Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners - Preface

~Other Speakers A-F: John Bunyan:

A PREFACE, OR BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE PUBLISHING OF THIS WORK, WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR THEREOF, AND DEDICATED TO THOSE WHOM GOD HATH COUNTED HIM WORTHY TO BEGET TO FAITH, BY HIS MINISTRY IN THE WORD.

Children, grace be with you, Amen. I being taken from you in presence, and so tied up, that I cannot perform that duty that from God doth lie upon me to youward, for your further edifying and building up in faith and holiness, &c., yet that you may see my soul hath fatherly care and desire after your spiritual and everlasting welfare; I now once again, as before, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, so 'now' from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards (Song 4:8), do look yet after you all, greatly longing to see your safe arrival into the desired haven. 3

I thank God upon every remembrance of you; and rejoice, even while I stick between the teeth of the lions in the wilderness, at the grace, and mercy, and knowledge of Christ our saviour, which God hath bestowed upon you, with abundance of faith and love. Your hungerings and thirstings also after further acquaintance with the Father, in his Son; your tenderness of heart, your trembling at sin, your sober and holy deportment also, before both God and men, is great refreshment to me; "For ye are my glory and joy" (1 Thess 2:20).

I have sent you here enclosed, a drop of that honey, that I have taken out of the carcase of a lion (Judg 14:5-9). I have eaten thereof myself also, and am much refreshed thereby. (Temptations, when we meet them at first, are as the lion that roared upon Samson; but if we overcome them, the next time we see them, we shall find a nest of honey within them.) The Philistines understand me not. It is 'something of' a relation of the work of God upon my own soul, even from the very first, till now; wherein you may perceive my castings down, and raisings up; for he woundeth, and his hands make whole. It is written in the Scripture (Isa 38:19), "The father to the children shall make known the truth of God." Yea, it was for this reason I lay so long at Sinai (Deut 4:10,11), to see the fire, and the cloud, and the darkness, that I might fear the Lord all the days of my life upon earth, and tell of his wondrous works to my children (Psa 78:3-5).

Moses (Num 33:1,2) writ of the journeyings of the children of Israel, from Egypt to the land of Canaan; and commanded also, that they did remember their forty years' travel in the wilderness. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no" (Deut 8:2). Wherefore this I have endeavoured to do; and not only so, but to publish it also; that, if God will, others may be put in remembrance of what he hath done for their souls, by reading his work upon me.

It is profitable for Christians to be often calling to mind the very beginnings of grace with their souls. "It is a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations" (Exo 12:42). "O my God," saith David (Psa 42:6), "my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." He remembered also the lion and the bear, when he went to fight with the giant of Gath (1 Sam 17:36,37).

It was Paul's accustomed manner (Acts 22), and that when tried for his life (Acts 24), even to open, before his judges, the manner of his conversion: he would think of that day, and that hour, in the which he first did meet with grace; 4 for he found it support unto him. When God had brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea, far into the wilderness, yet they must turn quite about thither again, to remember the drowning of their enemies there (Num 14:25). For though they sang his praise before, yet "they soon forgot his works" (Psa 106:11-13).

In this discourse of mine you may see much; much, I say, of the grace of God towards me. I thank God I can count it much, for it was above my sins and Satan's temptations too. I can remember my fears, and doubts, and sad months with comfort; they are as the head of Goliah in my hand. There was nothing to David like Goliah's sword, even that sword that should have been sheathed in his bowels; for the very sight and remembrance of that did preach forth God's deliverance to him. Oh, the remembrance of my great sins, of my great temptations, and of my great fears of perishing for ever! They bring afresh into my mind the remembrance of my great help, my great support from heaven, and that the great grace that God extended to such a wretch as I.

My dear children, call to mind the former days, "and the years of ancient times: remember also your songs in the night; and commune with your own heart" (Psa 73:5-12). Yea, look diligently, and leave no corner therein unsearched, for there is treasure hid, even the treasure of your first and second experience of the grace of God.
toward you. Remember, I say, the word that first laid hold upon you; remember your terrors of conscience, and fear of death and hell; remember also your tears and prayers to God; yea, how you sighed under every hedge for mercy. Have you never a hill Mizar to remember? Have you forgot the close, the milk house, the stable, the barn, and the like, where God did visit your soul? Remember also the Word— the Word, I say, upon which the Lord hath caused you to hope. If you have sinned against light; if you are tempted to blaspheme; if you are down in despair; if you think God fights against you; or if heaven is hid from your eyes, remember it was thus with your father, but out of them all the Lord delivered me.

I could have enlarged much in this my discourse, of my temptations and troubles for sin; as also of the merciful kindness and working of God with my soul. I could also have stepped into a style much higher than this in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more than here I have seemed to do, but I dare not. God did not play in convincing of me, the devil did not play in tempting of me, neither did I play when I sunk as into a bottomless pit, when the pangs of hell caught hold upon me; wherefore I may not play in my relating of them, but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was. He that liketh it, let him receive it; and he that does not, let him produce a better. Farewell.

My dear children, the milk and honey is beyond this wilderness. God be merciful to you, and grant 'that' you be not slothful to go in to possess the land.

JOHN BUNYAN.