

## THROUGH THE DARKEST VALLEY

In our previous study we looked at the two men Christian met as he proceeded into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. They weren't good companions for they brought no encouragement whatsoever, so he departed from them. As he travelled further into the valley he very quickly discovered ...

### THE CASUALTIES

These were former travellers who had not taken sufficient care and had fallen foul of the dangers. On one side of the path there was a deep ditch into which many had fallen ... often in their droves, - the blind leading the blind.

On the other side of the path was the most horrendous quagmire that when someone fell in they would inevitably sink to the bottom unless, - like the psalmist David, - there would be someone to lift them out (Ps. 40:2).

In between the dangers on either side was the narrowest of paths. It was a straight path. No matter ... to navigate your way through, you had to take the greatest of care for your life depended on it. ... And it was dark, - there was no light. There were noises, and they were getting louder, and more frightening. No wonder the journey of so many had ended in this place.

At the beginning of Job's terrible experience, - in his 'darkest valley', - his wife said to him, [2:9 Curse God, and die](#) ... Get it all over with! You're not going to win, so, [Curse God, and die](#). Jesus said, [Lk. 9:62 No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.](#) ... If you don't keep going, you'll fall! You will quit the Christian path, and you will go no further. You will inevitably fall by the side of the road. So, to avoid becoming one of **the casualties**, Christian is reminded the journey requires ...

### THE COMMITMENT

It is not right for the child of God to say we don't know what is ahead, because we do ... ultimately! Paul explains what is in front of us, [Phil. 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus](#). Our final destination is to be with Christ forever ... And when you know where you are going and Who you will meet you will be committed no matter what you face.

It was the noises that kept getting louder in Christian's ears. He couldn't see what was making them for it was too dark ... but he knew they were there.

And it was hard to concentrate because, - besides everything else, - he couldn't see where he was placing his foot next. It was horrendous! ... It was a *straight* path, though.

And every now and again he would see the flames and the smoke bellowing out from the fires of Hell. He put his sword in his sheath, - he felt utterly incapable, - and he began to pray earnestly, [Ps. 116:4 O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul.](#) ... What a prayer! Previously he had been walking through the darkness with the sword in his hand. He would have had it ready should something have jumped out in front of him ... but he came to the place where he decided he could hardly do anything more ... and his way through the valley depended upon the Lord completely.

Even when he began to pray, though, the flames were as high as they were before ... The terrors didn't disappear simply because he prayed, - they didn't miraculously leave him, they continued. In fact, he reckoned he heard a group of men coming towards him to do him harm ... and for a brief moment, he wondered if he might be better going back. But no, the Lord was working in his mind ... I've come this far, ... I'll keep going on and "I will walk in the strength of the Lord".

He was at the stage where he realised God was with him now more than ever. He hadn't left Him back at the Palace Beautiful ... in the nice and comfortable surroundings. He wasn't travelling on this horrendous journey on his own ... he had the Lord with him.

Yes, but the devil nevertheless went on an all-out offensive. He whispered doubts into Christian's ear ... and it happened just as he was making his way *out* of the valley. You would have thought it would have been becoming easier ... but that was when the devil *really* struck. Previously, the potential for danger was on the *outside*, now it's coming from the *inside* in the form of Christian's own thoughts. The devil came and reminded him of former things ... and Christian started to 'wander down memory lane' and remember what he used to be like before Christ saved him ... and the devil was causing him great anguish in his soul, setting out to tempt him to doubt his own salvation.

Then, he heard another voice; there were others who similarly had the experiences he encountered, - and one of them reminded him, [Ps. 23:4 though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with](#)

me. ... The same God Who promises, Heb. 13:5 I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

So Christian was committed to continuing his journey ... “No turning back, No turning back”. His new life in Christ was the determining factor in how he faced every difficulty. He was confident [*God*] turneth the shadow of death into the morning (Amos 5:8).

Of course, if it had been up to him, he wouldn't have chosen to pass through this Valley of the Shadow of Death ... but now he could more clearly understand why the Lord had taken him that way. It was for his spiritual development. It had taught him lessons he needed to learn ... and it also showed him how the Lord would not release His firm hold upon him.

And when the next day dawned, he realised how good the Lord had been ... as the psalmist declared, 59:16 But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble. 17 Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God *is* my defence, *and* the God of my mercy.

In the new light, Christian could see more clearly what the Lord had saved him from and how the Lord was wonderfully bringing him through. It was so difficult at the time, and so seemingly uncertain, but Christian could actually see more clearly now the purposes of the Lord concerning him.

I'm sure there were times he thought he might never come out of that valley. I'm sure there were times when he thought he might become another casualty ... especially on those occasions the devil was whispering in his ears. And even now, “the way was all along set so full of snares ... and so full of pits, pitfalls, deep holes ... that had it now been dark” ... the dangers continued to threaten him, but— with the sunshine of a new day, - he could see them more clearly, and avoid them. It was his testimony, Job 29:3 by His light I walked through darkness ... 119:105 Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. ... All glory to God!

### **THE COMPLETION**

It is not a matter of our ability to complete the course, ... the only way any of us will be able to complete the journey is by trusting in and being kept in Christ. Is. 43:2 When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee ... Through this confidence, Christian managed something many others hadn't.

They had started out in the valley but ended up falling from the narrow path, or else fallen foul of the enemy that lurked close by.

It's a privilege to be saved, and it is the work of God's grace that keeps us. We have nothing to boast in ourselves ... as Christian wrote in his poem, "O world of wonders, (I can say no less), that I should be preserved in that distress That I have met with here! ... But since I live, let Jesus wear the crown!" Through every stage we have passed, it has always been because of the Lord.

When each of us arrives in Heaven, we shall be there because He has safely brought us home. We shall finish the course through His merits. He will have kept us ... even during the most difficult of times when all around us is dark, but also even in the sunlight ... those times we thought we were safe, when we weren't.

When we complete our journey ... yes, we are looking forward to meeting again our loved ones who have died in Christ, but before we are reunited with them, we'll run to meet our Saviour for He will be the reason we are there ... the reason we have successfully completed the journey.

## CONCLUSION

The Christian path is full of dangers. They lurk not only in the darkness but also during those times when they are more visible. We can look around us and see how so many have fallen, - **the casualties**, - and there but for the grace of God we could have fallen also.

That which keeps us persevering onwards is nothing less than the preserving presence of God. No matter how dark the valley, He will never leave us, - He can't, for He has invested too much in His people. He will never abandon us. Yes, - like Christian, - it may have sometimes felt as if you were on your own ... but looking back on it now, you can more clearly see how He was there with you all the time, "Oh, blessed be That hand that from it hath delivered me!" ... That is a testimony to **the commitment** ... not merely my commitment to Him, but of far greater worth is His commitment to me.

**The casualties, the commitment ... and the completion.** Job. 19:25 I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth: 26 And *though* after my skin *worms* destroy this *body*, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

Christian is not home yet ... and neither are we. The Lord still has a purpose for us to fulfil while we remain here on this earth ... and only He knows how much further we have to go ... but every day brings us closer to Heaven. Then, we shall put it all behind us, "Dangers in darkness, devils, Hell, and sin, Did compass me while I this vale was in". David sang, *Ps. 30:5 in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*

In the words of another hymn, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus! Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ. One glimpse of his dear face, all sorrow will erase. So, bravely run the race till we see Christ."

May the Lord encourage us to keep going on, and to Him we would give all the glory! Amen.