Chapter Fifteen

Giant Despair

Giant Despair. “You trespassed on my land last night, trampling in and lying on my property. Therefore, you must come along with me.” So they were forced to go because he was stronger than they were. They had very little to say, for they knew they were at fault. The giant made them go ahead of him, and he put them into a very dark dungeon in his castle. The place was filthy and had an awful smell.¹ They stayed here from Wednesday morning until Saturday night, without any bread, drink, light, or anyone asking how they were doing. They were in a horrible situation and were far from friends and acquaintances. Here Christian had double sorrow, because it was through his counsel that they had been brought into this distressing situation.

Now Giant Despair had a wife, and her name was Diffidence.² When he went to bed, he told his wife what he had done, namely, that he had taken a couple of prisoners and cast them into his dungeon for trespassing on his land. Then he asked her what she thought he should do with them. She asked him who they were, where they were from, and where they were going. And he told her. Then she counseled him to go to them in the morning and beat them without any mercy. When he rose the next morning, he took a club made from a crab tree and went down into the dungeon. First, he began to berate them as if they were dogs, although they had never spoken an unkind word. Then he came at them and beat them mercilessly, so that they were not able to defend themselves. They were in such bad shape that they could not even turn over on the floor. Having done this, Giant Despair withdrew and left them to wallow in their misery and to grieve about their distress. All that day they spent their time in nothing but sighs and bitter complaints.

The next night, Diffidence was talking again with her husband about the two men. When she learned that they were still alive, she advised him to go to the men and encourage them to commit suicide. So when morning came, he went to them in a hostile manner as before. Perceiving them to be very sore from the blows he had given them the day before, he told them that since they would never come out of that place, they should commit suicide with a knife, rope, or poison. Then he said, “Why should you choose life, seeing it is accompanied with so much bitterness?” But they wanted him to let them go. With that, he glared at them and rushed toward them, and would have doubtless killed them himself, except that he fell into one of his fits. For sometimes in sunny weather, he fell into a fit and lost (for a time) the use of his hand. Therefore, he withdrew and left them (as before) to consider what to do. Then the prisoners consulted together, whether they should take his advice or not. And so they began their conversation.

Chr. “Brother, what shall we do? The life that we now are living is miserable. As for me, I do not know whether it is best to live this way or to die by my own hand. ‘...I prefer strangling and

¹ “You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend” (Ps. 88:18).
² Diffidence means “want of confidence or faith; mistrust, distrust, misgiving, doubt” (OED).
death rather than this body of mine’;\(^3\) and the grave would be easier for me than this dungeon. Shall we be controlled by the Giant?"

**Hope.** “Certainly our present situation is terrible, and death would be far more welcome to me than to live on in this way. But let us think about this: the Lord of the country to which we are going has said, ‘You shall not murder’. We are not to take the life of another. How much more, then, are we forbidden to take the Giant’s counsel and kill ourselves? Besides, he who kills another person, murders the body; but he who kills himself, kills body and soul. Moreover, my brother, you talk about ease in the grave. But have you forgotten hell, where murderers are certain to go? ‘For no murderer has eternal life.’ Let’s think about this again: all of the law is not in the hands of Giant Despair. Others, so far as I can understand, have been taken by him like us, yet have escaped his grasp. Who knows but that the God who made the world may cause Giant Despair to die? Or, that at some time or another he may forget to lock us in? Or, that he may have another fit in front of us and lose the use of both arms? And if that ever happens again, I am resolved to gather up all of my strength and to try vigorously to get out from under his control. I was a fool not to try to escape before. However, my brother, let us be patient and endure this for a while. The time may come when we will be released. But let us not be our own murderers.”

With these words, Hopeful restrained the mind of his brother. So they continued together (in the dark) that day in their sad and dismal condition.

Well, as evening was approaching, the Giant went down into the dungeon again to see if his prisoners had taken his counsel. But when he came there, he found them alive - barely alive. Since they had no bread or water and had such severe wounds from their beatings, they could do little else but breathe. But, I say, he found them alive, which made him fall into an intense rage. He told them that since they had disobeyed his counsel, it would be worse for them than if they had never been born.

