Pilgrim's Progress (Part 7)

Quote: "Of all the Temptations that ever I met with in my life, to question the being of God, and the truth of his Gospel, is the worst, and worst to be born." — John Bunyan

- Recap
  - Vanity & it's Fair (Vanity Fair)
    - (ask what this could be compared to in today's Christian walk)
    - what 3 things made Christian & Faithful stand out to the citizens of Vanity?
    - What happened to Faithful?
    - Who is Hopeful?
  - Hill of Lucre
  - Monument by the Way

- The River of God
  - Meadow
    - several days & nights
    - ate, rested, slept (this was a safe place to sleep)
  - the Way left the River (separate directions)
  - the Way became rough
    - they kept wishing for an easier way
    - "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way" (Numbers 21:4)
    - discuss tract – "Cutting Off the Cross" (http://godsacres.org/tract.CuttingOfftheCross.html)

- By-Path Meadow
  - stile leading from the Way to this meadow
    - definition "stile": set of steps for crossing a wall
    - spiritual stiles: temptations to leave the path
      - recognize "stiles" that have proved to be a danger in the past & avoid them at all costs
  - By-Path seems to run alongside of the Way
    - just outside of the fence
      - the fence is there for a reason (protection, to keep pilgrims IN the Way)
  - Hopeful is unsure, but Christian persuades him
  - (1) Vain-Confidence was walking ahead
    - Christian & Hopeful have "vain confidence" in thinking they can choose this path without repercussions
    - Christian & Hopeful call out to ask Vain-Confidence where he is going
    - Vain-Confidence tells them, "The Celestial Gate"
    - they don't know this traveler (unknown & unproven); yet they ask for and are reassured by his advice
  - Darkness Falls
    - Christian & Hopeful lose sight of Vain-Confidence
    - Vain-Confidence fell into a deep pit prepared by the owner of these grounds
      - dashed to pieces
      - Christian & Hopeful called out to Vain-Confidence
        - heard only groaning
    - Christian & Hopeful realize their error & determine to go back to the Way
      - thunder, rain, and floods prevented their return
        - "It is easier going out of the way when we are in, than going in when we are out."
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+ Discuss the ease of leaving the Christian walk versus the difficulty of returning
  • so important to stay in the Way, regardless of how easy or alluring By-Path is

  found shelter & fell asleep

• Doubting Castle
  ○ Giant Despair
    - while walking up & down his fields, finds Christian & Hopeful (trespassers)
    - Christian doesn't try to use his sword on this giant; despair makes him weak
    - imprisoned in Doubting Castle
      ■ from Wednesday morning until Saturday night (escaped Sunday morning)
      ■ Christ was taken to the Cross Wednesday morning
      ■ Christ arose from the grave Sunday morning
        * this would've been the time of greatest despair for the disciples
          + doubts concerning Christ & His message
      ■ based on Bunyan's own experiences with despair
        * "I found it a hard work now to pray to God, because despair was swallowing me up" (Grace Abounding by John Bunyan).
  ○ Diffidence (wife of Giant Despair)
    - (definition "diffidence": mistrust, skeptical)
    - counsels her husband to beat the prisoners unmercifully
      ■ Thursday: prisoners are beat with a cudgel (club) from the crab-tree
        * crab-tree cudgel: It was once quite common in England to use a stick of crab-apple wood as a weapon.
          + The wood is often knotty, and the tree has a thorny bark.
        * why did Giant Despair need to cut a new cudgel? Why not use an old one?
          + club fashioned according to the weaknesses of the prisoner
        * beat with despair, such as:
          + there is no way out of this problem
          + you are a constant failure (spiritual, academic, socially, etc.)
            • "you can never do anything right"
          + doubts about whether you are really saved or not
          + doubts concerning the reality of God
            • "Of all the Temptations that ever I met with in my life, to question the being of God, and the truth of his Gospel, is the worst, and worst to be born." (Bunyan)
          + doubts about whether this is the right Way or not
            • perhaps other religions are just as good
            • tenderheartedness: always feeling you didn't say or act right
      ■ Friday: prisoners are given the tools for suicide
        * knife, halter (rope) & poison
        * Despair: "Why should you choose to live, seeing it is attended with so much bitterness?"
        * prisoners ask to be set free
          + Despair fell into one of his fits & left them
            • had fits in sunshiny weather
            • when doubts & despair are brought into the Light, they are powerless

