

**Pilgrim's Progress:
Christiana's Story (5) –
Vanity Fair to Doubting Castle**

Ephesians 6:10-18

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Now turn with me if you would, first of all to Ephesians 6. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, as we've seen now on a number of occasions, and we will see again before we're done, that Bunyan describes the nature of biblical Christian spirituality in terms of warfare, in terms of battle imagery. And with that in mind, let's read together from Ephesians 6, and I'm going to begin at the tenth verse, reading through to the first half of verse 18...Ephesians 6:10. Before I read the Scriptures, let's look to God in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the Bible. We thank You for Your word, that holy men of old wrote as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit; that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine and reproof, and correction and instruction in the way of righteousness, that the man of God might be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. Teach us to love Your word more than our necessary food, to find in it that which is sweeter than honey. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.

Ephesians 6:10 —

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

Amen. May the Lord add His blessing to that reading of His word.

Now if you have your map with you—oh, several weeks ago now we handed out a little map, and if you have that map in your Bible (as some of you are very good to bring your homework with you), turn to the map. I'll describe it if you've forgotten it. It's in three columns, and we're half way up the middle column, working our way upwards. And you remember last we had reached the outskirts of the city of Vanity, with its fair—Vanity Fair. And we were in the house of a man by the name of Gaius.

We're looking at *Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II. This is Bunyan writing a sequel to *Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I. Part I was published in 1678, and Part II was published six years later in 1684. And I suggested several weeks ago that at least one of the reasons why Bunyan wrote Part II — there were at least a couple of reasons why he would write a sequel to his famous *Pilgrim's Progress* — one was that the first part had been about Christian, it had been about the husband. He had left the city of destruction and made his way along this journey to the Celestial City. But what about his wife? What about Christiana? What about the four young-ish boys that were left behind? And the tale was always one that needed to be told, the story of Christiana and her friend, Mercy, and her four boys.

But there was another reason why Bunyan wrote Part II of *Pilgrim's Progress*, and that is because other people began to write it for him! In the early 1680's there were at least two attempts to write the story, and not simply to write the story but to “correct” the theology they perceived was incorrect in *Pilgrim's Progress*, Part I. And that would be motivation enough for anyone, to make sure that if there was going to be a Part II that it was the one that you wanted it to be.

Now, Part II — I think I've said this a couple of times now — there's a reason why I prefer Part II to Part I. A lot of people have read Part I, but few people have read Part II. But you will now be among them who have read Part II of *Pilgrim's Progress*!

Part II is a woman's tale. It is the tale of Christiana. It's not the tale of Christian. The tale of Christian is a tale of a hero; it's a man's tale. It's full of adventure, and most of the characters in Part I — not all of them, but most of them — are strong characters. They're characters of great faith and great gifting, and great accomplishment. And Bunyan, I think, began to perceive after he had spent twelve years in prison...he is released in 1672; he goes back to prison again for 6-8 months or so in 1678, a year before Part I was published. But now that Bunyan is out of prison, he is the pastor of the Bedford Baptist Church, and the church is wholly devoted to the doctrines of grace — a Reformed church, a Calvinistic church. But he began to see as a pastor that there were other kinds of Christians, weak Christians; and that not every Christian had strong faith; that they were troubled by all kinds of things, sometimes very little things. And in Part

It there's this wonderful accessibility. When you read Part II, you find yourself saying again and again, "Well, I'm like that. I may not be like Faithful, I may not be like Evangelist, I may not be like Christian in Part I — strong. Sometimes I feel weak. Sometimes I'm terribly tempted. Sometimes I fall down. Sometimes I need someone to help me. Sometimes I need someone to protect me." And all of that appears in Part II of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Now Christiana and Mercy and the boys have been at the house of this man called Gaius. He's an innkeeper, and his Inn is to be found at the outskirts of the City of Vanity. And they've been there for more than a month, just on the outskirts of the City of Vanity.

