

The Hill Difficulty

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Though the Christian journey often contains unique moments of joy and closeness to God, day to day life can challenge a believer's zeal, joy, and sense of purpose. After his powerful arrival at the cross, Christian's journey brings him into contact with people who do not share the same gospel-centered focus that he has. As we turn our attention to this phase in Christian's pilgrimage, we will take note of several dangers and pitfalls that threaten to undermine believers in their spiritual journey.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

2 Corinthians 13:5; Romans 8:28-39

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To warn against the dangers of spiritual apathy and sloth.
2. To emphasize the importance of giving one's heart completely to Christ.
3. To describe the possibility of losing assurance of salvation.
4. To promote among Christians a greater resolve to make their calling and election sure.

QUOTATION

If you have assurance of your justification, do not abuse it. It is abusing assurance when we grow more remiss in duty; as the musician, having money thrown him, leaves off playing. By remissness, or intermitting the exercises of religion, we grieve the Spirit, and that is the way to have an embargo laid upon our spiritual comforts.

—Thomas Watson

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. The Need to Persevere

- A. When Christian left the foot of the cross, he came upon three sleeping men named Simple, Sloth, and Presumption.
- B. When Christian awakened the sleepers and warned them of potential danger, they responded with sleepy indifference.
- C. This interaction illustrates the significance of persevering in the faith.
 - i. Christians ought to examine themselves regularly to discern the state of their hearts (2 Corinthians 13:5).
 - ii. Yet, Christians can also find rest in God's promise that He will never relinquish His claim on His people (Romans 8:28-39; Philippians 1:6).

II. The Need to Engage the Heart

- A. After leaving Simple, Sloth, and Presumption behind, Christian met two other travelers on the road.
 - i. Considering it impractical to enter the road at the wicket gate, these men had climbed over the wall beside the road.
 - ii. Formalist and Hypocrisy expressed an interest in saving religion but substituted their own ideas for God's truth.
 - iii. As their names and actions indicate, these two men were not true pilgrims.
- B. Formalist possessed a form of godliness but denied its power (2 Timothy 3:5).
 - i. Writing in the repressive days of Charles II, Bunyan was imprisoned for defying the religious establishment by preaching without legal authorization.
 - ii. In his critique of formalism, Bunyan likely had in mind the complacency of those who participated in the outward rigors of ceremonial religion without a worshipful heart.
- C. While Formalist perhaps had some measure of faith, Hypocrisy did not.
 - i. Like many in Bunyan's day and today, Hypocrisy's religiosity was an outward show.
 - ii. As Christian suggested, Hypocrisy's true nature would be revealed on the day of judgment.

III. The Need for Continued Assurance

- A. As they walked, Christian, Formalist, and Hypocrisy drew near to a large hill called Difficulty.
- B. Though the other two stayed at the bottom, Christian made his way up the hill until he paused at an arbor built for weary pilgrims.
 - i. Christian rested at the arbor and gained encouragement by reading from his scroll.
 - ii. Christian drifted off to sleep and awoke several hours later.
- C. Eager to make up for lost time, Christian hastily climbed to the top of the hill before he realized that he had left his assurance scroll behind.

- D. In a panic and overcome by guilt and fear, Christian returned to the arbor and recovered his scroll.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. As he continued on his journey, Christian saw three men named _____.
 - a. Pliable, Obstinate, and Presumption
 - b. Sloth, Sleep, and Slumber
 - c. Laziness, Glutton, and Excess
 - d. Simple, Presumption, and Sloth
2. In spite of all his efforts, Christian could not awaken the three sleepers from their slumber.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. How did Christian meet Formalist and Hypocrisy?
 - a. They were enjoying a lavish feast beside the road
 - b. They climbed over the wall and joined him on the road
 - c. They saw him struggling to climb the hill and helped him
 - d. They had been guests at Interpreter's house
4. Formalist and Hypocrisy tried to persuade Christian to abandon his journey.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. What happened when Christian reached the top of the hill?
 - a. He sat down and read from his scroll
 - b. He fell asleep
 - c. He realized that he had lost something of great value
 - d. A man named Kindness brought him cool water to drink

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where did Christian meet the three sleeping men? Why is this surprising? What can we learn from the three sleepers?
2. What was the religious situation in England like during Bunyan's lifetime? How might characters like Formalist and Hypocrisy reflect people that Bunyan would have known? In what ways do these tendencies appear in the church today?
3. What is the significance of the hill known as difficulty? What kinds of hills have you experienced that have challenged you as a Christian?
4. What does Christian's slumber in the arbor represent? How does this sort of spiritual "sleep" affect a person's sense of assurance?