Chapter Twenty-Three

A Deep River

Now I saw that there was a river between them and the gate. But there was no bridge by which to go over. The river was very deep. The pilgrims were overwhelmed when they saw this river. The men (angels) who were traveling with them said, “You must go through it, or you cannot get to the gate.”

The pilgrims then began to inquire about another way to the gate, to which they answered, “Yes, but there have not been any, except two, namely Enoch and Elijah, who have been permitted to walk that path since the foundation of the world; nor shall there be any more until the last trumpet shall sound.”¹ The pilgrims then - especially Christian - began to be despondent. They looked all around but could not find a way by which they might escape the river. Then they asked the men if the water was the same depth everywhere. They said, “No.” But they could not help them in that matter. They said, “You will find it deeper or shallower according to your belief in the King of the place.”

Then they approached the water. As they entered, Christian began to sink. Crying out to his good friend, Hopeful, he said, “I am sinking in deep waters, and the billows are going over my head. All his waves are going over me.”

Hopeful responded, “Be of good cheer, my brother. I feel the bottom, and it is good.” Then Christian said, “Ah! my friend, the sorrows of death have surrounded me. I will not see the land that flows with milk and honey.” And with that, a great darkness and horror fell upon Christian, so that he could not see in front of him. Also, it was here that, to a great extent, he lost his senses and could not remember nor talk about any of the pleasant refreshments he had encountered during his pilgrimage. All the words he spoke betrayed the fact that his mind was filled with horror and overpowering fears that he would die in the river and never obtain entrance at the gate. Here also, as perceived by those who stood by, he was troubled by the sins he had committed, both before and after he became a pilgrim. It was also observed that he was troubled with frightening apparitions of evil spirits. Every now and then he would intimate this by his words. Hopeful, therefore, had trouble keeping his brother’s head above water. Sometimes Christian would go under and then surface again half dead. Hopeful would try to comfort him saying, “Brother, I see the gate and men standing by it to receive us.” But Christian would answer, “It is you; it is you they are waiting for. You have been hopeful ever since I met you.” “And so have you,” he said to Christian. “Ah, brother,” Christian said, “surely if I was right, the King would now arise to help me. But because of my sins, he has brought me into this snare and has left me.” Then Hopeful replied, “My brother, you have forgotten the text that speaks about

¹ “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (I Cor. 15:51-52).
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the wicked: ‘They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.’ 2 ‘The trouble and anguish that you go through in these waters are not a sign that God has forsaken you. They are only sent to try you, to determine whether you will recall those things you have received by his goodness and rely on him in your distress.’

Then I saw in my dream that Christian was meditating for a while. Hopeful added this word to him, “Be of good cheer; Jesus Christ makes you whole.” And with that, Christian broke out with a loud voice, “Oh, I see him again! And he tells me ‘When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.’” 3 Then they both were encouraged and, after that, the enemy was as still as a stone until they had crossed over. Christian found ground to stand on and discovered the rest of the river was shallow. So they crossed over to the other side. There on the banks of the river they saw two Shining Ones who were there waiting for them. When the pilgrims came up out of the river, the Shining Ones saluted them saying, “We are ministering spirits sent to minister to those who will be heirs of salvation.” Then they went along towards the gate. Now you must note that the City stood upon a mighty hill. But the pilgrims went up the hill with ease, because they had these two men to lead them up by the arms. Also, they had left their mortal garments behind them in the river. Although they had gone in with them, they came out without them. Therefore, they went up the hill with much agility and speed, even though the foundation upon which the City was built was higher than the clouds. They traveled ever higher, having an amiable conversation as they walked. They experienced comfort because they had safely crossed the river and had such glorious companions to welcome them.

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2 Ps. 73:4-5.

3 Isaiah 43:2a.