THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION

Christian has had such a ‘spiritual uplift’ in the company of the residents of the Palace Beautiful. They have spoken together of the Lord of the hill, what He means to each of them, and what He has done for them. He has been the constant theme of their conversations. It was time to move on though … but not completely on his own just yet.

THEY ACCOMPANIED HIM

“They began to go forward” … It is the only direction for the believer to travel. To go backwards is to take us away from our destination … and the further we go from our destination the greater the distance we have to return at a future date … We are adding to our troubles! The further away the prodigal son travelled from his father, the more arduous was his return. … So Christian made a definite decision to keep going forward.

It is also often the case when we have enjoyed good times of blessing that we face times of difficulty. During these times we are reminded how we must not travel the journey in our own strength. Just in the same way a coal taken from the hot fire will soon lose its heat, so also the Christian who withdraws himself from Christian fellowship will be affected. They lose the enthusiasm and the eagerness of their devotion to the Lord Jesus.

So it was necessary and very fitting for Christian to be accompanied as he set out on his journey again, down the hill. Discretion, Piety, Charity and Prudence insisted on it. He was not yet aware of what he would encounter in this Valley of Humiliation … but they would have been aware. And so …

THEY ENCOURAGED HIM

They encouraged him by taking him back to the “their former discourses”. These “former discourses” sprang from those initial conversations during their interviews with him … When Discretion first met him she asked where he had come from, where he was going, how he had set out on the journey, who he had met on the way. Piety, Charity and Prudence had asked him even more questions … and the conclusion they all came to was that Christian was a true pilgrim on his way to the Celestial City. In fact, Discretion was so touched when she first spoke to him that “the water stood in her eyes”. On those opening meetings, it was evident to them Christian had all the priorities in place that would gain him admittance to the Palace Beautiful.
And the conversations since then continued along that same theme as they made their way down the hill.

What do Christians speak to each other about? How do they encourage each other? Surely all their conversation is about the Lord Jesus Christ, - we are talking about Him here this evening. We would not think of meeting in this place and having any other subject in the centre of our preaching and our study but Christ. He is the sum total of who we are and why we are here. He loved us so much He came into this world to be crucified and to die for us, - we know that personally. He bore our sin in His own body on the cross. The salvation with which we have been saved is already our eternal salvation. ... And He is coming back again and we shall be with Him forever. He is Who we speak about because He means so much to us ... and there is so much to come to know about Him!

Yes, their conversation was all about the Lord of the hill and His favour towards them. As a consequence, Christian was eager to recommence and to head towards the next stage of his journey to the Celestial City.

However, since the journey previously had the climb to the top of the hill to find the Palace Beautiful, he now had to make his way back down again. It was neither easy to ascend, or to descend. It was also a different route by which he was descending. This time he would not be passing the Pleasant Arbour ... so he couldn’t take a break there. When he began to descend he had to continue until he was at the bottom of the hill.

He also had to take tremendous care ... because he could have been at the bottom sooner than he had planned! He could so easily have stumbled, and fallen down the hill. He said to his four companions, “so far as I can see, it is dangerous going down”. One careless step ... one lack of concentration ... one taking his eye of the path and he would have ended up seriously injured at the foot of the hill. ... He was carefully watching where he placed his feet!

As it was, he did make a slip or two, but he managed, - with the help of his friends, - to steady himself and keep upright. He didn’t break any bones, or sprain any ankles, or fall over and cut himself and hinder his progress. He managed it well, with the help of his friends. Even though they were talking as they descended the hill, they were also watchful. The four girls, - his friends, for the Lord’s sake, - knew exactly what to look out for, and they were safe ... and their experience kept Christian safe also.
Once again we emphasise the necessity of good Christian companionship … benefitting from the experience of our brothers and sisters who also know what it is to serve the Lord. In particular, Prudence guided his steps. She was the one who previously asked him if he ever regretted setting out on the journey from the City of Destruction … Such questions as … “Do you not think sometimes of the country from which you came? … Do you not yet bear away with you some of the things that then you were conversant with? (p.67)

She was the one who asked him, “And what is it that makes you so desirous to go to Mount Zion?” And she would have remembered Christian’s reply to her, (p.68) “Why, there I hope to see Him alive that did hang dead on the cross; and there I hope to be rid of all those things that to this day are in me an annoyance to me: there they say there is no death; and there I shall dwell with such company as I like best. For, to tell you the truth, I love Him because I was by Him eased of my burden; and I am weary of my inward sickness. I would fain be where I shall die no more, and with the company that shall continually cry, Holy, holy, holy.” … Even if he slipped, such knowledge of the Saviour would surely keep him on his feet!

