

## **Pilgrim's Progress (7): The Valley of Humiliation – The Fight with Apollyon**

**Ephesians 6:10-18**

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Now turn with me, if you would, to Ephesians, chapter six, and we're going to read from verse 10. Ephesians, chapter six, and beginning at verse 10.

We've been looking through, these Sunday evenings, at Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, allowing that to be a window through which we may view the Scriptures and the truths that are taught in the Scriptures, and tonight as we come in the section to the Valley of Humiliation in the allegory of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the Scripture in mind is that of Ephesians 6:10 and following. Before we read the passage together, let's come before God in prayer. Let's pray.

*Father, as we bow in Your presence just now, we ask for Your rich blessing. We are conscious that this is Your word that we are reading. It is by the inspiration of God that it was given. We ask for a spirit of illumination that we might read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

This is God's holy and inerrant word.

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Amen. And may God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

Now, Christian (as we were considering it last Lord's Day evening) has just left Palace Beautiful, after, you remember, glimpsing just before he left the Palace the Delectable Mountains he could see on the clear morning of his departure.

Before he leaves, he's given a sword and a shield and a helmet. And as you can see, Bunyan is immediately drawing our attention and minds to this famous passage in Ephesians 6, a passage which in itself is "borrowed", as it were, from the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament; a passage which reminds us as believers, as Christians, as the people of God, that we are involved, you and I, in a war; that there is no such thing in the Christian life as conscientious objection to this war.

Bunyan, you remember, had been fighting in a very real war in the civil war on the side of Cromwell, and no doubt some of that — and the memories of battle armor, I'm sure — came to his mind and drew him back to this biblical portrait of what a Christian is: someone who is engaged in constant battle, and battle against an enemy.

The enemy in this instance is called Apollyon, a name that is actually given to Satan in Revelation 9:11, and means destroyer. Satan is given many names in the Bible. He is called *diabolos*, or accuser; he's called *the tempter*; he's called *the evil one*; he's called *the prince, the god of this evil world*.

So Christian descends from the Palace, Palace Beautiful, and almost immediately descends into this Valley of Humiliation, and there is to meet this "foul fiend", as Bunyan calls him — namely, Apollyon.

Christian's instinct is to turn and run, and then he remembers something: that he doesn't have any protection for his back, and that if he is going to survive this attack against the evil one that he must utilize the pieces of armor that God has actually given to him — the shield and the sword, and the helmet. There is no point in him turning and running, because he is sure to be done for. He must face his fierce opponent.

Now there's something quintessentially Puritan about this portrait that Bunyan is actually drawing. Many of you will remember other such portraits. One thinks of William Gurnall's magnificent 750-page tome, an exposition of Ephesians 6, called *The Christian in Complete Armor*. Some of you men, for example, have been reading, I know, in the last couple of years, Thomas Brooks' *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*. And if we focus for a minute on Ephesians 6, this portrait of the embattled Christian, or the Christian who is battling against the enemy in all of his multifarious forms - the world and the flesh, to be sure, but especially the devil. We see Paul in Ephesians 6 drawing to a conclusion the letter to the Ephesians (that actually we're studying in the mornings), but in

almost every chapter of Ephesians Paul has had recourse to remind his readers that Christians were at one time in league with and under the dominion of Satan, but as a consequence of coming to faith in Jesus Christ that we have, as it were, now given our allegiance to Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior, our Prophet, Priest, and King. In chapter 4 and verse 27 of Ephesians, he has already exhorted the Ephesians, "Give no opportunity to the devil." We're not to give him any opportunity. We're to be on our guard. We're to be watchful. We're to be mindful that he is there, that he is always prowling about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Back in chapter 3 of Ephesians, Paul had prayed that, according to the riches of His power, that Christians would be strengthened in the inner man through Jesus Christ. And that's what he's doing in Ephesians 6. How are we to be strengthened in the inner man through Jesus Christ?

