

Pilgrim's Progress (Part 7)

Quote: "Of all the Temptations that ever I met with in my life, to question the being of God, and the truth of his Gospel, is the worst, and worst to be born." — John Bunyan

● Recap

- Vanity & it's Fair (Vanity Fair)
 - (ask what this could be compared to in today's Christian walk)
 - what 3 things made Christian & Faithful stand out to the citizens of Vanity?
 - What happened to Faithful?
 - Who is Hopeful?
- Hill of Lucre
- Monument by the Way

● The River of God

- Meadow
 - several days & nights
 - ate, rested, slept (this was a safe place to sleep)
- the Way left the River (separate directions)
- the Way became rough
 - they kept wishing for an easier way
 - "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way" (Numbers 21:4)
 - discuss tract – "Cutting Off the Cross" (<http://godsacres.org/tract.CuttingOfftheCross.html>)

● By-Path Meadow

- stile leading from the Way to this meadow
 - definition "stile": set of steps for crossing a wall
 - spiritual stiles: temptations to leave the path
 - recognize "stiles" that have proved to be a danger in the past & avoid them at all costs
- By-Path seems to run alongside of the Way
 - just outside of the fence
 - the fence is there for a reason (protection, to keep pilgrims IN the Way)
- Hopeful is unsure, but Christian persuades him
- (1) Vain-Confidence was walking ahead
 - Christian & Hopeful have "vain confidence" in thinking they can choose this path without repercussions
 - Christian & Hopeful call out to ask Vain-Confidence where he is going
 - Vain-Confidence tells them, "The Celestial Gate"
 - they don't know this traveler (unknown & unproven); yet they ask for and are reassured by his advice
- Darkness Falls
 - Christian & Hopeful lose sight of Vain-Confidence
 - Vain-Confidence fell into a deep pit prepared by the owner of these grounds
 - dashed to pieces
 - Christian & Hopeful called out to Vain-Confidence
 - * heard only groaning
 - Christian & Hopeful realize their error & determine to go back to the Way
 - thunder, rain, and floods prevented their return
 - * "It is easier going out of the way when we are in, than going in when we are out."

- + Discuss the ease of leaving the Christian walk versus the difficulty of returning
 - so important to stay in the Way, regardless of how easy or alluring By-Path is
 - found shelter & fell asleep
- **Doubting Castle**
 - Giant Despair
 - while walking up & down his fields, finds Christian & Hopeful (trespassers)
 - Christian doesn't try to use his sword on this giant; despair makes him weak¹
 - imprisoned in Doubting Castle
 - from Wednesday morning until Saturday night (escaped Sunday morning)
 - Christ was taken to the Cross Wednesday morning
 - Christ arose from the grave Sunday morning
 - * this would've been the time of greatest despair for the disciples
 - + doubts concerning Christ & His message
 - based on Bunyan's own experiences with despair
 - * "I found it a hard work now to pray to God, because despair was swallowing me up" (*Grace Abounding* by John Bunyan).
 - Diffidence (wife of Giant Despair)
 - (definition "diffidence": mistrust, skeptical)
 - counsels her husband to beat the prisoners unmercifully
 - **Thursday:** prisoners are beat with a cudgel (club) from the crab-tree
 - * crab-tree cudgel: It was once quite common in England to use a stick of crab-apple wood as a weapon.
 - + The wood is often knotty, and the tree has a thorny bark.
 - * why did Giant Despair need to cut a new cudgel? Why not use an old one?
 - + club fashioned according to the weaknesses of the prisoner
 - * beat with despair, such as:
 - + there is no way out of this problem
 - + you are a constant failure (spiritual, academic, socially, etc.)
 - "you can never do anything right"
 - + doubts about whether you are really saved or not
 - + doubts concerning the reality of God
 - "Of all the Temptations that ever I met with in my life, to question the being of God, and the truth of his Gospel, is the worst, and worst to be born." (Bunyan)
 - + doubts about whether this is the right Way or not
 - perhaps other religions are just as good
 - + tenderheartedness: always feeling you didn't say or act right
 - **Friday:** prisoners are given the tools for suicide
 - * knife, halter (rope) & poison
 - * Despair: "Why should you choose to live, seeing it is attended with so much bitterness?"
 - * prisoners ask to be set free
 - + Despair fell into one of his fits & left them
 - had fits in sunshiny weather
 - when doubts & despair are brought into the Light, they are powerless

