MOVING ON FROM THE PALACE BEAUTIFUL

Christian had been so encouraged in his faith during those few days he spent in the Palace Beautiful. It was ‘just what he needed’ following the rigours of his journey up until that point. He is eager now, though, to continue on in the direction of the Celestial City. He has had good fellowship with Piety, Prudence, Charity and the other inhabitants of that place ... and they have suitably been preparing him for the next stage.

Let’s take a look at each of them as they spend these final moments together. I’m sure you can identify something of the feelings in their hearts. They have had wonderful times together, and they will miss Christian as he indeed will miss them. But they cannot and they must not stand still. While Christian must step out once again, his new-found friends will meet other pilgrims and encourage them in the journey to the City.

THE ENCOURAGERS

It is Scriptural to be an encourager … Barnabas, for example, was an encourager. When everyone else was dubious and suspicious concerning Saul of Tarsus, it was Barnabas who took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus (Heb. 9:27).

It was Barnabas also who encouraged the young John Mark (Acts 15:37ff.), who previously had faltered in his commitment. You could easily imagine the spirit of Barnabas being very prevalent among the residents of the Palace Beautiful … And so it is an illustration among God’s people for the need to encourage each other. Each of us has come to Christ by different paths, but since we have come to Him we are now all on the same path. Therefore, we ought to encourage each other … and help each other along.

We have our salvation in Christ in common. Whatever else may threaten to divide and disrupt God’s people, we walk with our Saviour. They took great care with Christian, as I’m sure previous generations at the Palace Beautiful took with them. … Remember, they would someday continue on their journey to the Celestial City, and they would be glad of all the encouragement they also would be given.
It was a hard journey from Christian’s home in the City of Destruction along the treacherous lanes and roadways that brought him to where he was now … and he could be sure there would be many more obstacles and stumbling-blocks that would yet confront him. … And the people who understand the best about the journey we are on is fellow-believers … our companions in the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is our duty to encourage each other, and to comfort, reassure and inspire each other. When Christian first started out on the journey, he had to contend with his family calling him to return, then the maliciousness of Obstinate, and the lily-livered doublemindedness of Pliable … to the pompous conversations of Mr. Worldly Wiseman … and the fear put into him by Timorous and Mistrust … and many others. … Christian had so much and so many to put up with, but the Lord had brought him through, - it was the Lord that had taken him thus far. Along the way God provided men like Evangelist, Goodwill, Interpreter … and these dear folk in the Palace Beautiful.

Yes, we need to be encouraged … and we need to be encouraged by those who know the rigours and the joys of the journey we are on. And Christian is ready to move on, but before they would allow him to go we see how the encouragers developed into …

**The Equippers**
The journey for Christian has been difficult thus far … and it wasn’t about to become any easier … although he didn’t know what awaited him. But he was living in the joy of the moment, - being with his friends. However, the place where the enemy often attacks, - and regularly has a degree of victory, - is when we are feeling most confident and when we are not too far from those places of blessing. He sneaks up beside us as he sneaked up beside Eve in the Garden of Eden. He tells us what we want to hear as he puts his own slant on it. Christian had to be on his guard!

So the family brought him to the armoury. They were not simply going to send him off with good wishes. They insisted he would be suitably prepared, “they harnessed him from head to foot with what was of proof, lest perhaps he should meet with assaults in the way”.

He knoweth the way that I take (Job. 23:10) … Our God knows the dangers that await His people because He has already travelled this way. … And so they dressed Christian in battle armour from head to foot! …
They were making sure, - before he took a single step outside, - that he put on the whole armour of God (Eph. 6:10ff.)! He had a great time in the Palace Beautiful but now he had to be aware he was going out into the world again, - the world that was at enmity with God!

The world has never been the Christian’s friend, and it never will be. It consists of all kinds of attractions and dangers evoked against the believer to hinder his passage. If you want to reach the Celestial City, you don’t do it by using the world’s patterns or the world’s ideas … You make sure you are wearing the appropriate garments to pass through the horrors that await you. In just the same way that an Arctic explorer would not even think of going out into the snow without the right clothes and equipment, neither would Christian be permitted to leave the Palace Beautiful … He was “harnessed” with nothing less than the protection God provides from the Heavenly armoury.

