

The Fullness of Christ

The Aged Christian, or, "Jacob's Pilgrimage"

By [Octavius Winslow](#)

Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, Pharaoh asked him, "How old are you?"

And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." Genesis 47:7-9

What a magnificent study does this group present for the pencil of the spiritual painter! Here is a powerful monarch, an aged pilgrim, and an affectionate son; and from the history and character of each, ample material might be gathered well calculated richly to furnish our minds with the most impressive and instructive lessons and facts in relation to our present and future state of being. But it is more especially around the central object of this picture- the aged patriarch Jacob- that the peculiar interest gathers. There are three or four suggestive features in the portrait; may the Spirit of truth make our meditation of them instructive and sanctifying!

The first is the PILGRIMAGE of the patriarch. The aged saint selects one of the most striking figures with which to depict his own and all life- "the years of my pilgrimage." He stands before the king of Egypt in the character of a pilgrim. His life, if we examine it with care, will be found literally and strikingly to have exemplified this idea. He seemed to have no permanent resting. His life was migratory. God saw fit to lead His servant about in the wilderness, thus perfecting his character as a Christian pilgrim. He first dwelt in Canaan, from thence he removed to Padan-aram, and again he returned to Canaan. For some time he dwelt in Succoth, and then at Shechem, and after that at Hebron; and now in his old age, when we might suppose perfect repose would be vouchsafed to the aged saint, we find him, under God's especial direction, emigrating into Egypt; and from thence, as you will see by the sequel of his history, his remains were carried back again, and at last found their final resting-place in Canaan, the place from where he first set out.

Thus God is constantly teaching His saints that this cosmos is not their rest- that the world is but an inn, and life a journey to another and a distant environment. It is recorded of the ancient worthies that "they confessed they were strangers and

pilgrims on the earth;" they were not ashamed to acknowledge that this was their character. Let us now see how this character applies to all believers, and ascertain if in any feature it corresponds with us.

What are some of the elements, or rather characteristics of the Christian pilgrimage? In the first place, there is this characteristic- the Christian pilgrim is not at home here in this world. A pilgrim is never supposed to be so; he is traveling to a distant place. If ever this characteristic finds a truthful application, it is in the life of the child of God. He is not at home in this world; he does not feel so, and he is day by day made to realize that he is a stranger here, and that he experiences the heart of a stranger. Is this characteristic of the Christian pilgrimage ours? Oh, do we feel that earth is but a lodge, a sojourn as for a night? If so, then give grateful utterance to the sentiment: "My heart is a stranger here; I feel myself homeless in this world; my witness is above, my abode is on high; and if God sees fit to plant the thorn in my earthly nest, that my life should in this respect be felt to be that of a pilgrim, I will praise Him for the discipline into which it brings me, for the deepening conviction it imparts to my soul that my home is in heaven."

Another feature or characteristic of the Christian pilgrim is indifference to present objects, scenes, and events. A traveler, passing through a strange city to another and distant place, feels but little or no interest in the affairs of that city, its local administration, and its party strifes. There is an emphatic and solemn sense in which we as Christians ought to be indifferent to what is transpiring around us. We say 'a sense'. We do not think that God would have His people pass blindfolded through life, abjuring their intelligent and observant faculties, taking no note of His administrative government of the world. A true child of God cannot be totally indifferent to the mode by which his heavenly Father conducts His providential government. God's providence is the handmaid of His grace; and events in the divine administration of the world which often confound the statesman, baffle the diplomatist, and revolutionize the nations of the earth, are but the awful footsteps of Jehovah preparing tile way for the advancement and consolidation of His kingdom.

Our Lord, in His gentle rebuke of His disciples for not studying the "signs of the times," recognized the duty of all His followers to make themselves intelligent, interested, and prayerful students of His dealings with individuals, with families, and with nations. Beyond this we are to be Christian pilgrims, feeling no more interest or regard for these things than as though they were not. Ah, many a Christian professor merges his religion in his politics, loses the spirituality of his heavenly, in the deadening influence of his earthly calling. Beware, as a Christian man, of the politics of the world; beware of a too absorbing interest in worldly scenes; beware, oh, beware, of having the affections, thoughts, and powers of your soul swept onward by the tide of political, commercial, and scientific excitement, which drowns so many souls in perdition. As a believer in Jesus, you are a pilgrim on earth; and a denizen of heaven you are the citizen of a better,

that is, a heavenly country.

