

John Bunyan

A Journey in His Life and Legacy

By

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Gathering to worship without threat is a perceived right that we take for granted as Americans. But that's not the case for believers in dozens of countries throughout the globe. Nor was it the right even in 17th century England. In 1662, participating in worship through ways not prescribed by Charles II of England could land the guilty in prison without bail. Only until he conformed to the law and made public restitution would he go free. A third offense levied him being transported to work as a slave for seven years on a foreign plantation (e.g., the North American colonies). If he tried to escape, he could be put to death. What this meant, in short, was that (1) the British crown required all citizens to worship in the national church following the prescriptions of the Book of Common Prayer; (2) no one was allowed to conduct meetings, services, or assemblies (or conventicles, as they were called) unless authorized by the crown; (3) so holding any gospel service meant that the leader could be arrested, imprisoned, and banished.

Enter John Bunyan, who for holding such an unauthorized assembly for gospel purposes was arrested and imprisoned. As he stood before Justice Keelin, threatened with banishment from the realm, Bunyan replied, "...if I was out of prison to-day I would

preach the gospel again to-morrow, by the help of God.”¹ Despite years behind bars, Bunyan never wavered. The gospel was too precious for him to be silent in order to be free of jail. “Come, be of good cheer,” he wrote while imprisoned, “let us not be daunted; our cause is good, we need not be ashamed of it; to preach God’s Word is so good a work, that we shall be well rewarded, if we suffer for that...”² None of us in the American context face the threat under which Bunyan lived. We can read his story, consider him to be a remarkable man, and go merrily on our way. However, as we embark on a brief journey through John Bunyan’s life and legacy, I want to challenge us to think about this from another angle. What if the day were to come where the government dictated parameters for how you could practice the Christian faith? What if the civil authorities forbade you to meet and discuss the gospel? What if they outlawed any kind of overt evangelism? Would you retreat in cowardice from Christ? Would you shrink from the faith in order to avoid being punished?

Living in Vanity Fair

Life in 16th & 17th Century England

Christian and his companion Faithful, met again with Evangelist as they continued their journey toward the Celestial City. They had passed through the wilderness, and now

¹ *The Works of John Bunyan* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999, reprinted from 1854 edition), vol. 1, 56-57; hereafter cited as *Works*.

² *Works*, 1:51.

the town of Vanity Fair lay before them. Evangelist encouraged and exhorted them. “My Sons, you have heard in the words of the truth of the Gospel, that you must through many Tribulations enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. And again, That in every City, Bonds and afflictions abide in you; and therefore you cannot expect that you should go long on your Pilgrimage without them, in some sort or other.” Then Evangelist warned that when they came to the town of Vanity Fair, that one or both of them would seal their testimony with blood. So he exhorted, “But be you faithful unto Death, and the King will give you a Crown of Life.”³

The two pilgrims entered the city and found an amalgamation of the kingdoms of the world. Chief among them was Rome, and “her merchandise is greatly promoted in this Fair.”⁴ Christian and Faithful stood out in the city, though they did nothing to draw attention to themselves. The narrator points to three ways that they were distinguished from the citizens of Vanity Fair. First, “The Pilgrims were cloathed with such kind of Raiment as was diverse from the Raiment of any that traded in that Fair”—that, of course, being the righteousness of Christ. Second, And as they wondered at their apparel, so they did likewise at their speech”—for their speech reflected their citizenship in the kingdom of God rather than the world. Third, the pilgrims had no care for the wares being offered at Vanity Fair, saying, “That their trade and traffick was in Heaven”—so they did not love the world or the things in the world (1 John 2:15).⁵

³ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to that which is to Come Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream; Wherein is Discovered the Manner of His Setting Out; His Dangerous Journey; and Safe Arrival at the Desired Countrey* [sic.] (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997 from the 1895 edition), 97; hereafter referred to as *Pilgrim's Progress*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

Though they did nothing to attack those in Vanity Fair, the clothing, speech, and lifestyle of the pilgrims greatly offended the people in Vanity Fair. “Therefore they took them and beat them, and besmeared them with dirt, and then put them into the Cage, that they might be made a Spectacle to all the men of the Fair.”⁶

Then came the mock trial by which the two men faced condemnation by the city. “Envy” claimed that he heard Faithful once say, “That Christianity and the Customs of our town of Vanity, were diametrically opposite, and could not be reconciled.”⁷ “Superstition” said he heard Faithful say, “That our Religion was naught, and such by which a man could by no means please God.”⁸ After Faithful made a brief defense of his statements, the judge charged the jury with the case. They were made up of characters such as Mr. Blind-man, Mr. No-good, Mr. Malice, Mr. High-mind, and Mr. Hate-light.⁹ They returned a guilty verdict, and called for a cruel death. Here is how it is described:

They therefore brought him out, to do with him according to their Law; and first they scourged him, then they buffeted him, then they lanced his flesh with knives: after that they stoned him with stones, then pricked him with their swords; and last of all, they burn him to ashes at the Stake. Thus came *Faithful* to his end.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Christian, by “he that over-rules all things, having the Power of their rage in his own Hand, so wrought it about, that Christian for that time escaped them, and went

⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁷ Ibid., 104.

⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁹ Ibid., 108.

¹⁰ Ibid., 109.

his way.”¹¹ And so Bunyan, writing from prison, capsules the experience of believers through the centuries, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Bunyan’s story doesn’t begin with his birth. It starts many years earlier during the English Reformation of the 16th century. The infamous Henry VIII, not due to biblical convictions but out of seeking legal accommodation to divorce Queen Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn, enacted the 1534 Act of Supremacy that established the Church of England distinct from the Roman Catholic Church. Henry became the head of the church. His reforms were primarily ecclesiological not theological.¹² Though reformation unwittingly began under Henry, it was not without price of persecution and martyrdom of evangelical Christians.

Edward VI followed his father as king at the age of 9, obviously depending on advisers, primarily the Duke of Somerset, who advanced reformation: (1) the communion cup restored to the people; (2) the clergy allowed to marry; (3) images removed from the church; (4) the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549, 1552) published as the liturgical standard in the English people’s own language instead of the Latin of the Roman Church.¹³ In 1549, under the archbishop of Canterbury’s leadership, the First Act of Uniformity passed Parliament coinciding with the *Book of Common Prayer*. It “abolished the Latin mass and made a new Liturgy (the Prayer book of 1549) the legal form of worship.”¹⁴ Though to us that may appear stifling, it proved revolutionary for English citizens. Imagine being

¹¹ Ibid., 109.

¹² Stephen Nichols, *Pages from Church History* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Puritan & Reformed, 2006), 200-201.

¹³ Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity* (Peabody, MA: The Prince Press, 2001), vol. 2, 75-76.

¹⁴ Owen Chadwick, *The Penguin History of the Church: The Reformation*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 117-118.

required to worship in a language that you did not understand! It would be liberating, even if following a prescribed liturgy, just to worship intelligently. However, in spite of the positives, this eventually proved to be a destructive act for the Puritans, including John Bunyan, whose imprisonment was the direct result of this act.

Edward VI lived only 6 years as the British Monarch, followed by Lady Jane Grey who ascended the throne for nine days in an effort to continue Protestant reforms (1553). She stood faithfully for Christ and the gospel, sealing her testimony by death at the hand of Mary I, better known as “Bloody Mary” or Mary Tudor. Lady Jane demonstrated theological precision in response to her examiner, even though knowing that her life hung in the balance by her response. Asked if “it is not sufficient only to believe,” she explained:

I deny that, and I affirm that faith only saveth; but it is meet [right] for a Christian to do good works, in token that he follows the steps of his Master, Christ, yet may we not say that they profit to our salvation; for when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, and faith only in Christ’s blood saves us.¹⁵

In 1553, Mary I ascended the throne and immediately began to turn-back the Protestant reforms and reestablish Roman Catholicism as the official state religion. She filled the Tower of London with Protestant prisoners and executed many whose stories were later recorded in John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*. Bunyan would find much encouragement and inspiration in these stories, while he would also expose the fallacies

¹⁵ Nichols, 202.

of the papacy in *Pilgrim's Progress*. His recounting of Christian and Faithful's imprisonment in Vanity Fair, and the latter's martyrdom, certainly has its roots in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. As we noted earlier, *Rome* stood out as the primary enticer of visitors to Vanity Fair.¹⁶ *Ignorance*, a character that Christian and Hopeful met on the way, thought that the gate to the Celestial City would be opened to him because he lived a good life, prayed, fasted, paid tithes, and gave alms. When Christian reproved such ignorance of the way to the City, Ignorance replied, "Gentlemen, ye be utter Strangers to me, I know you not; be content to follow the Religion of your country, and I will follow the Religion of mine. I hope all will be well."¹⁷ Such a picture could be yet another of Rome's deceitfulness as well as any sort of state religion.

In 1558, Mary's half-sister, Elizabeth I, daughter of Anne Boleyn, replaced her as queen. She reigned for 45 years, restoring Protestantism by the 1559 (Second) Act of Supremacy, declaring Elizabeth to be the Governor of the Church, thus restoring Anglicanism. She chose the title "Governor" rather than "Head" as her Father, Henry VIII had done in 1534 in the First Act of Supremacy, stating that Christ alone is Head of the Church. The Second Act of Uniformity (1559) restored the liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer*.¹⁸ "In 1563, the *Thirty-Nine Articles* became the doctrinal standard of the Anglican Church."¹⁹ In the same year, the first edition of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* came

¹⁶ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 99.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁸ Chadwick 101, 132.

¹⁹ Nichols, 203.

into the public's eye, never to let the church forget the price of biblical reformation and true gospel work.

Elizabeth I was the last of the Tudor monarchy followed by ascension of the Stuart monarch, James I (1603-1625). Most notably, his reign produced the colonization of the New World—primarily for religious freedom, and the 1611 Authorized Version of the Bible—of which about 75-80% was borrowed from the martyred William Tyndale's translation.

Charles I (1625-1649) followed James I. Stephen Nichols points out that “with his reign the Reformation took a few steps back.”²⁰ His Catholic wife influenced him; additionally, his ineptness and inflexibility set him at odds with Parliament, and lay the foundation for the English Civil War during the 1640's.²¹

John Bunyan was born during Charles' reign in 1628. The English Reformation continued during his teenage years, as distinguished scholars and pastors met at Westminster Abbey at the behest of Parliament, and composed the Westminster Standards: Confession, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and Directory for Public Worship.²²

Under Oliver Cromwell's leadership in 1649, Parliamentary forces defeated King Charles' army. Being accused of high treason and of instigating the Civil War led to the beheading of Charles I. Cromwell took the title of Lord Protector, leaving Britain without a monarchy. With a mostly Puritan Parliament, Cromwell moved the English

²⁰ Ibid., 205.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Reformation forward. Though offered the crown, he refused in hope of establishing a republic.²³ His son Richard was unable to maintain his father's power, thus resigning and opening the way for the monarchy to be restored.

Charles II (1660-1685), who had fled to the Continent, was recalled to the throne by Parliament in 1660. This period, known as the Restoration, can be summed up as a time of "reaction against the Puritans."²⁴ Parliament restored episcopacy and the Book of Common Prayer, while seeking to stamp out any independent movements. The achievements of the Puritans were reversed. Charles II's true colors were shown when on his deathbed he converted to Roman Catholicism. This explains much of the harsh treatment that John Bunyan and other Puritans faced for nonconformity to the state religion. Bunyan remained in the Bedford jail for much of Charles II's reign.

A year after Bunyan's death, William (1689-1702) and Mary (1689-1694)—William Prince of Orange and Mary the daughter of James II (who followed Charles II for 3 years)—began their co-regency. They practiced tolerance in their realm with the 1689 Act of Toleration that granted religious freedom even to those not swearing allegiance to the Thirty Nine Articles.

However, though too late for Bunyan to enjoy, the door was opened for other Puritans and nonconformists to preach the gospel without encumbrance.

²³ Gonzales, 162.

²⁴ Ibid.

