THE WALLS OF SALVATION!

Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation (Isaiah 26:1 In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks). Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Sometimes when you hear a person giving their testimony they spend a great deal of time telling you what their life was like up until the moment they came to the Lord Jesus. Then, after that conversion experience, the testimony often comes to an abrupt conclusion. However, John Bunyan reminds us salvation is an ongoing work of God’s grace. He illustrates this teaching … Christian **has been saved** at the wicket gate, - that was the moment he believed and passed ‘from death unto life’. That was the moment he was saved. Some folk can’t really tell you when that moment was, though. They know they are saved, but they cannot give you the exact time of the exact day of the exact month … but there is no doubt about it, they **know** they are soundly saved by God’s grace.

However, not only is our salvation to be restricted to some experience in the past, - that is, when we **have been** saved, - it is also a **progressive** and an ongoing experience. Our salvation in Christ does not stand still, - I was saved forty years ago, and that’s it! … No, we see here that while Christian **had been** saved when he passed through the gate, he progressed in **being saved** at the house of the Interpreter as he moved from room to room and observed life’s lessons. And this **progression** in our salvation is known as ‘sanctification’. Sanctification is the process whereby the Holy Spirit works to conform us and mould us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, as Christian **progresses** towards the cross, Bunyan watches as the heavy burden on Christian’s back rolled away. This was the place of deliverance, where those issues he continued to contend with rolled away, once and for all.

Many of us know what it is like, - even after we have come to Christ, - to battle with problems and concerns that weigh so heavily upon us. Perhaps it is a sin we have found so difficult to overcome … Maybe it has been old memories we have never been able to forget … and they have been hampering our walk with God. Some folk have addictions they are battling with, and they have tried to give them up … Maybe we’re holding on to friends and relationships we know are inhibiting our faith … Is this what it is going to be like throughout the rest of my life … my Christian life?!
As he made his way along the highway, - with the wall of salvation on either side, - Christian began to pick up pace … even despite the weight on his back continuing to make its presence felt. But what also was happening was this … he was determined to continue to persevere in his new-found faith in Christ, - that is the proof of the sovereign work of grace … you don’t give up at the first hurdle, but you keep going on! The Holy Spirit would lead him to that place of victory where he would reap the reward of salvation … of “keeping his hand on the plough” (Lk. 9:62). Ultimately, on his arrival at the cross, that which was holding him back, - hindering his progression, - was forever taken from him. And his testimony was so vivid, “I saw it no more”.

Yes, what a journey he has had since leaving his family and friends back in the City of Destruction. He has had a difficult time … He had fallen into the Slough of Despond, because he hadn’t taken the necessary precautions to search out those stepping-stones that would have brought him across safely. … Later, he had gone from the path and become embroiled in conversation with the wily Mr. Worldly Wiseman who sent him away in the wrong direction.

Yes, of course, Mr. Worldly Wiseman was at grave fault, but Christian had been warned about the pitfalls and the dangers … so he should have been more aware! Often our Christian journey is made all the more arduous simply because we ignore God’s instructions and we listen to the wrong people and we take the wrong advice. We get an idea into our heads and we think we know better! … At that stage of the journey, Christian thought he knew better … and if there was an easier, more gentle and more pleasant way to the Celestial City … well, it’s worth considering. However, early in his journey it was pointed out to him that our ways are not God’s ways. Salvation is according to the directions God sets before us, and any other paths we would put in their place will only lead further away from God. Sadly, also, when we take such directions they leave their scars. Nonetheless, by God’s grace, Christian now approaches the place of deliverance.

Let’s look back at how the Lord has taken him on to the journey. We first found him in an awful dilemma. He was “clothed in rags standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a Book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back”. As he walked in the field outside the city he was met by a man called Evangelist. “What must I do to be saved?” Pilgrim cried, “I know I’m a sinner and I know as long as I stay in the place where I’ve been born, I’m under the judgment of God. I’m frightened! … What must I do to be saved?!”

Notice he asked this question while in the fields. Yes, the Lord was working and Pilgrim didn’t see it! God had taken him from the distractions of the city …
Often God takes us out of those places with which we are familiar in order to confront us with our sin. … If the Lord had left him in the City of Destruction, and never moved in his heart, and convicted him … there would have been no story to tell … no Pilgrim’s Progress. But God began His work to bring him out!

We’re not going any further in our study of the narrative this evening, except that I want you to cast your own mind back to how the Lord began working in your soul … the circumstances that He brought your way. Maybe He never featured in your life, - you never gave Him a thought, - but now as you look back, you can see the absolute miracle God worked in order to make you His own. You can see how He loved you, how He found you, and the various stages by which He brought you unto Himself. Our salvation is a miracle! …

When we first moved to Kirkcaldy, and we were living in Lady Nairn Avenue, I was coming to church one day. A elderly woman was working in her garden. She was friendly and it was obvious she wanted to find out who I was. So I told her I was the new minister in the Baptist Church. She didn’t have any time for church, though, and she made it very obvious to me. In fact she hated anything to do with it and anything to do with God! She told me she was a ‘Catholic atheist’ (whatever that is!); she explained to me she never went anywhere religious. She wasn’t interested. In fact, she told me on subsequent occasions she was going to Hell, and it didn’t bother her! … “Would you not like to come to our Wednesday lunch?” No, she was definite about that!

