

Despair in the Christian Life

Refreshment at the River

Christian and Hopeful come to the River of the Water of Life where they drink and are refreshed. "I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream; my thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live for Him" (Horatius Bonar). There are trees to with fruit and the leaves are good for healing. There they can rest (Ps. 23:2).



Detour of Bypath Meadow



The narrow path becomes more difficult, rough and troublesome with the result that the pilgrims become discouraged. They spy steps to a smoother pathway. Christian believes this by path runs alongside the path they have been treading, the ground is just a little softer, and it leads alongside the narrow path, or does it? Discouragement can misguide us (Prov. 14:12). Vain-confidence assures them that this is the way to the Celestial gate. They follow Vain-confidence into the night who falls into a deep pit. Realizing their mistake, they begin to return. But they found it easier to go out of the way, and more difficult to return. In the morning they are awakened by the gruff and brutal Giant Despair.

Doubting Castle

The pilgrims are imprisoned in a dungeon and they receive no charity, pity or hospitality. It is hard to believe that these two pilgrims having feasted and rested on the banks of the River of the Water of Life should find themselves so weak and downcast, imprisoned in Doubting Castle. They had known deliverances before, but here it seems they won't be rescued. The wife of Giant Despair (Diffidence = Distrust) suggests they end their lives. There is reprieve when light shines in the darkness (Jn. 1:5). Giant Despair is furious that these men remain alive.



They are becoming weaker, but Hopeful gives sound advice and stirs him to remember past

deliverances, past comforts. Fellowship and communion in dark times even between fellow prisoners in Doubting Castle may do us good. The first steps back from doubt and despair are filled with thoughts of God's care, faithfulness and graciousness.

Lessons:

1. Notice the steps that lead to Doubting Castle:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
2. A true child of God can find himself so despondent and despairing that it is possible to lose all assurance of salvation for a whole host of reasons.

Christian and Hopeful escape. They avail themselves of the throne of grace. There is prayer till the break of day. And Christian remembers he has a key called Promise that will open any lock in Doubting Castle. "Despair undervalues the promise, undervalues the invitation, undervalues the proffer of grace. As long as my eyes can find a promise, as long as there is the least mention of mercy, so long will I look for mercy...." When they reach the King's Highway, they erect a pillar with a warning. After this they set out on their way singing:

*Out of the way we went, and then we found
What it was to tread upon forbidden ground:
And let them that come after have a care,
Lest heedlessness makes them, as we, to fare;
Lest they, for trespassing, his prisoners are,
Whose Castle Doubting, and whose name Despair.*

Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on the three things that led Christian and Hopeful to despair?
2. What thought patterns signal that someone is in Doubting Castle?
3. What are some important steps to take to be delivered from the hold of doubt in our lives?
4. Alexander Whyte: "Despair is not good, but it is infinitely better than indifference.... Where despair has slain its thousands, presumption has slain its ten thousands. The agonies of the former are indeed more terrible, but the securities of the latter are far more fatal." Do you agree with this statement?