And, there have been two weddings. Matthew, one of the boys, has married Christiana's friend, Mercy. It's a beautiful thing. I said last time (I think I was quoting Roland Bainton, the historian who wrote a wonderful biography of Martin Luther) that in the seventeenth century in Puritan times... you know, we fall in love in order to marry; they married in order to fall in love, and so there's very little courtship. It is suggested in one line, and then in the next line they're getting married, Matthew and Mercy.

Then James and Phoebe... James, another one of the boys, marries Phoebe, the daughter of this innkeeper called Gaius. So there have already been two weddings. Now there are going to be two more tonight, the other two boys will be married before the night's through.

On the road to Vanity

Now they set out. They head now towards the direction of the City of Vanity, and Great-Heart recounts the tale of Christian, of Part I. And he recounts this tale as they make their journey. As they make the journey in Part II, they're always remembering what has occurred on the first part of the journey. And you'll remember, of course, in the City of Vanity what happened. Vanity was Bunyan's way of describing the allurements of this world and the hostility of this world. Christian and Faithful were mocked and derided in the City of Vanity. Faithful, of course, will lose his life. He will become a martyr. They will treat him most violently. There will be this mockery of a trial, you remember, and eventually he will be killed. And you remember that beautiful description as Faithful ascends almost like Elijah into the clouds.

Well, now Christiana, the wife of Christian (who has died, of course, and gone to heaven), she is now in the allegory in the City of Vanity. And they're recounting, perhaps with a measure of fear and trepidation, as they draw near now to this city—Christiana and Mercy, Matthew and James, and Phoebe and some other characters: Mr. Honest, and Mr. Ready-to-halt, who has crutches, and Mr. Feeble-mind, who seems always to be afraid that he will be a burden to others.

Bunyan has come across characters like this—Ready-to-halt, with crutches, and Feeble-mind, who's always worrying that he's a burden to others. And then they arrive at Vanity, the city, and they lodge in the house of a man called Mason.

Now Mnason is a character, of course, in The Acts of the Apostles. When Paul comes to Jerusalem in Acts 21, the offering...the collection that they've collected in Asia Minor for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem because of the famine, they stop in Caesarea for a short time, and then make their way up to Jerusalem. And then when they get to the outskirts of Jerusalem, they stay in the house of a man by the name of Mnason, a man who shows hospitality.

So there are some saints here in the wickedness of this city, and Mnason sends his daughter (his daughter is called Grace) and she brings some of the characters — Mr. Contrite, Mr. Holy-man, Mr. Love-saint, Mr. Dare-not-die, and Mr. Penitent — all to show that in this wicked city there are these believers.

Vanity

Now Bunyan makes an interesting comment. We need not stay here long, but he makes this interesting comment that “The people of Vanity [he says] are much more moderate than when Christian visited here.” Well, that begs for a little bit of a comment. When Christian visited there, Faithful lost his life. It was a wicked, violent, hostile city. But all that has changed...at least it has changed to some degree. Part II is written in 1684, and the times have changed. And

Charles II, who had been restored in 1660 following the brief period of a republic in England, Charles II is about to give way to James II of Scotland, and he was a man who would bring persecution again. He would be overthrown of course in what is known as the Glorious Revolution.” I'm not sure I should mention the Glorious Revolution on the eve of Thanksgiving Day. It seems somewhat out of place. But just to remind you of what could have been yours, had there not been this little skirmish in the eighteenth century, these would be your kings and queens, you understand!

Well, all that aside, just at the point where Bunyan is writing Part II of *Pilgrim's Progress*, the persecution has stopped. Well, it has stopped in England. It actually hadn't stopped in Scotland, and in the year that Part II was published there were in Scotland some of the worst killing times of the Covenanters that Britain has ever known. But he makes this point.

