
THE STATELY PALACE

THE THIRD REICH of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party was loudly touted to be the thousand year kingdom. Populated by murderers and egomaniacs, it steadily advanced, systematically occupying the countries of Europe, forcing one nation after another to bow beneath its savage despotism. It finally succumbed only after plunging the world into war, being consumed by its own tyranny and wickedness.

The gospel announces the coming of another kingdom of a different kind than the Third Reich. This kingdom also is steadily advancing, but rather than relying on forced occupation and fear to accomplish its aims, it is being invaded and occupied by those who are aggressively seeking to gain entrance. Matthew's Gospel puts it this way: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" (Matthew 11:12, NIV). Another way of translating the text might be "eager men are seizing it and taking it by storm."

We remember that the previous room in the Interpreter's house depicted Christ pouring grace into the life of the true believer despite satanic efforts to snuff the work out. It is all of Christ. Now we get the other side of the coin—the Christian life is one of active, aggressive effort. Bunyan wastes no time in letting the reader know that Christ will preserve His own unto the end, but His own will also "put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11), and they will "fight the good fight of faith" and "lay hold on eternal life" (1

Timothy 6:12).

The imagery is graphic. The Kingdom of Heaven is depicted as a stately palace surrounded by armed guards and many looking on but doing nothing. Out of the crowd comes one man who takes up a sword, rushes the door and cuts and hacks his way into the palace. Upon gaining entry, he hears a voice saying, "Come in, come in, eternal glory thou shalt win."

It is strange how backwards we can turn things in our contemporary way of looking at things. How common it is to think that it is *my* choice and *my* effort that brings me into the embrace of Christ, and then after salvation takes place, I simply "let go and let God," and all will be well in the final day.

There is a dual emphasis all throughout the Bible that exactly the opposite is true. Salvation is of God's free grace ("which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," John 1:13). Sanctification, which is an outgrowth of God's free grace, takes the form of mortifying the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13), presenting your bodies a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), working out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), studying to show yourself approved unto God (1 Timothy 2:15), and many, many more orders to the redeemed heart. Only by this kind of warfare can the stout heart forcefully and courageously assault the Kingdom of Heaven and hear the words, "Come in, come in, eternal glory thou shalt win."
