

From Vanity To Victory

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[0 : 0 0] Well if we could this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, we're going to continue looking at the pilgrims' progress but if we read again just verse one of Psalm 98. Psalm 98 and verse one where the psalmist says, O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things, his right hand and his holy arm have gained him the victory. I don't know about you but as I was reading through this next section in part two of the pilgrims' progress and then learning about Christiana and the boys and who they met with as they continued along the King's highway, you know I was thinking that their experience was very like the experience of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz. Now I don't say that flippantly or in an irreverent manner, I actually say it because I believe that there was a Christian influence, a Gospel influence in the life of the author who wrote the Wizard of Oz because the author Frank

Baum, he was brought up as a Methodist, he was brought up in a Christian home and as you know the Wizard of Oz, it's a children's story about Dorothy and her dog Toto and how they take this journey along the Yellowbrick Road and they're going towards the Emerald City to see the Wizard of Oz but while they're on their journey along the Yellowbrick Road towards the Emerald City, Dorothy meets different people who are going in the same direction. She met a scarecrow who wanted a brain, she met a tin man who needed a heart and she also you'll remember she met a lion who desired more courage and you know you can see the slight comparisons with part two of the pilgrims progress because when Christiana and the boys, when they fled the city of destruction and set out along the King's highway towards the celestial city, when they were just setting out they met Mershey, Mershey joined with them and then as we read they passed through the slough of despond, they crossed over the Wicked Gate, they heard messages in the interpreter's house, they stood at the cross, they persevered up the hill called difficulty, they encountered lions and grim at the Porter's Lodge, they received a pilgrims welcome at the top at

Palace Beautiful, then they remembered Christian in the Valley of Humiliation, they prayed for light in the Valley of the Shadow of Death and they killed a man called Maul at the end of the valley. Then the pilgrims, as we read last week, they met an old pilgrim called Honest, he joined them on the journey as they came to Gaius's Inn and while they stayed with Gaius there was not one but two marriages, Matthew married Mershey and then Gaius's daughter Phoebe, she married Christiana's youngest son James. Then after the double wedding we're told that the pilgrims stayed there about 10 days and then they continued on their journey.

But you know what we see in this section this evening is that like the Wizard of Oz where people continually joined on the journey towards the Emerald City, what we see this evening is that there are now an extra four pilgrims who have joined in on the journey towards the Celestial City and actually by the time we reach the end of this section this evening there will be another six pilgrims on the journey, there will be a total of 14 pilgrims in the pilgrims progress as well as great heart by the time we finish this section this evening and so I'd like us to think about this section this evening and what is to think about it under three headings, three headings victims, vanity and victory, victims, vanity and victory. So first of all victims, by your rights therefore they went on, great heart and honest went before. Christiana, Mersey, Phoebe and the four boys Matthew, James, Samuel and Joseph they all went next and then Mr.

Phoebe-Mind came behind and Mr. Ready to hold with his crutches. Now if you were counting that's great heart the guide and ten pilgrims and you may be wondering well where did Mr. Phoebe-Mind come from, where did Mr. Ready to halt come from?

[4 : 59] Well Mr. Phoebe-Mind he was rescued from giant sleigh good by great heart because while the pilgrims, while they were staying at Gaius's inn, Gaius requested that great heart take his weapons and rescue Mr. Phoebe-Mind. Gaius said to the pilgrims he said well now you are here and since as I know that great heart is good at his weapons if you please we will walk into the fields to see if we can do any good. About a mile from here there is one sleigh good, a giant that doth much annoy the king's highway in these parts. He is a master of thieves and it would be well if we could clear these parts of him. So we read that they consented and they went and great heart he went with his sword and his helmet and a shield and the rest of them went with spears and staves. Then when they came to the place where sleigh good lived the giant saw them and he said why are you here on my ground? And great heart he responded and said to revenge the blood of pilgrims. So great heart were told and some of the boys they fought with giant sleigh good for over an hour but it was great heart who killed giant sleigh good. He cut off his head and then he brought back his head to the inn as a trophy along with Mr. Feeblemind. Then when they were back at the inn the pilgrims asked Mr. Feeblemind how he fell into the hands of giant sleigh good. And Mr. Feeblemind said he said as you see I am a sickly man.

