

A DREAMER AND HIS WONDERFUL DREAM

The Story of John Bunyan and The Pilgrim's Progress

by

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Chapter 2

His Imprisonment

Bunyan now began to confess CHRIST as his Saviour before men; and seeing from the Word of GOD that believers were baptized upon their profession of faith in CHRIST, he desired to thus obey the LORD in baptism. He was accordingly immersed in the Name of the Father and of the SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19)

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16)

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Acts 10:47)

"And brought them out, and said, Sirs, What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:30-31)

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:3-11).

In the town of Bedford was a company of Christians who were termed "*nonconformists*" or "*Dissenters*" because they would not conform to the rules and regulations of the State church.

These people believed, and rightly so, that the Word of GOD is the alone rule for faith and practice. With this company Bunyan associated himself and he speaks of the great joy he had as he sat around the LORD's table with the LORD's people remembering the LORD's death until the LORD should come again.

"And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:19-20)

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (I Corinthians 11:23-26).

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

Ponder carefully these Scriptures, and if you are a child of GOD you will be glad to hear the voice of the SHEPHERD: **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"** (John 10:27) and thus obey Him in these two ordinances that He instituted for all who have trusted Him as their Saviour.

The experience through which John Bunyan had passed now stood him in good stead; and he began, as opportunity afforded itself, to speak of the LORD JESUS to both saved and unsaved.

He did not rush ahead of GOD, but gradually blossomed out into a clear rugged preacher of the glorious Gospel of the grace of GOD, until the calls to preach became so many that after prayerful consideration he decided to give up his tinkering and devote his whole time to the ministry of GOD's Word.

Hundreds came to listen to him from all classes and conditions of society.

- The simple folks loved to hear him preach because he used language that they could understand; and his rough eloquence, born of sincere love for their souls, attracted and held their attention.

- The rich and educated, too, used to come and hear "the preaching tinker" as they called him; and they marvelled at the ability of one who had received so little education.

- Many souls professed to be saved under his ministry, and the children of GOD were strengthened in the faith and "Grew in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18).

It so happened, however, that there was a law in England in those days which decreed that none but ordained ministers, or those intending to be, should be allowed to preach.

Bunyan denied the right of the State to say who should, or who should not preach. "His was the mighty ordination of the pierced hands": **"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go**

and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16) and this, to his mind, was all that was necessary.

He had his commission from the Commander-in-Chief Who had said, "**Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,**" (Mark 16:15) and in obedience to his LORD he went everywhere preaching the Gospel.

This brought him to the notice of the authorities and complaint was lodged against him, but due to the brethren rallying to his support, the prosecution was dropped.

Then came the restoration of the Stuarts to the throne of England, and such ministry as Bunyan's was forbidden under severe penalties.

For a time Bunyan used to disguise himself in order to pass unnoticed to the place where he was to preach, but at length he decided to dispense with all disguise and boldly preach the Word, preferring to "**obey God rather than man**" (Acts 5:24).

He was asked to preach in the village of Samsell and accepted the invitation.

He was warned by his friends that the authorities knew of it and would take measures to stop him, but he went boldly on, determined that nothing should make him afraid. He had the promise of the presence of his LORD, so why should he be afraid what man should do unto him?

Accordingly he went to Samsell to conduct the meeting. After he had opened the service with prayer, he read this text, "Dost thou believe on the Son of GOD?" and while he was proceeding to speak from it a policeman walked in, and producing a warrant arrested him on the spot.

He was taken before a Justice of the peace named Wingate who tried to get him to promise to cease preaching, and to find sureties who would pledge themselves to see that he kept his word; but this Bunyan resolutely refused to do. Accordingly Justice Wingate on the 13th of November, 1660, committed him to the Assizes when he would be brought up for trial.

A few weeks later when the Assizes met, Bunyan was brought before the court at which sat the following judges: Keeling, Chester, Blundale, Beecher and Snagg. His indictment was then read: "John Bunyan, of the town of Bedford, laborer, hath devilishly and perniciously abstained from coming to church to hear divine service, and is a common upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventions, to the great disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of the kingdom, contrary to the laws of our sovereign Lord, the King."

