

***“The Pilgrims Progress”***  
***“The River Of Death”***  
***(Hebrews 11:13)***

**Introduction:**

1. Tonight:
  - In Our Series Through:
    - The Pilgrims Progress:
      - We Come To The Very End:
        - Of The Pilgrimage:
          - Of Our Characters:
            - Though Not The End:
              - Of Their Story!
    - Because - Tonight:
      - Both Christian & Hopeful:
        - Will Reach & Then Cross:
          - What Bunyan Describes As:
            - The River Of Death!
2. If You Remember:
  - From Last Week:
    - They Experienced:
      - A Glimpse Of Glory:
        - And - A Taste Of Heaven:
          - From The Country Of Beulah!
    - Which Represents:
      - In The Words Of George Cheever:
        - The “Very Near, Deep, Blissful Communion With God!”
    - And - I Believe:
      - This Experience:
        - Is Likely Something:
          - That Bunyan Himself Understood Something About!
    - Whether That Was In:
      - His Own Pilgrimage - Or:
        - He Was A Witness To It:
          - In Someone Else’s Pilgrimage!
3. But - The Experience We Will Read About Tonight:
  - He Had ***Not*** Experienced:
    - Nor Could He Witness:
      - The Spiritual Journey Of Others:
        - Crossing From Time:
          - Into Eternity!
    - So - Like The Rest Of Us:
      - He Had To Rely On:
        - What God Has Chosen To Reveal To Us:
          - About The Experience Of Death:
            - In Order To Portray It For Us:
              - At The End Of His Story!
    - And - By The Way:
      - This Is Still The Only Way:
        - To Learn About Death And:
          - The Regions Beyond!
      - Though We Know From Scripture:
        - That There Were Many:
          - Who Were Brought Back To Life:
            - Yet - They Never Came Back With:
              - Any Known Memory Or Description:
                - Of What Lay Beyond!
      - Those Who Write About:

- Their Ninety Minutes In Heaven - Or:
  - Their Twenty-Three Minutes In Hell:
    - Those Memories Are But A Delusion:
      - And Do Not Correspond To What We Find In The Word Of God!
- 4. But - That's Not What We Will Read:
  - In Bunyan's Scripture-Informed Illustration:
    - Of Death - Which Took Our Pilgrims:
      - By Surprise When It Was Their Time:
        - To "Go The Way Of All The Earth!"
  - And So - Starting On Page 99, Paragraph 2:
    - We Read - *"Now, I further saw, that betwixt them and the gate was a river, but there was no bridge to go over; the river was very deep!"*
      - Read Through Page 100, Paragraph 2.5:
        - *"Christian therefore presently found ground to stand upon, and so it followed that the rest of the river was but shallow. Thus they got over!"*
- 5. Death Is Not A Topic:
  - That We Who Are Living:
    - Like To Talk About Or Think About:
      - All That Much!
  - But - It Is The One Encounter:
    - That Every One Of Us Is Sure To Face:
      - But Few Of Us:
        - Ever Really Prepare For:
          - In Any Meaningful Way!
  - And This Is Why:
    - When Christian & Hopeful:
      - Came To The Banks Of This River:
        - They Were Surprised And Stunned:
          - At The View!
    - In The Back Of Their Minds:
      - They Had To Have Known:
        - That It Would Have Had To Be Crossed:
          - In Order To Reach Their Destination:
            - The Celestial City!
    - But - It Came Up:
      - So Fast & Too Soon:
        - And Right When They Were Enjoying:
          - The Delights Of Sweet Beulah Land!
    - But - Their "Times" Were In God's Hand:
      - Their Times Had Come!
        - And The First Thing Bunyan Portrays For Us Is:

### **1. *The Great Enemy Of Death!***

- The River Of Death:
  - Was Not A Welcome Sight:
    - To Our Pilgrims!
      - It Was Not Seen By Them:
        - As Their Friend:
          - Even Though They Knew What Lay Directly:
            - On The Other Side!
  - In 1 Corinthians 15:6 - The Apostle Paul Tells Us That:
    - "The Last Enemy That Shall Be Destroyed Is Death!"
      - And Until Then:
        - Death Remains An Enemy:
          - To All Of Us!
            - Believers & Unbelievers Alike!
  - It Is An Enemy Because Of:
    - The Sting Of Death!