Death usually knocked once a day at my door and I thought I would never be well at home so I betook myself to a pilgrims life and I have travelled from the town of uncertainty. I'm a man of no strength of body nor yet of mind but would if I could spend my life in the pilgrims way. And indeed said Mr. Feeblemind I have found much relief from pilgrims for it was the will of the Lord that comfort should be given to the Feeblemind it. This I have resolved to run when I can to go when I cannot run and to creep when I cannot go. As to the principle thing I thank him that loves me I am fixed my way is before me my mind is beyond the river that has no bridge though I am as you see but off a Feeblemind.

And what's more is that Honest he looks at Mr. Feeblemind and he discovers that Mr. Feeblemind is a nephew of Mr. Fearing and he makes the assumption because they actually looked alike and they spoke alike. And if you remember last week Honest had described Mr. Fearing. He described him as a man who had the root of the matter in him but was always overcome with doubts and fear.

And like Mr. Feeblemind here his uncle Mr. Fearing he was a Christian pilgrim. A Christian pilgrim who headed slowly but surely towards the celestial city. However he lived his life thinking that he was unworthy and unwanted. And because of his fear he failed to lay hold of the joy of God's promises. Choosing rather to live in doubt and despondency. I know Mr.

Feeblemind he was very similar to his uncle Mr. Fearing because he was never sure. He was never steadfast in his faith. He was always unsure and uncertain and unclear about his salvation and his security of the Saviour. Mr. Feeblemind he didn't have a strong character. He wasn't a bold and brash believer. He wasn't a confident and courageous Christian. He didn't speak with an open and outright tone. He wasn't assertive. He didn't have an affirmative character.

[9 : 24] Rather he was more of a quiet and timid man. He was often plagued by discouragements and despondency. He was feeble minded. He was faint hearted. He was always downcast in mind, body and soul. You know my friend Mr. Feeblemind was the kind of pilgrim who always sang Sam 42. Oh why art thou cast down my soul?

Why in me so dismayed? Mr. Feeblemind was someone who was always downcast, always despondent, always doubtful, maybe even depressed. But you know and this is an important part. I love the way Mr. Feeblemind describes his pilgrimage.

Because he confesses to all the other pilgrims. He says I have resolved to run when I can, to go when I cannot run and to creep when I cannot go. I have resolved to run when I can, to go when I cannot run and to creep when I cannot go. And you know Bunyan is reminding us that even though we may be feeble minded pilgrims, even though we may be downcast and despondent and doubtful and maybe even depressed, the wonderful thing is we keep going. We keep persevering on to the celestial city. We get there slowly but surely. And my friend you may be echoing Sam 42 this evening. You may be asking oh why art thou cast down my soul?

Why in me so dismayed? But don't stop there. Don't stop there. Press on to the next line. Oh why art thou cast down my soul? Why in me so dismayed? Trust God for I shall praise him yet. His countenance is my aid. And you know this is why Paul exhorted and encouraged the church to encourage the faint hearted. To comfort the feeble minded. To help the weak and to be patient with them all. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. And that's what we read because when the pilgrims were about to continue on their journey Bunyan writes he says when they were going out of the door Mr. Feeble Mind lingered but great heart said come along with us come along with us I will be your guide and Mr. Feeble Mind he said but you are all so strong I'm weak I'll be a burden to you but brother said great heart I have it in my work to comfort the feeble minded and to support the weak you must go along with us we will wait for you we will lend you our help we will deny ourselves of some things for your sake rather than leave you behind and then we read that while Mr. Feeble Mind and great heart while the student guy is his door another pilgrim comes along and this pilgrim comes along with crutches in his hands and he's called Mr. Ready to Halt. You know I love the names that Bunyan comes up with they're just brilliant and with that we're told that Mr. Feeble Mind he says to Mr. Ready to Halt how did you get here I was just complaining that I didn't have a suitable companion to walk with me but you have arrived at my wish welcome welcome he says welcome Mr.