Without examination of any witnesses for the defenses he was found guilty, and Judge Keeling savagely and bitterly condemned him as follows:

"Hear your sentence. You must be had back again to prison, and there lie for three months following; and at three month's end, if you do not submit and go to church to hear divine service and leave your preaching, you must be banished from the realm; and if, after such a day as shall be appointed you to be gone, you shall be found in this realm, you must stretch by the neck for it."

Bunyan's reply is worthy of notice. Unafraid and unawed by these judges that had so unjustly condemned him, he replied, "If I were out of prison today, I would preach again tomorrow, so help me GOD!"

We may well thank GOD for such men as John Bunyan.

The horrors of the prison together with the separation from his wife and children did not move his dauntless soul. It is to such men, that we, in later years, are indebted for the religious liberty we now enjoy.

These men valued a good conscience with GOD more than a good reputation amongst their fellows. They valued the liberty of Heaven more than the liberty of earth.

This is the type of Christianity that the world respects.

Alas! There are too many so-called Christians who are carried to and fro by men's opinions and threats, and suit their speaking to the likes and dislikes of their audiences, and who love the praise of men more than the praise of GOD. Verily, such have their reward, but not in Heaven.

It is, under GOD, due to such men as Bunyan that we are thus permitted to preach the Gospel freely, none daring to make us afraid.

Let us ever remember that these privileges we now enjoy have cost the blood and tears of thousands who gladly suffered torture, imprisonment, banishment and death, rather than deny the faith, or besmirch their good conscience before GOD. May it be ours to rightly value and follow their noble example!

The prison where he was confined was as different from modern prisons as night is from day.

It was a dark and damp place situated on the level of the river Ouse, and was often overcrowded, making it one of the most foul and loathsome places of confinement in England.

In this fearful place Bunyan spent twelve long years.

For some reason the sentence of banishment was never put into effect. His case caused quite a little trouble and came into the courts on several occasions; but this did not help him, as the judges seemed afraid to execute their sentence, yet had not the courage to release him, so he was confined in Bedford jail for that lengthy period. Just think of it!

Many of my readers might not yet be twelve years of age, and yet for this period of time Bunyan was "a prisoner of Jesus Christ," all because, like Daniel, he had

"dared to have a purpose firm,
and dared to make it known!"

Someone has well said that "One's Christian experience is worth just what it cost."

- It cost the apostle Paul the loss of all things and ultimately his own life.

- It cost Bunyan twelve years in a foul den.
- What has ours cost us?

What have we suffered for the sake of the Gospel?

"Must we be carried to the skies
on flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
and sailed through bloody seas?"

At any time, had he desired it, Bunyan could have obtained his liberty by promising not to preach any more; but he was made of sterner stuff than this, and counted it an honor to suffer for "CHRIST's sake and the Gospel's"

Let us not forget that he had a wife and children. How were his family to live if the bread winner was in prison? Bunyan was able to earn a very little by tagging shoe laces, but this not sufficient to keep them. How then were they taken care of?

The same GOD Who gives to the birds of the air their nests, and to the flowers of the field their clothing, saw to it that during the whole time of His servant's imprisonment, their needs were all supplied and they wanted for no good thing. Truly, GOD's promises are not mere empty words, but real truths on which His children may implicitly depend.

"My God shall supply all your needs, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). Upon these **"exceeding great and precious promises"** Bunyan rested in simple faith; and proved, as thousands of others, that

"those who trust him wholly,
find Him wholly true."

Whilst his enemies were rejoicing in the fact that they had quieted his dissenting voice by putting him in prison, they little realized they were but fulfilling the purpose of GOD. They were yet to discover that **"God was working all things together for good for them that love Him, to those who are the called according to His purposes"** (Romans 8:28), and that **"God makes the wrath of his enemies to praise him!"**

It is quite true that Bunyan was shut out from man, but it is equally true that he was shut up to GOD Who, in a wonderful way, opened up the Scriptures to him.

