

Shadows of Christ & His Bride

Lesson #8

I Being In The Way

March 6, 2024

Gen. 24:26-27 And the man bowed down his head and worshipped the LORD.

And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham,
who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth:

I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren.

Eliezer's words illustrate how important it is that we be obedient to the Lord each day.

Consider: How can people think they have any right to expect any guidance from God when they have their feet on a wrong path? Many men run into all manner of perplexities by their own folly and self-will, and never ask whether their acts are right or wrong, wise or foolish, until they begin to taste the bitter consequences. Then they cry to God to help them.

King Asa - II Chronicles 14-16 - Ruled for 41 years

I. Time Of Peace & Victory - II Chron. 14:1 - 15:7

1. His 1st 10 years were peaceful and prosperous. He walked with God. [II Chron. 14:1, 2, 6]

➤ Began his reign with a heart like David: A heart that always returns to God.

2. He used the Time Of Peace to Prepare For Future Conflicts. Great National Reforms

➤ He stamped out idolatry; tore down pagan altars, removed the high places. [14:3, 5].

➤ He fortified the land by building defense cities and assembling a 580,000 men army.

➤ He commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers;

to obey His law and commandments. [II Chron. 14:4, 7]

II Chron. 14:9, 11 And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah. And Asa Cried Unto The Lord His God, [Note: Relationship with God was already in place!] and said, Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for We Rest On You, and In Your Name we go against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!"

1. To appreciate King Asa's faith, we must consider what he was up against. There were one million Ethiopian soldiers, plus 300 chariots moving in against King Asa and his army.

Psalms 50:15: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and you shall glorify me."

2. He attacked the enemy "In The Name Of The LORD" to bring glory to God for the victory.

II Sam. 22:4 I will call upon the LORD who is worthy to be praised.

So shall I be saved from mine enemies.

God's Response: II Chron. 14:12-13 So The LORD Struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar; and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before the LORD, and before his host; and they carried away very much spoil.

- The LORD soundly defeated the Egyptian army.
- Judah's men plundered the cities and brought back an immense amount of spoils.
- The Egyptians didn't attack Judah again for almost 300 years. Wow!

II Chron. 15:1-14 - After The Victory

1. Spirit of God came upon the prophet Azariah who went out to meet King Asa.

- a. "Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while you are with Him; and if you seek Him, He will be found of you..." [II Chron. 15:1, 2].
- b. However, Azariah added this warning, "but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you" [15:2b].
- c. Be ye strong therefore and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.

Truth: After victories, seek the Lord, obey and trust Him, and be strong in the Lord.

Response: They used this time of peace to prepare for future conflicts.

They were exhorted to continue the work, build the nation and serve the Lord faithfully.

- He renewed the altar of the LORD & assembled the people to renew their covenant.

II Chron. 15:9 Then he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who dwelt with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, for They Came Over To Him In Great Numbers from Israel when They Saw That The LORD His God Was With Him.

II Chron. 15:11-15 And they offered unto the LORD the same time, of the spoil which they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep. And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul;

That Whosoever Would Not Seek The LORD God Of Israel Should Be Put To Death, whether small or great, whether man or woman.

¹⁴ And they sware unto the LORD with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart and sought him with their whole desire; and He Was Found Of Them: and the LORD gave them rest.

- They had peace until the 35th year of Asa's reign. [II Chron. 15:19]

II. Asa's Relapse & Rebellion: [II Chron. 16:1-14]

Apparently, King Asa became careless in his walk with the Lord.

- a. The LORD sent Baasah, King of Israel, to war against Asa.
- b. Baasha fortified Ramah, which was located about 6 miles north of Jerusalem.

From this vantage point, Baasha would be able to monitor his own people who might go to Jerusalem, and he could launch his own attack on Jerusalem.

- King Baasha gathered his army and moved south to the border of Judah. Baasha had made an alliance with the King of Syria and gathered a powerful force to threaten King Asa.
- Baasha's army took the city [Ramah] and fortified it.
- They now controlled the border so no-one could go in and out of Judah.

King Asa needed to recapture Ramah but knew that would be difficult while King Baasha had the support of the powerful King Ben-Haddad of Aram and his army.

- Instead of asking God for help and trusting Him, Asa devised his own plan.

Warning #1 - Departing or drifting from what He knew about God.

Warning #2 - Doubts God and Faith Begins To Waver

c. Asa, in his unbelief, turned to politics for help. He gave the dedicated treasures from the temple to Ben-hadad, king of Syria, and entered into a pact with a pagan nation. [bribe enemy] The Temple treasure arrived in Damascus with a message from King Asa, 'Let there be a treaty between Judah and Syria as there was between my father and your father. I am sending you silver and gold. Now break your treaty with King Baasha of Israel so he will have to withdraw.' With Syria attacking Israel from the north, King Baasha would have to abandon Ramah and move north to defend his country.