Well, part of the way that we are strengthened is by utilizing and remembering these pieces of armor that God has given to us. It's what our Lord taught His disciples in that important moment in His ministry in Caesarea Philippi. "I build My church," He says, "within the precincts of the gates of Hades, but they will not prevail against it." Jesus marches out, as it were, into the centuries that follow, and He builds His church in enemy-occupied territory, and He gives that promise: the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

And that's why Bunyan has, as this hymn that we're terribly struggling to sing on these Sunday evenings...hopefully, by the time we come to the end, we'll have this in our armor. The words are wonderful. I grew up with *Monks Gate*, so I've not found it such a problem.

But, the

"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 labor night and day to be a pilgrim."

Now let's look at this in a little more detail. I want us to see three essential things, and the first is:

### **I. The parameters of the battle.**

And Bunyan, as well as Paul in Ephesians 6, and what Bunyan is doing is merely drawing out what Paul is teaching in Ephesians 6. He's teaching us the battle between Apollyon (that is to say, the devil) and Christian is actually set in a much larger conflict. He tells us in Ephesians 6 that we wrestle against...not against

flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers in the heavenly places. That is to say that we exist as Christians, as it were, in a realm — a spiritual realm — a realm in which we are brought into union and communion with Jesus Christ, to be sure, but also we are now brought into acquaintance with a realm not just of the Spirit of Christ, but of Apollyon himself. And we wrestle in our lives in that particular context.

Do you see what Paul is doing in Ephesians 6? What Bunyan is doing here in the narrative of Christian's journey? He's reminding us that now that we are in union and communion with Jesus Christ, we have, you and I, an implacable enemy; an enemy that never rests, an enemy that makes us the object of his attacks. Because he hates Jesus Christ, he hates all who are Jesus Christ's. Bunyan is saying to you as Paul is saying in Ephesians 6, don't ever forget that. Don't ever forget that, because the devil would love you to forget that. He wants to go about his work without you even knowing that he's there!

And Christian is on this journey, and he's being reminded we have an implacable enemy. Notice also in Ephesians 6 that Paul makes a reference to what he calls “the evil day”; that we will be enabled to stand in “the evil day.”

Now, commentators on Ephesians 6 are divided. Some think that Paul may well be referring to a day somewhere in the future, that he's talking about an evil day at the end of the age as part of those events that will usher in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, but I like to think that Paul perhaps is not so much referring to something in the dim and distant future, but may well be referring to an event that every Christian may know: that there are particular days that are evil — the kind of day that we read of, say, in the opening chapters of Job; that there comes a day when Satan is given permission to attack all that Job has and destroy his family, and destroy his wealth and his livelihood; and then, even to attack him personally. An evil day, and in that day, if that day comes...not every day is an evil day.

The 23rd Psalm: “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He restores my soul.” There are days of beauty and tranquility, and peace, and rest and comfort, and a sense of God's presence. Yes! There are those days, but there is an evil day, too: days when the telephone rings, and it's bad news; days when you encounter someone that you know, and harsh words are spoken; days when you're trodden upon; days in your marriage; days in your place of work; days when sickness and ill health burdens you; an evil day, and in that day...in that day...in days when you might have to face Apollyon himself.

Now, most of us may never face Apollyon. You understand that. We face his minions, we face the hoards of demons, but we may never face — face to face — Apollyon, like Christian does here. There are days, perhaps, ahead of us that are evil days. And Bunyan is saying, Be prepared for that. And the way to be

prepared for that is to remember the pieces of armor that God has given to you. The evil day is when temptation and opportunity and desire all come together; when they all come together, like David and Bathsheba; when opportunity and desire are coalesced, and an evil day resulted.