- Though It Was God:
  - Who Designed Death:
    - Back In Genesis 2:17 - When He Told Adam & Eve That:
      - “In The Day That Thou Eatest [Of The Forbidden Fruit] Thou Shalt Surely Die!”
- Yet - It Was Man’s Sin:
  - That Brought About Death!
    - Romans 5:12 - “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned!”
- And Ever Since Then:
  - “The Sting Of Death Is Sin!”
    - Sin Is What Makes Death:
      - Such A Fierce Enemy:
        - To The Living!
    - Even Believers - As Depicted By Christian:
      - Can Be Reminded Of Their Sins:
        - When They Are At The Brink:
          - Of Death!
  - It Is An Enemy Because Of:
- The Suddenness Of Death!
  - It Stops The Living:
    - Right In Their Tracks!
  - As Job Said In Job 1:21:
    - “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither!”
  - And As Solomon Wrote In Ecclesiastes 5:15:
    - “As he came forth of his mother’s womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand!”
  - This Means That:
    - All Of Your Plans:
      - Will One Day:
        - Be Left Unfinished!
    - All Of Your Pursuits:
      - Will One Day:
        - Be Forgotten!
    - And - All Of Your Possessions:
      - Will One Day:
        - Be Left For Others!
  - And All This Will Come Upon You:
    - Suddenly!
      - And You Will Come Face To Face:
        - With This Enemy:
          - That Wants To Stamp Out All Memory Of You From The Face Of This Earth!
  - Death Is Also An Enemy Because Of:
- The Suffering Of Death!
  - Of Course - Death Itself:
    - Is But The Moment Of Separation Of:
      - Your Body & Your Soul!
    - And The Departure Of:
      - Your Spirit From Your Body!
    - It Is The Unnatural Tearing Away:
      - Of What God Meant To Be United Forever:
        - As His Own Image & Likeness In This World!
  - But - As Horrifying As That Thought:
    - Should Be To Us:
      - It’s The *Process* Of Death:
        - That We Shudder At The Most!
      - The Plagues & The Pains That We Will Face:

- As We Approach The Steep Bank Of That River!
- Death Remains A Great Enemy:
  - To All Who Are Living:
    - In This World!
  - And That Is Why Christian & Hopeful:
    - Looked For A Bridge:
      - Or For Some Other Solution:
        - So They Could Get Across To The Other Side!
  - But When They Realized That:
    - They Would Have To Contend With:
      - This “Last Enemy” - Bunyan Tells Us:
        - That “The Pilgrims Began To Despond In Their Minds!”
- And That Then Leads Us:
  - To A Description Of The Indescribable:

## 2. *The Great Encounter With Death!*

- Both Christian & Hopeful:
  - Encounter Death:
    - In Their Own Way!
      - And Yet - In The Story At Least:
        - They Are Seen As:
          - Dying Together!
    - Of Course - We Know That - Humanly Speaking:
      - Death Is A Solitary Encounter:
        - For Each Of Us!
      - Hebrews 9:27 Reminds Us That:
        - “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment!”
      - And So - Each One Of Us Is Called To:
        - “Prepare To Meet Thy God!”
    - But - Here We See That:
      - Those Who Are Like Christian:
        - Never Have To Face The Enemy Of Death:
          - On Their Own!
    - In This Way:
      - Hopeful Is A Symbol:
        - Of The Help That:
          - Both Christ & Other Christians Can Bring:
            - To Those Whose Time To Die Has Come!
  - The Encounter Of Christian:
    - Was A Haunting Experience:
      - And May Describe The Death-Beds:
        - Of Many Who Truly Are:
          - Christians!
      - Christian Always Possessed:
        - A Very “Strong And Sensitive Conscience!”
          - And This Sensitivity:
            - Is What Brought Him Even To The Point Of Despair:
              - In His Fight With His “Last Enemy!”
      - Bunyan Seems To Think That King David:
        - Had A Similar Conscience:
          - Since He Puts David’s Words:
            - In Christian’s Mouth!
          - Psalm 88:4-7 - “I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: / Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. / Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. / Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah!”
      - For A Sensitive Soul Like Christian:
        - Death Was A Hard & Difficult Experience!

