TIMOROUS AND MISTRUST

John Bunyan is showing us the road to Heaven is not a lonely one. We all have many folk who encourage us … like Evangelist who encouraged Christian. They keep you focussed on the way ahead. The One Whose particular purpose this is, is the Holy Spirit … Jn. 14:25 he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance … Jn. 16:8 he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment … v.13 he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come v.14 He shall glorify me.

However, there are also others we meet on the road to Heaven… who are all too ready to give up when the going gets tough.

This was nothing new to Christian, of course. At the outset of his journey he had to contend with Obstinate and Pliable. Obstinate didn’t see any point to it, while Pliable tried it for a while but didn’t really consider it worth the hassle. Others, - like Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, - were looking for the easiest way. Passion, - who lived in the room of the House of the Interpreter, - was impatient, and he didn’t want to wait until the end of his journey for the reward … he wanted it now … and that affected his progress.

Timorous and Mistrust met Christian as he reached the summit of the Hill Difficulty. This would have been a great moment for him, - a great sense of achievement as he reached this important milestone on his journey. However, these two characters had bad news for him. They told him there were two lions along the road, and it would be wiser if he didn’t go any further.

Now, what kind of men were these? They didn’t know whether the lions were asleep or awake. It just takes a split second for them to sense your presence, to chase you, catch you and maul you to pieces! … But, since your destination required you to travel along that road, you have to find some way of dealing with those lions! However, Timorous and Mistrust weren’t prepared to consider that an option! So they turned, retreated, and warned everyone they met not to go any further. And if everyone listened to them, the Celestial City would have been a fairly empty place … and sadly, I’m sure some did listen!

What would Christian do, though? Well, he was determined to keep going on, “If I return to my home in the City of Destruction, which region is destined for the judgment of fire and brimstone, then I will certainly perish. However, if I can eventually reach the Celestial City, then my safety is assured there. Therefore I must press forward, in spite of risks and perils. To go back is to certainly suffer
death; but to go forward, though fear of death will threaten along the way, is yet to have the prospect of everlasting life beyond. So I will definitely go forward.”

Pressing forward … That was the way to go! It can be a great discouragement when we watch professing believers going backwards. These two characters had previously put great effort into climbing the Hill Difficulty, - as Christian had done, - and they had climbed down the other side, - as Christian was fully intending to do … but then they decided they weren’t going any further. It is sad and discouraging when such people “take their hands off the plough” and turn back. Granted, there was danger up ahead but these two men didn’t even give a moment’s thought to confronting the lions and continuing on. Again, the Scriptures come to mind … Mt. 10:22 he that endureth to the end shall be saved … James 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

And so Christian ventured on alone. However, the words of the two men were going over and over in his mind … So, to gain the necessary strength and confidence, he reached his hand inside his cloak where he had previously kept his roll, but it wasn’t there! … It wasn’t there! … He panicked … he needed it! He became distressed because he turned to that roll many times throughout the day, in all kinds of circumstances … And it was also his ‘pass’ into the Celestial City. That’s not to say if you own a Bible it gets you automatically into Heaven. No, what it means is that the roll, - the Bible, - was the necessary roadmap for his journey … and he mustn’t go on without it for he needed its directions! He quickly realised where he had carelessly allowed it to fall from his hands, and he had to go back halfways down the hill to retrieve it.

We can understand why Christian wasn’t feeling ‘at his best’ when he met these two. He was a little deflated. He was missing the Word of God. He had managed to climb to the top of the hill, but he wasn’t in his best condition spiritually. These two men were quitters so you wouldn’t expect much from them, but Christian took his journey seriously. Even though he was for continuing on, they had left an effect upon him and he needed to read from that roll … but he didn’t have it! He had lost it and he needed to find it!