## **II. The malevolence of the enemy.**

But let me plot this a little further and see in the second place the malevolence of the enemy. Apollyon is described by Bunyan, and he is merely picking up the language of Revelation 9. He is described as clothed with scales like a fish, wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, the mouth of a lion, and out of his mouth came fire and smoke. And Satan (Apollyon) now engages in various stratagems...various stratagems by which he systematically attacked Christian. And there are four of them.

The first one is that he questions Christian's identity. He asks him where does he come from, and Christian says that he's come from the City of Destruction. And Apollyon says, "I perceive thou art one of my subjects; for all that country is mine..." And what Apollyon, what the devil is doing here is questioning, do you see, the very identity of Christian. Because although it is true that Christian did come from the City of Destruction and was at one time a subject of Apollyon, he is no longer that; that once he had come to the Cross and within sight of that tomb and his Burden had fallen away, he was no longer subject of Apollyon.

The devil loves to remind us of where we have come from, and to suggest that perhaps we haven't traveled sufficiently far to entertain the assurance that we're not still members of that City of Destruction.

And then, failing in that stratagem, the devil moves on to a second, and does something. And this is so very insightful on Bunyan's part, because if the Puritans understood something, they understood something about the stratagems of the devil. And what Apollyon now does is he points out Christian's unfaithfulness along the way, because Christian, you remember, had been unfaithful along the way. He had veered off course; he had failed to listen to the advice of Evangelist; he had found himself falling asleep on the Hill. And along the way, it is true that Christian had indeed failed, and the devil is pointing this out. And the devil is saying, 'How can you be a Christian? How can you be a subject of Jesus Christ when you failed so miserably in this way?'

"Thou didst faint at first when setting out, when thou wast almost choaked in the Gulph of Despond; thou didst attempt wrong ways to be rid of thy Burden, whereas thou shouldest have stayed till thy Prince had taken it off."

Isn't it interesting...isn't it interesting that Bunyan is saying the devil knows precisely the way of salvation? He knows precisely what Christian should have

done, and he's pointing out the doctrine of sanctification and saying to Christian, 'Look, here is the doctrine of sanctification, and look how miserably you perform it!'

And do you know what Christian's response is? Not to become defensive; he acknowledges the fact: all this is true, and much more which you have left out. It's actually much worse than you think it is. And then he runs to the Cross of Jesus Christ and he says, 'However great my sins and failures are, there is forgiveness, that God may be feared.'

That's a wonderful, wonderful piece of advice. When Satan casts your sin in your face, acknowledge it and run to the cross, and see that at the cross there is forgiveness, even for ongoing sin.

It sends the devil into a rage, Bunyan says, and so a third stratagem comes: a fiery dart. And Christian now uses his shield to good effect:

"Then did Christian draw; for he saw it was time to bestir him; and Apollyon as fast made at him, throwing Darts as thick as hail; by the which, notwithstanding all that Christian could do to avoid it, Apollyon wounded him in his head, his hand, and foot. This made Christian give a little back..."

Notice what Bunyan is teaching here. Drawing from Ephesians 6, drawing from Revelation 9, drawing from that picture in Revelation 12 of the great red dragon waiting to devour the child that was born, drawing from these pictures and saying in effect, 'Look, there will be times when Satan will do real damage, just because you're a Christian, just because you're in Jesus Christ, just because you're born again with the Spirit of God.' There are times when Satan may well do real damage, as the opening chapters of the Book of Job teach us.

And then, there's a fourth stratagem, and it's personal hand-to-hand combat. It's a very moving section of Pilgrim's Progress. Christian wrestles, and he falls to the ground, and his sword falls out of his hand and Apollyon rises with a triumphant look, ready to slay him, and says, "I am sure of thee now!" and Christian never comes closer to death than at this point. And Apollyon is about to strike, and Christian reaches out his hand and, Sam Gangee-like with Chelop, plunges that sword into Apollyon: "Rejoice not against my, O mine enemy, when I fall I shall rise..." [and he's quoting from Micah 7:8], and he thrusts at Apollyon who speeds away to the strains of Christian quoting from Romans 8:38: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us."