- He Experienced Horror:
  - Because He Remembered His Past Failures!
- He Experienced Hopelessness:
  - Because He Remembered His Past Foes!
- He Experienced Helplessness:
  - Because He Felt As If God Had Abandoned Him!
- And Yet - Hopeful Points Out To Christian That:
  - How One Dies:
    - Is Not Necessarily A Reflection:
      - Of How One Lived!
  - Using Psalm 73:4 - He Explains That:
    - Sometimes Those Who Should Fear Death Most - Because They Are Unprepared For It
    - Die Without A Wimper! "There Are No Bands In Their Death!"
      - And Yet Those Who Can Embrace Death - Because They Have Prepared For It
      - May Die In Great Distress!
- For The Christian - Death May Be:
  - The Last And Most Difficult Trial Of Your Faith:
    - Which In The End:
      - God Promises That It Will "Be Found Unto Praise And Honor And Glory At The Appearing Of Jesus Christ!" (1 Peter 1:7)
- How Will You Face Death?
  - Well - Bunyan Then Went On To Describe:
- The Encounter Of Hopeful:
  - Which Was - Truly - A Hope-Filled Experience!
  - And I Think The Main Difference:
    - Between The Two Was:
      - Where They Were Looking:
        - When Death Came Up To Them - Arrayed For Battle!
- Neither Christian Nor Hopeful:
  - Stared Death In The Eye:
    - For They Knew:
      - They Were No Match For It!
- But Christian Did:
  - Look Within:
    - His Own Heart!
      - Questioning His Faith & Readiness:
        - To Meet Death!
  - He Also Kept Looking:
    - Backward:
      - Fearful - Not Of Death:
        - But Of His Own Past!
  - And So:
    - At First:
      - He Felt No Bottom:
        - To The River:
          - And Sank In Despair!
- Hopeful However:
  - Looked:
    - Forward!
      - Keeping His Eyes On:
        - On The Lord & His Promises!
  - He Also Kept Looking:
    - Without!
      - Doing Whatever He Could:
        - To Help His Brother:
          - Keep His Head Above Water!
- How? He Continued To Remind Christian:

- Of The Promises Found:
  - In The Word Of God!
    - And - In A Sense:
      - Hopeful “Died With His Boots On!”
- He Distracted Himself:
  - From Death:
    - By Helping Others:
      - To Live!
- And This Is The Best Way For Us:
  - To Not Only Help Others:
    - Prepare To Die - But To Help Ourselves:
      - Meet Death:
        - With Hope!
- William Mason - “When You Visit A Sick Or Death Bed, Be Sure That You Take God’s Word With You, In Your Heart And In Your Mouth! It Is From That Only That You May Expect A Blessing Upon, And To The Soul Of, The Sick Or The Dying; For It Is By The Word Of God That Faith Came At The First; It Is By That, Faith Is Strengthened At Last; And Jesus Is The Sum And Substance Of The Scriptures!”
- And What Happened In The End?
  - Of Their Encounters With Death?
    - Like The Egyptians Slain By The Lord:
      - In The Red Sea:
        - The Last Enemy Became:
          - “Still As A Stone!”
    - And - “The Rest Of The River Was But Shallow!”
      - And - “Thus They Got Over!”
  - It Was God’s Grace:
    - That Had “Brought Them Safe Thus Far!”
      - And It Was God’s Grace:
        - That Did “Lead Them Home!”
  - And So - We Can Then Discover:

