CHRISTIAN ENTERS IN AT THE GATE (Part II)

He’s in through the gate! He has knocked, and it has been opened to him. He has gained entrance and he is with Mr. Goodwill. Christian is on a new path now that will inevitably lead him by the way of the cross. … Has it been worth it so far, Christian? Are you glad you’re there on this side of the gate, and not on the other side? Oh yes, he told Mr Goodwill, “Now I begin to reap the benefit of my hazards”. … The hymn describes how he felt, “It will be worth it all when we see Jesus, Life’s trials will seem so small when we see Christ; One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase.”

Ahead of him stretched a road he knew would eventually take him to the Celestial City. How rough or how smooth his travelling conditions would depend on how he kept the instructions he would be given throughout his journey. Granted, there would be times, - through no fault of his own, - he would struggle, but during those occasions he would experience the closeness of the presence of God.

… And Goodwill encouraged him, “An open door is set before thee and no man can shut it”. Those were the same words of comfort and encouragement the Lord Jesus gave the faithful church in Philadelphia (cf. Rev. 3:8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name). Christian was being assured of the free access along this narrow way, with the guarantee it cannot be closed by human endeavours. No matter how hard they try, there can be none able to strip him of his salvation … Once in Christ, in Christ forever! Augustus Toplady wrote, “A sovereign protector I have, Unseen, yet for ever at hand, Unchangeably faithful to save, Almighty to rule and command. He smiles and my comforts abound; His grace as the dew shall descend; And walls of salvation surround The soul He delights to defend.”

Then, Christian is led by Goodwill to review his journey thus far. He cast his mind back to how Obstinate and Pliable assessed the worthiness or otherwise of his venture. Basically, they thought it lacked value, and the need for an overwhelming commitment. He also heard it in the voices of his wife and children as they cried after him … trying to get him to give up on his search. It could so easily have caused him to reconsider and return … had he not put his fingers into his ears and carried on.

But the opposition and the temptations to return dogged him consistently. When it wasn’t Pliable’s ‘chirping away’ in his ear as they travelled along the road, it then became the panic and fear of sinking in the Slough of Despond. …
And shortly after Help had lifted him out of the slough/pit, Mr. Worldly Wiseman appeared and captivated him with promises of an easy gospel that would give him all the privileges but without any of the effort. However, Mr. Worldly Wiseman’s gospel proved elusive and Christian had to abandon his quest and return to the former path in order to reach the wicket gate.

Each step of the way the overriding hand of God was unmistakably guiding him. I’m sure you can also look back and see the process whereby God led you to be saved. You can recognise how He put His plan into action. … Christian recognised it too, “Why, truly, I do not know what had become of me there, had not Evangelist happily met me again, as I was musing in the midst of my dumps; but it was God’s mercy that he came to me again, for else I had never come hither. But now I am come, such a one as I am, more fit, indeed, for death, by that mountain, than thus to stand talking with my Lord; but, O! what a favour is this to me, that yet I am admitted entrance here!”

Why do you think Mr. Goodwill is leading Christian to look back and ‘go over’ his experiences since leaving the City of Destruction? Sometimes we don’t like to look back for it can stir up old memories that might be best left forgotten. Mr. Goodwill, however, wanted Christian to acknowledge God’s hand of guidance, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us (I Sam. 7:12). This was also important for the way ahead. … Yes, the Lord has brought me this far … and, when you see His hand in your life, then it gives you further confidence that He will safely bring you to your future destination in Heaven! Those who come to Him through saving faith will never be cast from His presence (Jn. 6:37). That is their blessed hope!