Another characteristic of the Christian's pilgrimage is the life of faith that he lives. This is an essential element of the Christian pilgrimage- a life of faith in God. It is a blessed life to live. Some of our sweetest moments are those in which we trace the blessing bestowed immediately to God's hand and to God's heart, when it comes to us, so detached from what is human, and from what is the result of our own planning, scheming, forethought, and anticipation, as compels the grateful acknowledgment- "This is from my Father's love; in this I trace my Father's hand; it comes to me in answer to prayer, and as the fruit of filial, believing trust in God." If, then, we are true to our confession, the life we live must be one of faith, day by day, on the fulness of Christ, on the life of the Spirit, on a Father's care, protection, and counsel. O sweet and blessed life! it is the most God-honoring, Christ-crowning, holy life the Christian pilgrim can live. It is the happiest life too. What a pressure of anxious care it uplifts from the mind, what fears it removes, what confidence it inspires, and what peace it imparts!

A pilgrim's life must also, in a great measure, be a life of privation and vicissitude, a chequered and changeful life. It must be one of trial and disappointment. He has often a thorny path to tread, dreary, desolate, and lonely. Were it otherwise, it would be lacking in much that renders a Christian pilgrim's life blessed and enviable- a life above the ordinary beings around him. To prevent him from sliding, God often makes the believer's path flinty; to allure him into closer communion with Himself, He makes it solitary; to bring him into the deeper experience of His love and sympathy, He makes it trying and sorrowful. Thus the Christian pilgrim's path homeward is just what his heavenly Father makes it- a truth well calculated to bring us into perfect and cheerful contentedness with all God's ways.

But let us not paint the Christian pilgrim's path in hues too somber. It is not all loneliness and straitness; it is not all darkness and sorrow. Oh, no! We partake in our earthly pilgrimage oftentimes of the luscious grapes of Canaan. We often have in faith the first-fruits of glory. David speaks of music in his pilgrimage: "Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." The Christian can sing in the ways of the Lord- traveling to Zion with the songs of Zion floating from his lips. Oh! it is a slander upon the gospel of Jesus to suppose that it inculcates a religion of gloom and despondency, a religion rayless, cheerless, joyless.

Even in the deepest and most painful soul-exercises of the believer, there is more of real happiness than in all the world combined. One would rather have the tears of the Christian than the smiles of the worldling, the mourning of the saint than the laughter of the sinner. To sing in the Lord's ways- His trying ways, His disappointing ways, His darksome ways, His chastening ways- to sing in the ways of His truth, and obedience, and love- oh, there is infinitely more sweetness and melody in those songs which wake their echoes along the Christian pilgrim's lonely, tearful, weary path, than ever breathes from the world's harp of gladness

and of song. To sing of a precious Savior, of a full Christ, of a Father's dealings, of a coming glory, of an eternal heaven; oh! who will say that the Christian pilgrim is not a joyous, happy man?

Our Christian pilgrimage, too, has its especial supports, succourings, consolations. The Lord does not leave us to tread this pilgrimage at our own cost, relying upon our own resources. Ah, no! you do not take a step in your homeward march but you are surrounded by the presence of your Savior. Jesus is with you; He knows all your sorrows, He sees all your battlings, your misgivings, your infirmities, trials, and needs. Jesus is with you in the pilgrimage, and you cannot be alone.

Nor would we forget to remind you that the Christian pilgrimage has a glorious termination. We must keep this fully in view. We seek a city that is to come; we are not journeying to any uncertain, imaginary place. We are going to our heavenly mansion; we are traveling to the celestial city; we are wending our way to our glorious inheritance, and in a little while- O solemn thought! God give us to realize it!- it will burst upon us in its glory, blessed, indescribable, inconceivable glory, and we shall exchange an earthly yet Christian pilgrimage, for the heavenly and eternal rest that awaits the people of God- the end of our pilgrimage!

Now, observe the CHARACTER of this pilgrimage as depicted by the patriarch- it is emphatic and striking: "And Jacob said, Few and evil have the days of the years of my pilgrimage been." This is its character- "few and evil." Here is a good man's estimate of life. You will only obtain such an estimate from a child of God. It is only a Christian man, a believer in Jesus, one who lives as seeing Him who is invisible, that can form a proper estimate of life. How impressive are these words! Let us consider them for a moment.

First, the duration of our Christian pilgrimage- "Few have the days of the years of my life been." He does not compute his life by years, but by days. At the longest, they are but few. Ask the most aged saint, as he throws back a glance on the past, if that retrospect does not appear to be like a little speck in the horizon of his existence. At the longest, our days are but few. Compare the days of our years with the thoughts, the plans, the enterprises appertaining to our present existence. How full of thought, of enterprise, of plan is human life! How much the mind is contemplating, how much the hands are expecting to achieve! And yet, compared with what we actually accomplish, and with what we leave unfinished, how brief is our present existence!

