

# Finishing Well

Lesson #40

Old Gate: Seek The Old Path

Oct. 27

Jer. 6:16 "This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient [old] paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.'"

Appalachian National Scenic Trail: 2,190 Miles Long & passes through 14 states

- Takes ~6 months to hike the entire trail in a continuous journey
- ~3 million people visit and hike part of the journey every year
- ~3,000 people attempt the entire journey every year
- Elevation gain/loss equivalent to hiking Mt. Everest from sea level and back 16x

"In the 1950s, the Appalachian Trail twisted through my father's apple orchard on the Tennessee / North Carolina border, and I grew up meeting hikers who paused at our packinghouse for a swig of water or apple cider. They never stayed long; they were following white blazes painted on trees, rocks and fence posts from one end of the orchard to the other. Today, approximately 165,000 blazes mark the trail from Georgia to Maine, guiding thru-hikers all the way to Mount Katahdin. Missing the blazes is time consuming, even deadly, for some areas of the Appalachians can swallow up hikers like a haunted forest.

[Side trails are often marked with 6" by 2" wide blue paint marks on trees.

The Blue-blazers are hikers that use side trails often as a shortcut or to avoid climbs.]

The blazes on the A.T. come to mind: Jer. 6:16:

"This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.'"

Rom. 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have HOPE.

Divine judgment was on course for the nation of Judah because of the sins of King Manasseh. Hundreds of years before Christ's birth, the people of Judah were in full rebellion. Influenced by the pagan culture surrounding them, the Israelites began to worship idols instead of the one true God. As their depravity grew and destruction loomed, a lone prophet was given an enormous task: call God's people back to Him.

God called Jeremiah to be His prophet to Judah during the 13<sup>th</sup> year of King Josiah. [Jer. 1-6]

- Remains God's prophet to Judah until 586 BC @ Fall of Jerusalem: Taken to Egypt

Jeremiah's Message: 13x > Backsliding      53x > committed sin, iniquity or trespass

47x > Return to the LORD      14x > You will be scattered      51x > Taken captive by Babylon

Jeremiah's Declaration: A sinister force threatened Jerusalem because of her great wickedness. O, that she would receive instruction from the LORD. [Jer. 6:1-8]

Context: Judah is languishing under the threat of impending punishment.

- Repentance Is Their Only Hope.

Problem: Apostasy: They have found a "new way," a religion of convenience which turned the people away from Jehovah God.

The covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was for the benefit of the nation. The Law of Moses and God's promises to David were given to direct the nation towards the road of righteousness and the path to peace where they would find rest for their soul.

God's Word is sovereign, and the ancient paths were tried and tested. They secured God's blessings for His people and promised rest for their soul - while disobedience dictated devastation, destruction, and deportation from their promised land. However, they preferred the pagan practices of the surrounding nations and refused to return to the Mosaic Law, which was fundamental to right living. The people would not walk in God's ways and their deliberate disobedience caused Him to marvel at His rebellious people.

False Doctrine: Their false prophets are flourishing in a ministry that is shallow and popular because they promise peace when there is none.

- The priests are ruling with a strong and merciless hand and committing vile abominations with female worshipers. NOT ASHAMED!

- Evil rulers and judges go to the temple faithfully and pretend to be devoted to Jehovah.

They Have Never Called For Repentance!

Disaster: My people love it this way; Now it's so easy to be a Jew.

There are no demands; no care for the poor; no requirements for holiness.

Spiritual Cancer > Destroying the people - They cover their sins with religious activity.

Trust in > the ark, the temple, religious rituals, the covenant

Results: The "new way" led to false worship, loss of fear of God and love for God, direct rebellion against God's commands, and a polluted priesthood.

His very difficult message: Repent and turn to the LORD God whose wrath is coming due to your sin of idolatry. You have forsaken the true God by worshiping idols and pagan gods.

In your hypocrisy, you have maintained temple worship, but you give only lip service to God.

Warning: You have drifted away from the LORD God > on a wrong path.

Destruction is ahead because you have departed from the LORD and His ways.

He warned of approaching judgment from the north if they did not heed his words.

Jer. 6:9 Judah will be plundered, picked clean

Jer. 6:11-12 taken captive, and their houses and belongings given to others.

Jer. 6:16 "This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient [old] paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.'"

But they said, We will not walk therein.

How did the people of Jerusalem get themselves into such a state of apostasy?

It is the same way we allow ourselves to get carried away by sin and error.

1. They closed their ears to the Word. God's Word is a reproach to them.

Jer. 6:10 To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold, their ears are closed [uncircumcised= flesh not cut away] and they cannot listen.

Behold, the word of the Lord has become a reproach to them; they have no delight in it."

Luke 8:8 Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Many want to "have their ears tickled" [II Timothy 4:3] and listen to a message of their choosing since they "have no delight" in the Word of God.

Prov. 13:13 Whoever despises the word and counsel [of God] brings destruction upon himself, but he who [reverently] fears and respects the commandment [of God] is rewarded.

2. They followed what was popular.

Jer. 6:13 For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness [greedy for gain], and from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely.

Micah 3:11 described their mentality: Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money.

How can religious leaders/teachers guarantee their own monetary gain?

II Tim. 4:3-4 They deliver the message that pleases the people.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

<sup>4</sup> And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables.

In John 6, Jesus loses His crowd. He fed the hungry people, but He also gave them the Word of God. He used 2 key words in His sermon: Come and Believe.

➤ You come to Jesus Christ and yield yourself to Him.

➤ His statement, "For I came down from heaven," disturbed the religious leaders because they knew it was a statement of deity.

John 6:60 Many therefore of His disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? <sup>61</sup> When Jesus knew in himself that His disciples murmured at it, He said unto them, Doth this offend you?

➤ Many people encounter "a difficult statement" in God's word and will abandon it.

John 6:66 This happened when Jesus taught with the result that "many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore."

3. They ignored sin

Jer. 6:14 They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.

The false prophets declared "peace" while God's prophet declared "a great destruction" because of their abomination. [Jer. 6:1, 15]

I Cor. 5:1-2 The church in Corinth ignored sin in their midst. Paul warned this was dangerous because "a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough." [I Cor. 5:6].

➤ The influence of sin would spread and would cause further trouble in the future.

4. They lost their sense of shame.

Jer. 6:15 "Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? NO! They were not ashamed at all; they did not even know how to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I visit them, they shall be cast down," saith the LORD.

I Tim. 4:2 They became "seared" in their own conscience."

- When you no longer feel guilt for sin, there is no motivation to repent.
- We will inevitably depart from the "ancient paths."

Warning to Us today: You CANNOT go anywhere you want, think anything you want, say anything you want, watch anything you want, listen to anything you want and still be holy!

- There is a price to pay. Destruction is ahead! Have departed from LORD & His ways.

As the Babylonian military leaders and soldiers were preparing to march against Judah, planning their siege against Jerusalem, and agreeing their battle strategies, the children of Judah and Benjamin refused to listen to Jeremiah's pleading cries to escape the wrath to come.

The Lord Himself marveled at the foolhardiness of His obstinate people - even the winds and waves heeded His commands and yet His defiant nation would not!

Although the Lord warned Jeremiah that the people would not listen to his words, remember their covenant with God, or return to the old ways of righteousness, this weeping prophet was faithful to his calling.

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 they said, We will not walk therein.

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.
- Bypass 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 my 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 get 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.

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.

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.