Spurgeon: Imagine! A man of God being an instructor for Satan!

1. Rather than look to God for help, King Asa turned to wicked, worldly King Ben-hadad of Syria [II Chron. 16:1-3].

Spurgeon: "You would not have supposed that he would be the man who...would be running after an idolater and cringing before him and praying him to help him!"

2. It does seem strange indeed, that when faced with a million invaders, King Asa calmly relied on God, but now, when a small problem comes up, King Asa relies on a heathen king.

3. Maybe: King Asa thought he could manage a smaller problem without God's help.

Spurgeon: Believers frequently behave worse in little trials than in great ones.

d. Ben-Hadad took the gold and silver belonging to God, broke his promise with Israel and helped Judah. He immediately gathered his army to attack Israel.

e. Commanders and troops were dispatched to conquer the towns of Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim and other nearby places where food was stored. In this way, Ben-Hadad gained control over the major trade routes and crippled Baasha's power and income.

f. When Baasha heard that he was being attacked in the north he withdrew his troops in the south to defend his land.

g. Having achieved his purpose, Asa conscripted the people to go to Ramah and carry off the stones and timber. With that material the king built two fortified cities:

Mizpeh about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Ramah, and Geba about the same distance to the east.

Consider: Everyone was happy except the LORD.

- God sent the prophet Hanani to rebuke Asa.
- If you had relied on the LORD, you would have defeated both Israel and Syria.
- The results of your plan and disobedience: 1. Judah gained a few towns.
2. The Lord's treasury was robbed. 3. You are in a sinful alliance with Syria.

Consider: All the resources God gave you for victory were stolen by the enemy.

Prov. 28:26 He that trusts in his own heart is a fool:

but he who walks wisely shall be delivered.

Remember: God did not fail you when Zerah and the huge Egyptian army attacked Judah.

- Both Judah & Israel suffered from faithless forgetfulness.
- Although God had delivered them when they were outnumbered, they repeatedly sought help from heathen nations rather than from God.
- Asa sought help from Syria: Evidence of the spiritual decline of the nation
- His confidence in God must have slipped. He sought only a HUMAN solution.

II Chron. 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth,
to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.
Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore, from henceforth thou shalt have wars.
This word was God's word spoken by the prophet Hannani. King Asa did not heed the word.
Note: Judah would pay for this mistake for years. Syria became a constant problem to Judah.
Consider: Many have won a battle but later lose the war due to pride or carelessness.

In II Cor. 11:2 Paul stated he wanted to present the church at Corinth to the Lord as a pure virgin. He was afraid the enemy would deceive them, and they would have a divided heart.

Problem: Asa's heart was divided - one day trusting the Lord and
the next day trusting in the arm of the flesh.

Note: A perfect heart isn't a sinless heart,
but a heart wholly yielded to the Lord and fully trusting Him.

1. Asa revealed the wickedness of his heart by becoming angry, rejecting the prophet's message, and putting him in prison. He brutally oppressed the people who opposed him.
2. God gave Asa time to repent, but he refused.

Heb. 12:6 "For whom the Lord loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives."

3. Three years later, God afflicted him with a disease in his feet.
4. King Asa's "disease was exceeding great" (16:12) very painful.
5. Turned his back on God; refused to confess his sins and seek God.
6. King Asa sought help from the physicians. Two years later, he died.

Note: He has progressed from Warning #1 - Warning #4

Truth: Asa made a good beginning and lived a life of faith, but when it came to his final years, he rebelled against the Lord. Spiritual progress stopped.

His greatest failure was missing what God could have done with his life if he had been willing to be humble. His pride ruined the health of his reign.

He stubbornly held on to his failure until his death.

Spurgeon: "Now, a life may begin well, and yet may be clouded before its close. The verdure of earnestness may fade into the sere and yellow leaf of backsliding. We may have the grace of God in our earliest days, but unless we have, day by day, fresh help from on high, dead flies may pollute the ointment and spoil the sweet odor of our lives. We shall need to watch against temptation so long as we are in this wilderness of sin. Only in Heaven are we out of gunshot of the devil. Though we may have been kept in the ways of the Lord, as Asa was, for 50 or 60 years, yet if left by the Master for a single moment we shall bring discredit upon His holy name."

Charles Spurgeon loved The Pilgrim's Progress so much he read it over one hundred times. It will challenge you to walk in the old paths and to be faithful in following the ways of righteousness and truth.

Before entering the town of Vanity, Christian and Faithful were warned that one of them would lose his life for the sake of gospel. They were aware of the danger, but they entered willingly, believing that Christ and the souls of those in the town were of more value than their own comfort, or even their own lives.