Ready to Halt I hope that you and I maybe some help to one another and Mr. Ready to Halt says I shall be glad of your company and I will lend you even one of my crutches but Mr. Feeble Mind says thank you but but no thank you I'm not inclined to halt before I am lame and so Mr. Ready to Halt says if I or my crutches can help you in any way we are both here at your command Mr. Good Mr. Feeble Mind you know in his book Bunyan's character Alexander White he explains who Mr. Ready to Halt really was. Alexander White he he writes Mr.

[14 : 05] Ready to Halt is the Mephubisheth of the pilgrimage while Mephubisheth was still a child his nurse led the young prince fall and from that day until the day of his death he was lame on both his feet. Mephubisheth's lifelong lameness and then David's extraordinary grace in those two points says Alexander White we have all that we know about Mr. Ready to Halt. Surely Mr. Ready to Halt was the greatest and the best believer in all the pilgrimage. Each pilgrim had his own qualities yes but Mr. Ready to Halt beat them all he says for he was absolutely and always dependent upon the promises. The promises of scripture he says wear his crutches take away the promises he writes and Mr. Ready to Halt will be a heap on the roadside he cannot take a single step unless he's leaning upon a promise. And you know my friend it's a beautiful description isn't it? Even though we don't know much about Mr. Ready to Halt we know enough because we know that every step he took towards the celestial city he took that step looking loving and leaning upon the promises of God and that's you know that's how we should walk towards the celestial city. We should take every step in the pilgrims progress towards the celestial city looking loving and leaning upon the promises of God. They are our crutches the promises of God are our crutches. Then Bunyan writes the pilgrims went on great heart and honest went before. Christiana, Murshy, Phoebe and the four boys Matthew, Joseph, Samuel and James went next and the victims of the pilgrims progress Mr. Feeble Mind and Mr. Ready to Halt with his crutches they came behind and so we've considered the victims but secondly we see vanity so victims and then vanity vanity. Bunyan writes now by this time they had come within sight of the town of vanity where vanity fair is kept so when they saw that they were near the town they consulted with one another how they should pass through the town and some said one thing and some said another. Now you'll remember that when

Christian passed through the town of vanity he was challenged and confronted by all the the tantalizing temptations of vanity fair. Of course vanity fair had been built by Beelzebub and Apollyon and Legion and it was built in order to distract and divert pilgrims away from the Kings highway. Vanity fair was there to tempt and tantalize Christians from going to the celestial city. Vanity fair was to appeal and attract Christian pilgrims to waste their life on all the pointless pleasures and vanities of this world. My friend all the glitter and all the glamour of vanity fair was to make pilgrims like you and me look love and live life with a temporal perspective rather than an eternal perspective. But you know what made vanity fair so appealing was that it was open all year around. It wasn't closed on the Lord's Day, it wasn't closed for holidays or even for weekends. Vanity fair was open for business and the vanities of this world were on offer 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. And Bunyan he has already told us what was on offer at vanity fair. He said that this fair are all such things sold as houses, lands, trades, places, honors, performance, titles, countries, kingdoms, lusts, pleasures and delights of all sorts as wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, silver, gold, pearls, precious stones and whatnot. Bunyan says everything you can possibly imagine it's all on offer and vanity fair. It's all there at vanity fair. Now of course

