**CHRISTIAN’S TESTIMONY**

Peter counselled his readers, *I Pet. 3:15* be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. It doesn’t require special theological training … but simply a living and personal knowledge of how the Lord Jesus Christ has changed your life for His glory.

It is only right that you are examined on this most fundamental of questions before you would progress further in the journey to Heaven. You don’t want to discover one day that it has been a sad delusion and you have been fooling yourself. Sadly, many people don’t sufficiently examine themselves in the light of Scripture as to what being a Christian truly means. Attending church regularly and being a church member doesn’t save anyone. Neither does having Christian friends and using Christian language … and so Piety asks of Christian the reason of the hope that was within him.

At the outset of their conversation, notice the joy with which he begins to tell her of how God directed him in his search. At the time, - as we have previously considered, - there were many struggles on the journey … and doubtless there would remain many struggles ahead for him … But he had proved the grace of God from the very moment he noticed God beginning to work in his life. He was troubled, deeply troubled … and yet he now had a new song to God’s glory and God’s grace. “Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice … Tell out, my soul, the greatness of His Name … His mercy sure from age to age the same”. He had proved God … even in the darkness and hopelessness of the City of Destruction.

It was none but God Who troubled his spirit and made him to recognise the terrible judgment hanging over him. Even before the voice of Evangelist pierced his ears he knew he was a lost Hell-deserving sinner with neither hope in this world or in the next … in eternity. When he was faced with the harsh reality of his sin, he could find no rest and no escape. Whether he was in his bed at night, or at his workplace, in the company of his friends or wandering through the countryside the consequences of his sin were increasingly crushing him.

Then, in the sovereignty of God, grace despatched a herald with the message of the Gospel. Evangelist pointed him to the wicket gate. Christian well remembered that first meeting. …
It came at the right time … when he was ready and willing to listen and to accept that he must begin a journey in order to escape from the City of Destruction.

Yes, he would have added up how much this journey would cost him … but in comparison with how much it would cost him if he remained in that place, the mind of Pilgrim was compelled to heed the message from that man God had sent to speak with him. And so he began to leave his old life behind.

Looking back, he spoke of how he had begun to recognise a much bigger plan, “It was as God would have it … he (Evangelist) directed me to the wicket gate, which else I should never have found, and so set me into the way that hath led me directly to this house”. The further he travelled on this journey the more he could see God’s hand it all.

You’ll notice how I avoided Christian’s statement, “… I did not know whether to go. But by chance there came a man …” … “By chance” … Some people talk about … ‘as luck would have it’ … There is no such thing in the Lord’s plan. The Lord hasn’t made His plans on the basis of what might possibly take place … if we ‘fell into line’ and agreed with Him. … No, Christian got it right the first time, “as God would have it”.

And God brought Evangelist into the path of Christian, and God used him to direct this seeker of the Good News. Yes, there were others on the road who were willing to give their advice to Christian. It started at the very commencement of the journey when Pliable and Obstinate followed him … and also along the way he met such dubious characters as Mr. Worldly Wiseman. He had no shortage of ‘advisors’ … but as he now looked back he could see the clear hand of God’s guidance in every part of his journey.

Piety then asked him another question and steered him to the wonderful experience he had in Interpreter’s house. There, - he told her, - he was reminded of “how Christ, in despite of Satan, maintains His work of grace in the heart”. Yes, we must not minimise the fact the devil is powerful but we must also emphasise that God is all-powerful! The devil is no match for God, - not now or never! Isaac Watts wrote, “O God, our king, whose sovereign sway The glorious hosts of Heaven obey, And devils at Thy presence flee, Blest is the man that trusts in Thee”
... And Christian was trusting in the Lord ... and he knew he had to! He knew that outside of Christ lay no hope of eternity in Heaven for God’s judgment of condemnation awaits all those who will not believe.

These indelible Biblical truths were stamped upon his believing heart and he had been given an insatiable hunger/appetite to discover more as he continued on his journey to Heaven.