So Vanity is a relatively accessible city now for Christiana and Mercy and the boys. And they stay there for a while, and in this city now there are two more weddings. Samuel, another one of the boys, marries Grace, the daughter of this man Mnason in Vanity. And Martha, another one of his daughters, marries the fourth boy, Joseph. So within relatively few pages, Bunyan has all four of his

boys married—and not just married, but married in the Lord, and married well. And there's something extraordinarily beautiful about it, if you're a lover of literature—Jane Austen or something like that, where there are these beautifully descriptive wedding scenes. Well, that's what you've got here in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Now it doesn't stay beautiful for long. A Monster now appears, with seven heads and ten horns, and he comes out of the woods and murders people. Those who love their lives more than their souls succumb to his demands and are spared. But Great-heart — yes, Great-heart, this extraordinary figure in *Pilgrim's Progress*, Part II — Great-heart goes into battle with him, and they wound him and they wound him seriously. And Bunyan seems to be making the point that preaching and Christian action can seriously hinder the progress and advancement of evil. They stand a while at the place where Faithful was killed, and they give thanks “to Him that enabled him to bear his Cross so well.”

Outside of Vanity Fair, they pass by the hill called Lucre (“filthy lucre”). They come to the River, the River that surrounds Pleasant Meadow; and it's a point in the journey where there's just tranquility and peace. You know, in the Twenty-Third Psalm, even if there are enemies in the Twenty-Third Psalm:

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.”

Yes, there is the valley of the shadow of death. Yes, they're eating in the presence of their enemies, to be sure, in Psalm 23, but there's this pastoral scene. It's July 4 — it's picnic time. You're sitting by a river. You're eating your favorite food. Birds are singing, the sun is shining. There are shepherds here and there is peace here, and there's tranquility here.

Well, we have such periods in our lives, you and I...periods where God has blessed us, periods where we seem to be free from trial. That may not be where you are tonight, of course; I understand that. You may be in the thick of trial tonight. You may be in the midst of battle. You may be facing the Monster with seven heads and ten horns tonight. But that's not all of your life, is it? There are days when we battle. There are days when we have to pick up our sword and do battle with an enemy. We're going to look at that in a minute, but there are days, too—beautiful days, glorious days, days when our cup runs over, days when we can't believe how good God is to us, days when everything seems to be wonderful, and prayers are answered above and beyond our asking. Good days. And that's what Bunyan is describing here by the River in the Pleasant Meadows. But they're not there for long.

Doubting Castle, Giant Despair

They move along and they come to By-path Meadow. Now you remember By-path Meadow, of course, because as you can see from the map, if you have it before you, it leads to Doubting Castle. And who lives in Doubting Castle? The Giant Despair and Mrs. Despair. She lives there, too. And Great-heart and Mr. Honest, and of course as you might expect, the four boys...they go on this journey. They leave the women behind. Mr. Feeble-mind and Mr. Ready-to-halt look after the women.

Now just a little aside. Bunyan got into some trouble for that part of the allegory, of depicting the four women being looked after by these two decrepit men! And he was accused then, and he most certainly is being accused today of course by the literati of misogyny—of not being nice to women. Well, you've missed the point entirely. What is Bunyan saying? That when you are on the way (and the women are on the road), when you are walking on the road you are safe. It's when you go off the road that you are unsafe. All the trouble always come when they deviate off the road, on the road. And Bunyan quotes from Isaiah that a little child will lead them, and that's what these two men are, Feeble-mind and Ready-to-halt. So long as you are walking in the way, so long as you are following the Lord...but when you deviate...and Great-heart knows that some always do deviate, so he and the boys go off to deal with Giant Despair and Mrs. Despair. And they kill both Giant Despair and his wife. And then for the next seven days they systematically destroy the Castle, Doubting Castle.

Mr. Despondency

Now they find dead bodies everywhere, and there are bones everywhere. And they also discover two people who are barely alive: Mr. Despondency, and his daughter, Much-afraid.