Bunyan wasn't saying that any of these things are wrong in and of themselves because as you know all of these things, all of these things are God's good and gracious benefits and blessings towards us. But you know what Bunyan was saying and what Bunyan is reminding us again in part two is that if we as pilgrims put anything or anyone before Jesus, then that's an idol. If we make someone or something primary or priority in our lives before Jesus Christ, then that's an idol. And the Bible says idols are vanity. Idols are vanity, their pointless pleasure that keep us from looking and loving and living life with an eternal perspective. And you know that's why Paul emphasizes to us in Second Corinthians four that we must not look to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen because the things that are seen, they are temporal. But the things that are unseen are eternal. And you ask pilgrims who are repeatedly challenged and confronted by all the temptations and tantalizations and the appeal and the attraction and the glitter and the glamour of the pointless pleasures of vanity fair. We need to look my friend. We need to love. We need to live life with an eternal perspective, a perspective that looks towards the celestial city. And you know that's why these pilgrims all consult consulted with one another as to how they should pass through the town of vanity. They were all concerned about the attractions of vanity fair. And so their guide, great heart, he says, I have led many pilgrims through this town. I am acquainted with one Mr. Nason of Cyprus, an old disciple at whose house we may lodge. If you think good, we will turn in there. Now the character of Mr. Nason is based upon a man called Nason, mentioned in Acts 21. You know when Paul was travelling from Ephesus to Jerusalem, those who were with him, they stopped at Caesarea and they launched there with this old disciple called Nason. And as you'd expect, Mr. Nason, he welcomed great heart and all of the 10 pilgrims. He welcomed them into his home to stay with him. And while they were sitting in the dining room, Honest asked Mr. Nason if there were any good, good people living in the town of vanity. He asked if there's anyone good living in this town. And you know it may seem like a silly question. Is there anyone good living in the town of vanity fair? But you know what we discover is that there were faithful pilgrims living in the town of vanity.

And it's a reminder to us that Christians must be in the world, but not off the world. Christians must live in the town of vanity, but not love the town of vanity. Christians must live in the town of vanity, but not love the town of vanity. Because separation my friend is not isolation. It's contact without contamination. Separation is not isolation. It's contact without contamination. And you know with that Mr. Nason, he called his daughter Grace. He called her and said, he said, go and tell my friends. Mr. Contrite, Mr. Holy Man, Mr. Love Saint, Mr. Dare not lie and Mr. Penitent, tell them that I have a friend or two at my house who would like to meet them this evening. And at Mr. Nason's request, these men, they came and joined the pilgrims around the dining room table and they joined in in the conversation. And it's in that we read that Mr. Contrite, he asks honest a question that we should all ask one another. He asks him, how are you getting on in your pilgrimage? How are you getting on in your pilgrimage? You know, it's a great question. That's a question that we should all ask one another. Because you know far too often when we're asked, how are you? We all just say, well, I'm fine. I'm not bad. But sometimes in reality, we feel the complete opposite. Because instead of feeling fine or not bad, we feel bad and not fine. But you know, this is a question we should ask one another not to to check up on one another, but just to check in on one another. How are you getting on in your pilgrimage? My friend, how are you getting on in your pilgrimage? How are you getting on in the pilgrims' programs? But you know, I love honest answer. It's very honest. I love his answer because he says, sometimes our way is clean, sometimes uphill, sometimes downhill. We are seldom at a certainty. The wind is not always on our back, nor is everyone a friend that we meet with in the way. We have met with some notable rubs already, and what are yet behind, we know not. But for the most part, we find it true that has been talked off of old. A good man must suffer trouble. It's a great answer because in reality, the pilgrims progress, it's not plain sailing. The Christian life is not plain sailing. It has ups and downs. It has mountains and valleys. It has rocks and ruts. It has pitfalls and potholes. It has good days and bad days. It has light and dark. It has laughing and even loneliness.

My friend, the Christian life has all the sins and sufferings and sicknesses and sorrows like everyone else, except the Christian life has someone to take it all to. The Christian life has someone to take it all to. We have a friend in Jesus. And that's what the hymn writer reminds us, doesn't he? What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. What's interesting is that all ten pilgrims, they stayed with Mr. Nason in Vanity Fair for quite some time. In fact, they stayed long enough for Mr. Nason's daughters, Grace and Martha. They got married to Christiana's sons, Samuel and Joseph. Grace married Samuel and Martha married Joseph. Then Bunyan writes, well the time grew on that the pilgrims must go on their way. They prepared for their journey, committed each other to the protection of their king and set forward on their way. Again, great heart went before the pilgrims, but this time there were 12 of them. There was Honest

[26 : 39] Christiana, Mercy and Matthew, Phoebe and James, Grace and Samuel, Joseph and Martha, Mr. Feeble-Mind and Mr. Ready to Halt with his crutches. There was 12 of them. And then we read that when the pilgrims came to the place where faithful was put to death just outside the town of Vanity, they stood and thanked the Lord for enabling faithful to bear his cross so well. As you know, as you remember, faithful was faithful unto death and he received the crown of life. Then we're told that the pilgrims went on to victory as they continued their journey in the pilgrims' progress and that brings us to consider lastly, victory. So victims, Vanity and victory.