John Bunyan's Life: The Early Years

Born November 30, 1628 to a moderate, working class family in the village of Elstow near Bedford, John Bunyan was baptized into the Church of England. He said virtually nothing in his many writings about his parents. His silence on their spiritual influence indicates there wasn't much to be had.²⁵ Instead, he wrote in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* that from childhood he had few equals for personal ungodliness. Even in his younger years, he was given to "cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God." He explained that these characteristics became "so settled and rooted... that they became as a second nature to me." Though bothered about his sin while only nine or ten, he continued unabated. As he grew into his teenage years he recounted that he had no thought of God, of piety, or of heaven and hell.²⁶

He accounted himself as easily given to sin; yet Bunyan despised any religious hypocrite. If one professed to be religious but didn't live the part, he said, "it would make my spirit tremble."²⁷ This attitude may have spurred his development of such a wide array of hypocrites in *Pilgrim's Progress*, exposing its variegated subtleties such as *Pliable*, *Presumption*, *Formalist*, and *Hypocrisy*.

In his spiritual autobiography, he recalled how the Lord did not abandon him, but instead, protected him in situations when he could easily have died. Twice he escaped drowning; another time he stunned a poisonous snake, opened its mouth and removed its

²⁵ *Works*, I, fn. 6.

²⁶ *Works*, I:6.

²⁷ *Works*, I:7.

fangs without being bitten. In the English Civil War, he had swapped guard duty with another soldier who was killed while serving on Bunyan's watch.²⁸

Marriage

Bunyan married as a twenty-one year old (1649), though no record exists of his first wife's name. He considered this "as an important turning point in his life."²⁹ His father-in-law, who must have been deceased, "was counted godly." Bunyan explained, "This woman and I, though we came together as poor as poor might be, not having so much household stuff as a dish or spoon betwixt us both, yet she had for her part, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* [Arthur Dent, 1601], and *The Practice of Piety* [Lewis Bayly, c. 1613], which her father had left her when he died"³⁰

Bunyan treasured the books, read them thoroughly, and yet he was not yet spiritually awakened. However, he found inspiration in them to become religious. Though not abandoning his wicked life, Bunyan began to regularly attend church and entered into the religious superstitions often characteristic of his day.³¹ Seeing that the Israelites were in God's favor in the Old Testament, he hoped that he was Jewish so that he would find happiness. But when his father told him that the Bunyan's were not Jewish, he felt

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ David Calhoun, *Grace Abounding: the Life, Books & Influence of John Bunyan* (Fearne, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 14.

³⁰ *Works*, I:7; cf. Calhoun, 15.

³¹ *Works*, I:7.

dejected. All the while he had no conviction of his sin.³² This is why he lays such emphasis on conviction of sin in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Conviction of sin

After his pastor preached a sermon on the evil of Sabbath breaking, Bunyan began to take serious inventory of his life. He was accustomed to utilizing Sundays to “delight in all manner of vice.”³³ For the first time that he could remember, he felt a load of guilt. He thought that the parson had conspired to preach particularly against him with such a topic! After lunch, the conviction left, and he returned to his regular amusements. But right in the midst of a game of *tipcat*—a game that involves batting a piece of wood in the air, “a voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul,” he wrote, “which said, Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?” He sensed the Lord looking at him with displeasure. However, he thought that Christ would not forgive him: “I felt my heart sink in despair, concluding it was too late; and therefore I resolved in my mind I would go on in sin.” Then he reasoned that since he was already damned that he might as well be damned for many sins as for a few.³⁴

In many ways, Bunyan sounded like a modern American—at least with this kind of attitude. Many have been exposed to the law of God and the gospel, but without any true Christianity. Their consciences show some wincing at their sin, and even a little concern

³² *Works*, I:8.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

for God's judgment. But then they conclude, 'what's the use in pretending to be religious? I'm going to hell with everyone else, so it must not be all that bad. I may as well indulge myself in whatever I desire.'

Here is an important reminder for us in both our praying and evangelizing. We can do just as Bunyan's preacher did, speak on a probing subject and temporarily move someone to consider issues of the soul. But only the Holy Spirit can deeply impress the mind and heart of one's lostness and desperate need for life through Christ. We must pray to that end as we labor together in gospel work. Do not neglect to set forth the law and gospel; but also, do not forget to depend on the Holy Spirit to bring forth the fruit of genuine conversion.

Later, as Bunyan reflected on this time, he admitted that his conclusion that he was already damned motivated him to "taste the sweetness" of sin. So, he pursued sin with "as much haste" as he could fill his belly with sin's delicacies, thinking that he would soon die, so he wanted to fulfill his sinful desires. Obviously, as he observed, this kind of temptation came from the devil and is far too common with others in the same condition. He said that the devil seeks in such cases "to overrun their spirits with a scurvy and seared frame of heart, and benumbing of conscience."³⁵

Yet the Lord did not let him go. Bunyan told of a remarkable occasion where the Lord shamed him by an ungodly woman. Evidently, Bunyan considered himself very skilled in profanity. As he stood "cursing and swearing" near this lady's house, she rebuked him! Though, as he described her, this woman "was a very loose and ungodly wretch," she

³⁵ *Works*, I:9.

complained about his cursing, telling him that he would “spoil all the youth in a whole town, if they came in [his] company.”³⁶ Here is providence at work. This lady had no evangelistic intentions; yet God was pleased to apply the brunt of the law through this lady though she was not a believer. We must never think that *everything depends on us* when it comes to seeing the lost converted. Yes, we must spread the gospel but the Lord is working in ways that we’re not aware even as we pray and plead with Him for the salvation of our friends and family.

The impact of this time proved remarkable. Bunyan spoke of how he had been profane in his speech even when a child, and that his father never corrected him or tried to teach him otherwise. It’s probably an indication that Bunyan spoke as he heard in the home. Yet the shaming rebuke of this “loose and ungodly wretch” so affected him that he laid aside his cursing. Still he did not know Christ, though his language totally changed—even to his own amazement!

This bears a momentary question. Is it our job to try to reform people morally as the means to see their conversion? Are we to focus on moral change in the sinner? Though there are plenty of good reasons to point a person toward moral change, etc.—they will enjoy life more, they will be more pleasant to be around—that can be a dangerous substitute for true conversion. They can become another *Formalist* or *Legalist*, as Bunyan titled them; yet never know the gospel and certainly, never enter the Celestial City. We must not pretend with anyone that if they reform their lives they will be Christian; nor must we intimate that they must reform their lives in order to become Christians. In other

³⁶ Ibid.

words, we must not put something in the place of biblical conversion. The moral changes will come as the unbeliever repents and casts himself upon Christ as Savior and Lord. At that point, he can be instructed with ears to hear, recognizing that there's no additional merit with God for his moral change.

This happened with Bunyan. Around this same time, he began to read the Bible. That was progress, for sure, but still he did not know Christ. He wrote, "Wherefore I fell to some outward reformation, both in my words and life, and did set the commandments before me for my way to heaven; which commandments I also did strive to keep, and, as I thought, did keep them pretty well sometimes, and then I should have comfort."³⁷ He got to the point where he thought that he "pleased God as well as any man in England!" Some of his neighbors began to commend him as a godly man. And he liked what he heard! He even took pride in it, admitting later that he "loved to be talked of as one that was truly godly."³⁸ This continued for more than a year; he thought that his outward behavior evidenced being Christian, so he took consolation in the comments of others about his morality.

Here is the subtlety of morality as a substitute for conversion. Because of outward changes, a person is more pleasant to be around; he may even be complimented for acting like a "good Christian." His behavior may even be superior to that of many professing to be Christians. So, he concludes, he's a Christian because his life stacks up well against most others. He may even brush off those that would speak the gospel to him, thinking that he really has no need of that since he's already a Christian. I've encountered this kind

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *Works*, I:10.

of person time and again through my years as a believer and a pastor. Many become quite stubborn about their moral superiority, thinking that they measure up rather well and so have no need of the redemptive work of Christ. Yet they measure themselves by fellow sinners and not by the righteous standard of God's law. Once they see this, their ship sinks!

During this time, Bunyan struggled with odd fears of death. He thought that if he engaged in ringing bells at the local parish church that a bell might fall on him and kill him. So he would stand under a beam or next to a door, just in case he had to make a quick exit for safety. Then he began to fear that the steeple might fall on him. As he later saw, he had no confidence in Christ and no assurance that he belonged to Christ. He confessed,

But poor wretch as I was, I was all this while ignorant of Jesus Christ, and going about to establish my own righteousness; and had perished therein had not God, in mercy, showed me more of my state of nature.³⁹

Do you identify with Bunyan? I certainly do! For a number of years, I had that same kind of smugness, thinking that because I was respectably moral that God surely had to be pleased with me. But I knew nothing of my own sinful condition. I could easily pick out a few "bad boys" in town and feel good about myself. Yet God did not look at me in comparison with the "bad boys." He looked at me against the righteous standard of His

³⁹ Ibid.

law. I stood guilty and condemned, but didn't know it until the gospel began to break through my stubborn arrogance.

Through the Wicket Gate

Conversion, Doubt, & Assurance

We learn some of the insightful ways that our God works to save sinners as we hear John Bunyan’s own story of conversion to Christ. Keep in mind that he was a self-righteous man; that condition of soul numbs a person to the truth of the gospel. Yet God showed great mercy to him through the unexpected conversation from three or four poor Christian women. As he plied his trade as a tinker, a mender of pots and pans, Bunyan happened upon them as they were discussing how miserable they were before coming to Christ; admitting the truth about their own natures at enmity with God and inclined toward sin. They spoke of the new birth and the work of God in their hearts—truths which Bunyan did not understand. They demonstrated remarkable joy as they talked of God’s love, and the abundant ways that the Lord had comforted and strengthened them. Scripture laced their conversation, as did joy and grace to such a point that Bunyan said it appeared “as if they had found a new world, as if they were people that dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned among their neighbours.”⁴⁰ It turned out that the women were members of the church pastored by John Gifford who would eventually become Bunyan’s pastor and mentor.⁴¹

His intention was to talk with the ladies, thinking himself rather gifted in discourse. But so stunned was he by what they had to say and by his own lack of real spiritual life,

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Calhoun, 17.

he went back to his work. Here, true conviction pinpointed his faulty foundation as though a mighty upheaval occurred in his soul:

At this I felt my own heart began to shake, as mistrusting my condition to be nought; for I saw that in all my thoughts about religion and salvation, the new birth did never enter into my mind, neither knew I the comfort of the Word and promise, nor the deceitfulness and treachery of my own wicked heart....Thus, therefore, when I had heard and considered what they said, I left them, and went about my employment again, but their talk and discourse went with me; also my heart would tarry with them, for I was greatly affected with their words, both because by them I was convinced that I wanted the true tokens of a truly godly man, and also because by them I was convinced of the happy and blessed condition of him that was such a one.⁴²

A simple, overheard conversation among a few Christians became the means God used to arrest John Bunyan's mind from his self-dependence. In the next century, the same would happen to John Wesley, as he listened to a group of Moravian Brethren sing to the Lord and speak with joy and confidence of Christ in ways that he did not understand. That eventually led to Wesley's conversion to Christ.

We do not know the times that the Lord uses our casual conversation with one another to speak to someone about their spiritual need. It is a good reminder that we not grow careless with our words. Someone in great need may be listening, even eavesdropping.

⁴² *Works*, I:10.

Does your conversation with your friends savor of Christ even as did the conversation of these unnamed ladies in Bunyan's life?