Now I wanted to just read to you just a little section of it:

They fell to demolishing Doubting Castle, and that you know might with ease be done, since Giant Despair was dead. They were seven days in destroying of that, and in it of Pilgrims they found one Mr. Despondency, almost starved to death, and one Much-afraid, his daughter; these two they saved alive. But it would ha' made you ha' wondered, to have seen the dead bodies that lay here and there in the castle-yard, and how full of dead men's bones the dungeon was.

The Christian life for Bunyan is a fight. It's always a fight. It's a struggle, and sometimes it's a struggle against a Giant Despair. The Puritans, and Bunyan was among them, knew how prone certain Christians are to fall into despondency, to be caught in the clutches of spiritual despondency, of spiritual melancholy. Now, that for several reasons: sometimes because of the struggle with the flesh, of

indwelling sin...

“the good that we would, we do not; the evil that we would not, that we find that we do. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

It's discouraging, the lack of progress that we seem to make. When we think that we've made great strides and great advancements in the Christian life, we find one day we wake up and we're still struggling, and we're still struggling with the same sins, the same issues, and they bring us down. And it can lead to despondency and dejection, the struggle with the flesh, and Bunyan knows all about it.

And sometimes because of the struggle and contention with the world, with cities like Vanity. Vanity is one of the great cities of the world, like Babylon. The Bible talks about Babylon and Jerusalem. Augustine — the city of the world and the city of God. Well, Bunyan talks about Vanity, the City of Vanity. They're heading of course to the Celestial City. They have left the City of Destruction; they're in the City of Vanity with its Vanity Fair, with its allurements, with its temptations. And we can fall into the clutches of temptation. “Yield not to temptation” — but sometimes we yield, and it can be terribly discouraging. It can lead to spiritual despondency.

Sometimes it's because of the struggle with the devil himself, with the archenemy of souls, who is a liar from the very beginning. Christian had struggled with Apollyon; now Great-heart is dealing with these Giants. It's Giant Maul, and Giant Slay-good, and Giant Despair, and Giant Grim. Now what is Bunyan doing?

You'd think, wouldn't you, that after being a Christian for several years — twenty years, thirty, forty, fifty years — that the devil wouldn't trouble you any more. But there are people in here tonight who have been Christians for many, many years, many decades, and they'll tell you there are days when they feel as if they are in the very grip of Satan...in the very grip of Satan, when the devil seems to have them. It's what Paul calls in Ephesians 6, that we read earlier, “an evil day.” There's an evil day. There are days that it's in the beautiful meadows, that it's all peace and wonderful and tranquil, and we're beside still waters and the birds are singing; and there are days when we're in the grip of a fight—a mean, deadly fight.

Elijah knew all about it. Remember Elijah, in I Kings 19? After such a victory on Mount Carmel, after slaying the prophets of Baal, and what do we find in chapter 19 but that he's sitting under a juniper tree. He's asking the Lord to take him away. Queen Jezebel has threatened to kill him before the sun goes down, and rather than she get the victory for him, he's saying, ‘Lord, You do it, and You get the victory for it.’ There's Jeremiah. Remember Jeremiah in chapter 20? He spent the night in the stocks. The military temple policeman, Pashur, has heard him preaching one of these anti-temple sermons, and he's had him locked up in

prison and put in the stocks, and beaten. And the next day, what do you find in Jeremiah 20? Well, he's been reading Job. He's been reading the third chapter of Job. He's saying things like 'I wish I'd never been born.' He's saying things like 'I wish I'd have died in my mother's womb, so that she might be my grave forever.' He's saying things like that. This is Jeremiah, one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament, and he's experiencing spiritual dejection. He's in the grip of Giant Despair. He's in Doubting Castle.

There's the psalmist. You know those two Psalms—they belong together—Psalm 42 and 43. (If you say this is your favorite Psalm, then you'd better say it quietly.)

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul?
Why art thou disquieted within me?”