Vanian writes, now they went on and when they came to by-path Meadow and to the style which Christian and hopeful went when they were taken by giant despair and put into doubting castle. And you know, as they sat at the style beside where Christian and hopeful built a pillar with an inscription, you remember that Christian and hopeful, they put an inscription at the style to stop anyone going over towards doubting castle. And the inscription read over the style as the way to doubting castle, which is kept by giant despair who despises the king of the celestial city and seeks to destroy his holy pilgrims. But it was there that we read that all the 12 pilgrims and Great Heart, their guide, they sat down and they consulted what was best to be done.

They were wondering whether they thought that there was enough of them and that they were strong enough with Great Heart as their guide to use this opportunity to attack giant despair and demolish doubting castle and set any prisoners that are there at liberty. And we're told that as the pilgrims discussed their dilemma, one said one thing and one said another thing. But then we read that Great Heart, he interrupts their discussion by giving this arousing warrior speech. He says, I have been commanded to resist sin and to overcome evil and to fight the good fight of faith. And who shall I fight this good fight with if not giant despair? Therefore I will attack giant despair and demolish doubting castle. Who will go with me? He says. Then honest, old honest says I will. And so will we, said the four boys. And so they left the women by the style into

Bypath Meadow and the strong men who went, they left Mr. Feeble Mind and ready to halt, they left them behind, appointing them to be guards over the women until they came back. And we read that Great Heart, honest, Matthew, Samuel, Joseph and James, they went to Doubting Castle to look for giant despair. And when they arrive at the castle gate, the ambush and the attack of giant despair at Doubting Castle, it began in the politest of ways. We're told that Great Heart knocked at the door and giant despair, he comes to the door. He comes with his wife following behind. Dividence was there following, not far behind.

And giant despair, he says, who is so strong as to disturb the giant despair? And the reply comes, it is I, Great Heart, I serve the king of the celestial city, guiding pilgrims to their destination. I demand that you open the gates so I can enter. Prepare yourself to fight for I have come to take away your head and demolish Doubting Castle. He's not so polite now. But you know, on hearing the voice of Great Heart, giant despair, he immediately puts on his armor. We're told he puts on a helmet of steel on his head, a breastplate of fire on his chest.

[31 : 15] He puts iron shoes on his feet and he picks up a large club in his hand. And giant despair, he goes out to meet these six men who have come to fight him. And we're told that dividends, she came to help giant despair, but honest, old honest, just cuts her down with one blow. Then we read the pilgrims fought for their lives. They fought for their lives until giant despair was brought down to the ground. But he was loath to die. Bunyan even says that giant despair struggled so hard against the pilgrims and that he was brought down again and again. And he was brought down so often, says Bunyan, that it seemed that he had as many lives as a cat. But Great Heart was his death. Because Great Heart, we're told, he wouldn't stop attacking giant despair until he had severed his head.

He wouldn't stop until he had severed the giant's head from his shoulder. And once giant despair was dead, the pilgrims began demolishing Doubting Castle.

And we're told that they did it with ease, because the giant was dead. And you know, my friend, with despair dead and doubt demolished, it made it easier for the pilgrims to progress. With despair dead and doubt demolished, it made it easier for the pilgrims to progress. And you know, that's how it often is in the Christian life. You remember when Christian was there with hopeful in Doubting Castle. They were in the dungeon of Doubting Castle and giant despair was encouraging them to kill themselves. And Christian, he endured the experience of darkness and discouragement and doubt and depression and despair and the thoughts of death. But it was when he remembered what his saviour had also endured. That's what encouraged him. That's what encouraged him, that his saviour had also endured and experienced darkness and discouragement and doubt and depression, despair and death and Calvary. And that encouraged Christian, that's what gave Christian hope. And his hope, like our hope, was the anchor of his soul.

