

A DREAMER AND HIS WONDERFUL DREAM

The Story of John Bunyan and The Pilgrim's Progress

by

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Chapter 3

A MAN NAMED "GRACELESS"

Now let us begin the story itself.

It opens upon a man whose face is turned from his own home. His clothes are all in rags and a fearful burden is upon his back. As he reads from a book he holds in his hands, he cries as though his heart would break, "**What must I do to be saved?**"

Who is this man? Where does he live? Why are his clothes so ragged and filthy? What is that burden he carries on his back? What book is he reading and why does he cry, "**What must I do to be saved?**" All these questions naturally come to our mind; so we will answer them in the order they are asked.

The man's name is Graceless, or one who is without the grace of GOD in his heart.

It is quite true that he is called "Christian" in the "*Pilgrim's Progress*"; but, further on in the story, when this pilgrim reaches a beautiful castle, and is asked what his name is, he replies, "My name is Christian, but it used to be Graceless", we will therefore call him "Graceless," as this name suits him much better in the state in which he is.

Graceless is a picture of everyone by nature.

If, up to this time you have never been born again, then it is your name in the sight of GOD. GOD's Word nowhere suggests that all people are the children of GOD; but on the contrary, it states that all are "**by nature the children of wrath . . . without God, without Christ, without hope . . . without peace, without excuse, and without life**" (Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-13). Only those who are "**the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus**" have any right to pray, "**Our Father which art in Heaven.**"

There are many in these days who imagine they are Christians because they live fairly good lives or have submitted to various religious rites and ceremonies, or joined some religious denomination.

These people have never seen their true condition before GOD, and consequently have never availed themselves

of the great provision He has made for lost and guilty sinners through the salvation secured by His beloved SON at Calvary's Cross.

GOD, Who knows all things, has declared in His Word. **"There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one . . . There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"** (Romans 3:10-12, 23).

Thus the name of each one who is still unsaved is "*Graceless*" or "*Sinner*."

When a person is prepared to own his name as "Sinner," he will discover that the Gospel is indeed good news when it reveals the fact that **"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!"** (I Timothy 1:15).

The town in which he lived was the "City of Destruction." This is a picture of this world which is **"guilty before God"**: **"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God"** (Romans 3:19), and which lies in the arms of the wicked one: **"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness"** (I John 5:19).

This world will one day be visited in judgment by the LORD JESUS, Whom it once despised, rejected, and crucified.

All who reject Him as Saviour will discover in a future day that **"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power"** (II Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Thus, this world, to those who know not GOD and who have not obeyed the Gospel by believing on CHRIST, is a City of Destruction; for the wrath of GOD abides, even now, on all who reject His beloved SON: **"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him"** (John 3:36).

This world system, with all its vanities, pleasures, lusts, treasure, pride, and popularity is governed not by the GOD of Heaven, but by the god of this age, the Devil, who has blinded the minds of them that believe not, **"lest they should believe and the light of the Gospel should shine unto them"** (II Corinthians 4:4). Those who receive GOD's SON to be their Saviour and LORD are said to be **"not of this world,"** although they live in it, and at the coming of the LORD JESUS, they shall be taken out of this scene before the judgment of GOD falls upon it.

The filthy rags with which Graceless is clothed is an illustration of what our own righteousnesses are like in GOD's sight. Doubtless Graceless had thought, as many others, that he was just as good as the next man.

He prided himself on his good works, his good resolutions, his good character, and on his religious observances; but GOD mercifully opened his eyes to see the truth of what His Word declared, namely, that **"We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags"** (Isaiah 64:6).

Notice this carefully. It does not say "All our badness," but "**All our righteousness**, (that is, the good deeds and moral character in which many are trusting for their salvation) **are filthy rags**" in His sight.

GOD is a holy, righteous, and sin-hating Person and only perfection can please Him.

Anything short of perfection is sin, and inasmuch as all the garments of our character are spotted and strained by sin, therefore these garments are in His sight as filthy rags. No person clothed in filthy rags can possibly enter the gates of Heaven, for nothing that defiles can be admitted there. But what we cannot do, GOD has done.

He has provided a spotless robe of perfect righteousness for every unclean sinner who will own his need and received His Son, the LORD JESUS, to be his Saviour. This righteousness, or rightness before GOD was purchased by the precious blood of CHRIST, Who died for sinners and rose again for their justification. GOD offers this robe of righteousness unto all, and puts it upon each person that believes on His Son: "**Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference**" (Romans 3:22). Are you still clad in the filthy rags of your own righteousness or have you been clothed with the righteousness of GOD?