Bunyan gave a wonderful picture of this in the conversion of *Hopeful* who lived in the town of Vanity Fair. Though Christian and Faithful were manacled in a cage, Hopeful listened to their conversations and watched their lives even in the midst of suffering. He joined himself to Christian, entered into covenant with him, and told him that he would be his companion on the journey. Bunyan narrates, "Thus one died to make testimony to the truth, and another rises out of his ashes to be a companion with *Christian* in his Pilgrimage."⁴³

It seems that the Holy Spirit regenerated Bunyan about this time as evidenced by his reflection on what happened afterward. He said that he found his heart especially tender so that he listened intently to the Scripture that these ladies and others spoke. He was convicted by the Word of God to the depths of his being. Unlike previous occasions when conviction appeared superficial, resulting in superficial changes, now his whole being felt the weightiness of his sin. He testified as well to "a great bending of my mind to a continual meditating on it [that is, the gospel spoken by these poor folks], and on all other good things which at any time I heard or read of." His mind, now fixed on eternity, could not be moved to the mundane issues of life. He was consumed with the kingdom of God. The proof in this came when he ran across one of his best friends whom he had previously joined in ungodly behavior. He called the young man's attention to eternal issues and found no desire to join with him again. His behavior had changed from the

⁴³ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 110

inside out because he had new desires for Christ and His kingdom. Even though he had little knowledge, the Holy Spirit protected him from the error of those who believed that you ought to sin liberally so that grace might abound in one's life. He admitted that their teaching would have seemed very sweet to him before but now he saw their teaching as flawed and accursed.⁴⁴

What later showed up in all of Bunyan's writings was his love for the Word of God. He wrote, "The Bible was precious to me in those days," as he looked into it "with new eyes" and read as he never had before. He explained, "Indeed, I was then never out of the Bible, either by reading or meditation; still crying out to God, that I might know the truth, and way to heaven and glory."⁴⁵ This characteristic of Bunyan caused C. H. Spurgeon to later comment, "Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his soul is full of the Word of God."⁴⁶

Reflections on Conversion to Christ

In our day of "cookie cutter Christians," it is refreshing to read of Bunyan's conversion and the struggles he faced. I say this because it is instructive for us. We have

⁴⁴ *Works*, I:11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Jeff Robinson, "'An Epistle to All the Slothful and Careless People: Sanctification and Perseverance in *The Pilgrim's Progress*,'" an unpublished paper, page 3, quoting from C.H. Spurgeon, *C.H. Spurgeon's Autobiography* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1897), 4:268.

too much tendency to produce carbon copy Christians—everyone goes through the same routine and then calls themselves Christians. The reality is that we encounter different experiences in the process of conversion and assurance. Though we are all saved through the work of Christ alone, our stories vary. Some may never remember a date or time of their conversion but give clear evidence of the new birth. Others recall some dramatic moment that led to their trusting Christ. Some can plot the steady progress toward conviction, understanding, and faith in Christ. Others trust Christ but due to their particular personalities, struggle with assurance. Some go through the motions of being Christians because of their upbringing, but later, through one circumstance or another, they are brought to a true knowledge of Christ.

I point this out because it is important that we are patient with people through their spiritual struggles. On one hand, we do not need to attempt to do the Holy Spirit's work. We cannot produce the new birth through clever techniques. Some Christians, well-meaning, I am sure, go through evangelism training and think they now know everything that is needed to lead someone to faith in Christ. As helpful as some of these may be—and I've profited from several methods of training—just as one shoe does not fit everyone in the room, neither does one methodology of evangelism fit every person's need. Our responsibility is to thoroughly understand the gospel—to read it, study it, live in it, meditate on it, discuss it, and apply it—then, in the course of God-given opportunities, speak the gospel to others, depending on the Holy Spirit to do the work in the heart. Any attempt to manipulate a decision cuts short the real work needed in the soul. No one came to Bunyan and tried to get him to pray a little prayer, and then declare

him a Christian. Bunyan struggled over his soul as the Lord used the gospel witness of several to bring him to repentance and faith in Christ.

On the other hand, we need to realize that some will struggle spiritually in ways that maybe we don't struggle. Be careful not to quickly gloss over a person's struggle and be careful not to quickly dole out a simple solution. Earlier in the year, a young couple sat with me and one of my fellow elders to discuss membership in our church. Neither have Christian parents or a Christian background; both had been very much a part of the world. The wife came through a period of struggle initiated by the Holy Spirit, when she picked up a Bible in a hotel and began reading. It turned her inside out! She wrestled and wrestled until she came to a place of casting herself on Christ for mercy and grace. As she talked with her husband, all of this sounded agreeable, so he *consented* to being a Christian. They joined a Southern Baptist church in our city that immediately baptized them. They realized after a while that they were not hearing the Word expounded, so they visited with us. After visiting for a while, they inquired about membership. In the process of interviewing them, the wife gave a clear word of testimony. But her husband, though very agreeable, seemed quite obviously to be riding his wife's "coattail of conversion." I questioned him about assurance of relationship to Jesus Christ. He had none. So we put off their membership in the church until he came to a genuine relationship to Christ. We talked further about the gospel. I gave him some assignments for reading in the Word, as well as giving him some gospel material to read. He did this diligently. I, along with several others that knew him well, would speak to him about his soul on a regular basis, trying to gauge whether or not he was backing off or moving forward spiritually, as well

as seeking to answer his questions about the gospel. Just a few weeks ago, after several months of wrestling with the gospel and his own faith in Christ, he grabbed my hand after a worship service, put his arm on my shoulder, looked me in the eyes, and said, “I’ve looked to Christ; I’ve trusted Him.” Coming to Christ is the most critical issue of life; we must never presume when it comes to the soul and eternity.

John Bunyan had his own struggles before coming to assurance that he had trusted in Christ. Some of this, I think we can observe, came due to his personality. He was a keenly sensitive person, probably somewhat melancholy in his disposition. Such a person may struggle more than the happy-go-lucky phlegmatic personality. Those involved in pastoral care must recognize this, and pray for discernment when working with people through spiritual issues. Bunyan’s sensitivities focused on whether or not he was one of the elect and whether or not “the day of grace” had passed him by. At first, he was actually offended by the doctrine of election! The reason, as he explained, was due to relying only upon the mercy of God. But this drove him to the Scriptures where he not only found election to be a pleasant doctrine but found confidence that his trust in the Lord gave evidence of being elected by God.⁴⁷ When he wrestled over whether the day of grace had passed him by, he bemoaned his sinfulness and the years he had wasted in pursuing wickedness. He thought his delay in trusting the Lord had put him forever away from grace until he came across the parable in Luke 14:22-23. “Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled,” the nobleman told his servant. He replied that he had done so, “and yet there is room.” Bunyan wrote,

⁴⁷ *Works*, I:13-14.

“And yet there is room,” were sweet words to me; for, truly, I thought that by them I saw there was place enough in heaven for me; and, moreover, that when the Lord Jesus did speak these words, he then did think of me; and that he knowing that the time would come that I should be afflicted with fear that there was no place left for me in his bosom, did before speak this word, and leave it upon record, that I might find help thereby against this vile temptation.⁴⁸

In each struggle with assurance, Bunyan found them as goads driving him to the Word of God. No one gave him a pat solution. Those that knew him gave him up to the Lord and let him struggle in the good hands of the Savior until assurance welled up in his heart. Fellow believers pointed him to the Word but did not try to give him assurance. Even Pastor John Gifford, whom Bunyan later memorializes as *Evangelist*, the character that came to Christian’s rescue on several occasions in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, did not short-circuit the process of the Holy Spirit’s work in Bunyan’s life. He spoke with Bunyan, encouraged him, and always pointed him to Christ. He invited him to his home where he spoke with others “about the dealings of God with the soul.”⁴⁹

Learning from Bunyan

We live in a psycho-therapeutic era that typically looks for quick, easy solutions even with issues of the soul. We can learn something from Bunyan and his fellow 17th century

⁴⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 15.

believers. First, Christ alone can satisfy the desperate heart. We must not substitute trite formulas or clichés for a sinner exchanging his rags for Christ’s righteousness and receiving the assurance of forgiveness of sins. Second, the Word of God is sufficient for every struggle of the soul. Bunyan’s Christian friends kept referring to the promises of God in the Word. That drove him back and back to the Scripture for his assurance.⁵⁰ Consequently, Bunyan, throughout his entire Christian life, relied upon the Word of God—a worthy goal for us in our discipleship! Consider a couple of examples of how the Word met Bunyan in his need. On one occasion, he thought of the wickedness and blasphemy in which he had lived for so long. With his sensitive spirit, this could drive him to the precipice! But the Scripture was brought to mind from Colossians 1:20, that Christ has “made peace through the blood of his cross.” He commented, “By which I was made to see, both again, and again, and again, that day, that God and my soul were friends by this blood; yea, I saw that the justice of God and my sinful soul could embrace and kiss each other through this blood.”⁵¹ Another occasion, he mused on his wretchedness when Hebrews 2:14-15 came to mind. “Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to slavery.” He commented, “I thought that the glory of these words was then so weighty on me that I

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., I:19-20.

was, both once and twice, ready to swoon as I sat; yet not with grief and trouble, but with solid joy and peace.”⁵²

Third, while we do well to offer biblical counsel to those in need, we must rely on the Holy Spirit to do the lasting, transforming work in the soul. If we attempt to manipulate someone toward a decision so that we can notch our belts with another convert, we do injustice to the sinner as well as to the kingdom of God. Pastor Gifford provides an excellent example in this. His practice was to press his hearers, whether from pulpit or private counsel, not to simply trust what a man might say when speaking for God but rather “to cry mightily to God that he would convince us of the reality thereof, and set us down therein, by his own Spirit, in the holy Word.”⁵³ The reason was quite plain; if temptation came, unless the believer had anchored his convictions and assurance in Scripture, he would easily succumb.

Growth in Grace and the Struggle for Assurance

Bunyan placed himself under the pastoral ministry of John Gifford. Gifford had been a major in the King’s army, and lived a wicked life, even being condemned to death on one occasion. Having escaped the death sentence, in God’s mercy, he came under conviction of his sin and found forgiveness in Christ’s atoning work. He grew rapidly and faithfully, and soon began a church in 1650 with Bunyan beginning to attend in 1653, and becoming

⁵² *Ibid.*, I:20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, I:20.

a member in 1655.⁵⁴ Bunyan “was baptized,” by Gifford, “...in the waters of the River Great Ouse, which flows through Bedford.”⁵⁵ Though Gifford’s time with Bunyan was relatively brief, his mark on his life continued through all his days.

Evidently, Bunyan soaked up everything that he heard from pulpit, discussion, and his own reading and meditation upon Scripture. He said, “How was my soul led from truth to truth by God!” He continued, “For, to my remembrance, there was not anything that I then cried unto God to make known and reveal unto me but he was pleased to do it for me; I mean not one part of the gospel of the Lord Jesus, but I was orderly led into it.” Along the way, he struggled with the two natures of Christ—His deity and humanity. He had to be convinced in the Scripture to believe anything. In the midst of his struggle, he read from Revelation 5, “And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb.” He reflected, “In the midst of the throne, ‘thought I,’ there is his Godhead; in the midst of the elders, there is his manhood; but oh! methought this did glister! it was a goodly touch, and gave me sweet satisfaction.” Additionally, during this same time he encountered the errors of the Quakers. This drove him to the Scriptures so that he searched diligently to distinguish truth from error.⁵⁶

Bunyan identified the process that the Lord used with him. First, he would be afflicted with some temptation, whether an issue involving sin or false teaching or a trial. Then, he would find his refuge in Christ through the Word. He committed much of Scripture to

⁵⁴ cf. *Works*, I:20; David Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 24.

⁵⁵ Calhoun, 24.

⁵⁶ *Works*, I:21.

memory and consequently, regularly meditated upon it so that he might find just the answer to his current crisis.⁵⁷ He also profited by the writing of others. By God's kind providence, a copy of Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians fell into his hands. He said that the book "was so old that it was ready to fall piece from piece if I did but turn it over." Yet he devoured the book, coming to the conclusion that it spoke precisely what he had been experiencing. He said that it was "as if this book had been written out of my heart." His advice, "I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians, excepting the Holy Bible, before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience."⁵⁸ I have found the same work to be extremely profitable as well, and along with Bunyan, commend Luther's commentary on Galatians as a reliable resource for your study of Scripture and spiritual growth.

Soon after his conversion, it seemed that the Lord began to intensely train Bunyan for what lay ahead. He told of a period of a year in which hardly a day passed that he did not face "a more grievous and dreadful temptation than before." The temptation, in his words, was "To sell and part with this most blessed Christ, to exchange him for the things of this life, for anything." He said that sometimes the thought, "Sell him, sell him, sell him," would run endlessly through his mind. The tempter would make him believe that he had consented to this temptation, and for Bunyan, it was as though he was "tortured upon a rack for whole days together."⁵⁹ He would sit down to eat a meal, and the temptation to "sell him" would come, so that he left the table to fervently pray. He would

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., I:22.