Spiritual Depression

Do you ever say that? Do you find yourself in days when you're saying, “Why are you cast down, O my soul?”

This spiritual cloud seems to have descended, but Bunyan isn't unaware of the multifaceted nature, of course, of melancholy and depression. He understands that. He's certainly not living in the twenty-first century, but the Puritans understood a great deal about depressions and how sometimes they're caused by physical things, and things like food and sleep and so on. But it isn't all just a spiritual factor. But *sometimes* it is a spiritual factor, and Bunyan is addressing this here with Doubting Castle and Giant Despair. What? “Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you disquieted within me?”

You remember the two on the Emmaus Road, Cleopas and his companion. (Was it Luke? Was it his wife?) Jesus has been crucified. He's been buried. They had fallen in love with Him. They had begun to think that He was the Savior, He was the promised one, He was the Messiah. He was the one who would make sense of everything. They had begun to put their hopes and trust in Him. They'd gone to Jerusalem to be near Him, and to hear Him and to listen to Him. And they'd killed Him...a violent, bloody crucifixion...they had killed Him. They had heard they had taken His body down from the cross, dead. They'd buried Him. And you remember how Jesus catches up with them...how Luke describes them in the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke...how their faces were to the ground. When you're dejected, when you're despondent, when you're spiritually depressed and confused, you can't look up any more. I imagine they're not saying much.

Victory over depression

And Jesus...you remember Jesus' question to them? “Why do you look so sad?”

Why do you look so sad? They're in the grip of Giant Despair. They have been locked up in Doubting Castle. And Jesus comes to them and ever so gently...He doesn't rebuke them, He doesn't say 'You silly people, don't you understand anything?' No, He takes them to the Bible, and "...beginning with Moses and in all the prophets, He begins to expound to them all those things concerning Himself."

It's such a key verse in the New Testament in the understanding of the Old Testament. He leads them on that beautiful, glorious Bible study—what a Bible study that must have been! Don't you wish you could have overheard that Bible study? I wish I could hear it. I'd love to know what passages Jesus took them to. Did He take them to Genesis 3:15? Did He take them to the twenty-second Psalm, that He had quoted on the cross? Did He take them to Isaiah 53? And then when they reached Emmaus and they broke bread, remember their eyes were opened and they beheld Him, and they understood who it was. Because He's the Great Physician. Bunyan is describing the Christian life in which that is a possibility.

Now, there are various views of spirituality out there in the world today, on television especially...in the media...that seem to want to present Christians as always ones with elated joy; that if you're not always experiencing this nth degree of exaltation that there's something wrong with you. But Bunyan's portrayal of the Christian life is a much more realistic one; it's one that you and I can identify with, because you go to a conference or you listen to a sermon, or you read a book or you read a Bible study, and you're on Cloud Nine. And you're driving home on I-55, and then you get home and you open the door and there's just bedlam, and everything seems to go wrong. The telephone goes, or a letter comes in the mail, or somebody says something that just breaks the atmosphere in a heartbeat, and you realize you're in this world. You're in Christ, to be sure, but you're in this world, and it's a world of hostility and it's a world where you have to fight. And that's what Great-heart is doing with Giant Despair, and he kills him.

But he says something extraordinary: "Sin can rebuild this Castle," Great-heart warns, "and make Despair the Giant alive again." Great-heart has killed him, but sin can make him alive again — and don't we know it. And don't we know it....

Well, next time we'll move on in this journey. But let's come before God now in prayer. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Bunyan. Thank You for his insight into the Scriptures. Thank You especially for these wonderful portraits of believers whose lives are frail and timid, and who often fell. Because we find that that's where we are very often, and we thank You that You are patient, and You are kind, and You are generous, and You help us, and You sustain us and You strengthen us. And we thank You for friends who help us. Thank You for those who encourage us when we are down. We thank You for those who stay loyal to us when we are driven by

the winds. And we ask now for Your blessing, and all of this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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