PARLOUR, PASSION & PATIENCE

After having entered the house of the Interpreter, Christian was led into a very large parlour, i.e. living room. It was so full of dust, though, because it was never cleaned. So, Interpreter called for a man to start sweeping … but there was such dust Christian started to choke! Interpreter called for a ‘gracious lady’ who sprinkled water over the room and then began sweeping and cleaning. The preparations this lady had made meant the dust was no longer flying about, and so Christian stopped his choking. … What is the significance of the picture John Bunyan is presenting us with?

Christian has walked through the wicket gate; he has left behind him the stringent judicial requirements of Mr Legality and his associates, and he had wisely decided to abandon climbing any further the imposing Mount Sinai. Yet, something of their legacy remained with him, for example, how could he possibly think he could meet the high standards of being a Christian? He was a simple soul, a young Christian in the faith, and he felt so inadequate of his high calling in Christ.

Each of us, - at some time or another in our Christian experience, - can identify with how he felt. We have felt so undeserving of God’s grace, and we found ourselves facing our own inadequacies … How could God possibly love someone like me? I can’t live up to being a Christian … And we can become susceptible to all kinds of thoughts that dampen our spirit to be joyful and to grow in our faith. This section of the story, then, is an illustration of how God intervenes and encourages His people through the sanctifying and healing effects that the message of the Gospel brings to us when we feel incapable.

The dusty room … the sweeper of the dust that fills the air causing Christian to choke … the sprinkler of the water. What does it all mean? Bunyan is contrasting the old Law with the new, - he is portraying the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ. Bunyan explains in The Doctrine of the Law and Grace, “so long as people are ignorant of the nature of the law, and of their being under it, that is under the curse and condemning power of it, by reason of their sin against it - so long they will be careless, and negligent as to the enquiring after the true knowledge of the gospel.” In other words, if the sinful state of your heart is not made clear to you, it will never trouble you … even though it declares you guilty! However, when the Law, - the sweeper, - begins to make you aware of the dust and dirt, you then become troubled in your sin. Rom. 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin … 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound.
It is the Law that has aroused your conscience to understand how far short we fall (cf. Rom. 3:23). There was nothing wrong with the Law of Moses because it was instituted by God, - the Law of the Lord is perfect (Ps. 19:7), - but the Law does not save … Its purpose is to show us the standards God requires … Those standards are higher than anyone can achieve through their own ability, and they show the sinner in whose heart sin reigns the awfulness of their state before God’s holy righteousness.

Then, onto the scene comes the ‘damsel’, and she gently sprinkles throughout the room with the water … “When she had done, it was swept and cleansed with pleasure”. What a simple work of grace! … The Law that showed up the dust and the dirt … ‘the damsel’ came and sprinkled grace upon it. By doing so, she subdued the sin and made the heart pliable to receive the pleasures of the Gospel. She brought to Christian’s attention that there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:1). The cleansing agency of the Holy Spirit in salvation made the heart fit for habitation by the King of Glory!

The Gospel alone has the power to vanquish sin and produce the quality of righteousness God requires … both in the initial conversion and also in the ongoing work of sanctification throughout the believer’s life on earth.

The parlour having been cleansed, Christian and Interpreter moved into a smaller room were two little children were sitting. Their names were Passion and Patience. Christian immediately recognised the difference in the two children, - Passion (the eldest) wasn’t happy, whereas Patience was very quiet and content. … The inquisitive Christian asked why this was.

Interpreter then explained how Passion, a privileged child of the governor, knew that although one day he would share all the governor’s wealth and comforts … he wasn’t content to wait … he wanted it all now! James used a term that very aptly describes this young child Passion … double-minded … unstable in all his ways (1:12). He craved the things of the world … not being content, - like Patience, - to wait for the promised inheritance. He wanted the things of Heaven, but he also wanted the things this world offered now! … “As here thou seest, passion will have all now, this year, that is to say, in this world; so are the men of this world: They must have all their good things now; they cannot stay till the next year, that is, until the next world, for their portion of good.”
Consequently, Passion was neither happy nor prepared … and he even began to
depreciate and belittle Patience who was looking forward with silent and contented
anticipation of his inheritance. Passion mocked him because, - as far as he was
concerned, - Patience had no drive and no ‘push’.

