
ESCAPE FROM DOUBTING CASTLE

THE SENSE OF LOSS of the presence and promises of God and the feeling that these belong to everyone else but me are a sign of entrapment in Doubting Castle. In our day of “easy-believism” it could appear that the reality of a Giant Despair might be somewhat on the extreme side of things (and of course, we wouldn’t want to be extremist when it comes to religion). One might question whether our hope today is more resilient and stronger against fear and doubt than it was in Bunyan’s time. Probably not. It is more likely that the seventeenth century Puritan mind had a better understanding of the true nature and strength of remaining sin as well as the operations of repentance and faith in the life of the child of God than we do today. Bunyan is not afraid to bring his two brave pilgrims to the end of their rope and into thoughts of suicide as they languish within their prison walls.

Bunyan’s account of his own struggles within Doubting Castle is found in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. It is well worth reading because it is the account and commentary of the turmoil in his own heart over whether God would accept him in his misery and wretchedness.

Mired in the depth of hopelessness, Christian remembered a key called Promise, lodged in his bosom, that answered the dilemma in which they found themselves. We

must never think that this key represents an inherent spark of goodness and virtue that somehow appears at the darkest of moments from deep within our heart. This key of Promise represents the resuming of fellowship between the offending child of God and his Redeemer, but it is a promise that comes external to us. It is a pledge, the oath-bound word of honor that comes by way of the Word of God through the Spirit of God. Laying hold of the key Promise marks the persevering actions of a prodigal now returning to his God in true repentance and faith with full resolve never to displease the Savior again.

For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us (2 Corinthians 1:20, NKJV).

The centrality of the Savior is so very crucial here because there is an inherent tendency in us all to disbelieve that the blood of Christ is really sufficient to save my soul. The bones in the Castle-yard were not put there for effect. Bunyan’s own commentary is clear: “Oh, many a pull hath my heart had with Satan for the blessed sixth chapter of John ... and again as I was thus musing, that Scripture also came with great power upon my spirit: Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us” (Titus 3:5).