The encouragers, the equippers …

The Enquirer

Usually, - up until now, - it has nearly always been someone else asking the questions … But Christian now becomes the enquirer. He asked three questions:

1. Did Porter see any other pilgrims pass by?
2. Did he find out their name?
3. How far ahead did he think they were?

Porter was the first contact Christian had when he arrived at the Palace Beautiful … and it is fitting Porter is with him at the gate again to bid him farewell. It shows us also that was Porter’s calling and responsibility in his service to the Lord of the hill. Sometimes the ministry of the ‘people on the door’ can be overlooked. It is not simply for handing out hymnbooks … When you are ‘on the door’ you are taking part in the ministry of this place as you welcome and invite worshippers and guests into the house of the Lord. For ‘strangers’, the ‘porter on the door’ is the first point of contact. When we visit a church for the first time, how we settle into that place of worship often develops from the kind of welcome we received. … Sometimes people come into our church with very heavy hearts and it can be a word of encouragement that lifts them up in preparation to worship the Lord. It is indeed an important role to welcome people into the house of the Lord.
And, of course, it’s not just the responsibility of those on the door, - it is the responsibility of all whom the Lord gathers in to welcome and encourage each other. It is a ministry for which each of God’s people are equipped and responsible for. … And Porter is now mentioned again … still at the gate, as Christian was leaving the Palace Beautiful.

Porter, have you seen any other pilgrims pass by? Christian has enjoyed good company for those few days … and now he wants to resume his journey with similar good company. It’s the best way to travel … with those of a similar mind. You have the same interests and the same destination. You have the same subjects to speak about. Being a Christian, you have so much in common with a fellow-Christian even though you may never have met them previously. … And Christian has been taught the benefits of good Christian company.

A man of few words, Porter replied simply “Yes”. Indeed, we’re not travelling to Heaven alone! “Did you know him?” It is good when one believer can recommend another. You don’t want to be in the company of someone you’re not sure about. Porter replied that his name was Faithful. Christian’s eyes ‘lit up’, Och, sure Christian knew him! Faithful had been a neighbour of his from back there in the City of Destruction! It’s always good to get together with people you know the Lord has saved out of similar circumstances to yourself. Maybe they used to drink in the same pub, and attended the same clubs … but the Lord has saved you both, and you’re now both on the road to Heaven!

“How far do you think he is ahead of me?” … “By now, he’ll be down at the bottom of the hill”. Far enough, and yet not too far! So Christian sets off to catch up with him. And what a beautiful farewell from one Christian brother to another, “Well, good Porter, the Lord be with thee, and add to all thy blessings much increase for the kindness thou hast shown to me”. … And so Christian “began to go forward”.

CONCLUSION
We have used simple titles but I trust they explain what was happening here. Christian was blessed with the company of encouragers who spent precious time with him in the Palace Beautiful. As he would have travelled onwards, he would have had many precious memories to look back on that would bring him confidence and reassurance. It was good he had been in their company. Good sound Christian company is necessary for God’s people! …
In such company we understand what God has done for us, and we are not ashamed to speak about it. Besides, we understand each other and we can strengthen each other in the faith. … We all need to be encouragers of one another.

And being encouragers, we also need to know how important it is to be used by God to bring our brothers and sisters into the Christian’s armoury, … to be instrumental in the Lord equipping them for all that lies ahead. Yes, we are called to be equippers … for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). For sure, each of us are responsible before the Lord for the other. Jesus commanded Peter, Lk. 22:32, Strengthen thy brethren. … What a responsibility!

Encouragers, equippers … enquirer … It’s good to ask questions so we discover the answers that point us in the right direction for the Lord and His people to travel. And while we, of course, enquire of our brothers and sisters in the faith … the ultimate source that underlies all our enquiries is the Word of God, - it is why we study it together.

As Christian left that place to embark on the next stage of the journey, he had the sword by his side. And each step was bringing him closer to the Celestial City … That was the road along which he was looking forward to joining with his friend Faithful and hearing of how the Lord had saved and kept him.

Christian fellowship can never be overrated. I know we are all different and we have all got our own ways … but sound Christian fellowship based on our love for the Saviour is invaluable. It helps us deal with all our strange individual foibles in order to put Christ first. It is what we have in common that we build upon in our walk with the Lord. “Fellowship with Christians is for the sake of fellowship with God” (J.I. Packer)

May we guard what the Lord has blessed us together with in Christ, and seek to live alongside each other for Him in Christian fellowship and companionship for, - as John wrote, - 1 Jn. 1:7 if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.