

**Pilgrim's Progress:
Christiana's Story (6) –
Delectable Mountains and Enchanted Ground**

John 10:7-18; Ezekiel 34

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Now turn with me if you would first of all to the map. If there are hardened “Bunyanites” here who have now learnt to bring their map with them on Wednesday nights, we have one more lesson to go next week. We need to get to heaven! We need to cross the River and get to the Celestial City, and we’ll do that next week.

But tonight we're going to spend some time...if you've found your map, we're on the last section of the map...we've gone from Vanity Fair, and tonight we're going to spend some time in the region known as the Delectable Mountains, and heading on up to Enchanted Ground. And on the way from the Delectable Mountains, Great-heart and Christiana and Mercy and the four boys and some others meet one of the great, great characters in either Part I or Part II of *Pilgrim's Progress*, and that is Mr. Valiant-for-truth. And those of you who are only barely familiar with *Pilgrim's Progress* will immediately resonate with Mr. Valiant-for-truth, a man of extraordinary ability and courage and resourcefulness, and I want to talk a little bit about him tonight.

But in the Delectable Mountains, they meet Shepherds. And I want to read from the Scriptures, from John 10. Bunyan is drawing not so much from John 10, but from Ezekiel 34; but John 10 is based on Ezekiel 34, and Ezekiel 34 draws a contrast between good shepherds and bad shepherds, or good shepherds and false shepherds, and John 10 of course speaks primarily of the Good Shepherd, and the true Shepherd that is our Lord Jesus Christ. So turn with me to John 10, and we are going to read from verse 7 down to the eighteenth verse. Before we read the passage together, let's once again look to God in prayer.

Lord our God, we are mindful now as we turn first of all to the Scriptures that this is Your word. We thank You for the sword of faith, which is the word of God. We thank You for the way in which it speaks to every area of our lives; that there is nothing that happens to us that isn't reflected in some way, in some measure, in the Scriptures. You foresaw what our needs would be. We pray for a better understanding and a better knowledge of the contents of Scripture. We would

know our Bibles better than we do. But more than that, O Lord, we would love our Bibles more than we do. We want to be men and women who love the Scriptures, and love to be in the Scriptures. We thank You for Pilgrim's Progress because it leads us to the Scriptures, helps us to understand the Scriptures better. Fill our minds, fill our hearts with Your word. May it be to us something sweeter than the honeycomb, that we may desire it more than food itself. Now grant Your blessing, Lord, we pray, as we read the Scriptures together. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

This is God's word:

So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

Amen. And may God add His blessing to that reading of His holy and inerrant word.

Now. You remember where we were last week. We were at the Castle of Giant Despair and his wife, and you remember that Great-heart and Mr. Honest and the four sons — all four of whom are now married, you remember — there have been four weddings in the last couple of weeks. All the men go off to battle. They go to kill Giant Despair and his wife, and for seven days they engage in the destruction of Doubting Castle. They raze it to the ground. It's one of the great battle scenes. If *Pilgrim's Progress* were a movie, and I suppose one day it will be, this will be one of those great battle scenes of Palena Fields, or ones that Ligon really loves! I can imagine this. It's not a huge battle; their numbers are small, of course. But it's a famous battle against an evil, wicked enemy. But you remember there was a sting in the tail; that although Giant Despair was killed, Bunyan says sin can make him alive again. In other words, that in this world, in this life, before we get to heaven we may engage in mortal conflict with enemies

— enemies that are within, enemies that are in our hearts, enemies in our minds — but they come to life again. Some of us know that all too well. I'm amazed that being a Christian for 36 years, I thought I was done with some sins. I really did think I was done with them. And then just when you think that, they come back again. They come to life again. They're raised to life again.

Well, having killed Giant Despair, there's a somewhat gory scene. They chop his head off. They bury his body underneath some stones, and they bring the head of Giant Despair back to the road where Mercy and Christiana and the four women (the wives of these four sons, guarded, you remember, by two of the men), and they bring the head of Giant Despair back to show them.

