

### **Lesson Twenty-Three ENTRANCE INTO THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL**

We have come to the point in the book of *Pilgrim's Progress* where the Pilgrim has just recovered his roll on the Hill of Difficulty. We have seen that the Hill of Difficulty represented those periods in our Christian life in which we experience difficulties such as the loss of a loved one, some financial setback, or some heartache that makes life extremely difficult for us to look forward and to try to go on. Yet it is through or over the Hill of Difficulty that the way of Jesus Christ leads. We found that while the Pilgrim was going up the hill, he met two false pilgrims running back down the hill. Their names were Timorous and Mistrust, and the reason they were going back in their Christian profession is that they were afraid of the dangers that lay ahead, particularly when they saw the lions that were at the top of the hill.

We are going to begin at that point in which the Christian will go on up to the top of the hill where he will see a beautiful palace known as the House Beautiful. What is this House Beautiful? Please notice in your book:

***But while he was thus bewailing his unhappy miscarriage, he lifted up his eyes, and behold there was a very stately palace before him, the name of which was Beautiful, and it stood just by the highway-side.***

The House Beautiful represents the visible fellowship of believers or the church in its fellowship realm. Bunyan placed the church on top of the Hill of Difficulty indicating that God has a reason for establishing a church of fellow-shipping believers. It is when we go through difficulties in our lives, that we receive some of the most support and strength from the fellowship of believers. So right on top of the Hill of Difficulty there sets the church or the fellow-shipping with believers. Notice that the church is standing by the highway-side. In other words, the way does not go through the church, but the church is by the wayside. Here we see Bunyan's doctrine of the church. If he had made the way of salvation going through the church, it would have meant that church membership was essential in order to get to heaven. Bunyan did not believe that, and of course, we do not either. However, the established Church of England, the Roman Church, and other authoritarian churches today, do teach that in order to enter into heaven, you must be a member of the established church. However, as much as Bunyan believed in the importance of the church, he had the church sitting by the way-side and not part of salvation. It was placed there to encourage pilgrims on their way unto life eternal.

Next we read that Pilgrim arrives at the entrance to the House Beautiful, or the church visible. Up until this time, he has been traveling alone, but now he is going to publicly confess his faith in Christ by joining a fellowship of believers. However, there are some lions in the way which he will have to deal with first. What do these lions represent? In the 17<sup>th</sup> century when Bunyan wrote this, if you identified with a local independent church of believers, you were going to suffer persecution by the established church, which was the Church of England or the Anglican Church. Any individual who would dare join a Baptist Church, a Presbyterian Church, or some independent church, could expect to be persecuted by the established Church of England. This is what the lions represented. The fact that the lions were chained revealed that although Bunyan was in prison for his preaching of the gospel, the persecution was beginning to let up a little bit. The edict of the government was passed whereby these non-conformists were more tolerated than they had been in previous

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days. Whatever that represented in that time period, nevertheless it is still true today that anytime a person is going to openly profess his faith in Christ, there will be some obstacles that will give him some problems. He may have some problems

with relatives or his immediate family who may be opposed to his joining a church or whatever it is. There will be some lions in the way. Then we read that the Christian was just about ready to go back when:

***The porter at the lodge, (which represents the pastor) whose name was Watchful, perceiving that Christian made a halt, as if he would go back, cried unto him saying: "Is thy strength so small? Fear not the lions, for they are chained, and are placed there for trial of faith where it is; and for discovery of those that have none."***

In other words, the lions are simply there to prove who has true faith in Christ and who doesn't, and:

***"Keep in the midst of the path and no hurt shall come unto thee." This I saw that he went on trembling for fear of the lions: but taking good heed to the directions of the Porter, he heard them roar, but they did him no harm. Then he clapped his hands, and went on till he came and stood before the gate where the Porter was. Then said Christian to the Porter: "Sir, what house is this? And may I lodge here tonight?" And the Porter answered: "This house was built by the Lord of the hill, and He built it for the relief and security of pilgrims."***