It reminds us we can go nowhere spiritually without God’s Word that is as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Ps. 119:105). We need it as we travel across every type of terrain. … For example, it accompanied the psalmist in times of joy and in times of sorrow, in times when he felt confident and in times when he was fearful. Christian needed to find the roll again!
Remember how he lost it ... He lost it in that place where he stayed longer than he should have. He lost it in the place where he had become comfortable ... where he had become at ease. ... Therefore, to go forward confidently, he had to retrace his steps. Yes, he would have had to use up some of his energy, and lose some more of his time ... but nonetheless, he had to go back along that old path heading to “the pleasant arbour”. He had to go back, for he had to regain that which he had carelessly misplaced.

But isn’t it good he didn’t go down the hill with Timorous and Mistrust ... They would have been bad company for him. If he had spent too long with them, they would have got inside his mind and it would have affected his heart ... but he very wisely let them go on their own. ... You could imagine them going off down the hill and how their descent would have been far easier than their ascent. The lions on the road they would forget ... as they were returning to their old friends ‘at home’ who would welcome them with open arms.

Aren’t you glad the Lord has saved you and He is keeping you! Yes, we must confess we make our mistakes but God has placed the unstinting desire to keep going on. Like Christian, sometimes we need to repair the things carelessness has damaged, and we need to acknowledge our failings and confess them before the Lord. ... Christian could not have gone forward, though, without first going back ... and he asked the Lord “forgiveness for that his foolish act”.

It takes humility, and it requires repentance, “But all the way he went back, who can sufficiently set forth the sorrow of Christian’s heart? Sometimes he sighed, and sometimes he wept, and often he rebuked himself for his being so foolish as to sleep at length at that place which had only been erected for the purpose of modest refreshment from weariness. Thus, therefore he went back, further and further, carefully looking on this side and on that, ever so eager to find that scroll which had so often given him comfort on his journey. Thus Christian continued downhill until the Shady Resting-place, where he had earlier sat and slept, came into view. At this sight his sorrow increased with the more vivid remembrance of his wicked indulgence”.

It wasn’t an easy journey. He had to tramp over that same ground three times, - his carelessness had kept him back and lost him precious energy that ought to have been used taking him further along the road.
But his journey back to find the roll was absolutely necessary … and it was worth it, for the Lord led him to find it. “With trembling and haste” he picked it up and placed it close to his heart. Just imagine the joy as he climbed again to the top! John Bunyan described it, “Oh how nimbly now did he go up the rest of the hill!” … He had a fresh ‘skip in his step’!

We cannot judge him too harshly, because there have been times when we also ‘have added unnecessarily to our journey’. We haven’t always taken the care we should have taken and we’ve wasted time and effort that could well have been spent profitably for the Lord.

Nevertheless, though, he found it, - “this roll was the assurance of his life, and accepted at the desired haven”. I wouldn’t want to be accused of Bibliolatry … but the Word of God is altogether precious to us, - there is no other book on earth like it, - and we ought to treat it with the greatest and highest regard. Men and women have given their lives literally for us to have it … and we should regard our copies as a real privilege to own! … And you will never get far in the Christian path without the Bible. We need to read it and study it, and to make its great truths our own.

John Fawcett wrote, “How precious is the book divine, By inspiration given; Bright as a lamp its pages shine To guide our souls to Heaven.”

Christian is again joyful, he is reassured, he is prayerful, and he is spiritually mobile. He is on his way again! … And surely that is grace … Philip Doddridge wrote, “Grace taught my wandering feet To tread the heavenly road, … ’Tis grace has kept me to this day, And will not let me go”.

Yes, he had some ways to go yet. He had to press on in the darkness, and he had to face the lions … but very soon along the road he would see the lights of the palace Beautiful. That was where the Lord was bringing him to next … and there would be a place of rest before he would embark upon the next stage of his journey.

Isn’t it a comfort the Lord has each stage of our journey mapped out … and He knows exactly where He is taking us to, so we are to be confident He will bring us there safely. “There is a place of quiet rest, Near to the heart of God, A place where sin cannot molest, Near to the heart of God”. That is where we are heading, and by His grace we shall arrive safely and triumphantly. Amen.