Listen to some more words of close and personal intimacy spoken by Mr. Goodwill … Here is our Saviour speaking, “and therefore, good Christian, come a little way with me, and I will teach thee about the way thou must go. Look before thee; dost thou see this narrow way? THAT is the way thou must go; it was cast up by the patriarchs, prophets, Christ, and his apostles; and it is as straight as a rule can make it. This is the way thou must go.” Such is the instruction given by the living Word of God! … This is not the broad way, but the narrow way. Along the broad way, its travellers can choose any number of directions and options to try … They will be happy to accommodate themselves in all kinds of circumstances to suit their tastes, - there is no shortage of special offers … but that is not the direction the believer takes. The people of God have only one direction that is described as The Way (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14,22). It’s a direction they must travel together, - that is why it is so important for harmony among us …
We encourage each other along the narrow way … facing the various enemies together, bearing hardships together, and not indulging in any practices contrary to the instructions of God’s Word.

Christian, - to his cost, - had already learned there are many twists and turns that are seductively appealing to the traveller to lead him astray … and that was why Goodwill was informing him he needs to distinguish the difference between right and wrong, as far as God is concerned. In his quest, the Lord would make known those things to him.

Some people say, there’s nothing in the Bible that tells me I should not be involved in this activity or in that … How do you answer them? Well, the way I would answer them is … If the Lord does not tell you to follow along that path, then why take it?! If you are wondering ‘should I or shouldn’t I’ … would that not be an indication the Holy Spirit is working through your conscience to tell you that you shouldn’t! … And then there are those who blatantly disobey God’s Word … the same Word of God that sets out before us the plain distinction between the right path we should travel and the wrong paths of disobedience we should avoid at all costs! … I don’t care if you can tell me it worked for you … The issue at hand is our obedience to the Word of God, and its clear instruction as we journey along the path that leads us to Heaven.

You will see here that Christian is concerned he will lose his way. He lost the way before when he followed Mr. Worldly Wiseman’s directions … but Mr. Goodwill assures him he is on the right road now!

And notice he is becoming increasingly weary of his heavy burden. It is getting no lighter, and he longs to lay it down … “Help me off with it, Mr. Goodwill!” … Not just yet, Christian, “be content to bear it, until thou comest to the place of deliverance; for there it will fall from thy back of itself.” You’ll not be able to release it yourself … but when you come to that place of deliverance, it will roll away! Nothing can keep it strapped to you when God commands it to go!

In the meantime, he was to leave the vicinity of the gate through which he has just recently passed, and he is to travel further into the distance to meet another man. How it is that in our walk with the Lord we never stand still! This next man he would meet “would show him excellent things”. At the house of Interpreter he would receive all the foundational knowledge he would need to keep pressing on. He would receive a deeper understanding as to the work of the Saviour, and a clearer vision of the grace of God demonstrated at the cross! …
At that point his load, - his burden, - would be lifted at Calvary and replaced with God-given assurance, endurance, perseverance and resolve.

Knowing, then, the privileges and pleasures of Christ that lay ahead “Christian began to gird up his loins, and to address himself to his journey”. … No turning back, no turning back!

At the next stage, - at the house of the Interpreter, - profitable and wonderful truths will be revealed to him. Gradually, the Lord is teaching him. He is not deluged with information he has to collate and assess by himself. The Holy Spirit is gently and steadily showing him what he needs to know. These were truths that only the authentic citizens of that Kingdom can know. … With a new ‘skip in his step’ he sets off in his new journey!

As long as we remain in this world we are on the same journey … and any journey, - by definition, - is defined by the ongoing requirement to keep pressing forward, … It is never God’s will for His people to stand still and ‘put down roots’ in this world. … “This world is not my home I’m just passing through; My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue”.

And it’s never God’s will for His people to become so comfortable that we’re not looking forward to moving on to that place where we shall meet Him … And that’s the reason we long for Heaven, because that is where we shall see Him face-to-face!

You are confident you are on that road, aren’t you? You may have burdens and difficulties to face … but you know you are going home to Glory. Heaven is your destination. It is one of the most important things for us to be convinced about … that the moment we leave this scene of time, we’ll be with the Lord! None of us are going to be here forever … but in Heaven, eternity stretches out before us. There we shall see Jesus. We shall see our family, our loved ones and our friends who have died in Christ … and we shall be there forever.

Indeed, it gives added meaning to those four words of introduction into the next section, “Then he went on …” May the Lord encourage us as we go on with Him! Amen.