The purpose of a local fellowship of believers is for the relief and security of those believers. Why did God establish a local church? Interestingly, you can search in your Bible, and you will not find such a thing as individual sheep running around alone. Sheep are not individualists, but they congregate in flocks. Therefore, the Lord established local assemblies so that individual Christians experiencing difficulties and trials can gain relief, security or hope from other fellow Christians. This is what a true local church ought to be. Regretfully that is not always the case today. A local church ought to be a place where you can receive fellowship, strength, refreshment and a sense of security in your Christian experience, especially when you go through times of difficulties. I am sure that some of you could stand and testify as to what your Christian friends have meant to you when you were going up the Hill of Difficulty in your own lives. The Lord of the hill has built the stately palace, or the beautiful home here for the relief and the security of the pilgrims. **The Porter also asked whence he was, and whither he was going.** This is an important thing that Bunyan would bring out in this allegory, and that is, before a person is to be received into the fellowship of a local church, he should be examined as to the soundness of his faith in the Lord. **The Porter** (or the Pastor) **also asked whence he was,** (where did he come from) **and whither he was going?"** Now notice how the Christian replies. He says:

**"I am come from the city of Destruction, and am going to Mount Zion; but because the sun is now set, I desire, if I may, to lodge here tonight."**

The pastor wanted to know this: "why do you want to unite with the fellowship of this church, and what makes you think that you have a right or a privilege to receive our fellowship?" How did Christian answer? He said, "Well, I once was lost. I once lived in the city of Destruction and I'm on my way to heaven. Now that the sun is now setting, I would like to find a place to lodge for the night." A lodging place is a place of rest. Imagine how wonderful it is to experience rest and relaxation at the end of a long day of traveling. Maybe you have driven four or five hundred miles that day and at the end of the day you look for a place of lodging whereby you may be able to rest. This is what the individual is asking. The Pastor or the Porter says: **"What is your name?"** And Christian says, **"My name is now Christian, but my name at the first was Graceless."** I think that is beautiful. He says I am now a Christian, but I used to be graceless. He did not attribute the cause of his salvation to himself, but to the grace of God. The pastor is interrogating this individual for membership into the local church, desiring to know whether he is really saved or not. The way in which Christian replied truly sets this forth. This individual has gone through many experiences, and we could not say that his conversion experience was what many teach

today, an instantaneous one. I think that is important. Many conversions are instantaneous, but many other people go through many trials and tribulations in their life before they gain assurance that they are truly one of God's children. Therefore, it is wrong to teach that every conversion must be exactly an instantaneous one. The new birth or regeneration is instantaneous, but not everybody's salvation experience is exactly the same. It is important that you should be able to say, "at one time I was lost, but now I am a Christian." Maybe you cannot remember the day and hour, or exactly how you became a Christian, but you ought to be able to say, "Once I was graceless, but now I'm a Christian." Remember one time in the Bible Jesus healed a blind man, who went back to the Pharisees. They were questioning him as to what had happened. He couldn't exactly explain what had occurred to him, but he said these words, **"One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see."** (John 9:25) That is the essence of being able to explain that you are a true Christian, and that you are saved. So we read on: The Porter says: **"But how doth it happen that you come so late? The sun is set."** The pastor is simply asking this person, "Well how is it that you've been a Christian now for so long and you haven't joined a church yet? What has kept you from identifying with a body of believers when you have been converted for such a long time. And so, he said: **"I had been here sooner but that, wretched man that I am, I slept in the arbor that stands on the hillside!"** He attributed it to his own laziness, his own negligence in seeking out a fellowship of believers to identify with.

**"Nay, I had, notwithstanding that, been here much sooner but that in my sleep I lost my evidence, and came without it to the brow of the hill; and then feeling for it, and finding it now, I was forced with sorrow of heart to go back to the place where I slept my sleep, where I found it; and now I am come." Now the Porter says: "Well, I will call out one of the virgins of this place, who will, if she likes your talk, bring you into the rest of the family, according to the rules of the house."**