⁵⁹ *Works*, I:22.

gain momentary relief, only to think of Esau who sold his birthright for a bowl of porridge. Then, as he arose from sleep one morning, the thought hit him, “The blood of Christ remits all guilt.” The verse from 1 John 1:7 came to mind, “The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” Peace filled his soul at the very thought of this triumph through Christ. While peace sustained him for a while, he would soon plummet again. But each time, the Lord brought another biblical text to mind that focused on the work of Christ for the redeemed. Regular application of the gospel became his practice. He learned to treasure the preserving power of God for His people. With that preservation, Bunyan realized that God’s providence was at work even in allowing His children to endure suffering and temptation and trials. “He would let David, Hezekiah, Solomon, Peter, and others fall,” he wrote, “but he would not let them fall into sin unpardonable, nor into hell for sin.”⁶⁰

Clearly, Bunyan understood that assurance was not a decision, as some in our day seem to think, but an ongoing reality given to the believer to sustain him through every trial and temptation. *Pilgrim’s Progress* illustrated this in the story of Christian’s “Roll.” The roll “was the Assurance of his life, and Acceptance at the desired Haven,” so, assurance of salvation through the promises of Christ in the gospel. After the burden of sin fell off his back at the sight of the cross and then rolled into the empty tomb, Christian was given a robe of righteousness and a roll to keep in his inner coat near to his heart. Following this, as he climbed the Hill of Difficulty, he found “a pleasant *Arbour*, made by the Lord of the Hill, for the refreshment of weary Travellers.”⁶¹ He sat down to rest;

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, I:25.

⁶¹ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 41.

and in the process of being refreshed—which Bunyan likens to “a word of grace”—he pulled out his roll “and read therein to his Comfort.”⁶² But as sometimes happens in those periods when God gives special grace to us, we may thoughtlessly grow comfortable and slack and careless. At such times, we presume upon the Lord and His good grace to sustain us. Christian did just that, falling asleep with his roll in his hand. The roll fell from his hand as he slept, so that when startled by his slumber, he quickly began his journey up the hill to the Beautiful Palace. In his haste, he did not notice that the roll had fallen from him. Only after encountering two false pilgrims who ran away from the Beautiful Palace, did he realize that he missed his roll. Chiding himself for his slothfulness, Christian lost precious time by having to retrace his steps until he could recover the roll, knowing that he could not traverse the road to the Celestial City, with all of its dangers, without the roll in his bosom. Bunyan makes the point that Christians must see the living vitality of assurance, and regularly find comfort and encouragement through the promises in the gospel of Christ and the witness of the Holy Spirit. God has given assurance to sustain us through difficult times so that we might persevere in the faith.

Bunyan’s great consolation was Christ and His redemptive work. The more he meditated upon what Christ truly accomplished, the less he found himself retreating to the law for righteousness. As he contemplated the faithfulness of Christ in the new covenant, he wrote, “Oh! I cannot now express what then I saw and felt of the steadiness of Jesus Christ, the rock of man’s salvation; what was done could not be undone, added

⁶² Ibid.

to, nor altered.”⁶³ This theme of the righteousness of Christ became a constant companion with Bunyan, and colored his sermons and books. Toward the end of this long, intense period of inward struggle with assurance, he walked through a field one day, continuing with his struggle, when the thought struck him, “Thy righteousness is in heaven.” He realized that while condemning himself for his failures, he had been trying to increase his righteous standing with God. When he did well, he felt that God was more inclined to him; when he fell into sin, he thought that his righteousness diminished. That error in thinking proved destructive to him, just as it has to so many through the centuries. His righteousness was in heaven because Christ was in heaven at God’s right hand. God couldn’t ask for more righteousness than that of Christ; as one in union with Jesus Christ, then God accepts Christ’s righteousness as the believer’s very own. Listen to how he exulted in Christ and His righteousness.

I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Heb. xiii.8.

...Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed, I was loosed from my affliction and irons, my temptations also fled away; so that, from that time, those dreadful scriptures of God left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God. So when I came home I looked to see if I could find that sentence, Thy righteousness is in heaven; but could not find such a saying, wherefore my heart began

⁶³ *Works*, I:30.

to sink again, only that was brought to my remembrance he “of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption;” by this word I saw the other sentence true. 1 Co. i.30.⁶⁴

As he thought upon Christ as His righteousness, being made by God the believer’s wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30), he further contemplated his union with Christ, especially as it is set forth in Ephesians 5:30, “because we are members of His body.” “By this also was my faith in him, as my righteousness, the more confirmed to me,” he wrote, “for if he and I were one, then his righteousness was mine, his merits mine, his victory also mine. Now could I see myself in heaven and earth at once; in heaven by my Christ, by my head, by my righteousness and life, though on earth by my body or person.”⁶⁵

In *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian had come to the Beautiful Palace, allegorically, the church. After being examined by Discretion in order to gain admittance to the Beautiful Palace, he engaged three ladies, Prudence, Piety, and Charity in conversation, as they questioned him regarding his faith and walk in Christ. Prudence asked him about his “annoyances,” referring to the areas in which he had struggled, and by what means “they were vanquished.” Christian responded, “Yes, when I think what I saw at the Cross, that will do it [the death of Christ]; and when I look upon my ‘broidered Coat, that will do it [Christ’s righteousness]; also when I look into the Roll that I carry in my bosom, that will do it [assurance of salvation through Christ’s promises]; and when my thoughts wax

⁶⁴ *Works*, I:35-36.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

warm about whither I am going, that will do it [the Celestial City].” Bunyan related through the allegory precisely what he came to embrace in his own life as he dealt with the struggles of doubt and depression. He looked to Christ’s death on his behalf, Christ’s righteousness imputed to him as his standing with God, the assuring promises in the gospel, and the anticipation of being with Christ in Heaven.⁶⁶

Learning a few lessons

What do we learn from this time in Bunyan’s life? First, he was not an educated person by our standards or by 17th century standards. He attended what amounts to grammar school where he learned to read and write. So, we cannot attribute his incisive thinking upon Scripture to his academic training. Second, though highly introspective and even given to dreams, he did not rely upon his imagination as the source of his comfort or for direction in his life. He always went to the Word of God. He devoured the Scriptures! He gave his soul no rest until he found the answer in the Word to whatever situation he faced. That became the guiding principle in his life; it’s also clearly set forth allegorically in *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Third, a portion of Bunyan’s suffering came as a direct result of his own psychological/emotional framework. It’s vital that we grasp something of how he dealt with his own personality issues with regard to his spiritual life; for each of us, though wired differently, face our own struggles. It’s encouraging to see how Bunyan dealt with

⁶⁶ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 47-51.

his very intense depression and melancholy temperament. I think that you'll agree, even with the brief sketch of his life, that John Bunyan possessed a keenly sensitive conscience! One Christian psychiatrist, Gaius Davies, wrote a very interesting book entitled, *Genius, Guilt, and Grace*, in which he analyzes a number of figures in Christian history. Bunyan, according to Dr. Davies, suffered from "a severe obsessive-compulsive disorder."⁶⁷ For instance, Bunyan's repetitive struggle with the words, "sell him, sell him, sell him," and the constant thinking about Esau, points to obsessive-compulsive behavior. This led to him being "over-conscientious," so that he wanted above all, "to get things absolutely *right*."⁶⁸ This inevitably promoted perfectionist tendencies, so that if he felt even a tinge of doubt, he plummeted, thinking that it was evidence that he did not belong to Christ. Much of his autobiography is Bunyan's own testimony of his inward struggles, and how he faced these struggles with the gospel of Christ.

What Dr. Davies demonstrates is not that this was a weakness in Bunyan but rather it just happened to be the way that his mind and psyche worked. Though he struggled for a long time, he eventually got this part of his life under control by disciplining his thinking according to the Word of God. Davies explains that his suffering should not be called an illness; instead, Bunyan is a good example of "how the spiritual and psychiatric aspects, though separate, are inevitably intertwined."⁶⁹ As Bunyan worked on the spiritual part of life, it had a remarkable impact on his psychological life. Additionally, as Davies points out, Bunyan's "over-conscientiousness, had much to do with his going into and staying in

⁶⁷ Gaius Davies, *Genius, Guilt, and Grace: a Doctor Looks at Suffering and Success* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 65.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

prison,” and that imprisonment gave us “his three greatest books.”⁷⁰ So, rather than pity Bunyan because he suffered with a melancholy disposition, we must recognize that the God of providence governed his life and circumstances so that the kingdom of God was enriched by his contributions; while Bunyan experienced immeasurable joy in Christ due to the intense periods of suffering, seeking, and discovering more of Christ.

So much for “cookie-cutter Christians!” Bunyan vividly illustrates, along with many other figures in Christian history, how God works with each person’s strengths, weaknesses, personalities, frailties, foibles, and struggles. We must be careful not to disregard a person because he or she has what we perceive to be a personality or a psychological weakness. No doubt, had we been one of the pastors responsible to disciple John Bunyan in those early days as a struggling Christian, we would have considered him to be “high maintenance!” Answering his questions, constantly encouraging him when he began to sag, patiently listening to his endless struggles would have been taxing. Would we have grown impatient with a man that struggled for several years with nagging doubts?

Pastor Gifford, the unnamed women, and others kept pointing Bunyan to Christ, understanding that Christ alone makes us a whole person. All of us are flawed. All of us have particular areas of weakness in our dispositions and personalities and temperaments and psyches. The fall of Adam in Genesis 3, left us marred at every point (cf. Romans 5). But it is Jesus Christ through the gospel that makes us whole. That doesn’t mean that becoming a Christian eliminates melancholy or depression or carelessness or laziness or

⁷⁰ Ibid., 83.

any other number of issues inherent to us. Instead, being in union with Christ, as Bunyan so clearly discovered and taught, enables us to overcome the natural weaknesses, or at minimum, get them under Christ's control.

Fourth, Bunyan teaches us about the struggle of the soul to come to grips with the gospel so that one relies on Christ's righteousness and not his own. For Bunyan, as well as the rest of us, conversion is not three simple steps or praying a prayer or making a decision. One dead in trespasses and sins encounters the risen, ascended Christ; a life at enmity with God comes face to face with the wrath of God unleashed upon His Son at the cross; one guilty, deserving wrath struggles to see how God could actually forgive and reconcile Himself to one that has been an enemy. Bunyan pictures this with Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, carrying a huge burden on his back. He reads in "the Book," as he calls the Bible, "that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to Judgment; and I find that I am not willing to do the first, nor able to do the second."⁷¹ He begins the journey to the Wicket Gate where Evangelist told him to go to find relief from his burden. But as he leaves, his family begs him not to go, so he puts his fingers in his ears to deafen their appeals; his neighbors mock him and threaten him and try to keep him in the City of Destruction. Yet so intense is the weight of his burden of sin, so conscious the reality of judgment, that nothing can deter him finding relief for his soul. He soon slogs into the Slough of Despond where he struggles to free himself to no avail: "but [he] could not get out because of the Burden that was upon his back" until Evangelist comes to him, and "drew him out, and set him upon sound Ground, and bid him go on his way."⁷² Bunyan

⁷¹ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 3.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 9.

pictures the struggle with sin, the struggle with staying focused on the gospel, and the struggle with the world's opposition to the way of Christ. Humanly speaking, only the one bearing the good news can aid the struggler until his burden of sin tumbles into the empty tomb.

Because Christian is broken over his sin he gives heed to the gospel message of *Evangelist*. This breaking over sin is necessary because of the condition of the heart. In "The Acceptable Sacrifice, or The Excellency of a Broken Heart," Bunyan explains why the heart must be broken if a man is to believe the gospel. The natural man is

1. "dead...stupefied...unconcerned" with the gospel;
2. he is "a fool as to that which is spiritual and heavenly"
3. he is "a proud man also...which holds many a man in the chains of his sins"
4. he is "stubborn...rebellious, and disobedient"
5. he is fearless with "no fear of God before their eyes"
6. "he is a false believer concerning God," not believing God's own report of Himself
7. "he is a great lover of sin; he is captivated, ravished, drowned in the delights of it"
8. "he is a wild man" who "gives no heed to good counsel" and who "will greatly busy himself all his life to accomplish that which, when it is completed, amounts to nothing"
9. he is "a man that disrelishes the things of the kingdom of God."⁷³

⁷³ *Works*, I:702-708.

As he concludes this sermon, he writes, “Come, come, conversion to God is not so easy and so smooth a thing as some would have men believe it is. Why is man’s heart compared to fallow ground, God’s Word to a plough, and his ministers to ploughmen? if the heart indeed has no need of breaking, in order to the receiving of the seed of God unto eternal life. Je. iv.3. Lu. ix.62. 1 Co. ix. 10.”⁷⁴ He makes the case that “a broken heart is the handiwork of God...in the sight of God an excellent thing; because a broken heart is submissive; it falleth before God, and giveth to him his glory...a broken heart prizes Christ, and has a high esteem for him...it is a thankful heart for that sense of sin and of grace it has received...it is an excellent thing in, the sight of God, because it is a heart that desires now to become a receptacle or habitation for the spirit and graces of the Spirit of God.”⁷⁵ Bunyan’s own struggles exhibited this brokenness through which he came to the joy of union with Christ in full assurance of forgiveness of sins.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, I:720.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, “The Excellency of a Broken Heart,” I:709-712.