As a result of much Bible study, and prayer, the wonderful story of "The Pilgrim's Progress" was written while he was in Bedford jail and thus accomplished, and is still accomplishing, a work for GOD that never could have been done had Bunyan been at liberty.

The prison, as it were, became GOD's university in which John Bunyan was educated in the will of GOD through the Word of GOD, and thus enabled of GOD to pen this masterpiece of English literature, this greatest of allegories, which has been used to the awakening and salvation of many thousands of precious souls. May GOD in His grace be pleased to use it to your salvation if you have not yet become a Christian! cowper was right when

he sang --

"GOD moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform,
He plants His footsteps in the deep,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds you so much dread
Are great with mercies, and shall break
In blessings on your head!"

Through the years that have passed an ever increasing number of Christians have found in its pages comfort in trouble, guidance in difficulty and deliverance from the bondage of legalism. Indeed, the whole Church has been edified, as in this beautiful allegory, the Christian life from start to finish has been so graphically pictured.

"*The Pilgrim's Progress*" was not published until 1678, six years after Bunyan had been set at liberty.

The manner in which he, together with a large number of other Nonconformists, as they were called, obtained his freedom is interesting.

Some time after the return to the throne of Charles II, who, during the Civil war had fled to France, he was waited on by a deputation of Quakers, one of whom was a man named Carver. This man reminded the king that during his flight from England after the battle of Worchester, he had aided him in his escape to France, and had been the one who had carried him ashore from a small boat when a privateer had been on the point of capturing him.

This the king recalled, and the old sailor interceded with him for the Nonconformists in English prisons and said, "I am now come to ask thee to be kind to my brethren in their distress, as I was kind to thee in thine."

The king replied that Carver might renew his request another time and he would consider it.

Without any delay, Carver, joined by other Quakers, appealed for the liberation of all Nonconformists of every name, and the result was that on September 13, 1672, Bunyan, together with many others was set at liberty.

Mr. Gifford having died, he was asked to become the pastor of the little congregation in Bedford. After much prayer he decided to do so and thus resumed his preaching of the glorious Gospel of the blessed GOD, and was again mightily used to the ingathering of many precious souls and the upbuilding of the believers in their most holy faith.

Thus did GOD deliver His servant after all His purposes concerning him had been accomplished.

"*The Pilgrim's Progress*" had been written.

Bunyan had learned the deep things of GOD in the solitude of his prison cell, and he came out of it a better man. He knew GOD better; he knew the LORD JESUS more intimately; he knew the Scriptures more fully, and had learned like Paul, "in whatsoever state he was, to be content."

Truly, "walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage," when those stone walls enclose a child of GOD; and the iron bars one whom the Son of GOD has made free. John Bunyan's spirit was unfettered, his conscience was free, and his tongue the pen of a ready writer. Thus did Bedford jail, dark, dank, and dreary, become the birthplace of the next best book to the Bible.

The first edition of "*The Pilgrim's Progress*" was published in 1678 by Nathaniel Ponder and the title page read as follows:

"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 save arrival at the desired country. By John Bunyan. Licensed and entered according to order. London, printed for Nathaniel Ponder at the Peacock in the Poultry near Cornhill 1678."

Its popularity was immediately assured.

Old and young, educated and uneducated, churchmen and dissenters alike, purchased the book, and within ten years twelve editions had been published. Before Bunyan died, over 100,000 copies had been sold in England alone.

Since then, it has been translated into over one hundred languages and has a sale second only to the Bible.

Monuments have been erected to the memory of Bunyan, but these, like all monuments, will crumble and fall. The greatest monument to his memory is the book he has written, that lives in the hearts and lives of thousands who, through the reading of its pages, have been brought to see their need of the Lord JESUS CHRIST, and led to accept and confess as Saviour and LORD, the One whose precious blood secured their pardon.