And well, what do you think? There is a party! They break into singing and dancing. Bunyan describes Christiana as playing the lyre and Mercy as playing the lute, and there's dancing. And there's a delightful scene where Mr. Despondency takes the ... Mr. Despondency isn't for dancing. He takes some of the medicine, the bottle of spirits that they had been given way back at the House of Interpreter. They had been given this bottle of spirits to revive him. He has been maltreated by Giant Despair. He's weak and emaciated. He's in no mood whatsoever for dancing. But Mr. Ready-to-halt, who has been looking after the women, takes Mr. Despondency's daughter...you remember they found her in the Castle. She was almost at the point of death, and her name is Much-afraid. And here you've got this delightful scene of this man, Mr. Ready-to-halt, and the daughter of Mr. Despondency, Much-afraid, and they're dancing. But Mr. Ready-to-halt is on crutches, and when he's dancing he disposes one of his crutches, but he dances with the other crutch. And you have to try and imagine it in your head, because it's somewhat amusing. And Bunyan says,

"...But I promise you, he footed it well; also the girl was to be commended, for she answered the musick handsomely."

Now I was telling Ligon yesterday as I was reading this again how extraordinary it is in *Pilgrim's Progress* that every now and then you have these descriptions of singing and dancing in this high Puritan period. You don't get much more Puritan than John Owen in the 1670's. This was written in the 1680's...1684. You remember the oft-repeated quip of H.L. Mencken, his definition of a Puritan: "The nagging fear that someone somewhere may be happy." That's how he describes a Puritan, that he's paranoid that someone somewhere in the world is going to be happy. Well, of course that's a terrible, wicked...it's an evil assessment of Puritanism, our forefathers. John Bunyan...and here's John Bunyan ready to describe the joy — the vibrant, healthy joy that comes from knowing Christ and knowing our sins to be forgiven.

Well, they move on now to the Delectable Mountains. And if you've got your map with you, you'll see there's a range of mountains, and at the foot of the mountains they meet these Shepherds. Good shepherds. He's basing it, as I was saying

earlier, on Ezekiel 34, which contrasts good shepherds and bad shepherds. And these shepherds greet the party and explain that this region is for the feeble as well as the strong. And I want to read just a very short section here, because there's something extraordinarily beautiful about this particular section. It's a favorite section of mine, and it's a favorite section of the second part rather than the first part of *Pilgrim's Progress*. It's one of the reasons why I particularly like the second part of *Pilgrim's Progress*, and I'm hoping to make some converts among you in this little seven-week study that we've had together.

Then said the Shepherds; This is a comfortable Company [the group of people who have come: Christiana, Mercy, and the four boys and their wives and so on]; you are welcome to us, for we have for the feeble, as well as the strong; our Prince has an eye to what is done to the least of these. Therefore Infirmity must not be a block to our entertainment. So they had them to the Palace door, and then said unto them, Come in Mr. Feeble-mind, come in Mr. Ready-to-halt, come in Mr. Despondency, and Mrs. Much-afraid, his daughter. These, Mr. Great-heart, said the Shepherds to the Guide, we call in by name, for that they are most subject to draw back; but as for you, and the rest that are strong, we leave you to your wonted liberty. Then said Mr. Great-heart, This day I see that Grace doth shine in your faces, and that you are my Lord's Shepherds indeed; for that you have not pushed these diseased neither with side nor shoulder...

Now he's referring to Ezekiel 34, and one of the marks of a false shepherd in Ezekiel 34 is that he pushes with his shoulder those who are weak and diseased, out of the way. But these shepherds care for the poor, and they care for the weak amongst the flock of God, and I find that to be an extraordinarily beautiful description by Bunyan of the Christian church. Bunyan having been released from prison, he'd been a pastor now out of prison for the last ten-plus years in Bedford. He'd experienced a period of six months back in prison during that period, but he's telling us about what the church is like. And the church consists of strong Christians, but the church also consists of weak Christians and feeble Christians, and untaught Christians.

