

6 - The Slough of Despond

Now I saw in my dream that, just as they had ended this talk, they drew near to a very miry slough that was in the midst of the plain; and they being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was "Despond." Here, therefore, they wallowed for a time, being grievously bedaubed with the dirt; and CHRISTIAN, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire.

Pli. Then said PLIABLE, "Ah! neighbour CHRISTIAN, where are you now?"

Chr. "Truly," said CHRISTIAN, "I do not know."

Pli. At that PLIABLE began to be offended, and angrily said to his fellow, "Is this the happiness you have told me of all this while? If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect 'twixt this and our journey's end? If I get out again with my life, you shall possess the brave country alone." And with that he gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire on that side of the slough which was next to his own house: so away he went, and CHRISTIAN saw him no more.

Wherefore CHRISTIAN was left to tumble in the Slough of Despond alone; but still he endeavoured to struggle to that side of the slough that was farthest from his own house, and next to the wicket gate: which he did, but could not get out, because of the burden that was upon his back. But I beheld, in my dream, that a man came to him whose name was HELP, and asked him what he did there?

Chr. "Sir," said CHRISTIAN, "I was bidden to go this way by a man called EVANGELIST, who directed me also to yonder gate, that I might escape the wrath to come; and as I was going thither, I fell in here."

Help. But why did you not look for the steps?

Chr. Fear followed me so hard, that I fled the next way and fell in.

Help. Then said he, "Give me thy hand." So he gave him his hand, and he drew him out; and set him upon some ground, and bade him go on his way (#Ps 40:2).

Then I stepped to him that plucked him out, and said, "Sir, wherefore, since over this place is the way from the city of Destruction to yonder gate, is it that this plat is not mended, that poor travellers might go thither with more security?" And he said unto me, "This miry slough is such a place as cannot be mended: it is the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run; and therefore it is called the Slough of Despond. For still, as the sinner is awakened about his lost condition, there arises in his soul many fears and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place: and this is the reason of the badness of this ground.

"It is not the pleasure of the King that this place should remain so bad (#Isa 35:3,4); his labourers also have, by the directions of his Majesty's surveyors, been for above this sixteen hundred years employed about this patch of ground to see if perhaps it might have been mended: yea, and to my knowledge," said he, "here have been swallowed up at least twenty thousand cartloads, yea, millions, of wholesome instructions. The cartloads have, at all season, been brought from all places of the King's dominions

(and they that can tell say they are the best materials to make good ground of the place), if so be it might have been mended. But it is the Slough of Despond still, and so will be, when they have done what they can.

"True, there are, by the direction of the lawgiver, certain good and substantial steps placed evenly through the very midst of this slough; but at such times as this place does spew out its filth, as it doth against change of weather, these steps are hardly seen; or, if they be, men, through the dizziness of their heads, step beside, and then they are bemired to purpose, notwithstanding the steps be there; but the ground is good when they have once got in at the gate" (#1Sa 12:23).

Now I saw in my dream that by this time PLIABLE was got home to his house again. So his neighbours came to visit him; and some of them called him a wise man for coming back; and some called him a fool for hazarding himself with CHRISTIAN: others, again, did mock at his cowardliness, saying, "Surely, since you began to venture, you would not have been so base as to have given out for a few difficulties:" so PLIABLE sat sneaking among them. But at last got he more confidence; and then they all "turned tail," and began to deride poor CHRISTIAN behind his back. And thus much concerning PLIABLE.

Ps 40:2, Isa 35:3,4, 1Sa 12:23

"He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, *And* established my steps." (Ps 40:2 NKJV)

"³ Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. ⁴ Say to those *who are* fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance, *With* the recompense of God; He will come and save you." (Isa 35:3-4 NKJV)

"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way." (1Sa 12:23 NKJV)