Look at those teeming thoughts in the busy brain of man! Look at those extensive schemes he is meditating! Look at those vast enterprises He has embarked in! Why, those thoughts, those schemes, those enterprises, were they to be actually achieved and completed, would require the years of Methuselah! How contemptible, then, as to its duration, does the present life appear in contrast with the teeming, enterprising thoughts of man! His days are but few. "He gives up his

life, and in that very day his thoughts perish." All his worldly thoughts, all his ambitious thoughts, all his miserly thoughts, all his selfish thoughts, all his sinful and self-righteous thoughts perish in that day when God extinguishes his candle.

But the most impressive point of light in which we can view the brief duration of human existence is in its relation to the soul's preparation for eternity. The work of salvation is a mighty- the mightiest work, wrought in man. When we think, then, of the great work that is to be accomplished for eternity, the salvation of the soul, the preparation for a state of being that is fixed and eternal- when we remember how much is to be done in the soul before it is fit for heaven- when we think how much is to be crowded into the few days of this short and fleeting life- the soul quickened- sins pardoned- the person justified- the heart sanctified- God loved- Christ accepted; Oh, it is truly but a few days that man has to prepare for an endless eternity!

My reader, are you neglecting the great salvation? Are you postponing to another and more convenient season the work of repentance? I tell you that the one work of saving your soul is the work of a life! You have no time to lose. Your hours are fleeting, your days are numbered- the sands of time are flowing fast. Onward, then, in this great work, and do not rest until you have "made your calling and election sure." Remember that salvation is of God, and that the essential work is all finished and perfected by Christ; that the work to be wrought in you by the power of the Holy Spirit is the necessary work of repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ- the new, divine, and heavenly birth, apart from which there can be no place for you in the new heavens and the new earth. Christ must make all things new- the heavens new- the earth new- man new- every thing, every object, and every creature shall be in harmony with the new-born creation which the coming of the Lord will usher in.

But not only are our days "few," they are "evil." "Few and evil have the days of the years of my pilgrimage been." This is the solemn conviction and testimony of a man of God- of a man who knew his own heart, who as he threw back his glance on his one hundred and thirty years, could trace nothing in them all that he could speak of as being righteous and holy and good. If we take the interpretation of the word simply as referring to trials, adversities, and sorrows, what an instructive life, in that point of light, was the life of the good old patriarch! His life seemed one continuous trial, one series of vicissitudes, calamities, and sorrows. Look at him, a fugitive from the parental home while yet a youth; look at him fleeing from the wrath of his incensed brother; think of his fourteen years of labor in Laban's house; think of his crushing, domestic affliction in Shechem. Then came the supposed death of his son Joseph, then the biting famine- and then the series of trials growing out of that famine. Ah! Well might he say, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my pilgrimage been; my life has been a life chequered and changeful and sad. Few and evil have my days been."

But this, more or less, is a picture of the Christian, find him where you may. It is

through much tribulation he is to enter the kingdom. Trial is the allotment of the believer here. It is his Father's will, it is the portion of Christ's pilgrims, that affliction should trace their road hence to the eternal blessed city. Has God thus led you, beloved, or is He thus leading you now? Oh, be not discouraged or cast down! The Lord is not dealing strangely with you, but as He deals with all His saints in all ages of the world; therefore do not write hard and bitter things against yourself, and infer that you cannot be a child of God, a Christian pilgrim, one whom God loves, because the Lord afflicts you and permits you to be tempted in many stages of your Christian journey.

But, oh, what veiled blessings are these "evils!" Exempted from them, you would be exempt from the choicest lessons of the Christian school, from the most fruitful seasons of spiritual growth, from the most authentic seals of divine adoption, from some of the most tender, winning, precious unfoldings of Jesus. Oh, they are not "evil" in the sense of a judicial correction, for there is no curse, no wrath, no frown in a believer's afflictions- they are covenant blessings wearing a disciplinary garb.

But was there no allusion in these words of Jacob to the sins that had traced all his chequered history- to the outbreak of spiritual evil dwelling in his heart- to his ten thousand times ten thousand backslidings, declensions, and stumblings? Do you think that he did not remember how often he had erred from God, like a wandering sheep, sinning against Him who loved him so? Do you think he did not remember how much ingratitude, unbelief, and disobedience, failure and flaw, had traced the whole of his pilgrimage, from the moment that, by fraud and falsehood, he had obtained the birthright, down to the moment when, in unbelief and despondency, he pronounced against God's dealings, and exclaimed, "All these things are against me!"

Oh yes! this would be his testimony to the heathen king of Egypt: "I am but a poor sinner. My life, as a man that professedly feared God, has been shaded and defiled, tinted and tainted, with many a sinful blot, departure, and fall. I have been a disobedient, wayward, foolish child, murmuring, rebellious, and restless beneath the yoke, and many a sad memory now lays me in the dust of self-abasement before my covenant God. "Behold, I am vile, and abhor myself in dust and in ashes. Few and evil have the days of my pilgrimage been."