And the Shepherds make food for them that is "easy to the palate," Bunyan describes, for the weak ones, for the feeble ones. And I find that to be a wonderful lesson, that in the church — in our own church — we have the strong. We have the Mr. Great-hearts and we have the Mr. Valiant-for-truth, and we've got the four boys ready to show their courage at a moment's notice; but we've got weak ones, and folk who barely believe. They believe, but they're always saying, "Lord, help thou my unbelief!" And those who are passing through enormous trials and whose assurance is being tested, and whose conviction as to the truth is being tested.

Now they come to view these mountains. Now, they don't view all of the

mountains, but they view three of them in particular.

Before them they see a mount called Mount Marvel. And on Mount Marvel they see a man “that tumbled the hills about with words.” He tumbled the hills with words...he would utter words and the hills would turn over. It's a picture, you understand, but he's describing of course Mark 11:23, about faith and the power of faith:

“Truly I say to you that whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

A lesson about faith and prayer; not just to pray for something, but to believe as we pray. To encourage faith and conviction as we pray.

Then they look at Mount Innocent. And they see a man who's clothed in white. And there are two men, Prejudice and Ill-will, and they are throwing dirt at this man. But every time they throw dirt at this man, the dirt falls away and he is as white as he was before. And Bunyan says that he's teaching that Christians that live innocently in the world, that God will cleanse his testimony; that no matter what ill-will the world may display towards that believer, God will always view him as one wearing white clothes, as a righteous one in Jesus Christ.

And then they look at a third mountain, and it's called Mount Charity. And there's a man with a bundle of cloth. And out of that cloth he cuts material to make coats and garments for the poor, but the cloth would never grow any less. And he alludes to the story of the widow of Nain in the Elijah/Elisha narratives in the Old Testament. The cruets of oil that he'd asked, you remember? The prophet had asked for her to bake him some bread, and it was the last of the oil, and it was the last of the flour. And the prophet insists that she bake this bread, and she bakes it. But the cruets of oil did not give out. It continued to be filled. And those, Bunyan says, who have a heart for the poor shall never go without, for as much as you give, as much will be given back to you again.

Now when they leave the Delectable Mountains, they meet at the place in Part I of Pilgrim's Progress where Little Faith was robbed. And they meet now this marvelous character called Mr. Valiant-for-truth. And as he's introduced to us, he's introduced to us in this way:

“There stood a man with his sword drawn, and his face all bloody.”

That's a marvelous way of drawing our attention to this man — that he has a sword drawn and there's blood on his face! He's been engaged in battle, and he's been fighting three men. And he's been fighting them for three hours, and as soon as this Company arrive, these three men disappear. Now we're to

understand that in the allegory which is *Pilgrim's Progress*, these three men that Mr. Valiant-for-truth has been fighting are internal. They're within himself.

He gives a reason why he had left. He comes from the Dark Land, and his parents are still there. They had opposed him leaving and going on this pilgrimage to the Celestial City. The Dark Land was near the coast where the City of Destruction was, where Christian and Christiana and the boys had come from. And he'd left the Dark Land because it was unsuitable and unprofitable, and he had forsaken it, and he had given this reason for doing so:

We had one Mr. Tell-truth come into our parts, and he told about what Christian had done, how he had left the City of Destruction to head for the Celestial City...That man so told the story of Christian and his Travels, that my heart fell into a burning haste, to be gone after him; nor could my father or mother keep me; so I got from them, and am now come thus far on my Way.

Now, some of us can relate to that. I certainly can relate to that. I remember someone telling me for the first time the story of the gospel. I remember meeting someone who had evidently changed...that there was something different about them in a metaphorical way...that a light seemed to shine out from their hearts and spirits that I'd never seen before. And I remember vividly that whatever it was this person had, I wanted. I'd come to see the emptiness of life, the vanity of life without Jesus Christ.

