

VALLEY OF DEATH



HOW TO AVOID THE SNARES OF SATAN

THE VALLEY'S REFERENCE

- ❖ Bunyan symbolically uses the Valley of Death to picture the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness
- ❖ Similarly, the retreating pilgrims (Self-love and Critic) are said to be descendants of the spies bringing back the negative report on the promised land
- ❖ As such, the Valley of Death pictures the severe trials necessary as a prerequisite to entering heaven, and the retreating pilgrims as those false Christians who retreat from the course due to fear demonstrating their lack of true faith

THE VALLEY'S REFERENCE

‘WHERE IS THE LORD WHO BROUGHT US UP OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, WHO LED US THROUGH THE WILDERNESS, THROUGH A LAND OF DESERTS AND OF PITS, THROUGH A LAND OF DROUGHT AND OF DEEP DARKNESS, THROUGH A LAND THAT NO ONE CROSSED AND WHERE NO MAN DWELT?’ JER. 2:6

SO THEY GAVE OUT TO THE SONS OF ISRAEL A BAD REPORT OF THE LAND WHICH THEY HAD SPIED OUT, SAYING, “THE LAND THROUGH WHICH WE HAVE GONE, IN SPYING IT OUT, IS A LAND THAT DEVOURS ITS INHABITANTS; AND ALL THE PEOPLE WHOM WE SAW IN IT ARE MEN OF GREAT SIZE. NUM. 13:32

TRUE DISCIPLESHIP IS IRREVERSIBLE

As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.” And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” Another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.” But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:57-62

TRUE DISCIPLESHIP IS IRREVERSIBLE

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. 1 John 2:19

OBSTACLES IN THE VALLEY

- ❖ Demonic creatures (hobgoblins, satyrs, dragons)
- ❖ Howling and screaming of the condemned
- ❖ Dark cloud of confusion
- ❖ Together, these threats create fear and cloud the mind of rational judgment so one cannot combat them in human strength
- ❖ Note that as powerful as the Sword of the Spirit is, you have to be able to think clearly to employ this weapon, so Bunyan here suggests that there may be times when another weapon is needed

THE WEAPON OF PRAYER

- ❖ As Christian enters the valley he relies on the weapon of prayer
- ❖ In employing this weapon, we must acknowledge that we lack the strength to save ourselves, hence the necessity of first passing through the Valley of Humility before encountering the Valley of Death
- ❖ Praying for strength in trials is a testimony to ourselves and others that we have true faith in Christ
- ❖ Prayer in trials is the reflex of one who believes God's promise of ultimate deliverance

PRAYER IN TRIALS-OT

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:4

The cords of death encompassed me, And the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, And cried to my God for help; He heard my voice out of His temple, And my cry for help before Him came into His ears. Psalm 18:4-6

I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. Psalm 40:1-2

PRAYER IN TRIALS-NT

Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.” And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” Matthew 26:38–39

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. James 1:5-6

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. 1 Peter 4:1,7

PERILS OF THE NARROW PATH

- ❖ The deep ditch on one side, where the blind have led the blind, represents the pitfall of doctrinal error
- ❖ The quagmire on the other side, where the lustful have fallen, represents the pitfall of moral failure
- ❖ Note that both of these pits have trapped many and few have ever emerged from these spiritual conditions
- ❖ These pits on either side of the narrow path picture the two major spheres of the spiritual battle; the mental (what you believe) and the moral (what you actually do)
- ❖ Bunyan acknowledges that true believers can fall into these pits and be rescued by the Lord; the irreversibility of these conditions applies to unsaved pilgrims like Self-love and Critic unless the Lord intervenes to save them

DOCTRINAL ERROR

“Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” Matthew 15:14

Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. Hebrews 13:9

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! Galatians 1:6–8

DOCTRINAL ERROR

Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. Galatians 5:2-4

DOCTRINAL ERROR

The phrase does not mean that if a Christian sins, he falls from grace and thereby loses his salvation. There is a sense in which to sin is to fall into grace, if one is repentant. But to fall from grace, as seen by this context, is to fall into legalism. Or to put it another way, to choose legalism is to relinquish grace as the principle by which one desires to be related to God. EBD

DOCTRINAL ERROR

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge”—which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. 1 Timothy 6:20–21