Oh how different churches were in Bunyan's age than our churches are now. Ladies and gentlemen, it is the easiest thing in the world to join a church today. It is easier to join a church than it is a lodge or some social organization, but it was not so in Bunyan's day. They had rules, and before you could become a member of a church, you had to submit to the authority of that house. May I bring your attention to the church covenant that is hanging right back here on our wall which identifies our church as being no different. It says that before anyone should join into the fellowship of these believers, they should examine that covenant and go by the rules that this church established for membership. Nearly anybody and anything can join a church today, and that is why we have so many problems in our churches. We have so many unbelievers come in to our churches who do not have the

same desires and the same aspirations as do the true believers. When troubles and problems arise, they sap away the strength of the true believers. In Bunyan's day, as described in his book, before Christian would be received into the fellowship of this church, he was going to be interrogated according to the rules of the house. These were not rules that a group of believers made up on their own, but were simply the rules set forth in the New Testament. Believers should be able to give evidence of salvation, they should be baptized, and they should be walking according to the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the book we now have some individuals who are referred to as virgins, representing the purity of the church. They come out and set forth these rules.

***So Watchful, the Porter rang a bell at the sound of which came out of the door of the house a grave and beautiful damsel, named Discretion, and asked why she was called.***

We are going to be exposed to several different ladies, and the first one is named Discretion. What does this teach us? It sets forth that before a person should be received into the fellowship of the church, discretion should be used before he is admitted. That is, he should be examined as to what he believes, as to whether or not his profession is genuine, and

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whether he is just somebody that walks in the church door and claims, "I'm a Christian, I'd like to join your church." Today, most churches are so anxious to get members, they just respond with, "Come in, come in." Two weeks later, they have him teaching a class or else

elect him as a deacon. That is the way churches recruit members today. I am not exaggerating it, churches are desperate for people. If the churches maintained the purity that they did in Bunyan's day, you would have people desiring the church as something worthwhile and valuable. I'm sorry to say that today membership in most churches is sort of meaningless. You can be a church member and do anything and everything you want to do and still remain on the church roll. That is why the world has very little respect for the church anymore. When you go out and visit in people's homes today, and you invite them to church, they say, "why should I go to church, they are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites down there." It is sad to say in most churches today this could be true, because most don't uphold the standards of the New Testament. If you attempt to join most civic or private

organizations, you will find there are some things required of you to be a member of that organization. You will have some dues to pay. However today, there is nothing required to join a church or to keep your membership on that church roll. Some of the most highly valued institutions in our society are those which are the most difficult to join. On the other hand, you find some of the most lowly viewed institutions are those which have no requirements for membership. Isn't it a shame that the church of Jesus Christ operates on those principles? In the average lodge today, if you don't show up for a couple of months, they will send somebody out to inquire as to why you are not supporting that institution, and if that institution isn't supported, your name is removed from it. We have lost all conception of the purity of the church of Jesus Christ. Discretion comes out and asks why she was summoned.

***The Porter answered, "This man is on a journey from the City of Destruction to Mount Zion; but being weary and benighted, he asked me if he might lodge here tonight: so I told him I would call for thee, who, after discourse had with him, mayest do as seemeth thee good, even according to the law of the house."***

So the Porter requests that Discretion examine this person to see if he gives satisfactory answers in accordance with the rules of the house. If so, she could do with him as she sees good. ***"Then she asked him whence he was, and whither he was going."*** Notice Discretion asks, "where have you come from and where are you going?" He answered, "I have come from the City of Destruction. I used to be lost, but now I'm on my way to heaven." That is the right answer. That question creates no problem for a true believer. This pilgrim was not offended by this interrogation. True believers are not offended when people inquire as to the reason for their faith in Christ. But if a person is offended when someone asks him to give a testimony of his conversion, it is only evidence that he is not truly converted.

Again, Discretion speaks, ***"She asked him also how he got into the way?"*** In other words, "You say you are on the way to heaven, but how did you get in the way?" This is an important question to which he answers, "I came through the wicket gate of conversion, and I came by the cross." That is the true way." Do you see how this question would keep out Formalist and Hypocrisy? Do you remember how they got in the way? They jumped over the wall, didn't they? That is, they did not come by the way of the cross, and Discretion would be able to determine that. I have asked many individuals in their homes, what is their hope of heaven, and they would say, "Well, I was baptized, or I'm a good person." They are not in the way. Do you see the difference? Discretion should be exercised in discerning

what a person's hope is of going to heaven. Just because a person says, "I'm on my way to heaven," doesn't automatically mean that he knows what the Bible says about how a person is put on his way to heaven. ***"Then she asked him what he had seen and met with in the way; and he told her."*** That is, she asks, "what have you experienced now?" He tells her that he had seen Good-will at the gate, the House of the Interpreter, and received Holy Spirit instructions., So he gives his whole testimony now, telling what he has actually experienced in this thing of salvation.