Faithful died bearing witness to the truth of the gospel.

Hopeful is a new believer—his heart, a fresh work of God's grace. God was at work, even in the midst of concerted efforts to suppress and silence the gospel.

One died to bear testimony to the truth, and another rises out of his ashes to be a companion with Christian in his pilgrimage.

Hopeful came to faith in Christ by "the beholding of Christian and Faithful in their words and behavior." Bunyan adds for emphasis "in their sufferings at the fair." Their endurance through suffering demonstrated the true value and veracity of the gospel. Christ is a treasure worth more than all this world can offer—a treasure worth more than even life itself.

We live the Gospel before others and share the Gospel with others...

"that they may set their hope in God" [Psalm 78:7].

May God grant us to walk with hope that we might walk worthy of the gospel of Christ.

After a few minor adventures, Christian and Hopeful reach a sparkling stream, the River of the Water of Life, which meanders through beautiful meadows bright with flowers.

After drinking from this "crystal river" their weary spirits are revitalized and refreshed.

This represents a time in every Christian's life in which we encounter new discoveries of God's love, fresh manna from His word, and the sweet comfort of His Holy Spirit.

In this meadow they lay down and slept, for here they might lie down safely.

The path is soft and conveniently located next to the River of Life. It's easy to be faithful.

But unfortunately, such times don't last. Faithfulness is a hard thing to maintain.

Staying on the pilgrim path is a great challenge for different reasons. What happened here?

The condition of the road changed.

They became discouraged because of the difficulty of the way.

What was once smooth and pleasant, quickly becomes rough and painful.

As the road became more uncomfortable to their feet, they saw in the distance a stile that would take them over the fence and into a meadow in which there was a much smoother path on which to walk.

Bypath Meadow: A path that runs alongside The Way.

Assume it will merge with The Way at some place when the going gets easier.

Wishful thinking

Christian: "It is just as I desired! Here is an easy-going way —
come, good Hopeful, and let us go over!"

Hopeful: "But what if this easy path should lead us out of the way?"

Christian: "That is not likely. Look, it goes right alongside our pathway."

So Hopeful, being persuaded by his fellow, left the path and followed Christian over the stile.

Once in the meadow — they found it very easy for their feet.

When Christian saw the path and how pleasant things appeared to be, he said to Hopeful, "This is the way I want to go." Isn't that one of the main reasons we go astray? The way of righteous perseverance sometimes becomes difficult and discouraging. When this happens, we decide to take a bypath and go "the way I want to go." This is a sure step out of the old paths. Whenever we put our wishes ahead of God's wishes, we are headed for difficult times, and we are departing from God's ways. As they are walking in the path they chose, they encounter Vain-Confidence who says he is bound for the Celestial City and knows the way perfectly. Christian: Look, did not I tell you so? Now you see we are in the right path. Vain-Confidence is not a trustworthy guide. He went before them to lead the way, but night approached and it grew very dark. They could no longer see Vain-Confidence who had fallen into a deep pit which was made by the prince of ByPath Meadow to catch vain-glorious fools. They called after him, but there was no answer. He was dashed into pieces with his fall. Christian and Hopeful retreat, but as they can see nothing in the dark, they decide to lie down in the meadow to pass the night.

Self-Confidence When we turn away from God, we turn to ourselves, often with full confidence that we are right, that we know what we are doing and where we are going. We are therefore asserting our self-confidence. So with 100% surety, Self-Confidence tells Christian and Hopeful that this path leads "to the Celestial Gate". Of course, it does not and neither do the ways of self-will, self-reliance, self-promotion or self-exaltation.

In her devotional commentary on The Pilgrim's Progress, Cheryl Ford says, "Seeing a strong believer like Christian succumb to the temptation first to leave the Way and then presumptuously to rely upon Self-Confidence should cause us to be ever mindful of our desperate need for God's guidance and grace. We should guard our hearts from complaining about hardships. A humble song of praise will serve us much better than will peering over fences into forbidden places. Indeed, this spirit of discontentment is our constant enemy."

Sin has consequences and after Self-Confidence disappears, Hopeful asks the question, "Where are we now?" It was obvious that they are lost and out of God's way of joy and peace. ByPath Meadow is not the way of joy and peace. It cannot deliver what it seems to promise. It began to rain — with thundering and lightening, in a most dreadful manner — and the water was rising around them.

Then Hopeful groaned within himself, saying, "O that I had remained on the way!"

Christian: "Who could have thought that this path would have led us out of the way?"

The answer: He should have thought so, but he was not careful, and was blinded by his own pride, and lead astray by vain confidence.

