishness to think that I can ever see Heaven by trying to be good.'"

4. Q. How then did Hopeful come to see his need for the Lord Jesus Christ?

A. Faithful explained His atoning death (in which our punishment for sin was placed on Him) and our justification through faith (by which we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ). Here's a good summary of Faithful's explanation (taken from J. I. Packer, "Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan" in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to The Puritan Classics*):

H. He told me, That unless I could obtain the righteousness of a man that never had sinned, neither mine own, nor all the Righteousness of the World could save me.

C. And did you ask him what man this was, and how you must be justified by him?

H. Yes, and he told me it was the Lord Jesus. . . . Thus, said he, you must be justified by him, even by trusting to what he hath done by himself in the days of his flesh, and suffered when he did hang on the Tree. . . . He bid me go to him . . . for I was invited to come. . . . Then I asked him, What must I do when I came? And he told me, I must entreat upon my knees, with all my heart and soul, the Father to reveal him to me.

5. Q. What then did Faithful explain to Hopeful?

A. He taught him how to pray the Puritan equivalent of what is often referred to today as “the sinner’s prayer.” (Let’s be sure to note the difference!)

H. Then I asked him further, How I must make my supplication to him? . . . and he bid me say to this effect, God be merciful to me a sinner, and make me to know and believe in Jesus Christ. . . . Lord, I have heard that thou art a merciful God, and hast obtained that thy Son Jesus Christ should be the Savior of the World; and moreover, that thou art willing to bestow him upon such a poor sinner as I am. . . . Magnify thy grace in the Salvation of my soul, through thy Son Jesus Christ, Amen.

6. Q. Once Hopeful realized that the Lord had bestowed this saving grace upon him, what happened to him?

A. He was overwhelmed by the Lord’s love and salvation for him, *and* he was changed. He loved the Lord’s name (instead of using it in vain); he loved the Lord’s people (more than those in the town of Vanity); he loved the ways of Christ (as opposed to the ways of the world). His testimony reflects the clear teaching of the New Testament: saving faith is repentant faith, which *necessarily* leads to a changed life:

H. And now was my heart full of joy, mine eyes full of tears, and mine affections running over with love to the Name, People, and Ways of Jesus Christ.

C. This was a Revelation of Christ to your soul indeed. But tell me particularly what effect this had upon your spirit.

H. It made me see that God the Father, though he be just, can justly justify the coming sinner. It made me greatly ashamed of the vileness of my former life, and confounded me with the sense of mine own Ignorance; for there never came thought into my heart before now that showed me so the beauty of Jesus Christ.

It made me love a holy life, and long to do something for the Honour and Glory of the name of the Lord Jesus.

7. Q. How else is the meaning of saving faith re-enforced in this part of the story?

A. When the character of Ignorance re-appears, the pilgrims once again challenge his self-deceived religion of good works. But after a lengthy discussion, it’s clear that Ignorance is just as stubbornly resistant to the gospel of grace. Eventually Christian loses patience with the continued rebuttals of Ignorance; his response is a succinct summary of the meaning of true, saving faith:

“Ignorance is your name, and it fits you perfectly,” said Christian. “Even your answer demonstrates what I say. You are ignorant of what justifying righteousness is; you are just as ignorant of how to secure your soul by faith from the terrible wrath of God. Yes, you are also ignorant of the true effects of saving faith in Christ’s righteousness, those effects being a bowing and surrendering of the heart to God in Christ, a love for His Name, His Word, His ways, and His people—and not as you ignorantly imagine.”

8. Q. What then happens after Christian and Hopeful leave Ignorance behind?

A. Christian begins another extended discourse, this time on “the fear of the Lord,” which is “the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 1:7). Such godly fear, he says, “can be recognized by three things” – it is caused by a conviction of sin; it drives the soul to Christ; and it maintains within the soul a deep reverence for God, His Word, and His ways. Christian then tells Hopeful of Mr. Temporary, who was a pilgrim for a while but who later apostatized from the faith. He traces this man’s spiritual demise stage by stage. He gives nine reasons to Hopeful, which is one of the best analyses of spiritual decline that we will ever read (don’t miss our next study!). Clearly Christian never tires of discussing spiritual truths; he desperately wants to keep Hopeful awake as they cross the Enchanted Ground.

9. Q. So what should we do to keep ourselves spiritually alert whenever we find ourselves in the Enchanted Ground?

A. We should *plan* to keep Christian company and maintain Christian fellowship, and to talk about the things of the Lord. In the words of the author to the faint-hearted Hebrews, “*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near*” (Heb. 10:24-25).

Well over a century ago, Charles Haddon Spurgeon lamented the spiritual lethargy of the church in his day. In his sermon on “The Enchanted Ground,” he said the following: “There are, no doubt, many of us who are passing over this plain; and I fear that this is the condition of the majority of churches in the present day. They are lying down on the settles (sinking sediment) of lukewarmness in the harbours (restful shelters) of the Enchanted Ground. There is not that activity and zeal we could wish to see among them; they are not perhaps notably heterodox (unorthodox); they may not be invaded by the lion of persecution; but they are lying down to slumber God grant that His servants may be the means of arousing the Church from its lethargy, and stirring it up from its slumbers, lest haply (perhaps) professors should sleep the sleep of death” (Pictures From Pilgrim’s Progress: A Commentary on Portions of John Bunyan’s Immortal Allegory). Those words are just as relevant for the church in our day, and they provide just as clear a warning. For as the author of Hebrews has also written, “*So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised*” (Hebrews 10:35-36).