



Thoughts from the Bible and Books

A Newsletter for University Reformed Church
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In the spirit of Bunyan's Pilgrim Progress, I have written an allegory for (post-) modern American life. In this story, Evangelist tries to lead twelve individuals to The Pearl of Greatest Price. By no means, is my story as creative or powerful as Bunyan's. But perhaps it will be helpful all the same. The story will unfold throughout the summer issues of TBB. So you'll have to keep reading!

Many are Called, But Few are Chosen (Part 3)

Soon after the group set out the next morning, they came to a fork in the road. The travelers halted as Evangelist began to speak, "I warned you of the Rocks of Offense..."

"Surely the Rocks of Offense can be scaled with hard work and honest determination," interrupted Civil Religion, who seemed unnerved by any mention of the Rocks.

"As I was saying," Evangelist continued, "the Rocks of Offense can be dangerous, but they are more than a day's journey ahead. Today we will face tremendous challenges. We mustn't look past them."

"We're up for anything!" Mountain Top said with enthusiasm.

"We'll find our way," added Intellect.

"We must reach the Caves by nightfall if we are to be safe from the prowling lions which roam around at dark. To make it there we must pass over Truth Mountain and down through Tearful Valley. But first, the road is split before us."

"Which way shall we go, Evangelist?" asked Chosen.

"The path to my right is the Path of Light. The one to my left is the Path of Darkness," Evangelist spoke, gesturing with his hands to each side.

Intellect spoke up with conviction. "We would be fools to take the second path. It is overgrown, mangled, and altogether uninviting. To the Light Path! Follow me."

One by one the travelers fell into place behind Intellect, marching off to their right—confident and still puzzled that Evangelist made so much of such an easy choice.

The choice, however, was not an easy one for Mrs. Gray. "I'm puzzled." Mrs. Gray said with frustration in her voice.

"Why such consternation?" Evangelist asked his bewildered traveler, all the while knowing what was bothering her (there was always one in every group).

"The Light Path sounds good, but can it really be that simple?"

"It can."

Mrs. Gray explained. "Only a child would believe in anything so simple. There must be another way. You have settled too quickly, Evangelist. Or maybe you're eyes are deceiving you. It's not as easy as light and darkness or black and white. Surely, there is a gray path?"

"There was once." Evangelist had Mrs. Gray's attention. "Many years ago, before I was around, there was a Gray Path here. But it ran exactly parallel to the Black Path. So close in fact, that the two trails have eroded into the same. The two paths have overgrown into one. I suppose you could call the Black Path the Gray Path if you like, but they are really the same thing."

"Terrific!" Mrs. Gray was relieved. "I'll take that. I never was one for seeing things in black and white. Life's too complicated for that." Mrs. Gray bounded down the dark way. "I guess I'll be seeing you."

“I wish that were true,” Evangelist pined, “I wish that were true.”

By the time Evangelist caught up with the others, the group sat perched at the foot of Truth Mountain.

“Which way now?” Chosen asked.

Seeing that Evangelist was still catching his breath, Tolerant decided to speak up. “All roads are basically the same.”

Skeptic was, well, skeptical. “Are you sure?”

“Of course. Look around you. There must be hundreds of ways up the mountain. All of them look perfectly safe to me. I suppose some may have different twists and turns, but all of them are going to the same place no doubt.”

“There is only one way up Truth Mountain,” Evangelist proclaimed. “If you stray from that one path you will never reach the summit.”

“Fiddlesticks! I’ve heard of hundreds of people taking hundreds of different paths. Surely they can’t all be lost. Everyone will reach the top in their own way.”

Evangelist pleaded and pleaded with Tolerant to believe him that there was only one safe way up the Mountain. Tolerant listened with increasing intolerance until he could take no more. So he huffed his way up no path in particular and disappeared around the corner

Evangelist was too tired from running and pleading to say much else. He simply motioned with his hand and the remaining group plodded up the difficult trail with Evangelist leading the way.

After hours which seemed like days, the trail went from bad to worse. The incline was so steep the travelers crawled on all fours. Then Mountain Top (who had charged out in front a few hours earlier) saw it first: A downward slope! Just through the clearing, up a few more feet, the sky met the ground and the trail seemed to descend.

“We’re almost there! Just a few more feet!” Mountain Top was ecstatic. “Keep coming! The summit is just ahead.”

The group pushed and pulled themselves up to the top until everyone finally arrived. They rejoiced and then they rested, all except Mountain Top. He was far too excited to even sit down. He paced back and forth and jumped up and down and screamed a scream so loud it echoed back a forth and back again.

Seeing shadows settle on the valley ahead, Evangelist urged on the troops. “There will be plenty of rest tonight. Come. We must reach the Caves before dark.”

So they trundled down the mountain into the valley. The pilgrims, now numbering only six (Mountain Top, Chosen, Civil Religion, Skeptic, Sincerity, and Intellect), were tired. Yet, for hours, they walked briskly and quietly through the Tearful Valley.

Mountain Top broke the silence. “Why is the Valley called Tearful?”

“Shhh. Let’s hope we don’t find out,” admonished Sincerity.

“It is so named because it the place where every pilgrim will meet pain and grief,” Evangelist related in somber tones.

“This is a hard way” Chosen said. “I feel sadness in my bones already.”

“And more to come no doubt,” moaned Skeptic.

“But” Intellect interjected, “the Caves of Rest are close ahead and our journey is nearly over. We can’t turn around now.”

Mountain Top wasn’t so sure. “We can’t turn around? Why that’s the very thing we should be doing. Just a few miles back to the south is the great Mountain. If we hurry we can make the summit by sundown. This Valley is dreadful, and might I say, downright boring. This whole trip has been far too much walking and resting and far too little climbing and scaling. Why on earth did we ever leave the peak in the first place?”

“Because,” Evangelist was unusually stern, “no traveler reaches the Great City without passing through Tearful Valley.”

“Perhaps. But if the City you love so much is anything like this Valley, our trip’s end will be rather dull and dreary don’t you think? Go on without me. I’m going back to scale the Mountain. The air up there is delightful.”

“But you can’t reach the Great City by living on the mountain top. You must walk the Tearful Valley,” Evangelist warned.

“So be it then. Life will be better at the summit anyway. I’ll be happy there.” And with these words Mountain Top rushed back toward the Mountain.

Just then, Sincerity eyed a strange outcropping of boulders off in the distance.

“Hurry,” Evangelist cried, “to the Caves of Rest. The sun has nearly set and we will not be safe without shelter. The closer we are to the Great City the more that’s out to harm us. Quick, follow me.”

to be continued...