Bunyan also wrote many more books, the greatest of them being "The Holy War, a book every Christian should read.

Lord Macauley declared that had "*The Pilgrim's Progress*" not been written, "*The Holy War*" would have been the greatest allegory in existence. Amongst his other books, "*The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*" and "*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*" are best known.

In all, Bunyan wrote and published about sixty volumes.

During the sixteen years between his release and his home call, Bunyan was a busy man.

Crowds flocked to hear him preach. Sometimes he would have 1,200 people by seven o'clock on a winter morning and everywhere he went, the people would crowd to hear him, many being unable to gain admission to the building.

He had only one message. The all sufficiency of the living Word - CHRIST, and the "written Word" - the Scriptures, to meet all the needs of both sinner and saint; and these truths, preached in the power of the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, were blessed to the salvation and edification of thousands of souls.

John Bunyan died in the year 1688.

The cause of his home call was as follows. A young man had run away from his home, thus incurring the displeasure of his parents. The young man desired a reconciliation and asked Mr. Bunyan if he would try to use his influence to bring this about, which he promised to do. Accordingly, Bunyan started out on horseback to see the parents of this boy and secured their promise to receive him back. On the return journey he was overtaken in a severe rainstorm which gave him a severe chill. Due to his enfeebled constitution, the result of his prison experiences, this developed into something more serious, and after a comparatively short illness, the "*Immortal Dreamer*," as he was called, passed into the presence of the LORD he had loved and served so well. As his friends stood weeping at his bedside, watching their beloved friend's life slowly ebbing out, Bunyan rallied himself and exclaimed,

"Weep not for me.
We shall meet ere long to sing the new song
and remain everlastingly happy, world without end!"

The place of his death was Snow Hill and his body was laid in the Bunhill Fields, the nonconformist burial ground.

There it awaits that time when his spirit, which is already with CHRIST, shall at the coming of the Lord JESUS CHRIST, be reunited to a changed and glorified body, according to the power whereby the Son of GOD "**is able to subdue all things unto Himself**" (Philippians 3:21; I Thessalonians 4:13-17).

The plain inscription of the tombstone is

*John Bunyan, Author of 'The Pilgrim's Progress,'
Born 1628
Died 1688*

May the book he wrote, as we study its pages, become to us the blessing it has been to so many before! May his example of Christian fortitude and sincere devotion to the LORD JESUS be to each reader an inspiration and encouragement to not only begin the "journey from this world to that which is to come," but during that journey live for, and glorify the One Whose precious blood makes possible "The Pilgrim's Progress!"

The story itself is told as though it were a dream and is written in allegorical form.

That is, it is similar to a parable or an earthly story with a spiritual meaning.

The Christian life from the beginning to end is described as a journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Each person who appears in the story has a name that exactly describes his character. Thus a person named Mr. Good will be a good man, and a person named Mr. Bad, a bad man, and so on. Carefully remember the names of those who are introduced in this allegory, and it will give you a key that will help to unlock its

treasures, and will explain many things that would otherwise be difficult to understand.

The story is full of Scriptural truth and large portions of GOD's precious Word will be quoted. May the good seed of the holy Scriptures find an abiding place in the heart of the reader; for we are assured from the Bible that those who are children of GOD have become such by being "**born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever**" (I Peter 1:23).

The *Pilgrim's Progress* is a most important book for three reasons.

- First, because it tells us about the most important journey that anyone can go on, namely, a journey from this life to the life to come from time to eternity.
- Second, because it reveals the most important persons that will be met on that journey, and warns or counsels us as to how we should receive or reject their instructions.
- Lastly, this book unfolds the most important subject in this world, namely, salvation from the penalty of sin (which is eternal separation from GOD) through faith in the finished work of the Lord JESUS CHRIST; salvation from the power of sin through the indwelling of the HOLY SPIRIT in the believer; and salvation from the very presence and possibility of sin through being at home with CHRIST at the end of the journey.

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