Then, for their encouragement, they heard the voice of one saying

Jer. 6:16 Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

But by this time the waters had greatly risen — so the way of going back was very dangerous. Then Christian realized that it is easier to go out of the right way — than to get back into it. So they attempted to go back — but it was so dark, and the flood was so high, that they almost drowned nine or ten times. The floods represent the sorrows, distress and anguish that often accompany the consequences of our sin, even when we confess and seek forgiveness. Neither could they, using all their skill — get back to the stile that night. We cannot return to the ancient or old path on our own. At last, finding a little shelter — they sat down there. Being weary, they fell asleep until day-break. Next morning, they are surprised and seized by the prince of By-path Meadow, a giant named Despair. Charging them with malicious trespassing, he hauls them to his stronghold, Doubting Castle, and throws them into a deep dark dungeon. He beats them almost senseless and advises them to take their own lives so that he will not have to come back to finish them off himself. The depth of such brokenness is portrayed in the allegory as a dungeon, a dark and unpleasant place, "nasty and stinking to the spirits of these two men." Their sorrow is lingering and lonely. For four days they are confined without food or drink (to regain their strength) or light (to see and find a way out), or friends and acquaintances (to notice and take pity on them). Christian and Hopeful lie imprisoned in Doubting Castle because they were no longer looking to Christ and resting in His provision. They had looked to themselves to find an easier path. Even when they realized their error and sought to return to the Way, they failed, striving in their own efforts. "All the skill they had" was not sufficient to revive and restore them.

When all seems hopeless, Christian suddenly brightens up, "as one half amazed," and exclaims: "What a fool am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon when I may as well walk at liberty. I have a key in my bosom called Promise which will open any lock in Doubting Castle." The Key represents the "exceedingly great and precious promises" of the gospel—promises that are ours in Christ.

As Christian and Hopeful hasten to leave the castle, the loud creaking of the Gate arouses the giant. But when the giant attempts to pursue his prisoners, he falls into a seizure and cannot reclaim them. In the light of day, he [Despair] has no strength. Despair cannot endure when there is clear understanding and diligent application of God's Word.

We must look to Christ if we are to escape from Doubting Castle. If we lose sight of Christ or depend upon anything but Him for help, Despair will find us again.

The prisoners are soon out in the open and running as fast as they can to get back onto the Holy Way, where they erect a sign warning other Pilgrims against being tempted by the apparent ease of traveling by way of By-path Meadow.

Horatius Bonar was a Scottish author, preacher and hymn writer who lived in the 1800's.

Charles Spurgeon: "After university, Bonar pastored in village churches before serving many years at the main Presbyterian church in Edinburgh, which became known for its solid Bible teaching and revival.

He was a great winner of souls, preacher, hymn writer, and writer, gifted in putting great truths into understandable language. Unlike many writers of the Evangelical school, Dr. Bonar is not content with baling out milk for babes but gives us real thought and teaching... We say to all our friends, read and be refreshed. One who knew him well felt that he was Pre-eminently a man of God, one who lived entirely under the power of the world to come."

He married Jane Catherine Lundie in 1843 and five of their nine young children died in succession. Towards the end of their lives, one of their surviving daughters was left a widow with five small children and she returned to live with her parents.

Bonar was well acquainted with the dark path.

This from the hymn, "Thy way, not mine, O Lord," 1 of over 100 hymns he wrote.

¹Thy way, not mine, O Lord, however dark it be;

lead me by thine own hand, choose out the path for me.

²Smooth let it be or rough, it will be still the best;

winding or straight, it leads right onward to thy rest.

³I dare not choose my lot; I would not if I might:

Choose thou for me, my god, so shall I walk aright.

⁴The Kingdom that I seek is thine; so let the way that leads to it be thine,

Else I must surely stray.

⁵Take thou my cup, and it with joy or sorrow fill,

As best to thee may seem; choose thou my good and ill.

⁶Choose thou for me my friends, my sickness or my health;

choose thou my cares for me, my poverty or wealth.

⁷Not mine, not mine, the choice in things or great or small;

Be thou my guide, my strength, my wisdom, and my all.

This expresses the Christian who is so committed to God's way that not even the fear of a dark path can dissuade them from following Him.

They understand that there is no failure when God leads and you are in His will.

Rest for our souls will not be found in ByPath Meadow but only in Jesus Christ and in His truth.

J.C. Ryle The Old Paths "The longer I live the more I am convinced that the world needs no new Gospel as some profess to think. I am thoroughly persuaded that the world needs nothing but a bold, full, unflinching teaching of the "old paths." If those who hold Evangelical views were only more faithful to their own principles, and more bold, and uncompromising, and decided, both in their preaching and their lives, they would soon find...that they hold the only lever which can shake the world." May the Sovereign Lord of His church keep us in these old paths in these difficult days in which it is so tempting to turn aside after our own sinful ways.

Deut. 31:8 And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee,

he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.

Jer. 6:16 Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

Jim Elliot: "God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him."