⁷⁶ I’m indebted to Jeff Robinson’s essay that spurred my thoughts on this subject, p. 6.

Entering the Beautiful Palace

Church Membership and Ministry

Joining a Baptist church in Bunyan's day was no easy step. It involved an examination by the minister who sought to know if the inquiring sincerely repented of his sin and believed the gospel. Then, the minister mentioned this to the church, who in turn appointed several members to continue the examination and to scrutinize his moral character. Once they were satisfied of his seriousness, then he attended a private church meeting in which the members decided whether or not to receive the inquirer into their fellowship, and baptize him, if needed, and then admit him to the Lord's Table.⁷⁷ Shortly upon Bunyan's admittance to the Lord's Table, he again faced new temptations and unrest in his soul. It lasted for "three quarters of a year," and once again, the Lord met him in the Scripture and brought comfort to his troubled soul. At this time, he said that he was "somewhat inclining to a consumption," which was a named used in that era for tuberculosis. Interestingly, in 17th century London, twenty-percent of deaths were due to "consumption."⁷⁸ Physically weak, he now fell into another slump in his spirit. He began to examine himself with regard to "that blessed world to come." Though recalling God's goodness to him in preceding days, he also began to dredge up sins from the past. He said, "At the apprehension of these things my sickness was doubled upon me, for now

⁷⁷ *Works*, I:39, editor's note.

⁷⁸ <http://ask.yahoo.com/20020417.html>, accessed 10/12/07.

was I sick in my inward man, my soul was clogged with guilt; now also was my former experience of God's goodness to me quite taken out of my mind, and hid as if it had never been, nor seen."⁷⁹ Hear how the Lord met him with relief at this time.

Now was my soul greatly pinched between these two considerations, Live I must not, Die I dare not; now I sunk and fell in my spirit, and was giving up all for lost; but as I was walking up and down in the house, as a man in a most woful [*sic.*] state, that word of God took hold of my heart, Ye are "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Ro. iii.24. 'But oh what a turn it made upon me!' ...Sinner, thou thinkest that because of thy sins and infirmities I cannot save thy soul, but behold my Son is by me, and upon him I look, and not on thee, and will deal with thee according as I am pleased with him. At this I was greatly lightened in my mind, and made to understand that God could justify a sinner at any time; it was but 'his' looking upon Christ, and imputing of his benefits to us, and the work was forthwith done.⁸⁰

Call to Ministry

After he had been five or six years in the faith, the church recognized Bunyan's gifts for ministering the Word. So, as customary with dissenting churches (that is, not the state church or Anglican Church), the church perceived that God had His hand upon Bunyan. Consequently, in some private meetings, they asked him to offer a word of exhortation.

⁷⁹ *Works*, I:39.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

He said that he did so “in private, though with much weakness and infirmity,” as he began to see his gifts for ministry even as did the church. The church acknowledged the blessing of Bunyan’s ministry to them. Then they invited him to join some of them as they ministered the gospel among the poor in other villages. After effective ministry, the church continued to press Bunyan to engage in the preaching ministry. He prayed and fasted over their calling, and concluded that God had called him to ministry, even though at this time he still struggled with “the fiery darts of the devil concerning [his] eternal state.”⁸¹

The burden of gospel ministry pressed upon him, so that he could not restrain from preaching the good news. Though “with great fear and trembling at the sight of [his] own weakness,” he sought to preach the Word according to the gifts and abilities entrusted to him. By his own record, once people in the area found out about him, “they came in to hear the Word by hundreds, and that from all parts, though upon sundry and divers accounts.”⁸² Bunyan’s lively preaching had an immediate impact on the region, with people coming far and wide to hear his gospel ministry. He wrote, “I had not preached long before some began to be touched by the Word, and to be greatly afflicted in their minds at the apprehension of the greatness of their sin, and of their need of Jesus Christ.”⁸³ Frankly, Bunyan was stunned that people wanted to listen to his preaching of the gospel, and even more stunned by the testimonies of those affected by his messages.

⁸¹ *Works*, I:40-41.

⁸² *Ibid.*, I:41.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

We know Bunyan mostly from *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Holy War*, both classic allegories of the Christian life; so, how did he preach? Evidently, his preaching came with such passion, power, and clarity that even the greatest theologian of the day, John Owen, “told King Charles II that he would gladly trade all his learning for Bunyan’s power to preach.”⁸⁴ To begin with, Bunyan’s gospel preaching started with the law and the condemnation of all flesh by that law, due to original sin. He wrote, “Now this part of my work I fulfilled with great sense; for the terrors of the law, and guilt for my transgressions, lay heavy on my conscience. I preached what I felt, what I smartingly did feel, even that under which my poor soul did groan and tremble to astonishment.”⁸⁵ Because he felt such a deep consciousness of his own sinfulness, he communicated the same biblical reality to his audiences. Often, Bunyan felt such keenness of his own sinfulness, so that terror seized him as he entered the pulpit, only to know liberty from the Lord as he began to preach. For two years, he stayed in that mode of pounding away at man’s sinfulness. But after that time, he had been so affected by “many sweet discoveries of [Christ’s] blessed grace,” that he altered his preaching. He continued what he felt in his own soul but the difference was that he labored “to hold forth Jesus Christ in all his offices, relations, and benefits unto the world; and did strive also to discover, to condemn, and remove those false supports and props on which the world doth both lean, and by them fall and perish.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ J.I. Packer, “Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan (1628-1688),” Kelly Kapic and Randall Gleason, eds., *The Devoted Life: an Invitation to the Puritan Classics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 184.

⁸⁵ *Works*, I:42.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

The evolution of his preaching ministry continued, as he began to emphasize “the mystery of union with Christ.” He identified “three chief points of the Word of God” that he maintained for five years, namely, man’s sinfulness, Christ in His offices as Prophet, Priest, and King, and the mystery of union with Christ.⁸⁷ At that point, Bunyan crossed the line in the legal sand of England drawn by Charles II. He held illegal “conventicles” or assemblies for the preaching of the gospel, and thus was cast into Bedford jail.

Quite obviously, Bunyan was not the only one illegally preaching the gospel in England at that time. In 1662, the year of Bunyan’s imprisonment corresponding with the Act of Uniformity, “two thousand Puritan pastors were forced out of their churches.”⁸⁸ Some were able to avoid the authorities by staying in the countryside away from legal officials. This practice was common in other parts of Europe, particularly in France, during the Huegenot persecution by the French Catholic government prior to the Reformation, and among the Covenanters in Scotland during the reign of Mary Queen of Scots. It was not that Bunyan spent his time dealing with political or social issues in his preaching. He stayed by his priority of contending “with great earnestness for the word of faith and the remission of sins by the death and sufferings of Jesus.”⁸⁹ He especially delighted in preaching among the parishioners of the state churches that had opposed him, “not to render railing for railing, but to see how many of their carnal professors [he] could convince of their miserable state by the law, and of the want and worth of

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Publishers, 2001), 48.

⁸⁹ Ibid., I:43.

Christ.”⁹⁰ Bunyan explained the way that he approached the preaching ministry. I found it instructive. First, the Lord appeared to burden him with a particular place to preach. He called this “the going of God upon my spirit to desire I might preach there.” Next, he became burdened for particular people, longing for their salvation. Consequently, he observed that whenever it seemed that God would do a saving work among a people, “there the devil hath begun to roar in the hearts, and by the mouths of his servants.” Then he explained, “Yea, oftentimes when the wicked world that raged most, there hath been souls awaked by the Word.” He pulled back the curtain on his preaching burden:

My great desire in my fulfilling my ministry was to get into the darkest places of the country, even amongst those people that were furthest off of profession; yet not because I could not endure the light, for I feared not to show my gospel to any, but because I found my spirit leaned most after awakening and converting work, and the Word that I carried did lead itself most that way ‘also;’ “yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation.” Ro. xv.20.⁹¹

He cared not for applause or commendation. What Bunyan longed for were conversions, genuine, Spirit-wrought conversions to Christ, evidenced by “an heart set on fire to be saved by Christ, with strong breathing after a truly sanctified soul; that it was that delighted me; those were the souls I counted blessed,” he wrote.⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., I:44.

We might get the idea that he met with “success” every way that he turned. But the truth is that Bunyan faced many obstacles in preaching the gospel. The severe temptations to blaspheme Christ returned, often pressing him with such obstinacy that he feared that he would mouth his blasphemies from the pulpit.⁹³ The adversary came against him as well, trying to intimidate him to stop preaching truth. “What, will you preach this? This condemns yourself; of this your own soul is guilty; wherefore preach not of it at all,” he felt the devil saying to him. But God would enable him to have the same spirit that gave Samson strength to bow with all of his might in Dagon’s temple, crying, “Let me die with the Philistines!” (Judges 16:29-30). Bunyan wrote, “It is far better that thou do judge thyself, even by preaching plainly to others, than that thou, to save thyself, imprison the truth in unrighteousness; blessed be God for his help also in this.”⁹⁴ Pride would also raise its ugly head in his preaching. He counted it joyous to see this, commenting, “For it hath been my every day’s portion to be let into the evil of my own heart, and still made to see such a multitude of corruptions and infirmities therein, that it hath caused hanging down of the head under all my gifts and attainments; I have felt this thorn in the flesh, the very mercy of God to me. 2 Co.xii. 7-9.”⁹⁵ In other words, though pride came, due to his sensitivity he recognized it as a mirror into his own soul, reminding him of his own weakness in spite of the commendations of men about his preaching. He learned not to listen to men’s praises but to understand that he preached only by the great mercy of God.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

One of the surest means to bring a preacher down is through pride in his gifts and attainments. Only by walking humbly before the Lord, realizing that gifts alone cannot produce lasting fruit, can a preacher of the gospel know the power of God in his ministry. Bunyan wrote that the preacher “hath also cause to walk humbly with God, and be little in his own eyes, and to remember withal, that his gifts are not his own, but the church’s; and that by them he is made a servant to the church; and he must give at last an account of his stewardship unto the Lord Jesus; and to give a good account, will be a blessed thing.”⁹⁶ Then he added, “Let all men therefore prize a little with the fear of the Lord; gifts indeed are desirable, but yet great grace and small gifts are better than great gifts and no grace.”⁹⁷

Bunyan gave precise attention to the ministry of the pastor in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, using three characters to represent the preacher of the gospel. First, *Evangelist* who pointed the way to Christian finding relief from the burden he carried, shows the gospel preacher’s priority of pointing to Christ. He does not relieve the burden of the sinner but points to the only one that can—Jesus Christ. And, as did Evangelist, he comes alongside those in spiritual need in the difficult and demanding times of life, pointing consistently to Christ. Second, at the House of the Interpreter, who represents the Holy Spirit, Christian is led to a private room where Interpreter shows him “the picture of a very grave Person” on the wall. The narrator describes the “very grave Person” as having “eyes lifted up to Heaven, the best of Books in his hand, the Law of Truth was written upon his lips, the World was behind his back; it stood as if it pleaded with men, and a Crown of Gold did hang over its

⁹⁶ Ibid., I:45.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

head.”⁹⁸ We surmise from this portrait the priorities that Bunyan accounted for the pastor: prayer, the Word, speaking the truth, despising the things of the world, passionately pleading with sinners to come to Christ, and in heaven, the waiting reward for faithfulness. The Interpreter further explains, “The man whose picture this is, is one of a thousand; he can beget children, travel [travail] in birth with children, and nurse them himself when they are born.”⁹⁹ The uniqueness of the gospel preacher is evident by his faithful preaching for genuine conversion to Christ, and then, shepherding those believers that they might grow in sanctification. Additionally, Interpreter singles out the preacher’s work as singly set apart by God for the church: “I have shewed thee this picture first, because the man whose picture this is, is the only man whom the Lord of the place whither thou art going, hath authorized to be thy Guide in all difficult places thou may’st meet with in the Way.”¹⁰⁰ He put a high view on pastoral ministry through the local church.