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• John 1:5 – "And the Light shines on in the darkness, for the darkness has never overpowered it [put it out or absorbed it]" (The Amplified Bible)
• Light = Christ or the Word
* The prisoners discuss how suicide would be easier than "this dungeon"
  + Hopeful: "the Lord of the country to which we are going hath said, 'Thou shalt do no murder'"
  • forbidden to murder another or even one's own self
  + Hopeful: "let us be patient and endure for awhile"
  • Christian fellowship is an excellent cure for despair
  + Bunyan (through Hopeful's character) shows that suicide is wrong; perhaps refuting a work written by John Donne
  • Historical reference: John Donne (clergyman) wrote in defense of suicide, using Biblical examples, "including Jesus, Samson, Saul, and Judas Iscariot."²
  • This was published following the author's death (1631)
  • Pilgrim's Progress was published in 1678

● Think on These Things
  ○ Hopeful:
    - "Let us consider, the Lord of the country to which we are going"
    - "All the law is not in the hand of Giant Despair"
    - "Others have been taken by him as well as we, and yet have escaped out of his hands"
      - Despair might die or have another fit (with additional Light)³

● Giant Despair Returns
  ○ furious the prisoners are still alive
  ○ prisoners are barely alive
    - no bread (Bread of Life) or water (Holy Spirit)
  ○ more threatenings
    - Christian "swoons"; is tempted to end it all
    - Hopeful again encourages Christian
      ■ "Remember" – Apollyon, Valley of the Shadow of Death, Vanity Fair
      ■ "What hardship, terror, and amazement hast thou already gone through"
      ■ Isaiah 46:9 – "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me"
      * draw encouragement from past victories

● Castle-Yard Full of Bones & Skulls
  ○ Saturday: Diffidence tells Despair to show them the bones & skulls of other pilgrims who committed suicide
    - Diffidence (mistrust, skepticism) is the driving force behind Despair
      ■ Despair doesn't act without her prompting
      ■ Mistrust & skepticism of the Gospel, the Way, the truth is the beginning of despair
  ○ Despair promises to tear them into pieces in 10 days
    - why the delay?
    - can Despair "kill" the prisoners or only provide the "tools" of suicide?

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biathanatos

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○ Prisoners beaten & returned to their prison

● Midnight
○ Prisoners began to pray
  - Acts 16:25 – "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed"
○ Prayed all night

● Key of Promise
○ Christian remembers the key he has "in my bosom"
  - bosom = heart
    ■ why the heart and not his pocket?
    ■ Psalm 119:11 – "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."
    ■ Discuss the importance of "hiding" the Word in your heart for future needs
      * there are many Scriptures that are hard to understand ("dark sayings"); Psalm 78:2
      * every Scripture has its "mate" (Isaiah 34:6)
        + store up the Word in your heart; later, when the "mate" is read, understanding will come
○ God's Word is full of promises
  - find one that fits the "lock" of your situation
    ■ Christian's key unlocked 3 locks in Doubting Castle
      * last lock was "damnably hard" (devilishly tight)\(^4\)
  - every child of God has access to exactly the "key" that will deliver him from Doubting Castle
  - Examples of promises:
    ■ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).
    ■ "And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs" (Philippians 4:19).
    ■ "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).
    ■ "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19).
    ■ (ask for other examples)

● Deliverance
○ Sunday morning
  - just as the Resurrection occurred on Sunday morning, dispelling all doubts and despair in Jesus' followers
○ Back on the King's Highway
  - Went back over the stile
  - Set up a pillar to warn future pilgrims
    ■ "Over this stile is the way to Doubting Castle, which is kept by Giant Despair, who despiseth the King of the Celestial country, and seeks to destroy his holy pilgrims."
  - Young person, consider yourself warned concerning the stiles (temptations) that lead to By-Path Meadow

● Pilgrim's Progress – Part 2
○ Diffidence & Despair are killed & Doubting Castle is torn down by Great Heart, old Honest, and four young men