Many Christians today aren’t willing to wait for the Holy Spirit to work in the way
they would want Him to, or as quickly … so they start to involve themselves in
activities that imitate the world. They want to see results in a similar man to those
in the business and secular sectors! They are like Passion! … And they ‘run down’
those ‘simple’ churches who don’t take part in the plans and programmes they
initiate in tandem with the rest! Their walk is by sight rather than by faith, by
feeling and emotion rather than by the future promise of God and His Word. They
measure the successfulness of their activities by time rather than by eternity … by
the commendations of men rather than the Word of God.

You see, Patience was submissive to the governor’s will and promises. He was
willing to rely and wait for the Governor. He trusted his master, and he knew his
master had his best interests at heart. As Paul wrote, II Cor. 4:16 For which cause we
faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding
and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the
things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which
are not seen are eternal. … Patience quietly and contentedly waited for his coming
treasure, even in the face of ridicule!

I’ll let you into a secret … I would love for us to be a big church so that we could
have more dedicated people and more opportunities to impact for God on the local
community. I would love to have young people coming in, and the Word of God
directing them in their family life and in the workplace. I would love to see us
engage more in evangelism … But we must work with how God has blessed us. …
And God has blessed our small church. How else would we continue to keep on
going? It is by God’s grace we are still here. If we tried to maintain our presence by
using business company policies, we would fail … we’d go bankrupt! … But we
are here because it continues to be God’s will for us to be here!

As Christians, we daren’t measure ‘success’ in the way the world measures success
… and it is unfair to the Lord. They judge by results … figures and numbers they
can ‘add-up’, while all the time God is using different calculations.
Patience, therefore, demonstrates the believer whose confidence in the present and in the future is all in God. He is a child trusting in the promised reward ... as David wrote, Ps. 16:5 The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. ... And as Peter described, I Pet. 1:4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. ... Patience is eagerly anticipating and looking forward to Heaven, while Passion’s view has been diminished by lusting after the things of this world.

Just look at Patience again, for a moment ... sitting there quietly and contently as Passion fidgets and fumbles. To be ‘uncontent’ with what God has blessed you with is one of the saddest signs any Christian can display. God, I want more ... and God, I want more of this world while I’m in it. I’ll take something of Your grace but I also want all that my friends have too. And God, if You are not prepared to give those things of the world to me, ... I’ll go and get them myself ... and they might even take me away from my fellowship, and from the faith I ought to have ... but I’m prepared to do what is necessary ... But God, when it comes my time to leave this earth I also want all that You have there in Heaven for me as well. Yes, I’ll use my friends to get all this world can give me ... and then I’ll use the faith I say have in You to grab that which I reckon I’m entitled to have in eternity.

Quite rightly, Christian saw the significance in what he was being taught, and he asked, “Expound this matter more fully to me.” ... And very simply Christian learned the lessons that are so important for us to take hold of also:
1. Patience remains content with the future promises of Heaven that belong to God’s faithful people alone. They are God’s promises, such as Jn. 14:3 I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.
2. When all the so-called pleasures of the world that men and women such as Passion accumulated will have disappeared and vanished, the true child of God, - like Patience, - will be even more content and satisfied than ever ... “Oh, the soul-thrilling rapture when I view His blessed face, And the lustre of His kindly beaming eye; How my full heart will praise Him for the mercy, love and grace, That prepare for me a mansion in the sky.”
3. ... And Interpreter assured Christian, “The glory of the next world will never wear out” ... So therefore, as Paul wrote, Col. 3:2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

May God, then, grant us the spirit of Patience ... waiting for and trusting in the promises of the Father, I Jn. 3:2 now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. 3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.