He didn’t enjoy this same fellowship, - or company, - with Timorous or Mistrust, Obstinate or Pliable, … or not even with the confident Mr. Worldly-Wiseman. It reminds us we need to choose good spiritual fellow-travellers. We need to be with people who know the Lord, of the same mind. We need to take great care concerning our companions as we head towards Heaven!

How treacherous that journey would have been with people who did not know the Lord of the Hill! It would have been absolutely foolish to have been in their company. Again, it reminds us to steer clear of those who hold false and spurious doctrines, and those who are all too ready to align themselves with the ecumenical company. …

You notice here, too, that there weren’t great crowds surrounding Christian. … We are better being with a few who genuinely know Christ, than being with the many who claim the knowledge, but have no understanding of it.

In our fellowship and in our private walk we need to keep good company … as were these four faithful companions … they accompanied him and they encouraged him. Lastly …
**T**hey **P**rovided for **H**im

When they safely arrived at the bottom of the hill, they “gave him a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine, and a cluster of raisins”. … He hadn’t long since recommenced his journey but by the time he reached the bottom of that hill he needed sustenance!

… In I Samuel 30 we read of how the Amalekites ransacked the town of Ziklag, and they took the women captives … including two of King David’s wives. David, obviously, was greatly distressed (v.6), so he pursued the Amalekites. Along the way, the soldiers found an Egyptian whom they brought him to the king, and David gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water; 12 And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins: and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him (vv.11,12).

It reminds us about the significance of at the Lord’s Table. Previously, in the Palace Beautiful, they had sat down together around the table (pp. 70,71) … And now, before they parted from each other they were remembering again, … and they “gave him a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine, and a cluster of grapes”. It speaks to us of how the body of Christ was broken and His blood shed for our redemption. It is the Lord Who has saved us, and it is to the Lord we look for our advancement towards the Kingdom. He is the true vine (Jn. 15:1), and to bear the fruit we must abide in Him. We do not go in our own strength, but in His for through Him we are more than conquerors.

And this would be particularly fitting as Christian would embark on his meeting with Apollyon. To be prepared the sisters provided him with the essentials. They had him remember where the Lord had taken him from, and brought him to … It was only when Christian was suitably prepared we read, “and then he went his way”.

The next necessary stage was through the Valley of Humiliation. None of us knows what God has for us … We are grateful to Him for “the green pastures” and “the still waters” … but there are also the times He brings us through the darkest of valleys for our own building up in the faith.

The Lord Jesus in Mt. 12:20 quoted from Is. 42:3, A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench. … Sometimes, to strengthen us in our faith we need bruising … to remind us we need to keep depending upon Whose we are … We are not to carry on in our own energy. …
Remember how Peter thought he could … He thought he would never let the Lord down, but he did, and he wept bitterly (Mt. 26:75). Similarly, the Lord permitted the messenger of Satan to buffet Paul so he wouldn’t be exalted above measure (II Cor. 12:7) … and that was the occasion in which he wrote, v.9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Christian reminds us we shall get to Heaven in the Lord’s strength … and how we need never to forget that. We must always depend upon Him. He is the reason we are on the journey and He is the reason we shall complete it. As the hymn writer wrote …

I hunger and I thirst,  
Jesu, my manna be;  
Ye living waters, burst  
Out of the rock for me.

Thou bruised and broken Bread,  
My life-long wants supply;  
As living souls are fed,  
O feed me, or I die.

Thou true life-giving Vine,  
Let me Thy sweetness prove;  
Renew my life with Thine,  
Refresh my soul with love.

Rough paths my feet have trod  
Since first their course began;  
Feed me, Thou Bread of God;  
Help me, Thou Son of Man.

For still the desert lies  
My thirsting soul before;  
O living waters, rise  
Within me evermore.