MORAL FAILURE

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. 2 Timothy 3:1-5

MORAL FAILURE

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience. Colossians 3:5-6

MORAL FAILURE

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19–21

MORAL FAILURE

“But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Revelation 21:8

BELIEF AND OBEDIENCE ARE INSEPARABLE

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 1 John 5:1-5

THE RISKS OF FALLING

The path between the ditch and the quagmire was exceedingly narrow and Christian had to be extremely cautious to stay on it. It was almost like walking a tight rope over the bottomless pit in the dark. To go on was very dangerous, but it was just as hazardous to attempt to turn and go back. He crept along, feeling his way, not knowing what minute he might come to the end of the path and plunge downward into death. John Bunyan

AVOIDING THE PITS

- ❖ Here Bunyan makes the point that in the Valley of Death (a picture of the trials faced by believers) there is temptation to fall to either side of the path
- ❖ On the one side is doctrinal error, on the other is moral failure
- ❖ Great care is required to avoid these pitfalls, and one must be careful in avoiding the one not to fall into the other
- ❖ Navigation of this treacherous ground requires our full attention and the abounding grace of God applied to our walk

AVOIDING THE PITS

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

PASSING THE MOUTH OF HELL

- ❖ Bunyan's description of the mouth of hell pictures the fear the Christian can confront when faced by difficult trials
- ❖ This is further elaborated by his encountering of the "fiends" who were pressing near to him as he passed this area
- ❖ Also near the mouth of hell he was beset by mental confusion in which he thought he heard blasphemous words coming from his own mouth which were in fact uttered by a demon
- ❖ What strengthened him through all of this was prayer, and see how it encouraged him to learn there was another believer on the path ahead of him

DEALING WITH FEAR

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none. Isaiah 44:8

“But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:31-32

DEALING WITH FEAR

“It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:25,28

“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

BENEFITS OF FELLOWSHIP

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:46-47

VALLEY OF MARTYRS

- ❖ When dawn had come, Christian was able to walk past the many snares, traps and holes that littered the rest of the Valley of Death; this pictures the illumination the Holy Spirit brings to the life of the believer who is striving to be sanctified
- ❖ At the end he came to the place where he saw thousands of mangled bodies of the faithful Christians of the past
- ❖ Finding the cave of Pagan and Pope, he found them powerless to harm him because Pagan was dead and Pope was powerless and frail
- ❖ By this, Bunyan conveyed his view that the threat to true believers of Islam and Roman Catholicism was largely passed
- ❖ He also indicates (by observing they shared the same cave) that paganism and catholicism, both being false religions, were happy to abide together and conspire to derail the process of sanctification

PAGAN AND POPE

- ❖ We now know that Pagan and Pope have experienced a “rejuvenation” and are back at work in the world
- ❖ Bunyan, of course, was not infallible and could not have known of the future resurgence of these false religions
- ❖ Satan will continue to use false religion to prevent (if he could) some from coming to Christ and to mislead and derail from the narrow path those who belong to Christ
- ❖ Though physical martyrdom of Christians still occurs today in some parts of the world, the effects of false religion are everywhere just as deadly since they are a threat to our spiritual vitality

THE DANGER OF FALSE TEACHING

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 Peter 2:1

“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.” Matthew 24:9–13

THE DANGER OF FALSE TEACHING

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him. “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. “Behold, I have told you in advance. Matthew 24:23-25

APPLICATION

- ❖ We will all encounter severe trials in this life if we walk faithfully with Christ and will have to traverse our own “Valley of Death”
- ❖ We will not survive without employing the weapon of prayer
- ❖ Prayer is effective in itself and, when we pray, we receive assurance of our faith in Christ
- ❖ We must accept those trials God brings into our life and not retreat from them, rather we should embrace them as tools of our sanctification
- ❖ Like the martyrs before us, we must boldly pursue godliness whatever the cost, even up to the cost of our lives

APPLICATION

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. James 5:16

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. James 1:2-3

And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." Mark 8:34

THIS WEEK...

- ❖ Apply the weapon of prayer to your most difficult current trials
- ❖ See how prayer of thanksgiving for trials and for wisdom in trials produces an enlargement of your faith
- ❖ Remember that though our battle is against forces of evil much stronger than us, our Christ is much stronger than all the forces arrayed against us
- ❖ Though we daily fight spiritual battles, the spiritual war has already been won by Christ

THE TRIUMPHANT CHRIST

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. 1 Peter 3:18,22

THE TRIUMPHANT CHRIST

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. Hebrews 10:11-13

THE END OF THE STORY

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. Revelation 19:11,13,16,20