Chapter Thirty Six

The Fearful End of Ignorance

The River of Death.

NOW while I [Bunyan] was gazing upon all these things, I turned my head to look back and saw Ignorance come up to the bank of the River: but he was able to quickly reach the other side, and without half the difficulty that Christian and Hopeful had experienced. For it then happened that he found in that place a ferryman named Vain-hope who, with his boat, was able to transport him across.

Ignorance moves forward without fear or hesitancy.
He arrives at the River seemingly without a care in the world.
He saunters down to the riverbank alone, and stands there alone with no one to counsel him.

He employs a nearby Ferry-man named Vain-hope.
The outcome is a trouble-free crossing that only reinforces his delusion. But why did not the two shining ones indicate to Christian and Hopeful this means of crossing the River of Death? Because while it is a possibility, yet it is an impossibility for legitimate pilgrims.

Note: A peaceful death is no guarantee of entrance into heaven any more than a struggle in death is an indication of probable entrance into hell.

Psalms 73:3-5 (NLTSE)
For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.
They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong.
They don't have troubles like other people; they're not plagued with problems like everyone else.

The Gate of the City.

So, as was the case with the others I had watched, he ascended the Hill and approached the gate of the Celestial City, except that he traveled alone; neither did any man meet him and offer the least encouragement.

Having discarded his earthly garments with the greatest ease, safely on the other side Ignorance looks upward toward the Celestial City. So feeling supremely confident, he eagerly presses upward, alone, without any assisting escort
He receives no encouragement to seek entry.
Here is the supreme delusion, namely that of a man who not only ignores the truth, presented so convincingly by Christian earlier, but also relentlessly, enthusiastically, doggedly, blindly pursues a lie. He calls darkness to be light, error to be truth, that is until that awful day of revelation before God when his delusion is so shockingly revealed, and he is paralysed with the horror of it all.

Ignorance seeks entrance into the Celestial City.
When he had reached the gate, he looked up at the writing that was inscribed above; and then he began to knock, supposing that he would quickly be permitted to gain entrance. But the men who peered at him over the top of the gate first asked, “From where have you come? And what is it that you desire?”
So Ignorance replied, “I have eaten and have drunk in the presence of the King, and he has taught in our streets.”
Then they asked him for his scroll, so that they might go to the King and show it to him.
So he fumbled in his chest pocket and yet was unable to find anything. Then they further inquired, “Have you none?” But the man answered not so much as a word.
He misinterprets the inscription over the Gate. It read: “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14). Ignorance thought, “Yes, my obedience to God’s commandments will certainly qualify here.” Yet he completely failed to understand that what was required were works evidencing justification and not works producing justification.

Ignorance knocks boldly expecting immediate entrance. He falters in his investigation by the gatekeepers. They ask for a testimony. He has heard the teaching of the King. They ask for a certificate. He fumbles. He is speechless.

Matthew 7:21-23 (NLTSE)
"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

The other door.
So they told the King, but he would not come down to see him. Instead, he commanded the same two Shining Ones, who had previously conducted Christian and Hopeful to the City, to seize Ignorance, bind him hand and foot, and carry him away. Then they took him up and carried him through the air to the door that I had earlier seen in the side of the Hill below the Delectable Mountains, and dispatched him there.

Empty-handed, the gatekeepers withdraw to consult with the King and present this man’s plea. Meanwhile, Ignorance stands outside the gate of heaven realising that his moment of truth has come. Having passionately argued his case before many men along the way, now his claim to a good heart will be judged by He who truly knows his heart, and there will be no further court of appeal.

The King declares he will not come to meet the man. Why? Because he has never had an intimate acquaintance with this man. His claim of friendship is bogus, his qualifications are lacking, his approach is out of order, and his heart is impure. Now the truth of Luke 13:24 (Work hard to enter the narrow door to God's Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail.) is perfectly illustrated by Ignorance.

Again it becomes clear that the terms for reconciliation with God are for God to determine alone.

The King demands that he be bound and taken away. Ignorance is bound and transported away, where he is cast into the by-way to Hell!
Bunyan’s devastating conclusion.
Then I saw that there was a way to Hell even from the gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction. So I awoke, and behold it was a dream.
• The road to hell may pass the very gates of heaven!
• The awakening of the dreamer ends the allegory.

In conclusion, William Mason leaves us with this pressing truth:
This is a most awe-full conclusion. Consider it deeply. Weigh it attentively, so as to get good satisfaction from the Word to these important questions:-
• Am I in Christ, the way, the only way, to the kingdom, or not?
• Do I see that all other ways, whether of sin or self-righteousness, lead to hell?
• Does Christ dwell in my heart by faith?
• Am I a new creature in him?
• Do I renounce my own righteousness, as well as abhor my sins?
• Do I look alone to Christ for righteousness, and depend only on him for holiness?
• Is he the only hope of my soul, and the only confidence of my heart?
• And do I desire to be found in him; knowing by the Word, and feeling by the teaching of his Spirit, that I am totally lost in myself?
• Thus, is Christ formed in me, the only hope of glory?
• Do I study to please him, as well as hope to enjoy him?
• Is fellowship with God the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ, so prized by me, as to seek it, and to esteem it above all things?
If so, though I may find all things in nature, in the world, and from Satan, continually opposing this, yet I am in Christ the way, and he is in me the truth and the life.

Finally…
Life is a journey. Life is short. One day you will stand before God…Are you ready?
Question: What about those who have never heard?
Romans 1:20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.
Romans 2:15-16 They demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone’s secret life.
Matthew 7:7-11 "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.
"You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him."
Hebrews 11:6 And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

Discuss
• What happens to Ignorance once he crossed over the river of Death?
• Why do you think Bunyan chooses to to conclude The Pilgrim’s Progress with this account of the final outcome of Ignorance?
• Have another look at William Mason’s questions. Quietly spend time before God and answer each one for yourself. Remember that this is not about others, this is about you!