And again Christian bursts into song:

"Great Beelzebub, the Captain of this Fiend,  
Design'd my Ruin; therefore to this end  
He sent him harness'd out; and he with rage,

That hellish was, did fiercely me engage:

But blessed Michael helped me..." [Michael the archangel, that is, has come to his defense; it's an allusion, I think, to the Book of Daniel]...

"But blessed Michael helped me, and I,  
By dint of Sword, did quickly make him fly:  
Therefore to him let me give lasting Praise,  
And Thank, and bless his holy Name always."

The malevolence of the enemy.

### **III. The resources of victory.**

Well, a third thing that we learn in this section of *Pilgrim's Progress*, drawing, as we are, from Ephesians 6, are the resources of victory. And I want to mention two of them — two of the resources for victory in our encounter with the evil one. The first is to recognize the terrain.

What Paul is doing in Ephesians 6 is mapping out the Christian journey and saying to us that as believers in Jesus Christ, we can expect to do battle with the evil one. And what Bunyan is doing in his allegory is fleshing that terrain out and saying to us, 'Look, these are the kinds of things that Satan has done with God's people in the past, and he may well use those same stratagems with you, because Satan is a slow learner...because even though he's failed at these before, he never seems to be tired of using them again and again and again. So learn these devices of Satan. Learn to recognize, as it were, his voice.'

But there's a second thing that we are to learn here about the resources for victory. Not only recognize terrain, but do precisely what Christian does by putting on this battle armor. Do precisely what Paul tells the Ephesians to do, to put on each piece of armor — and there's a marvelous description of that armor in Ephesians 6, and some commentators sometimes suggest that because Paul is writing the Ephesians under house arrest, and because he was chained to a Roman soldier, that what he is describing is the armor that Roman soldiers would wear.

Actually, that's probably not the case, and what Paul is actually doing is, he's drawing from a picture that is actually given to us in Isaiah, in the Old Testament, in chapter 59. And there is Isaiah 59...let me encourage you this evening, before the Lord's Day draws to its final close, go back to Isaiah 59. And what you see in Isaiah 59 is a description, not of a believer wearing armor, but it's a picture of God wearing armor. It's the divine Lord who is coming against His enemies, and He's coming wearing this armor! It's a reference to the coming of Jesus Christ, because when Jesus encountered the attacks of Apollyon, it was with these very

same pieces of armor that He met all of the onslaughts of the wicked one. And do you see what Paul is saying, when he's saying put on these pieces of armor? He saying these pieces of armor have been tried and tested by God!

Next time you go to Britain for a trip or a vacation, and you go into a restaurant (it would have to be a fairly low-class restaurant...and for some of you, that means all restaurants in Britain!)...but, have a look at the sauce bottle. And more than likely on the sauce bottle there would be written the words, "By appointment of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II." And what that is supposed to mean is that this is an item that she herself uses in Buckingham Palace, and she's given that kind of stamp of approval. I think it probably meant more fifty years ago than it does now.

But do you see what Paul is saying? These are pieces of armor that Jesus Himself in His incarnate condition has put on and tried and tested, and won the victory against Apollyon.

Well, these are some of the lessons that we learn from Christian as he descends into this Valley of Humiliation and emerges victorious against the onslaughts of Apollyon. Let's pray together.

*Our Father in heaven, as we bow now in Your presence, we thank You for this word of Scripture in Ephesians 6. We thank you for the battle armor that You give to us, and pray that we might put on each piece with prayer; that we might be diligent as we encounter the wiles and stratagems of the evil one. And grand, O Lord, especially tonight to some of our brothers and sisters who may well be encountering the onslaughts of Satan even today, and we pray that You would give them great courage and great faith, and to trust Your promises and to use Your word, and to be much in prayer, as we pray for them. And grant, O gracious God, that Satan might be set running and fleeing away as we look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Now bless us, we pray, 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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