And in *Pilgrim's Progress*, they're always giving testimony to their conversion. Every time they seem to be on a journey, one or another is telling each other about how they were converted, how God the Spirit had drawn them. I'd love to encourage more of that in ourselves and in our conversations: "Tell me how God brought you to himself." And for some of you, it's from your earliest childhood, and through the means of grace of families and parental prayers and catechisms, and children's stories and sermons from the pulpit, and Sunday School periods and so on. And for others, like myself, it's a sudden and dramatic Paul-like Damascus road experience. One day you're in darkness, and another day, by the mercy and grace of God you are in the light.

Well, this is Mr. Valiant-for-truth, and he has been brought to saving faith by hearing the testimony of Christian, the testimony of this man who has now died.

Now what is it that we learn from Mr. Valiant-for-truth? And I want to say that we ought to learn at least three things from Mr. Valiant-for-truth.

First of all, we learn that truth must do battle with enemies. The truth must do battle with enemies, and we must think of the enemies that Mr. Valiant-for-truth has been fighting...these three men. We must think of them as within his heart. Bunyan calls the three enemies who attacked Valiant "Wild-head, Inconsiderate,

and Pragmatick.” Now we have to carefully define *pragmatic*, because it doesn't mean what you think it means. In the seventeenth century the word *pragmatic* meant something different. But these are ways in which truth can be expressed in a wrong way.

He talks about Mr. Wild-head. Sometimes Mr. Wild-head shows himself with a pen in his hand and he writes letters. And they're mean-spirited letters. They're true — the principle is true, but the words are wild and out of place, and it's filled with a bitterness of emotion that isn't under control. His head has become wild. Sometimes he's behind a pulpit. Yes, you can be true, and what you're saying is true, but there's a mean-spiritedness about it. There's an anger that is out of place about it. Sometimes it's in private conversations that Mr. Wild-head will manifest himself...in a debate, in incorrigible words. We've seen him rush up the character of some godly saint who is just not enlightened, whose understanding was just not as good as his Christian experience, and Wild-head comes — yes, with truth — but in a wild way, in a way that isn't appropriate.

What does Paul say in Ephesians 4:15? “Speak the truth in love.” Speak the truth. Speak the truth, but do so in love. What does John tell us about our Savior in the prologue of his Gospel? “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Not just truth. Truth, yes; but grace and truth. He comes with truth, but He comes with grace, too. Mr. Wild-head. Do you know Mr. Wild-head? Have you met Mr. Wild-head? It's a word particularly relevant to those of us who love the truth. It's one of our own distinctives, isn't it? We are defenders of the truth. That's why we are the PCA, that's why we are First Presbyterian Church or whatever, because we want to defend the truth against error. But we must do so in love, Bunyan is saying.

Then there's Mr. Inconsiderate. Those who speak too much, he says, seldom think they have said enough. And when the mouth is open in passion, the ear is shut to reason. Mr. Inconsiderate. Well, some of you have met Mr. Inconsiderate. You recognize him.

And then, Mr. Pragmatick. Now pragmatic in the seventeenth century meant something different to what it means today. It meant someone officiously busy in other people's affairs; interfering, or meddling. And by Bunyan's time, the word meant opinionated and dogmatic, and dictatorial.

Well, you see what Bunyan is doing. He's saying there's a Mr. Valiant-for-truth, and he's a wonderful man, and praise God for Mr. Valiant-for-truth and Mrs. Valiant-for-truth. But beware of Wild-head, and beware of Inconsiderate. And beware of Opinionated and Dictatorial.

The second thing we learn from Mr. Valiant-for-truth is that truth must fight with a good weapon. We must fight, but we must fight with a good weapon. Great-heart says to Mr. Valiant-for-truth:

“Let me see thy sword; so he shewed it to him. And when he had taken it in his hand, and looked thereon a while, he said, It is a right Jerusalem blade.”

