

Vanity Fair

The Allure of Vanity Fair

The King's highway runs through the town of Vanity, this bustling metropolis, which has a fair that is open all year long. This Fair is a place of vanity. In the end, it is all a mirage, and it will all be discarded as useless vanity.

This town was built by Beelzebub, Apollyon and Legion with the purpose of keeping earnest pilgrims from traveling toward the Celestial City. It is meant to distract. It is looking for the believer to make concessions. Giving in is considered a sign of maturity, and that is the way you are accepted.



Christian and Faithful enter Vanity Fair

Vanity Fair offers a variety of delights and pleasures; some are lawful, others questionable, and still others unlawful (feeding one's sinful lusts, etc.). But even lawful things can prove to be a source of temptation. Vanity Fair is not far away. But the believer has to go through it, and the point is: true discipleship is learned by actually passing through Vanity Fair and overcoming temptation, by being in the world, but not of the world.

Worldliness is "everything in a culture that makes sin look normal and righteousness look odd." It has an enormous and compelling power behind it.

The Disciple in Vanity Fair

The presence of Faithful and Christian stirs the town. How come?

1. Their clothing is different, clothing which points to being children of the King.
2. Their speech is different, speech about heavenly truth.
3. Their interests are different, turning away from vanity (Ps. 119:37), having their affections on things above (Col. 3:1), buying the truth (Prov. 23:23).

Bunyan is saying that the Christian is from another world, and stands apart from the culture. They are counter-cultural in clothing, speech and interests. The Christian does not blend in, but while in the world, is distinct from the world and does not live for the things made, but for the Builder and Maker of the heavenly city.

Persecution in Vanity Fair

The witness of Faithful and Christian stirs up disorder. An investigation is called for. Christian and Faithful declare they are strangers to the world, are going to their own country, have given no cause for this abuse. True, they have spurned the many commodities at the Fair, because the Truth is not sold there. The investigators charge them with being trouble-makers and place them in a cage. Christian and Faithful are mocked, but they return evil for good, blessing for cursing.



Bunyan, reflecting on his own experience writes: “Thus have I, in short, declared the manner and occasion of my being in prison: where I lie waiting the good will of God, to do with me as He pleaseth; knowing that not one hair of my head can fall to the ground without the will of my Father which is in heaven. Let the rage and malice of men be never so great, they can do no more, nor go no further, than God permits them; but when they have done their worst ‘we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.’”

They are indicted with

1. Being enemies of and disturbers of Vanity Fair;
2. Being schismatics who disliked unity; and
3. Being treasonous heretics with a hatred for Beelzebub’s rule.

Faithful’s in his defense says that 1) since the Lord is Lord of all, He must be obeyed. 2) They are men of peace, but not at the expense of truth. 3) Since Beelzebub is the Lord’s enemy, he must be defied.

The trial is overseen by a judge called Lord Hate-Good (a degenerate man who is merciless toward dissenters and non-conformists). Three witnesses are called: Envy, Superstition and Pickthank. Faithful tries to defend himself. The Judge addresses the jury (Mr. Blindman, Mr. No-Good, Mr. Malice, Mr. Love-Lust, Mr. Live-Loose, Mr. Heady, Mr. High-Minded, Mr. Enmity, Mr. Liar, Mr. Cruelty, Mr. Hate-Light, Mr. Implacable). Faithful is convicted, beaten before being burnt at the stake. But his death is gain.

*Well Faithful, thou have faithfully professed
Unto thy Lord: with him thou shalt be
blessed;
When faithless ones, with all their vain
delights,
Are crying out under their hellish plights.
Sing, Faithful, sing; and let thy name
survive:
For though they killed thee, thou art yet
alive.*



The Prince Through Vanity Fair

“The Prince of princes himself... passed through this town when heading toward his own country.” He knew the allurements that the world can offer. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, was tempted in all points like as we are (Heb. 4:15).

Discussion Questions

1. How real are the allurements of the world?
2. Why is the world opposed to true Christians?
3. Do any of the accusations made against Faithful sound familiar? How?
4. Do any of the characters in Vanity Fair reflect anything in your character?
5. Are you living for Vanity Fair or the Celestial City? How does this world hinder you from seeking heavenly things? Where are your affections? Where are you different from the world?