She told me, too, that she had a nephew who believed all that “Protestant God stuff”. He was studying across in Florida but was planning to come and live in the UK. I gave her my email address to give to him … he contacted me about his aunt and about the Lord’s work in Scotland.

Anyhow, she bought herself a computer … and the inevitable problems arose … and she had my phone number! 😊 I wouldn’t take anything for helping her so she insisted on taking Pearl, Philip and I out for a meal. Before the meal we prayed and gave thanks … but she was mocking God. When we moved to our present home we lost touch. I called to see her a few times after we left, but I could never get her in.

Then recently her nephew phoned to tell me she was seriously ill, and dying, … and he would like me to visit her. Since he told me the early signs of dementia had set in I asked him to come with me. We arranged a visit in June but, for some reason, the time chosen had to be changed and he was to get back to me. He only got back to me last week, and he told me she mightn’t last through the weekend.
We eventually went to see her on Monday afternoon. I would never have recognised her, and I don’t think she recognised me either. I mentioned a few memories to try and catch her attention, - she was tired, and her eyes were opening and closing. Bearing in mind how she previously was so antagonistic to the Gospel and God’s Word I asked the nephew to ask her if I could read a passage from the Bible. She agreed, and I read Psalm 23. It’s the best known psalm and I had hoped she knew of it … She did, - it happened to be one of the psalms her and her sister had learned as children. She began to cry. I explained to her about Heaven, and how the only means of entrance into Heaven is by believing in the Lord Jesus to take away her sin. She cried out!

She began to hold her nephew’s hand … and I stated the obvious … I told her the end of her life on earth was drawing to a close, and I also made plain to her she would enter into only one of two destinations, - Heaven or Hell. When someone is so close to death, we cannot avoid the realities. We mustn’t ‘pussy-foot’ around the inevitable. When I explained a little bit more of the Gospel, - in the simplest of terms, - I told her she must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and repent of her sin, in order to gain entrance into Heaven.

At that point she let go of her nephew’s hand, and she took my hand. Over recent weeks and months she hadn’t been lucid, - her mind was going, she hadn’t been saying much to anyone … but through her tears she was trying to speak to me. I asked her if she wanted to repent of her sins and believe in the Lord Jesus for salvation … and she nodded her head. She wasn’t fit for a long exposition of what it means to be a Christian, or for a long repetition of the sinner’s prayer. I simply asked her, “do you repent of your sins, and do you accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour?” She nodded her head again, and mouthed the word, “yes”. I shared with her a few more verses, and then we prayed.

… That woman who had been so antagonistic to the Gospel held my hand and closed her eyes, and we prayed. I believe the Lord was doing a work of grace in her heart. It was no accident the Lord gave us that opportunity, and it was a privilege to be there. She had mocked Him all her life. She had previously rejected all attempts to share with her the Gospel … but on Monday afternoon, I believe God answered the prayers of those who had been praying for her. … There is none so hard that God’s grace cannot save them!

On Tuesday morning I received an email from the nephew, “I dreaded the thought of seeing her, knowing that it would probably be the last time I’d ever see her again … and thinking that she was headed for an eternity of Hell. I really didn't
want to see her in the state … she was in, but I also knew that she needed to hear the Gospel one last time. So all weekend I steeled myself for what I thought would be a very depressing and unfruitful time. But the time we spent with her has filled me with great hope. In the past year or so, the most I've gotten out of her in terms of "conversation" was just a yes or no to whether she wanted a drink or another sweet. Today, though, it was a conversation, she was so engaged, and knew exactly what was going on."

But here is the most beautiful part of his email, “I don't know if she realized exactly who you were today, but she did recognize the message”. That is perhaps the greatest compliment I have ever been given. I didn’t intend for her to notice me, - I wasn’t there to be recognised and to present David Greenaway. For the message to enter her heart, I had to fade into the background, … as John wrote, He must increase, but I must decrease (Jn. 3:30).

Each one of us has an influence on other people, and, - as believers, - it is a Christian influence for which we are responsible in projecting. Evangelist was the man who influenced and spoke with Pilgrim in the fields just outside the City of Destruction. He told him simply and clearly about the gate and how he could find it. The Lord then guided and kept Pilgrim in his journey. And, Pilgrim’s success was guaranteed because when the Lord sets out to save the lost soul, He always achieves His purposes … without exception.

You and I have been praying for loved ones for many years and there doesn’t seem to be any sign of our prayers being answered. They are as hard today as ever they were … but don’t give up! Keep on praying and keep on upholding your witness so they know you have them ‘in your sights’, and that you care for not only their temporal welfare but also, - more importantly, - their eternal welfare. Yes, God is interested in them!

Remember how He led us along that path with a wall on either side, called ‘Salvation’. We didn’t recognise all He was doing at the time, but we see it more clearly now. We see how He brought everything together and how He drew us unto Himself. Yes, “we praise Him for all that is past, and trust Him for all that’s to come”. … And He has placed it within our hearts that what He did for us, He can also do for others. So, then, may we not lose hope but keep on trusting in the great promises of our wonderful God Who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).