Such will be our humiliating acknowledgment when life's pilgrimage draws near its close. "Unclean, unclean, evil and sinful have been the days of my life. I enter heaven with the publican's petition- 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' I rest now my hopes of acceptance with the Holy One, not upon a long life, a useful life, an active life, a religious life; for all, all is stained, and sullied, and darkened with sins countless as the sands, sins as scarlet and as crimson; but I rest in the spotless righteousness, in the atoning blood, in the one sacrifice, of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is all my salvation, all my desire, and all my plea- the blood of Jesus has washed them all away."

"How old are you?" A solemn question to ask ourselves. How old are you in nature? how old in grace? how old in sin? Sit down and ask yourself the question. Let there be a solemn pause between time and eternity- the busy whirl of life and its final account. Oh, drive not your worldly pursuits, and gains, and pleasures into the last stages of life! Set apart from it a season of self-examination, solemn reflection, of faithful dealing with your soul. Let your petition to God be, "Oh, spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more!" Let not the solemn summons to eternity surprise you. Let it not find you immersed in the cares and pursuits and gains of this world. Look well to your religion; look well to your foundation; look well to your hope! Aged pilgrim! how old are you? Nearing the end of the journey? Entering upon its last, its closing stage? Have you reached the verdant, sunlit slopes of Jordan's bank? Do its waves murmur at your feet? Do you see 'Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood?'

Oh, rejoice that you are so near the end of sin and sorrow, so near the end of the weary pilgrimage, so near to heaven, to Christ, to the spirits of just men made perfect.

"Shudder not to cross the stream;
Venture all your trust in Him;
Not one object of His care
Ever suffered shipwreck there."

"And Jacob blessed Pharaoh." It is a touching, an exquisitely beautiful feature this in our picture- Jacob blessing the king. Pharaoh had never been so blessed of man before! Here was a great saint blessing a great monarch. This was no empty compliment, fawning, flattering act of the aged man of God. The blessing of Jacob was a real blessing, there cannot be a doubt. The blessing of a man of God is one of the sweetest blessings God gives us. The prayers of a man of God, the best wishes of a believer in Jesus, are not to be despised. Jacob was a man of prayer- a man mighty in prayer. He wrestled all night with the Angel of the Covenant, and he was a successful petitioner with God. Now, for the king of Egypt to have had his prayers and his blessing, oh! all the riches of his kingdom were as nothing in comparison!

If God lays you on the heart of a Christian man, if God gives you a place in his prayers, his sympathies, his Christian desires, count that, my reader, among your most precious treasures. The intercessions of a godly man, the blessing of a man of prayer, of an aged pilgrim, of a departing father, of a dying mother, oh, treasure them up in the deepest cell of your memory, in the warmest nook of your heart, as among life's sweetest, holiest, costliest privileges. But, above all, seek the blessing of the God of Jacob, for the God of Jacob is yours, and it is infinitely better to have the blessing of the God of Jacob than even the blessing of Jacob himself. "I will bless you, and you shall be a blessing." This is the divine order - first, blessed of God, and then a blessing to man.

Aged saint! the God of Jacob is your covenant God! And what was Jacob's testimony of God? "The God who fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil." And still His promise and His presence are with you, your rod and your staff in old age, the strength of your heart and your portion forever, when your flesh and your heart fail. Does your trembling faith still cry, "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength fails?" Again the divine promise responds, "Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob; even to your old age I am He; and even to hoary hair will I carry you."

Enclosed within such Almighty arms, borne upon such a Divine bosom, you have nothing to fear, and nothing to do, but in faith, hope, and calmness, to exclaim to the loved ones clustering around your dying bed, "Behold, I die! but God shall be with you." Ah! who could fill the vacant place your departure hence will create but God himself? He has promised to fill it, and will fulfil His promise. "Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in me."

Dying pilgrim! your Joseph is with you! Your Jesus is at your side! His blood has washed away all your sins. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins." Salvation is finished- the great debt is paid- the covenant of grace is unchangeable- and Jesus is gone before to give you an abundant entrance and a loving welcome into the everlasting kingdom. And now, you have but calmly and patiently to wait until Jesus gently closes your eyes in death, and unseals them again in heaven's glory, bliss, and immortality. "In Your presence is fulness of joy, at Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore." "Absent from the body- present with the Lord."

"Absent from flesh! O blissful thought!
What unknown joys this moment brings
Freed from the mischiefs sin has wrought,
From pains and fears, and all their springs."

"Absent from flesh! illustrious day!
Surprising scene! triumphant stroke
That rends the prison of my clay,
And I can feel my fetters broke."

"Absent from flesh! then rise my soul
Where feet or wings could never climb,
Beyond the heavens, where planets roll,
Measuring the cares and joys of time."

"I go where God and glory shine,
His presence makes eternal day;
My all that's mortal I resign,
For angels wait and point my way."

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