Third, *Mr. Great-heart* completes the trio of pastoral portraits in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. He is one of my favorite characters, and has a prime spot in Book II of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, the story of Christian’s wife, Christiana and their children and others, as they make their way to the Celestial City. Bunyan scholars conclude that Mr. Great-heart was modeled after the pastoral care that Bunyan experienced under John Gifford. We find Christiana and her party at the House of the Interpreter, who puts them under the charge of Mr. Great-heart. Christiana is newly Christian, according to the allegory, having just

⁹⁸ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 25.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

been clothed in “fine linen white and clean.”¹⁰¹ She asks the pastoral figure about the details concerning the deed done to pardon them from the burden of sin. He explained, “Pardon by the Deed done, is pardon obtained by some one for another that hath need thereof: Not by the person pardoned...to wit, by him that let you in at the Gate: and he hath obtained it in this double way; he has performed Righteousness to cover you, and spilt Blood to wash you in.”¹⁰² Mr. Great-heart expounds upon the great doctrine of justification that includes Christ’s active obedience to the Law on behalf of all the redeemed, and by the passive obedience found in His bloody death at the cross, rendering satisfaction for all of God’s righteous demands for justice. Bunyan’s own elation at understanding the imputation of Christ’s righteousness on his behalf is furthered by a detailed explanation of this righteousness by Mr. Great-heart, indicating his conviction that the pastor must labor to teach this great doctrine to his flock.¹⁰³

Not only do we find Mr. Great-heart teaching and instructing in doctrine, but Bunyan also shows him fighting, risking his life on behalf of Christiana and those traveling with her. He draws his sword at the sight of a giant named *Grim* who had lions blocking the way of the travelers. While Christiana’s sons shrunk in fear, Mr. Great-heart smiled at them, and proceeded to slay the giant that tried to block their progress toward the Celestial City. He pictured the wise use of the Sword of the Spirit—the Word of God—in pastoral ministry to deal with whatever stands in the path of those whom Christ has

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 246-249.

redeemed. Another giant, Maul by name, was dispatched by Mr. Great-heart after he accosted the pilgrims by “Sophistry,” likely an allusion to Roman Catholicism.¹⁰⁴

Mr. Great-heart’s name expresses his nature, particularly as we find him rescuing weak pilgrims along the way to the Celestial City, such as *Feeble-mind*, *Mr. Ready-to-halt*, and *Mr. Despondency*, the latter of whom he rescued from the clutches of the Giant *Despair at Doubting-Castle*.¹⁰⁵ J.I. Packer explains the symbolism: “Bunyan means us to see him as the model pastor, showing at this point the patience and kindness that every pastor should maintain toward needier souls in the congregation who require of them special attention and more than a fair share of their ministry time”¹⁰⁶

Arrest and imprisonment for the sake of the gospel

After John Bunyan had preached for about five years, he went to a group of “good people in the country” in order to preach the gospel to them. But the authorities, alerted of Bunyan’s intention, whisked him away to a local justice. Though offering security that he would not flee before the date for his initial hearing, the authorities did not accept the bond he posted, evidently because he did not guarantee that he would not preach the gospel to the people if he gained opportunity. As a man of conviction, Bunyan would not

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 290ff.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 339-340.

¹⁰⁶ Kopic and Gleason, 195.

lay down preaching the gospel because of man's foolish laws that forbade him. The gospel surpassed English Law.

What was the horrible crime for which he was arrested? In Bunyan's own words, "I was indicted for an upholder and maintainer of unlawful assemblies and conventicles, and for not conforming to the national worship of the Church of England."¹⁰⁷ He was quite honest with them, letting the justices know that he intended to continue preaching the gospel. Consequently, they sentenced him to "perpetual banishment, because [he] refused to conform."¹⁰⁸ So, from November 1660 to his release toward the end of 1672, John Bunyan spent twelve years in the Bedford Jail for preaching the gospel.¹⁰⁹ All he had to do to get released was promise that he would never preach unlawfully again. But due to the burden of the gospel and the calling of God, Bunyan would not relent just so that he could be comfortable, and once again return to his family.

As he first wrote the words in *Grace Abounding*, he continued in prison. Our natural response would be to point to the injustice of the English justices in such a harsh sentence for that which is certainly no crime. We would lobby, as did John Owen, to get him out of prison. What did Bunyan think of his time in Bedford Jail?

I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now [that is, while in prison]; those Scriptures that I saw nothing in before, are made in this place and state to shine upon me; Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now; here I have seen him and felt him indeed: O that word, We have not preached

¹⁰⁷ *Works*, I:47.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, cf. I:47, editor's note.

unto you cunningly devised fables, 2 Pe. i.16; and that, God raised Christ from the dead, and gave him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God, 1 Pe. i.2, were blessed words unto me in this my imprisoned condition.

...I have had sweet sights of the forgiveness of my sins in this place, and of my being with Jesus in another world.

...I never knew what it was for God to stand by me at all turns, and at every offer of Satan ‘to afflict me,’ &c., as I have found him since I came in hither; for look how fears have presented themselves, so have supports and encouragements, yea, when I have started, even as it were at nothing else but my shadow, yet God, as being very tender of me, hath not suffered me to be molested, but would with one scripture and another strengthen me against all; insomuch that I have often said, Were it lawful, I could pray for greater trouble, for the greater comfort’s sake. Ec. vii.14, 2 Co. i.5.¹¹⁰

Prior to his imprisonment, Bunyan knew that his continued preaching of the gospel might land him in prison. He willingly risked this due to the burden to preach the gospel to those in need. For about a year before his arrest, he had two thoughts that regularly came to mind: first, he thought of how he might be able to endure imprisonment, especially if it became extended; second, he thought of how he might face death, if God should be pleased to take him. With regard to enduring, he found that every time he went to pray, he voiced the prayer of Colossians 1:11, that he might be “strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and

¹¹⁰ Ibid., I:47.

patience” with joyfulness. He understood that he didn’t need to simply have a grim resignation to his fate, and just bear it Stoicly. He wanted to endure as a Christian—and a joyful Christian, at that.

The second issue, that of the possibility of death, brought to mind Paul’s statement to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:9), “Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.” He wrote, “By this scripture I was made to see, that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass a sentence of death upon everything that can properly be called a thing of this life, even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyments, and all, as dead to me, and myself as dead to them.”¹¹¹ He added to this, that he knew that he must “live upon God that is invisible.”¹¹² John Piper points to this as the key statement that explains Bunyan’s remarkable Christian life and ministry.¹¹³ Just as Paul wrote when facing the same realities, Bunyan found comfort: “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). The way that he applied this is instructive. He did not want to gear himself for one level of suffering only to face a more intense level. For example, if he prayed and prepared only for imprisonment but not for the whip, then he might be overcome by the agony of being whipped. So he concluded, “that I see the best way to go through sufferings is to trust in God through Christ, as touching the world, to come; and as touching this world, to count “the grave my house, to make my

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, I:48.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Piper, 43.

bed in darkness, and to say to corruption, Thou *art* my father, and to the worm, *Thou art* my mother *and my sister.*” That is, to familiarize these things to me.”¹¹⁴ He likely found wise direction from reading *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* as well as more current stories of his Puritan colleagues as they suffered for the gospel during the cruel reign of Archbishop Laud (1633-1641).¹¹⁵

Bunyan’s first wife, the unnamed one, died in 1658, leaving him with four children under the age of ten. He remarried the next year to an eighteen-year old named Elizabeth who proved to be an excellent helper to him as well as a vocal defender before the authorities. His oldest child, Mary, was born blind and much-beloved to Bunyan, whom he called, “my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides,” in his autobiography.¹¹⁶ They lived on a meager wage as it was; so for him, as the chief provider, to be in prison meant that his family would face begging to subsist. He said that dealing with this knowledge of what lay before him if he continued to preach the gospel was “as the pulling the flesh from my bones.”¹¹⁷ Yet, in spite of it all, he said to his family, “I must venture you all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you.”¹¹⁸ Some may find his decision to be cruel and heartless toward his family but listen to his reasoning upon this:

I had also this consideration, that if I should now venture all for God, I engaged
God to take care of my concernments; but if I forsook him and his ways, for fear of

¹¹⁴ *Works*, I:48.

¹¹⁵ cf. Calhoun, 26; Bunyan, *Works*, I:48, editor’s note.

¹¹⁶ *Works*, I:48.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

any trouble that should come to me or mine, then I should not only falsify my profession, but should count also that my concernments were not so sure, if left at God's feet, while I stood to and for his name, as they would be, if they were under my own [care].¹¹⁹

He *ventured* all for God; that seemed to be his watchword during this trying time. When first imprisoned, he found despair as his cell-mate and despondency watching his every move. He felt himself sinking deeper and deeper so much so that he wrote, "I was not fit to die, neither indeed did think I could, if I should be called to it."¹²⁰ Yet as he labored through these dark days, struggling with temptation to despair, light came. "Thus was I tossed for many weeks, and knew not what to do," he wrote; "at last this consideration fell with weight upon me, That it was for the Word and way of God, that I was in this condition, wherefore I was engaged not to flinch a hair's breadth from it."¹²¹

Having ventured all for God did not exclude Bunyan from temptation to deny God. He explained that the most severe temptations he faced were questioning the being of God and the truth of His gospel.¹²² He thought that at such times, God would pour out severe chastisement upon him, yet instead, he found them as times for "the discovery of his grace."¹²³ Then he would think himself wrong to be comforted in the grace of God!

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., I:49.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 49-50.

¹²³ Ibid., 50.

Throughout these turbulent periods, he would run the gamut from elation to darkness—and the Lord sustained him in His great mercy.

We may have the idea that if we would be greatly used of God then we must have everything together: no doubts, no struggles, and no severe temptations. John Bunyan, along with many other figures in Christian history, help to obliterate such faulty understanding. Bunyan offered a candid look at his struggles, even going to the point of identifying “seven abominations,” as he called them, that afflicted his heart and with which he struggled.

1. Inclinations to unbelief.
2. Suddenly to forget the love and mercy that Christ manifesteth.
3. A leaning to the works of the law.
4. Wanderings and coldness in prayer.
5. To forget to watch for [the things] that I pray for.
6. Apt to murmur because I have no more, and yet ready to abuse what I have.
7. I can do none of those things which God command me, but my corruptions will thrust in themselves, “When I would do good, evil is present with me.”¹²⁴

Some of these abominations can be common to most all believers. Who doesn't struggle from time to time with forgetting the love and mercy of Christ or coldness in prayer or complaining? Yet some of these things appear to be woven into the fabric of Bunyan's complex life since due to his perfectionist tendencies, he struggled with

¹²⁴ Ibid.

unbelief and leaning toward the works of the law. Because he scrutinized everything about himself, he tended to be severe on even the hint of sin in his life. What others would never notice often glared in his mind.

We might think that because of these struggles he was a tortured soul. Times of inward torture he did have, indeed, but he learned that even with the tendencies toward these abominations, God was at work to instruct him and bring him more into the radiant experience of Christ. He added seven ways that the Lord ordered his abominations for his good.

1. They make me abhor myself.
2. They keep me from trusting my heart.
3. They convince me of the insufficiency of all inherent righteousness.
4. They show me the necessity of flying to Jesus.
5. They press me to pray unto God.
6. They show me the need I have to watch and be sober.
7. And provoke me to look to God, through Christ, to help me, and carry me through this world. Amen.¹²⁵

We surmise from these seven areas of divine blessing that he became conscious of his own insufficiency in living unto Christ. He daily needed to fly to Christ to venture all upon God. He learned to depend upon the Lord, to find his answers and comfort in

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Scripture, and to rest in God's faithfulness. In other words, John Bunyan learned that Christ was everything for him as a believer.

To the Celestial City

Finishing Well

During his time in the Bedford jail, John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a classic work “translated into more than 200 languages and to date is the second best-selling book in the history of the English language after the Bible.”¹²⁶ Even people outside Evangelical tradition have read and valued the book. Among “English readers it is bound to appear as the supreme classic of the English Puritan tradition,” as pointed out by Bunyan scholar Roger Sharrock.¹²⁷ J Gresham Machen, one of the 20th century’s most influential evangelical leaders, said that it “is a work that is pulsating with life in every word.”¹²⁸

The Pilgrim's Progress details the ongoing life of the believer, especially focusing on sanctification and perseverance, what Jeff Robinson calls “the twin foci of all of ministry” with the Puritans: “for in Puritan thought conversion was always related to the entire Christian life.”¹²⁹ It is a much-needed antidote to our current practice of marking decisions as Christian conversion without corresponding evidence of sanctification and perseverance. Far too much evangelism is geared toward simply adding another number

¹²⁶ Jeff Robinson, 1.