Isn't that a beautiful description? “It is a right Jerusalem blade.” You can imagine this sword being drawn out, and it's a right Jerusalem blade. He's talking of course about the Bible; he's talking about the word of God as being the sword of Jerusalem. And Valiant says:

“It is so. Let a man have one of these blades, with a hand to wield it, and skill to use it, and he may venture upon an Angel with it. He need not fear its holding, if he can but tell how to lie on. Its edge will never blunt. It will cut flesh, and bones, and soul, and spirit, and all.”

Of course he's alluding to Hebrews 4, that the Bible is “sharper than any two-edged sword, dividing asunder soul and spirit, and joints and marrow.”

Great-heart goes on in the conversation with Valiant:

“But you fought a great while, I wonder you was not weary.”

And Valiant says:

“I fought till my Sword did cleave to my hand, and then they were joined together, as if a sword grew out of my arm; and when the blood ran through my fingers, then I fought with most courage.” [And Great-heart says]: “Thou hast done well, thou hast resisted unto blood, striving against Sin.”

And he's citing of course from Hebrews 12, that in our perseverance we must be willing to resist even, yes, even to the point of blood, wielding the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

I'd been in some nervousness about this little study on a Wednesday evening. I'm always wondering if somebody's going to say “Why aren't we studying the Bible? We're studying Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.” But I hope and trust that Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is only a little window to get us into the Bible, to understand the Bible, so that we might use the Bible with greater tenacity and greater faith.

And the third thing — and in your bulletins I trust you have a copy of the hymn, because it's at this point with Mr. Valiant-for-truth that Bunyan now cites this hymn. Now, we sang this hymn together in the first session. It was awful! It was worse than awful! So I'm not going to make you sing it again tonight! But I do want to make you fall in love with these words.

Now these words are in *Trinity Hymnal*, though I have to say *Trinity Hymnal* has...well, you're going to be offended now. But I was going to say it has

feminized these words. It's taken the sort of manliness away from these words, and I want you to look at the original words of Bunyan here. It's a very famous hymn. It's very famous in Britain because of the sense of valor and courage, and even those who are not Christians love to sing this hymn. It's a kind of hymn to sort of march to, and it's been made famous by a tune that Ralph Vaughan Williams put to — MONKS GATE, I think it's called:

Who would true Valour see,
Let him come hither;
One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather:
There's no Discouragement
Shall make him once relent,
His first avow'd intent
To be a Pilgrim.

[Well, that's a very strong affirmative beginning of a Christian who has vowed to be a Pilgrim, and nothing and no one is going to be able to stand in his way.]

Whoso beset him round
With dismal stories,
Do but themselves confound,
His Strength the more is.

No Lion can him fight;
He'll with a Giant fight,
But he will have a right
To be a Pilgrim.

Hobgoblin, nor foul Fiend
Can daunt his spirit;
He knows, he at the End
Shall Life inherit.

Then Fancies fly away,
He'll fear not what men say,
He'll labour Night and Day
To be a Pilgrim.

It's a perseverance hymn; it's a hymn of Christian warfare; it's a hymn marching... "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war." It's that kind of hymn. It's a hymn that is calling for perseverance. It's calling for courage. It's calling for faith. It's calling for valour and virtue and courage, and especially passion and involvement.

There's nothing worse, I think, for Bunyan, than half-heartedness...half-

heartedness. And I wonder tonight, where are we in our Christian experience? In our love for the Lord? In our willingness to suffer for the cross and for the gospel? For our desire to see the lost brought to Jesus Christ? Are we persevering, and persevering in faith? Are we persevering in courage and conviction?

Those are some of the things that Bunyan is here trying to encourage.

Well, next week will be our last session in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and we'll go all the way on our little map, all the way to the Celestial City, and especially to the very, very moving description of crossing the River into the Celestial City.

Now let's pray together.

Father, we thank You. Thank You for the word, thank You for the power of the word, like a sword that divides asunder, that is quick and powerful. We thank You that You are a God that has made promises that can never ever be broken. We ask now that You fill us, fill us again tonight with fresh courage and fresh conviction. We would be soldiers, marching as to war. Now bless us, we pray, and forgive us all of our sins. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand; 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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