In answer to Piety’s next question he explained to her the despair and yet the joy that he met as he approached the cross. As he looked upon that place where God’s wrath was poured out upon His sinless Son ... you can almost see the tears welling up in Christian’s eyes, as he tells Piety, “I saw, as it were in my mind, a man hang bleeding on a tree”. This was the personal encounter with the Christ Who died and rose again for him. As he looked, he told her, “and the very sight of him made my burden fall from off my back, which load had caused me to groan so much; yes, it did actually drop from off my back! It was so astonishing for me because I had never seen such a thing before”.

Even though this had happened in the past, Christian continued with this abiding experience living in his heart, - Jesus died for me! He died as my Substitute. He took my place at Calvary. Christian’s journey to Heaven was truly set on course that day!

Previously, - at the Place of Deliverance (p.51f.), - he didn’t mention a man on a cross, but now when he sees it again, as fresh as on that first occasion, he recalled, “I saw, as it were in my mind, a man hang bleeding on a tree”. He is growing in his understanding of the doctrine of the atonement ... And this teaches us to explore and continue exploring what the Bible says about this great work of Christ, and never to take for granted how He achieved our full salvation. The believer should never tire of hearing about it, and speaking about it. It was the one greatest event in history that shall ever be remembered in eternity! ... Christ died for me! ... Here is the song of the Redeemed, Rev. 5:9 Thou art worthy ... for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood ... 1:5 Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

And then Christian tells Piety of how his rags were taken from him and replaced with the broidered coat he had been wearing ever since. What is the broidered coat? John Bunyan uses such language to display the great work of grace by which God purchased his soul. ...
Please turn to Ezekiel 16 where we see the mention of the ‘broidered coat’. There we are shown an awful picture of the children of Israel. God told His Ezekiel, v.2 Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, 3 And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite. 4 And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. 5 None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. … They were in a filthy, vile and wretched state before God. There was nothing that would have remotely attracted Him to them, and yet God said, v.6 when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. 7 I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. 8 Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. 9 Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. 10 I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers’ skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. 11 I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. 12 And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. 13 Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work

That is grace … the same grace that saved Christian! And as he continued, he described his meeting with the three Shining Ones. … He spoke about the mark on his forehead and the sacred roll he kept next to his heart.

He didn’t mention, though, about how he had slept too long under the Arbor Tree, or how he had neglected and lost the roll, or how he had to retrace his steps to retrieve it. I don’t believe he was being dishonest in not mentioning these things. They are the kind of things people like ‘to throw up at us’ … i.e. all our failures in the past. It’s good and it’s necessary to be honest but sometimes the devil’s work is done by Christians who remind us of all the failures we have compiled … failures that have been cast into the sea of God’s forgetfulness … and if God has put them beyond the reach, why should we go over them again. How many times have you yourself been bothered with something you have done years ago, and it seems to come back and haunt you on so many occasions. …
If God has forgiven you, why then should you allow the enemy to hold back your progress with that which God has already dealt with?!

Yes, Christian was right not to go over old ground for it only gave the devil some degree of joy. I believe it is the same when someone is giving their testimony. Maybe they have been steeped in sins such as alcoholism or drug addiction, maybe they have been a terrorist or a murderer, - it is so good to hear of such people being saved … but we don’t want to hear about their sin … we want to hear about their Saviour.

When you get to Heaven you will not be talking about the lifestyle you used to live before you came to Christ … you will be talking about the change in your life since Jesus came into your heart. And so Christian was thrilled with that change already … even as he spoke with Piety, and anticipated the journey that yet stretched out before him.

There is a change that takes place, - you become a new creation in Christ. If there is no change there is no conversion. Christ in your life demands change … He requires it. As we consider this opening part of Christian’s testimony we again look into our own lives for the evidence that God’s grace has truly effectuated our salvation. “For all the Lord has done for me, I never will cease to praise Him; And for His grace so rich and free, I never will cease to praise Him.” … That is the mark of a true believer … one who is looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

We began with Peter, and therefore it is fitting to close with him. Just as Christian was being examined by Piety, and then Prudence and Charity, the apostle wrote, II Peter 1:10 give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. … May the Lord find us worthy of being counted among His Redeemed! Amen.