***And at last she asked his name, so he said, "it is Christian; and I have so much the more a desire to lodge here tonight, because, by what I perceive, this place was built by the Lord of the hill for the relief and security of pilgrims."***

What is this interrogation doing? It is not discouraging a true believer, but is only enabling him to see that these people truly believe something, and they are cautious. They are kind, but they want to know whether he is a true Christian or not. It is not discouraging to a true believer, but it will sure weed out and screen out all the Formalists and the Hypocrites who would desire membership within the local congregation. Remember that when Israel left Egypt, there was a great multitude of Egyptians that went with them, just because they saw the miracles at the Red Sea. They were called the mixed multitude. What happened when they got out into the desert and things began getting a little rough? There was no water to drink or anything to eat. That mixed multitude began groaning and complaining. They said, "Moses has just brought us out here to kill us, let's go back to Egypt where we have the leeks, the onions, and the garlics." They were a source of sapping the strength of the Israelites. I really believe that what is sapping the strength of believers today are Formalists and Hypocrites in the church. That is, individuals who want to live by anything and everything but the Word of God. When the word of God is preached, and the manna comes down from heaven, they call it light bread, and they don't want it. They are bored with it, and they want to go back to Egypt where they can have some natural things that have some spice in it. They say, "Let's go back where we can kick up our heels and act just like the world acts." They have no appetite for true spirituality, and as a result, they act as a thorns in the sides of the true believers within that same congregation, keeping them from going on into greater victories in the Lord.

Now Christian is saying that he perceives that he wants to stay here tonight more than ever because he really believes the Lord of the hill has built this place. Now, I want you to notice Discretion. ***"So she smiled, but the water stood in her eyes."*** You see, just because you are cautious, doesn't mean that you do not have love for people. Here was an

individual that wanted to have a reason for this person's desire to join this church. When the proper reasons were given, she stood there with tears in her eyes. Discretion had compassion. This is the same way with our preaching the gospel. Because we preach about repentance from sin and the wrath of God, we do not do that in a way in which we have no compassion for people. If you want to see compassion, look what God did on the cross when He gave his only begotten Son for your sins and mine. Yet it was there His wrath was revealed, and so it is important and noteworthy that Discretion smiles here, but water stands in her eyes.

***After a little pause she said, "I will call forth two or three more of the family." So she ran to the door, and called out Prudence, Piety, and Charity, who, after a little more discourse with him, had him into the family; and many of them meeting him at the threshold of the house, said, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; this house was built by the Lord of the hill, on purpose to entertain such pilgrims in." Then he bowed his head, and followed them into the house. So when he was come in and sat down, they gave him something to drink and consented together that, until supper was ready, some of them should have some particular discourse with Christian; for the best improvement of time, they appointed Piety, Prudence, and Charity to discourse with him; and thus they began.***

In our next lesson we will see the fellowship that these three have with the Christian, but I do want to introduce these three to you. We have already seen the Porter whose name is Watchful. He is watching for the souls of men. As the Book of Hebrews says, **"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls."** (Hebrews 13:17). This has reference to the Pastors or the Shepherds of the flock. Then the pastor says, "I am going to use Discretion to interrogate the Christian." Then just before he is received into full fellowship into the church, Prudence, Piety and Charity come out and they ask him a few questions. What do these three stand for? First of all, Piety stands for experience. Her name is conveying, "Have you had a true experience with the Lord? We want to hear your experience." Not all of Christianity is just being able to say the right things at the right time. We must have experienced what it means to be converted and to be assured of that. Piety is going to interrogate the Christian before he is received into the fellowship of the believers. Then Prudence stands for sound judgment, to be **"ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you."** (I Peter 3:15). It is possible for a person to learn certain doctrines and listen to other people give their testimonies, and then be able to stand and quote those beliefs and repeat those people's testimonies, and yet still not be a true Christian. So Prudence comes on the scene and wants to know if this individual has sound judgment, and whether he really understands