¹²⁷ Robinson, p. 1, quoting Sharrock in John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 7.

¹²⁸ Quoted by Robinson, p. 2 from J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 46.

¹²⁹ Robinson, 4.

to the already astounding string of questionable conversions. My own denomination demonstrates this failure, as far less than fifty-percent of the members attend and participate in church regularly. This failure at biblical evangelism, substituting mere professions for persevering believers, has weakened the fabric of evangelicalism and cast dispersions on gospel ministry. We would do well to make Charles Spurgeon's practice our own, that of reading *The Pilgrim's Progress* each year so that we glean the same passion for biblical ministry that captured John Bunyan.

Bunyan's prison time was divided into two parts. The longest, twelve years, ran from 1660 due to the Act of Uniformity until 1672, when Charles II issued the Declaration of Indulgence giving "religious freedom "to all his loving subjects," including Roman Catholics and Nonconformists."¹³⁰ During his imprisonment, the jailer permitted him a few occasions to return home and to preach in the Bedford Church. Upon his release, he served as pastor of the church he had joined under Pastor Gifford's ministry. Less than five years later, with the Anglican bishops urging the king to suppress the meetings of Dissenters, Bunyan's license to preach was revoked, and due to not taking communion in the state church, he was sent back to Bedford jail. So late in 1676 he was," as he put it, "had home to prison again,"¹³¹ spending six months in jail before his release in June 1677. During that second imprisonment, he likely completed *The Pilgrim's Progress*.¹³² He was not new to publishing, having already published about 25 books before John

¹³⁰ Stephen Nichols, *Pages from Church History: A Guided Tour of Christian Classics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publications, 2006), 209.

¹³¹ *Works*, I:47.

¹³² Calhoun, 34-35.

Owen's publisher, at his urging, ran the first edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678.¹³³

The book ran through three editions in the first year! The tinker turned preacher from Bedford became a household name in England.

Why did the book make such an impact in Bunyan's day as well as in the 300+ years that have followed? I think that J.I. Packer's analysis of the book explains this quite well. Bunyan had not written an allegory before; he did it "as a novelty" in response to his lively imagination upon the details of the Christian life. "It stands," writes Packer, "as a full-scale index in picture form to the entire range of the Puritan understanding of Christian existence. The themes and images in both parts are biblical, and all the ups and downs of real and phony Christianity are presented for the reader's instruction and self-assessment."¹³⁴ Bunyan's method in the book was three-fold:

First, to picture personal spiritual life as a pilgrimage—a trek to a religiously significant destination, in this case heaven, the Celestial City. Second, to develop Jesus' image of the pilgrim path as straight, narrow and taxing, by dotting it with dangers and false trails alongside its helps and helpers. Third, to follow real-life individuals bearing character-label names through the ups and downs of their travels along it, seeing sights, visiting places, overcoming obstacles, resolving problems and relating to friends, foes, fools and failures whom they meet en route.¹³⁵

¹³³ Packer in Kapic and Gleason, 184.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 185.

Packer points out five key themes that dominate both parts of the book. First, “*the good word*,” highlights the Reformation and Puritan emphasis on the centrality of Scripture to every detail of life and eternity. It is a “*mirror*” which Mercy viewed in the Shepherd’s palace, seeing herself from one angle and the Prince of Pilgrims in the other. It is the “*map* that Mr. Great-heart consulted, to avoid pitfalls on the Enchanted Ground.” It is the “*sword*” which Christian used when fighting Apollyon and Mr. Valiant-for-Truth used in fighting against three thieves. Mr. Great-heart called it “a right Jerusalem blade,” while Valiant-for-Truth agreed: “It is so. Let a man have one of these Blades, with a hand to wield it, and skill to use it, and he may venture upon an Angel with it...Its edges will never blunt. It will cut Flesh, and Bones, and Soul, and Spirit, and all.”¹³⁶

The second theme, “*the good news*,” maintained the common theme of “the gospel as the Reformers had proclaimed it.” Bunyan emphasized three things about the gospel; “First, the atoning death of Christ, in which our punishment was diverted on to his shoulders, and second, our justification through faith, in which we are clothed in his righteousness set as it were on our shoulders (the “broidered coat” given to Christian as he stood before the cross). The third aspect of the good news Bunyan highlights is the heart-changing effect of God’s gift of faith in Christ.”¹³⁷ He does not hesitate to engage his readers in lengthy discussion of the doctrine of justification, emphasizing both the active and passive righteousness of Christ in accomplishing this work.

Third, “*the good way*” is central to the pilgrim journeys in both parts of the book. As Stephen Nichols points out in this regard, “It is hard to think of aspects of Christian life

¹³⁶ Ibid., 188-190.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 190.

that *the Pilgrim's Progress* does not touch upon...Bunyan has a remarkable ability to frame Christian's journey in such a way as to capture the universal elements of the Christian life."¹³⁸ Packer identifies six areas in the journey of Christian sanctification and perseverance that Bunyan makes.

1. *One must constantly labor to learn the spiritual truths by which one must live* (as Christian did from Evangelist, an emblem of a gospel minister, and in the House of the Interpreter, a figure for the Holy Spirit as teacher, and in the Palace Beautiful, a picture of the local church, and from the Shepherds, a corporate embodiment of pastoral insight, and also as Christiana did from Gaius, the hospitable veteran and wiseacre).

2. *One must constantly counter one's spontaneous "inward carnal cogitations, which, says Christian, "are my grief: and might I but chuse [sic] mine own things, I would chuse never to think of these things more; but when I would be doing of that which is best, that which is worst is with me."*

3. *One must constantly resist all persuasions to leave the road...* all seductions by the world... all allurements into the self-serving ease and comfort of By-path Meadow... and all temptations to become thoughtless and careless about eternal issues... Christian tells By-ends the time-server:

¹³⁸ Nichols, *Pages from Church History*, 209.

You must go against wind and Tide... You must also own Religion in his Rags, as well as when in his Silver Slippers, and stand by him too, when bound in Irons, as well as when he walketh the Streets with applause.

4. *One must be prepared for constant buffetings from tears and threats of all kinds...*

These cannot be avoided; they have to be faced and overcome. God provides pilgrims with armor “of proof” (that is, of tested quality), but they themselves must come to terms with their own fears and actually fight, and that is something that proves to be necessary over and over again.

5. *One must practice repentance regularly...* Christ’s death can benefit us no further than we repent of our sin as we invoke it, and clearly Bunyan believes we should be doing this over and over again.

6. *One must value and practice fellowship constantly.* Every Christian needs peer friendship and companionship; it is not good for any of us to be alone. Bunyan shows this by giving Christian first Faithful and then Hopeful as a fellow traveler and conversation partner, and by giving Christiana Mercy as a companion along with Great-heart as a guide and friend.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Packer in Kapic and Gleason, 188-195.

Fourth, “*the good guide*,” emphasizes the need for effective pastoral work in the body of Christ. Bunyan served as a pastor of Bedford Baptist Church, following in the good model of Pastor John Gifford, who had baptized and mentored him.¹⁴⁰ As we’ve already noted, Bunyan likely modeled his three images of the pastor on what he witnessed through the ministry of Gifford. These three, Evangelist, the Very Grave Person with the best of books in his hand, and Mr. Great-heart, demonstrate the varied aspects of pastoral ministry. Bunyan said of his own pastoral work, “My heart hath been so wrapped up in the glory of this excellent work, that I counted myself more blessed and honored of God by this, than if I had made me the emperor of the Christian world, or the lord of all the glory of the earth without it.”¹⁴¹

Fifth, “*the good end*” models dying in Puritan thought. “Death was everyone’s near neighbor in Puritan England,” as Packer explains. “Many adults died young, more than half the children born died before they reached their teens, and ordinarily everyone died at home, conscious to the last and in the presence of family and friends, who hung on their dying words as likely to be specially solemn and revealing.” This is a much-needed tonic in our day when thoughts of dying are as remote as snow on the Gulf Coast. Packer writes, “The Puritans taught that a life lived well, to the glory of God, should be rounded off by dying well, to the glory of God, and they sought to explain how.” Consequently, many Puritan titles addressed this subject. Bunyan detailed the deaths of the Christian pilgrims that he chronicled in both parts of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. One might think this

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 195-196.

¹⁴¹ Quoted by Piper, *Hidden Smile*, from *Christian Behavior Being the Fruits of True Christianity*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, II:574.

to be a somber subject but I've found it to be instructive and heartening as one nearer to death than when I was a college student. Packer concludes, "Bunyan wants us to realize that, from one standpoint, death-day is the most momentous occasion of any Christian's life, and so writes as to convince us that this is so. The result is the most powerful few pages he ever put on paper."¹⁴²

Bunyan's support in jail

John Bunyan spent twelve-and-a-half of the 60 years of his life in Bedford jail. That's one-fifth of his life! Yet, by God's grace, he made it profitable and fruitful for the kingdom of God. Rather than sulking and complaining, he used his time for study, meditation, writing, and ministry. He regularly preached to those in jail. On one occasion, a whole congregation had been arrested and put in jail; Bunyan preached the Word to them. From the time that he was converted until *The Pilgrim's Progress* first hit the market in 1678, Bunyan had published 25 books. Because he was considered uneducated and uncouth by the elites of his day, his pastor, John Burton, defended him in a foreword to his first book in 1656: "This man is not chosen out of an earthly but out of the heavenly university, the Church of Christ....He hath, through grace, taken these three heavenly degrees, to wit, union with Christ, the anointing of the Spirit, and experiences of

¹⁴² Packer in Kapic and Gleason, 196-198.

the temptations of Satan, which do more fit a man for that mighty work of preaching the Gospel than all university learning and degrees that can be had.”¹⁴³

Since a tinker provided only a meager income, once Bunyan was imprisoned, the Bedford Church came to his family’s aid. Bunyan added to the support by making shoelaces while in prison. The highlight of his day came when his blind daughter Mary, who had memorized the route to the jail, came each evening with a jar of soup for her father. He had married Elizabeth only two years before his imprisonment began. The strain upon her of caring for four young children without her husband, and being pregnant, proved too much for her body to handle. She went into premature labor and lost her child while Bunyan was in jail. But that didn’t stop her from making regular visits to the authorities, and even to London, to try to secure her husband’s release. One exchange that Bunyan records will demonstrate how this young woman had great spunk and dependency upon the Lord as she stood before the justices.

“Would he stop preaching?”

“My lord, he dares not leave off preaching as long as he can speak.”

“What is the need of talking?”

“There is need for this, my lord, for I have four small children that cannot help themselves, of which one is blind, and we have nothing to live upon but the charity of good people.”

Matthew Hale, with pity, asks if she really has four children being so young.

¹⁴³ Piper, *Hidden Smile*, 61, quoting from *Some Gospel Truths Opened in The Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Banner of truth Trust, 1991, orig. 1884), p. 141.

“My lord, I am but mother-in-law [stepmother] to them, having not been married to him yet full two years. Indeed, I was with child when my husband was first apprehended; but being young and unaccustomed to such things, I being smayed at the news, fell into labor, and so continued for eight days, and then was delivered; but my child died.”

Hale is moved, but other judges are hardened and speak against him. “He is a mere tinker!”

“Yes, and because he is a tinker and a poor man, therefore he is despised and cannot have justice.”

One Mr. Chester is enraged and says Bunyan will preach and do as he wishes.

“He preacheth nothing but the word of God!” she says.

Mr. Twisden, in a rage: “He runneth up and down and doeth harm.”

“No, my lord, it is not so; God hath owned him and done much good by him.”

The angry man continues, “His doctrine is the doctrine of the devil.”

“She replies, “My lord, when the righteous Judge shall appear, it will be known that his doctrine is not the doctrine of the devil.”

Bunyan’s biographer comments, “Elizabeth Bunyan was simply an English peasant woman: could she have spoken with more dignity had she been crowned queen?”¹⁴⁴

Out of jail

¹⁴⁴ Piper, *Hidden Smile*, 54-55, quoting John Brown, *John Bunyan*, 149-150.