### 3. ***The Great Escape From Death!***

- In Hebrews 11 - After Going Through:
  - A Lengthy List Of Men & Women:
    - Who Were Known For:
      - The Strength Of Their Faith:
        - The Writer Of Hebrews Tells Us In 11:13 - That - “These All Died In Faith!”
- The “Shining Ones” Understood The Importance Of Faith:
  - In The Final Spiritual Battle:
    - Of These Pilgrims!
      - They Told Them At The Outset That:
        - They Would Find The River “Deeper Or Shallower, As You Believe In The King Of The Place!”
- And - It Would Have Been Helpful:
  - For Christian:
    - To Remember This:
      - When - Like Peter - He Took His Eyes Of Jesus And:
        - “Saw The Wind Boisterous!”
  - It Would Have Been Better:
    - For Christian:
      - To Keep Looking:
        - Forward In Faith:
          - Instead Of Backward:
            - With Regret!
    - And To Keep Looking:
      - Without - To Help Others:
        - With Their Faith:
          - Instead Of Within:

- In Doubt!

- The Best Way To Prepare For Death:

- Is By - In Life - "Looking Unto Jesus The Author And Finisher Of Our Faith!"

- Ken Puls - "Those Most At Home In This World Will Have The Hardest Time Leaving It! It Is Difficult To Face Death When You Are Clinging Tenaciously To The World! Those Least Encumbered By The World Will Have An Easier Time Leaving It!"

### Conclusion:

1. But - As We Think Of The Author Of Our Story:

- It Seems As If:

- John Bunyan Wondered:

- About What Would Happen:

- At His Own Encounter With:

- His "Last Enemy" Of Death?

- In Writing About Christian:

- He May Even Have Anticipated:

- That Encounter:

- To Be His Own!

2. And That May Be:

- Our Heaviest Fear:

- When It Comes To Death!

- Will I Die:

- In Faith?

- And Will It Be:

- Strong Or Weak?

3. Perhaps The Best Way:

- To Prepare For Death **Then**:

- Is To Become Familiar With Death **Now**!

- This Is What Happened To Paul:

- When He Said To The Corinthians:

- "I Die Daily!"

- Because Through:

- Daily Death & Denial:

- Taking Up Our Cross:

- And Following The Lord In Faith:

- When Final Death Comes Up To You With Its:

- Snarling Face & Smoky Breath!

- You Will Be Able To Look Right Past:

- Its Darkness:

- Into The Radiant Light:

- Of Christ!

- You Will Be Able To Embrace:

- Your Enemy:

- Because You Know That:

- It Is Held In The Victorious Embrace:

- Of Your Friend! And:

- You Will Be Able To See It:

- Not As The End

- But The Beginning:

- Of Life And Immortality!

4. And In The End:

- This Is What Happened To John Bunyan:

- When He Encountered Death Himself!

- His Last Thoughts & Words:

- Were Nothing Like:

- His Counterpart:

- In His Story!

- "His Last Words, While Struggling With Death Were: 'Weep Not For Me, But For Yourselves! I Go To The Father

Of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who Will, No Doubt, Through The Mediation Of His Blessed Son, Receive Me, Though A Sinner! Where I Hope We, Ere Long, Shall Meet, To Sing The New Song And Remain Everlastingly Happy, World Without End! Amen!”

- Bunyan Then - “Felt The Ground Solid Under His Feet In Passing The Black River Which Has No Bridge, And Followed His Pilgrim Into The Celestial City On August 31, 1688, In The Sixtieth Year Of His Age!”

5. “O Death, Where Is Thy Sting? O Grave, Where Is Thy Victory? The Sting Of Death Is Sin; And The Strength Of Sin Is The Law! But Thanks Be To God, Which Giveth Us The Victory Through Our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57)

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