What about his burden?

This is a picture of the burden of sins that GOD sees on each person who is unsaved. GOD's Word describes sin as a burden that weighs down the soul with guilt. In Isaiah 1:4 we read: "**O people laden with iniquity**".

The LORD JESUS, when He came to this earth said, "**Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**"

What is sin? Sin is the transgression of the law, a breaking of GOD's commandments. The holy law declared, "**Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself**" (Luke 10:27).

The failure to obey these commands is sin, and inasmuch as all have failed to keep GOD's holy and righteous law, therefore "**all have sinned and come short of the glory of God**" [His perfect standard] (Romans 3:23).

These sins, mounting up, become like a great burden of guilt on those who are honest with GOD and themselves. Perhaps some will say, "I do not feel the burden of sin, and therefore am not the lost and guilty sinner that Graceless was." Suppose that a heavy load and guilty sinner that Graceless was."

Suppose that a heavy load were placed on a dead person; would he feel it? "No," you reply, "for he is dead." Suppose, a heavy load were placed on a living person; would he feel it? "Yes," you reply, "for he is alive." So it is with many today. GOD tells us that all by nature are dead in their trespasses and sins; consequently they do not feel their burden of sin and guilt.

When the Spirit of GOD commences to arouse a person from that condition, the burden of sin is realized.

Think of all the bad thoughts you have entertained in your mind; of all the bad words that have escaped your lips; of the bad deeds you have committed during your lifetime. Remember that all these are sins, and are your own sins. GOD knows them all and hates every one of them, though He loves the sinner.

The greatest sin possible to man is that of unbelief, or the rejection of GOD's dear SON as Saviour. It is the despising of the One Who bore our sins in His Own body on the tree and died that GOD's righteous claims might be met, and salvation full, free and eternal made possible for the vilest sinner who will believe. Is the reader guilty of this terrible sin of unbelief?

It is this sin that the Spirit of GOD convicts men of. The Saviour said of His work, "**When he [the Spirit of GOD] is come, he shall convince the world of sin . . . because they believe not in me.**"

Poor Graceless' burden was so strongly fastened to him that all his attempts to remove it were alike unavailing.

Neither his good works, his tears, his prayers, his friends, nor even his pastor could remove it. Perhaps the reader, even now, is seeking to lighten the burden of his guilt by his own efforts. All such attempts are doomed to failure, for only GOD can remove the load of sins and give the guilty conscience peace.

Have you realized your true condition yet, and owned yourself to be what GOD says you are - a lost, guilty, helpless, and burdened sinner?

The book Graceless held in his hands was the Bible - GOD's Word. It was the reading of this book that had opened his eyes to see himself as he really was.

- The Bible is a light that reveals our sins;
- a mirror that reflects our thoughts;
- a sword that cuts right to the heart.

It shows us that the Scripture is true when it says, "**The heart is deceitful above all things and is desperately wicked; who can know it?**" (Jeremiah. 17:9) GOD's Word is like a camera, or better still, like an X-ray machine, that brings to light the hidden things of darkness.

If we would see ourselves as we really are, we must read the Word of GOD.

- It will tell us the truth about ourselves.
- It will reveal our sinfulness, rebellion, pride, and desperate need of salvation.
- It will also show us the wonderful provision that GOD has made for that need in the gift of His Son, "**Who was made sin for us, He Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of GOD in Him!**" (II Corinthians 5:21).

Is it any wonder then, that this man, realizing his fearful plight and his utter inability to deliver himself, cried from his heart, "**What must I do to be saved?**"

Would that every reader, awakened in the mercy of GOD to see his need, would re-echo his cry, and seek earnestly and sincerely to be saved from the consequences of his sins. Thus has John Bunyan graphically described the lost and ruined state of all by nature. Happy is that person who sees in Graceless a picture of himself; for the next best thing to knowing oneself to be saved, is to know oneself to be lost!

In this plight, poor Graceless went home to his wife and children, and tried hard to keep them from seeing his

distress of soul; but he could not keep silent long, and at length began to unburden the thoughts of his heart to them.

"O, my dear wife," he exclaimed, "and you, my dear children, I am undone by reason of a burden that lies hard on me. Moreover, I am certainly informed that this city will be burned with fire from Heaven, and both myself and you shall miserably come to ruin, unless some way of escape can be found whereby we may be delivered."

When he had said this, his wife and children were amazed, and thought that he had become demented and lost his reason by thinking too much on eternal things; so they got him to bed as soon as possible, thinking that the night's rest would clear these notions from his mind. But alas! instead of sleeping, poor Graceless could only spend the night in groans and tears.