Even before he had been released from jail, Bunyan accepted the call of the Bedford Baptist Church as pastor. He remained their pastor until his death. According to estimates, when he began serving as pastor, there were about 120 nonconformist parishioners in Bedford. In spite of those that tried to get him to move to London for a bigger church, he stayed with the Bedford congregation, shepherding them faithfully. He did travel to London and other cities to preach. “In the days of toleration, a day’s notice would get a crowd of 1,200 to hear him preach at 7 o’clock in the morning on a weekday.”¹⁴⁵

As an author, Bunyan composed poetry, allegories in novel fashion, children’s books, theological works, and primarily expositions of Scripture. One Bunyan scholar lists 58 books that he wrote.¹⁴⁶ George Whitfield, the powerful preacher during the 18th century’s First Great Awakening, said of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, “It smells of the prison. It was written when the author was confined in Bedford jail. And ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross: the Spirit of Christ and of Glory then rests upon them.”¹⁴⁷ John Piper points out, “Bunyan’s writings were an extension of his pastoral ministry, mainly to his flock in Bedford, who lived in constant danger of harassment and prison. His suffering fit him well for the task” [Piper, 62].

We must not think of Bunyan always hidden away writing. Just like Evangelist and Mr. Great-heart, he regularly engaged his congregation as well as others in pastoral

¹⁴⁵ Piper, 53.

¹⁴⁶ Piper, 60, sourcing from Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), pp. xv-xvii.

¹⁴⁷ Piper, 61, quoting Barry Horner, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: An Evangelical Apologetic, Themes and Issues: An Evangelical Apologetic* (Lindenhurst, NY: Reformation Press Publishing, 1998), p. iii.

ministry. The application portions of his sermons breathe the air of pointed pastoral care. Often, he was called upon to help reconcile broken relationships. His last act of pastoral ministry included this, as he traveled to London to seek to mend a son's broken relationship with his father. He contracted a fever on the way back, dying of either pneumonia or the flu. It was fitting that Bunyan didn't die in an easy-chair but in the battle of pastoral ministry which he dearly loved. His death on August 31, 1688 was followed two days later by his burial in the Nonconformist burial plot known as Bunhill Fields. At the time, it was quite a distance removed from the city. Bunhill Fields became the final resting place for John Owen, Susanna Wesley, Daniel Defoe, and many others. Today, his tomb stands on a concrete walkway with Bunyan's likeness carved in it as well as figures from the story that he told in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Crossing the River

I think it is fitting to close this study by considering some of the pictures that Bunyan gave us of pilgrims crossing the river to the Celestial City.¹⁴⁸

The Last Difficulties

These men asked the pilgrims whence they came, and they told them; they also asked

¹⁴⁸ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 180-189.

them where they had lodged, what difficulties and dangers, what comforts and pleasures they had met in the way; and they told them. Then said the men that met them, "You have but two difficulties more to meet with, and then you are in the City."

CHRISTIAN then, and his companion, asked the men to go along with them; so they told them they would. "But," said they, "you must obtain it by your own faith." So I saw in my dream that they went on together till they came in sight of the gate.

Now I further saw that betwixt them and the gate was a river; but there was no bridge to go over: the river was very deep. At the sight, therefore, of this river, the pilgrims were much astounded; but the men that went with them said, "You must go through, or you cannot come at the gate."

The pilgrims then began to inquire if there was no other way to the gate; to which they answered, "Yes, but there hath not any, save two, to wit, Enoch and Elijah, been permitted to tread that path since the foundation of the world, nor shall until the last trumpet shall sound".

The pilgrims then--especially CHRISTIAN--began to despond in their minds; and looked this way and that, but no way could be found by them by which they might escape the river. Then they asked the men if the waters were all of a depth? They said, "No"; yet they could not help them in that case, for said they, "you shall find it deeper or shallower as you believe in the King of the place."

They then addressed themselves to the water; and entering, CHRISTIAN began to sink. And crying out to his good friend, HOPEFUL, he said, "I sink in deep waters, the billows go over my head; all his waves go over me."

Then said the other, "Be of good cheer, my brother; I feel the bottom, and it is good." Then said CHRISTIAN, "Ah! my friend, the sorrows of death have compassed me about; I shall 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 before him; also here he, in great measure, lost his senses, so that he could neither remember nor orderly talk of any of those sweet refreshments that he had met with in the way of his pilgrimage. But all the words that he spake still tended to discover that he had horror of mind, and hearty fears that he should die in that river, and never obtain entrance in at the gate; here also, as they that stood by perceived, he was much in the troublesome thoughts of the sins that he had committed, both since and before he began to be a pilgrim. 'Twas also observed that he was troubled with apparitions of hobgoblins and evil spirits; for ever and anon he would intimate so much by words. HOPEFUL, therefore, here had much ado to keep his brother's head above water; yea, sometimes he would be quite gone down, and then ere awhile he would rise up again half dead. HOPEFUL also would endeavour to comfort him, saying, "Brother, I see the gate, and men standing by it to receive us." But CHRISTIAN would answer, "'Tis you, 'tis you they wait for; you have been hopeful ever since I knew you." "And so have you," said

he to CHRISTIAN. "Ah, brother," said he, "surely, if I was right, he would now arise to help me; but, for my sins, he hath brought me into the snare, and hath left me."

Then said HOPEFUL, "My brother, you have quite forgot the text where it is said of the wicked, 'There are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm; they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men'.

These troubles and distresses that you go through in these waters are no sign that God hath forsaken you; but are sent to try you, whether you will call to mind that which heretofore you have received of his goodness, and live upon him in your distresses."

Then I saw in my dream that CHRISTIAN was as in a muse awhile, to whom also HOPEFUL added this word, "Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole "; and with that CHRISTIAN brake out with a loud voice, "Oh, I see him again! and he tells me, 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee'".

Then they both took courage, and the enemy was after that as still as a stone, until they were gone over. CHRISTIAN therefore presently found ground to stand upon; and so it followed that the rest of the river was but shallow. Thus they got over. Now upon the bank of the river, on the other side, they saw the two shining men again who there waited for them; wherefore, being come up out of the river, they saluted them, saying, "We are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those that shall be heirs of salvation." Thus they went along towards the gate. Now you must note that the City

stood upon a mighty hill; but the pilgrims went up that 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; for though they went in with them, they came out without them. They therefore went up here with much agility and speed; though the foundation upon which the City was framed was higher than the clouds. They therefore went up through the regions of the air, sweetly talking as they went; being comforted, because they safely got over the river, and had such glorious companions to attend them.

Welcome

The talk they had with the Shining Ones was about the glory of the place; who told them that the beauty and glory of it was inexpressible. "There," said they, "is the Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem; the innumerable company of angels; and the spirits of just men made perfect.

You are going now," said they, "to the Paradise of God; wherein you shall see the tree of life, and eat of the never fading fruits thereof. And when you come there, you shall have white robes given you; and your walk and talk shall be every day with the King, even all the days of eternity.

There you shall not see again such things as you saw when you were in the lower region upon the earth: to wit, sorrow, sickness, affliction, and death; for the former things are passed away.

You are going now to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob, and to the prophets; men that God hath taken away from the evil to come, and that are now resting upon their beds, each one walking in his righteousness".

The men then asked, "What must we do in the holy place?" To whom it was answered: "You must there receive the comfort of all your toil, and have joy for all your sorrow; you must reap what you have sown, even the fruit of all your prayers, and tears, and sufferings for the King by the way.

In that place you must wear crowns of gold, and enjoy the perpetual sight and visions of the Holy One; for there you shall see him as he is.

There, also, you shall serve him continually with praise, with shouting, and thanksgiving; whom you desired to serve in the world, though with much difficulty, because of the infirmity of your flesh. There your eyes shall be delighted with seeing, and your ears with hearing the pleasant voice of, the mighty One. There you shall enjoy your friends again, that are got thither before you; and there you shall with joy receive even every one that follows into the holy place after you. There, also, you shall be clothed with glory and majesty, and put into an equipage fit to ride out with the King of Glory. When he shall come with sound of trumpet in the clouds, as upon the wings of the wind, you shall come with him; and when he shall sit upon the Throne of

Judgment, you shall sit by him; yea, and when he shall pass sentence upon all the workers of iniquity, let them be angels or men, you also shall have a voice in that Judgment, because they were his and your enemies. Also, when he shall again return to the City, you shall go too, with sound of trumpet, and be ever with him."

Now, while they were thus drawing towards the gate, behold a company of the heavenly host came out to meet them; to whom it was said, by the other two Shining Ones, "These are the men that have loved our Lord when they were in the world, and that have left all for his holy Name; and he hath sent us to fetch them, and we have brought them thus far on their desired journey, that they may go in and look their Redeemer in the face with joy." Then the heavenly host gave a great shout, saying, "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb".

There came out also at this time, to meet them, several of the King's trumpeters, clothed in white and shining raiment; who, with melodious noises, and loud, made even the heavens to echo with their sound. These trumpeters saluted CHRISTIAN and his fellow with ten thousand welcomes, from the world: and this they did with shouting and sound of trumpet.

This done, they compassed them round on every side: some went before, some behind, and some on the right hand, some on the left (as 'twere to guide them through the upper regions); continually sounding as they went, with melodious noise, in notes on

high; so that the very sight was, to them that could behold it, as if heaven itself was come down to meet them. Thus, therefore, they walked on together; and as they walked, ever and anon these trumpeters, even, with joyful sound, would, by mixing their music with looks and gestures, still signify to CHRISTIAN and his brother how welcome they were into their company, and with what gladness they came to meet them. And now were these two men, as 't were, in heaven, before they came at it; being swallowed up with the sight of angels, and with hearing of their melodious notes. Here also they had the City itself in view; and they thought they heard all the bells therein to ring, to welcome them thereto; but, above all, the warm and joyful thoughts that they had about their own dwelling there, with such company, and that for ever and ever. Oh, by what tongue or pen can their glorious joy be expressed! And thus they came up to the gate.

Now when they were come up to the gate, there was written over it, in letters of gold, "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".

Then I saw in my dream, that the shining men bid them call at the gate, the which when they did, some from above looked over the gate: to wit, Enoch, Moses, and Elijah; to whom it was said, "These pilgrims are come from the city of Destruction, for the love that they bear to the King of this place." And then the pilgrims gave in unto them each man his certificate, which they had received in the beginning; those,

therefore were carried in to the King, who, when he had read them, said "Where are the men?" To whom it was answered, "They are standing without the gate." The King then commanded to open the gate, "That the righteous nation," said he, "that keeps truth, may enter in".

Now I saw in my dream, that these two men went in at the gate; and lo, as they entered, they were transfigured; and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There were also those that met them with harps and crowns, and gave them to them; the harps to praise withal, and the crowns in token of honour. Then I heard in my dream, that all the bells in the City rang again for joy; and that it was said unto them, "Enter ye into the joy of your Lord." I also heard the men themselves, that they sang with a loud voice, saying, "Blessing, honour, glory, and power, be to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever".

Now, just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them: and behold, the City shone like the sun: the streets also were paved with gold; and in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal.

There were also of them that had wings; and they answered one another without intermission, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord!" And after that they shut up the gates, which when I had seen, I wished myself among them.

Ignorance Comes to His End

Now, while I was gazing upon all these things, I turned my head to look back, and saw IGNORANCE come up to the river side; but he soon got over, and that without half the difficulty which the other two men met with. For it happened that there was then in that place one VAIN-HOPE, a ferryman, that with his boat helped him over: so he, as the other I saw, did ascend the hill to come up to the gate; only he came alone, neither did any man meet him with the least encouragement. When he was come up to the gate, he looked upon the writing that was above, and then began to knock, supposing that entrance should have been quickly administered to him; but he was asked by the men that looked over the top of the gate, "Whence came you? and what would you have?" He answered, "I have ate and drank in the presence of the King, and he has taught in our streets." Then they asked him for his certificate, that they might go in and show it to the King. So he fumbled in his bosom for one, and found none. Then said they, "Have you none?" But the man answered never a word. So they told the King; but he would not come down to see him, but commanded the two Shining Ones that conducted CHRISTIAN and HOPEFUL to the City, to go out, and take IGNORANCE, and bind him hand and foot, and have him away. Then they took him up, and carried him through the air to the door that I saw in the side of the hill, and put him in there. 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!