It was grounded firm and deep in the saviour's love. But now we see it in part two that with despair dead and doubt demolished, it made it easier for the pilgrims to progress. And they did progress because we're told that they were there at Doubting Castle demolishing it for seven days. And while they were there, they found a man named Mr. Despondency. And he had a daughter called Much Afraid. And when they found him, they were starving to death, almost starving to death. The Bunyan says that they managed to save these two alive. But when they looked, when they looked around the dungeon and out in the courtyard, they saw so many dead bodies and so many bones of pilgrims just lying there.

Nevertheless, the pilgrims took Mr. Despondency and his daughter, Much Afraid, they took them into his care, into their care, and they came back to the King's Highway with them. They also took the head of Giant Despair, leaving his body buried under the rubble of Doubting Castle. And when they returned to meet the other pilgrims who were waiting for them at the Stile to Bypath Meadow, Mr.

[35 : 11] Feeble-Mind and Mr. Ready to Hold, as soon as they saw the head of Giant Despair, they rejoiced. They rejoiced. In fact, they were so happy knowing that Despair was dead and Doubts was demolished that were told that Christiana and Mershi began playing music and singing. They began playing music and singing. Now in my mind, they were singing a Sam, of course. And I'd like to think that they were singing the words of Sam 98, where it says, as we read earlier, O sing a new song to the Lord, for wonders he has done, his right hand and his holy arm, the victory he hath won. It's a song of victory. And it was a great victory for the pilgrims. It was a joyful moment to know that to know that Despair was dead and Doubts was demolished. Doubts was destroyed. And you know, they were told that they were so joyful that Mr. Ready to Hold, who had his crutches, he took Mr. Despondency's daughter, who was called much afraid. He took her by the hand and he started dancing with her on the King's Highway.

They were so elated and full of joy that Despair was dead and Doubts was destroyed. They sang that new song to the Lord. They sang that his right hand and his holy arm have won the victory. And then Bunyan Wines, when these men bravely showed themselves against out in castle. And when they had slain Giant Despair, they went forward and they went on until they came to the delectable mountains. And I was there that the shepherds welcomed Great Heart. Great Heart, who was with now 14 pilgrims. 14 pilgrims were now with Great Heart. And God willing, we'll find out what happens on the delectable mountains next week as we continue in part two of the Pilgrim's Programmes. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.

O Lord our gracious God, may we give thanks to Thee for even the reminders through these characters of Thy faithfulness towards us, that we would be like Mr. Ready to Halt, leaning upon the promises, taking every step, leaning and standing upon the promises of God. And Lord that we would see that even though we must live in the town of Anity, we are not to love it, but that we are to stand firm and to speak out, to speak up for Jesus and to stand up for Jesus. And Lord we give thanks to Thee that there it is through the experience of doubt being demolished and despair dying, that we are able to know the victory, that we are able to know the victory through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that we are given that new song to sing, to sing the new song to the Lord for wonders He has done, that we can look at the cross and say with the Sammest that this is the doing of the Lord and wonder us in our eyes. O keep us Lord we pray in the week that lies ahead, a weak Lord that is unknown to any of us, but we give thanks that it is known to Thee, that Thou wouldst keep us on the narrow path, keep us on the King's Highway, pressing on in the Pilgrim's progress, going towards the celestial city, cleanses we ask for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of that Sam, Sam 98. Sam 98 we're singing in the Sing Sam's version and we're singing from the beginning down to the verse Mark 4. Sam 98 from the beginning. O sing a new song to the Lord for wonders He has done, His right hand and His holy arm, the victory have won. The Lord declared His saving work and made it to be known to all the nations of the world, His righteousness is shown.

We'll sing these verses of Sam 98 to God's praise.

O sing a new song to the Lord for wonders He has done, His holy arm, the victory have won.

[40 : 41] The Lord declared His saving work and made it to be known to all the nations of the world, His righteousness is shown. And all the nations of the earth have seen what the Lord has done. The road to faith is deliverance by His right hand and our Lord.

The name of the Lord, O holy earth, Shed light beyond rejoicing, Make music and be true and true in wake of your voice.