Hearing this, they were filled with fear. I think Christian fainted. But coming to again, they continued their conversation about the Giant’s counsel and whether they should take it or not. Now Christian once again seemed in favor of it. But Hopeful argued against it a second time as follows:

**Hope.** “My brother, do you not remember how courageous you have been in the past? Apollyon could not defeat you. Neither could you be crushed by what you heard, saw, or felt in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. What hardship, terror, and bewilderment you have already gone through! Are you now filled with fear? You see that I am in the dungeon with you, a far weaker man by nature that you are. Also, this Giant has wounded me as well as you and has cut off my bread and water. And along with you, I grieve that we do not have any light. Let us exercise a little more patience. Remember what a courageous man you were at Vanity Fair, not afraid of being put in chains or a cage. You were not even afraid of being killed. Therefore, let us - at least to avoid the shame that is not becoming of a Christian - be as patient as we can be.”

\(^3\) “When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint, even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions, so that I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine” (Job 7:13-15).
The Pilgrim’s Progress

Now night came again, and the Giant and his wife were in bed. She asked him about the prisoners and whether they had taken his counsel. He replied, “They are tough rascals. They choose to bear all this hardship rather than commit suicide.” Then she said, “Take them into the yard around the castle tomorrow and show them the bones and skulls of those whom you have already destroyed. Make them believe, before the end of the week, that you will also tear them in pieces as you have done to their friends who preceded them.”

So when morning came, the Giant went to them again, took them into the yard of the Castle, and showed them the sight, just as his wife had suggested. “At one time, these were pilgrims as you are. They trespassed on my land as you have done. And when the time came, I tore them in pieces. So within ten days, I will do the same to you. Go! Get back to your dungeon!” With that he beat them all the way back. All day Saturday they were in bad shape as before. Now when night came and Mrs. Diffidence and her husband the Giant had gone to bed, they continued their conversation about the prisoners. The old Giant was still astonished that he could not destroy them by his counsel or blows. And with that, his wife replied, “I fear that they live with hope that someone will come to release them. Or, maybe they hope to escape because they have a tool for picking the locks.” “Do you think so, my dear?” said the Giant. “I will search them in the morning.”

Well, on Saturday around midnight, the pilgrims began to pray. They continued to pray until it was almost daylight.

Now just before daylight, good Christian, somewhat amazed, broke out in this passionate speech: “What a fool am I to lie in a stinking dungeon when I can just as well be free! I have a key in my coat pocket called Promise. I am persuaded that it will open any door in Doubting Castle.” Then Hopeful said, “That’s good news. Good brother, take it out of your coat and try it.”

Then Christian took it from his coat and began to try it in the dungeon door. As he turned the key, the bolt moved and the door easily opened. Christian and Hopeful both came out. Then he went to the door that led to the yard around the castle. With his key he opened that door also. After that, he went to the iron gate, because that had to be opened, too. That lock was very difficult to open; but the key finally opened it. They pushed the gate open so they could escape quickly. As the gate opened, however, it made such a creaking sound that it awakened Giant Despair. As he hastened to pursue his prisoners, he felt his limbs fail. He had another fit, making it impossible for him to pursue them. So they escaped and came to the King’s highway again. They were safe now, because they were out of his jurisdiction.

Now after they had gone over the stile, they began to discuss what they should do to prevent future pilgrim’s from falling into the hands of Giant Despair. They agreed to erect a pillar and to engrave the following warning on its side: “Over this stile is the way to Doubting Castle, which is ruled by Giant Despair, who despises the King of the Celestial Country and seeks to destroy his holy pilgrims.” Many who came later read what was written and escaped the danger. Having completed the inscription, they sang this song:
Out of the way we went, and then we found
What 'twas to tread upon forbidden ground:
And let them that come after have a care,
Lest heedlessness makes them, as we, to fare:
Lest they, for trespassing, his prisoners are,
Whose castle’s Doubting, and whose name’s Despair.

John Bunyan first published The Pilgrim’s Progress in London after it was licensed on February 18, 1678. This edition was revised from the original in 1993 by John L. Musselman.

For further information, please contact:

The Jackson Institute
P.O. Box 500071
Atlanta, Georgia 31150-0071
Tel: 770-518-7994
jacksoninstitute@mindspring.com
www.tji.org