what it means to be a Christian. Remember Peter's quote, "**be ready to give a defense . . . for the hope that is within you.**" If I came to you tonight and asked you to tell me why you are a Christian, would you be able to give a reason that could be found in the Bible? Would you be able to say, "I know I am a Christian because this is what the Bible has to say about it." Now remember Peter says to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you. Paul wrote to Timothy and said, "**Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**" (II Timothy 2:15). So we must have sound judgment in sharing our testimonies with others.

Then the name of the third young virgin representing the purity of the church is Charity. You are going to love this. Charity wants to know where Christian's wife and kids are. Charity represents love or compassion for others. So Christian is going to have to tell Charity why his wife and kids are not with him. She is going to say, "Didn't you try to get them to come?" Then he will give his testimony as to how he had witnessed unto others trying to get them to come into the kingdom also. What is Bunyan saying here? Before a person is received into the fellowship of the church, do they show love, compassion and concern about getting others into the kingdom of Christ? Are they just interested in themselves, or do they have any concern about their neighbors and those that are round about them that they might also become Christians. So you see how Discretion is to be used, Piety means do they have a true experience with the Lord, Prudence, do they have sound judgment, can they stand and give a reason for the hope that is within them? Charity, do they have genuine, sacrificial Christian love for others?

Christian was willing and able to share all of his experiences because he had gone through the Wicket Gate and had come by way of the Cross. He did not have anything to fear. But can you not imagine, Formalist and Hypocrisy trying to answer these questions? Where did you come from? Well, I've just always been a good person. Why do you think you are going to get into heaven? Well, I'm doing the best I can. Have you helped anybody else come into the kingdom? Well, I don't figure that is any skin off my nose. They want to go to hell, let them go on, I don't care. Do you see how Formalist and Hypocrisy could never meet the standards of Biblical holiness? Put simply, do we have love for others, do we have a sound reason for our faith, do we have an experience of salvation to back up that which we say with our mouths?

After this discussion with Christian, the tears were in the eyes of these saints, and they opened their arms and welcomed the weary Pilgrim into the fellowship of the church

which was erected on top of the Hill of Difficulty, so that the Christian could receive some rest and some strength during times of testing and trials. I don't know about the rest of you, but I have been in the Lord long enough to know that I cannot go through this life as a loner. I encounter people ever so often that say, "I'm a Christian but I'm just going to live out here by myself." Neighbor, when you come upon that Hill of Difficulty, you will need some other Christians to fellowship with. The Scriptures say, **"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."** (Hebrews 10:25). Nicodemus may have tried to be a Christian privately, but because he has had a true work of grace, he could not remain that way. When Jesus died on the cross, Joseph and Nicodemus openly identified with Christ, and they took His body down from the cross. We read that Nicodemus, for fear of the Jews did not come out openly, but when Christ died he came out openly and was not afraid to identify with other Christians. So do not neglect and forsake the importance of a local church fellowship.

Our Father, we thank you for the ministry of the Holy Spirit who has revealed Christ unto us. We thank you for our Christian friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We thank you for the many times of encouragement that they have given us in our lives. We thank you that when we have been discouraged and despondent, that at that very time, you have sent good news by sending a brother or sister by and giving them the very words which were needful for us at that moment. We are thankful for the accounts given in the Bible that when David was discouraged you sent Jonathan, and how his spirit was restored. We are thankful for the time in the New Testament when Paul was low, and yet encouraging reports came to him regarding Timothy, Titus and the others. We would pray that we might not neglect our brothers and sisters in Christ, but that we might truly be enabled to experience true Christian fellowship. May it be a fellowship that is built upon love and compassion for each other, and may it be a fellowship that is built upon sound judgment in the faith. May it be a fellowship which we have common experiences that we may be able to share with each other in the Lord and to encourage each other in the things of the Lord. Bless this lesson, and seal it to our hearts, for we ask it in Jesus name and for His sake. Amen.