Like David, he had to say: "**Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer**" (Psalm 32:4).

The more he contemplated the holiness of GOD he had so grievously sinned against, the greater he perceived his guilt and sin to be; and as he thought of the wages of sin, which is eternal death, he groaned aloud.

In the morning they asked him how he did, but all he could reply was "Worse and worse."

He sought once more to point out to them from the Bible their sin and consequent danger, but they began to be hardened and to deride him for his folly.

They often would neglect him entirely, so that he began to retire privately to his room. oftentimes he wandered in the fields alone, sometimes reading and sometimes praying and crying out in his misery. Graceless learned that little sympathy could be expected even from those near and dear by the ties of nature, in his deep soul distress.

He was brought to realize that "**the heart knoweth his own bitterness**" (Proverbs 14:10) and that conviction of sin is a matter between the individual soul and the GOD against Whom he had sinned.

Truly there is no trouble like soul trouble. If any who read this are passing through a similar experience, remember that "**they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick,**" and that JESUS said, "**I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance**" (Matthew 9:12-13).

One day as he thus wandered in the fields, he opened his Bible and read these words, "**It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment**" (Hebrews 9:27).

At this he cried aloud the same pitiful cry, "**What must I do to be saved?**"

In response to this plea, a man named Evangelist came to him who asked him what he wanted and why he cried thus, to which Graceless answered, "Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment, and I find I am not willing to do the first nor able to do the second."

"But why not," inquired Evangelist, "seeing this life is attended with so many evils?"

Graceless replied, "Because I fear this burden upon my back will sink me into hell."

At this, Evangelist asked, "They why do you stand still?"

Graceless answered, "Because I know not whither to go."

Then Evangelist give him a roll of parchment on which was written these words, "**Flee from the wrath to come!**" (Matthew 3:7); Graceless, next inquired, "Whither must I fly?" and Evangelist pointing with his finger said, "Can you see yonder Wicket Gate?"; Graceless replied, "No!" "Then do you see yonder shining light?" next asked Evangelist. Graceless replied, "I think I do." Then Evangelist said, "Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou must do."

The meaning of this is perfectly simple.

Evangelist is a picture of a true child of GOD, who, having been delivered from the burden of sins himself, is in the position to tell others the way of salvation.

The Lord JESUS commands all who know and love and trust Him to "**Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature**" (Mark 16:15).

What a privilege and honor it is to point a poor, sin-burdened soul to the Lamb of GOD "**that taketh away the sin of the world!**"

You will notice that Evangelist did not attempt to take off Graceless' burden - only GOD can do this, when CHRIST is received into the heart by faith.

- The Wicket Gate is a picture of the willingness of CHRIST to receive sinners. He said, "**I am the Door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.**"

- The shining light is an illustration of the word of GOD which is described as "**A lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path**" (Psalm 119:105).

As the sinner follows the light of the Scriptures, it will bring Him to the One of Whom the Bible speaks - the Lord JESUS CHRIST, the Saviour of sinners - Who loves us and gave Himself a ransom for all (I Timothy 2:5-6).

Graceless then did what every sin-burdened soul should do.

He began to run in the direction of the light that Evangelist had pointed out. No sooner, however, had he started to run than his wife and children, perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but Graceless, remembering his need, placed his fingers in his ears to shut out their entreaties, and as he ran he cried, "Life! Life! Eternal Life!" Others of his neighbors did their best to prevent him from leaving the City of Destruction. They used ridicule and laughed at him for being such a fool. Others threatened him with violence if he did not give up the idea; but Graceless had wisely stopped his ears to shut out the pleas of his family, and the jeers and threats of his one time friends.

What a true picture this is of the difficulties of starting out on this greatest and most important of all journeys!

The Devil will see to it that all his opposition will be exerted against the poor sinner who seeks to escape from his clutches. He will seek by all the means in his power to prevent the soul from being saved, for he realizes that once a person trusts CHRIST as his Saviour he has lost him forever. He will use friends and enemies alike to keep the sinner from turning from his evil ways. All sorts of obstacles will be forthcoming. There will be ridicule, scorn, reasoning, and active opposition, even from one's own family.

The truly anxious soul, however, will be undeterred by these things, and like Graceless, will pay no heed to anyone or anything that would prevent him from fleeing from the wrath to come. It is well worth noting that Graceless did not try to make himself any better before he started out. He did not try to mend his rags or cleanse himself from his filthiness; but just as he was, in all his sin and need, he fled for refuge to the hope laid before him.

~ end of chapter 3 ~