¹ http://www.bunyanministries.org/pp_commentary/25_com%20christian_and_hopeful_with_giant_despair.pdf

- John 1:5 – "And the Light shines on in the darkness, for the darkness has never overpowered it [put it out or absorbed it]" (The Amplified Bible)
- Light = Christ or the Word
- * The prisoners discuss how suicide would be easier than "this dungeon"
 - + Hopeful: "the Lord of the country to which we are going hath said, 'Thou shalt do no murder'"
 - forbidden to murder another or even one's own self
 - + Hopeful: "let us be patient and endure for awhile"
 - Christian fellowship is an excellent cure for despair
 - + Bunyan (through Hopeful's character) shows that suicide is wrong; perhaps refuting a work written by John Donne
 - Historical reference: John Donne (clergyman) wrote in defense of suicide, using Biblical examples, "including Jesus, Samson, Saul, and Judas Iscariot."²
 - This was published following the author's death (1631)
 - *Pilgrim's Progress* was published in 1678
- **Think on These Things**
 - Hopeful:
 - "Let us consider, the Lord of the country to which we are going"
 - "All the law is not in the hand of Giant Despair"
 - "Others have been taken by him as well as we, and yet have escaped out of his hands"
 - Despair might die or have another fit (with additional Light)³
- **Giant Despair Returns**
 - furious the prisoners are still alive
 - prisoners are barely alive
 - no bread (Bread of Life) or water (Holy Spirit)
 - more threatenings
 - Christian "swoons"; is tempted to end it all
 - Hopeful again encourages Christian
 - "Remember" – Apollyon, Valley of the Shadow of Death, Vanity Fair
 - "What hardship, terror, and amazement hast thou already gone through"
 - Isaiah 46:9 – "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me"
 - * draw encouragement from past victories
- **Castle-Yard Full of Bones & Skulls**
 - **Saturday:** Diffidence tells Despair to show them the bones & skulls of other pilgrims who committed suicide
 - Diffidence (mistrust, skepticism) is the driving force behind Despair
 - Despair doesn't act without her prompting
 - Mistrust & skepticism of the Gospel, the Way, the truth is the beginning of despair
 - Despair promises to tear them into pieces in 10 days
 - why the delay?
 - can Despair "kill" the prisoners or only provide the "tools" of suicide?

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biathanatos>

³ http://www.bunyanministries.org/pp_commentary/25_com%20christian_and_hopeful_with_giant_despair.pdf

- Prisoners beaten & returned to their prison
- **Midnight**
 - Prisoners began to pray
 - Acts 16:25 – "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed"
 - Prayed all night
- **Key of Promise**
 - Christian remembers the key he has "in my bosom"
 - bosom = heart
 - why the heart and not his pocket?
 - Psalm 119:11 – "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."
 - Discuss the importance of "hiding" the Word in your heart for future needs
 - * there are many Scriptures that are hard to understand ("dark sayings"; Psalm 78:2)
 - * every Scripture has its "mate" (Isaiah 34:6)
 - + store up the Word in your heart; later, when the "mate" is read, understanding will come
 - God's Word is full of promises
 - find one that fits the "lock" of your situation
 - Christian's key unlocked 3 locks in Doubting Castle
 - * last lock was "damnably hard" (devilishly tight)⁴
 - every child of God has access to exactly the "key" that will deliver him from Doubting Castle
 - Examples of promises:
 - "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).
 - "And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs" (Philippians 4:19).
 - "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).
 - "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19).
 - (ask for other examples)
- **Deliverance**
 - Sunday morning
 - just as the Resurrection occurred on Sunday morning, dispelling all doubts and despair in Jesus' followers
 - Despair tried to go after them but had another of his fits
 - Back on the King's Highway
 - Went back over the stile
 - Set up a pillar to warn future pilgrims
 - "Over this stile is the way to Doubting Castle, which is kept by Giant Despair, who despiseth the King of the Celestial country, and seeks to destroy his holy pilgrims."
 - Young person, consider yourself warned concerning the stiles (temptations) that lead to By-Path Meadow
- **Pilgrim's Progress – Part 2**
 - Diffidence & Despair are killed & Doubting Castle is torn down by Great Heart, old Honest, and four young men

⁴ http://www.bunyanministries.org/pp_commentary/25_com%20christian_and_hopeful_with_giant_despair.pdf