

 New Creation Teaching Ministry

JOHN BUNYAN

A BIOGRAPHY

by

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Historical Background to the Puritans

England in the mid-seventeenth century was not a particularly safe place for the conscientious Christian. This was especially true of the Dissenting or Nonconformist ministers—those men who preached without having been ordained by a bishop in the Established Church—the Church of England—and who refused to subscribe unreservedly to the Book of Common Prayer.

As far back as the mid-sixteenth century there were many godly men and women— ‘Puritans’¹ as they were nick-named—who believed that the national Church had retained too much pre-Reformation Catholicism in its structure, liturgy and ministry, and they could not, with a clear conscience, subscribe to its ordinances. They believed the Church needed further purifying. They ‘attacked allegedly superstitious ceremonies and diocesan organisation, and campaigned for parity of ministers, parochial discipline, better preaching and more energetic recruitment for the ministry.’² They were especially concerned to see *godly* ministers preaching the vital truths of the Word of God.

In 1572 the Puritans had drawn up the ‘Admonition’—a vigorous statement of their position within the Church of England. ‘They protested that many ministers had no true call from God and were ignorant and inefficient, and that they administered the sacraments laxly. True Reformation, they urged, consisted in ‘abandoning all popish remnants both in ceremonies and regiment,’ and ‘in bringing in and placing in God’s Church those things only which the Lord Himself in His Word commandeth.’³ They also objected to the use of the surplice; the custom of signing with the cross at baptism; kneeling at the Lord’s Supper (implying adoration of the bread and wine); and they protested against certain church festivals—claiming they had a pagan or Romish origin. The principles of the ‘Admonition’ were narrowly defeated by a vote of the clergy gathered at Lambeth Palace in 1566 and many of the Puritans then began leaving the church. These were the cream of the English ministers of that time.

Queen Elizabeth viewed the Puritans with deep suspicion, and considered they were a direct threat to her supremacy—that is, as Supreme Governor in all spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs within the realm. Her harsh laws made life intolerable for those who would not conform, and more and more were forced to leave for the sake of their conscience. Her successor, James the First, threatened: ‘I will make them conform or harry them out of the land.’⁴ Over a period of time, these separating ‘nonconformists’ formed the English Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist and Quaker denominations. But a significant number still remained loyal to the State Church hoping to ‘reform’ it from within.

The Puritans—those inside and outside the Church—were unanimous in their conviction that the Church of England urgently needed further purifying. They were especially anxious to be true to the Scriptures in doctrine and worship and believed that God would not pour out His blessing on their nation so long as the Established Church remained contaminated with error and un-Biblical ways. They were deeply concerned, not just about forms and ceremonies, but about the true nature of Christianity.⁵

What does it mean to be a Christian? In what does the Christian life consist? What should Christian pastors believe? What should they teach? How should they live? What is the true nature of ministry? How should a Christian understand God’s acts in history? What is the Christian’s role in this world? What do the Scriptures teach about all these matters? Is not Scriptural purity in one’s belief and conduct of vital importance for every believer? Surely such integrity amongst God’s people is essential to enable His truth to spread throughout the realm?

These were some of the weighty matters which exercised these thinking men—these ‘Puritans’—both those inside as well as those outside the national church.

¹ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 21 ‘The word “Puritan” was apt to be used very vaguely and was found to be a useful term of abuse by those who disliked any stress on a moral life.’

² J.I. Packer. Article on *Puritan, Puritanism* Baker’s Dictionary of Theology. Baker. 1969. p 431

³ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 23

⁴ *Ibid.* p 22

⁵ *Sermons of the Great Ejection Banner of Truth.* 1962. p 8

‘The Puritans have been, and still are in some quarters, the most maligned and misrepresented of men. The very word “Puritan” has become a term of scorn, implying a gloomy fanaticism, a narrow-minded bigotry, a blight on all that is free and joyous. Nothing is farther from the actual truth. In fact, the Puritans were a body of men of God who brought a spiritual light to England, drew the nation back to moral values, and stamped a moral greatness upon her that no other group, religious or secular, has ever done. The hatred of the Puritans was deliberately fostered by their political and ecclesiastical enemies in the reign of Charles II, many of whom were avowed enemies of truth and godliness, or, like Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, singularly blind to their real aims and principles, and wilfully opposed to anything they stood for be it good or bad.’⁶

Puritans in Church of England pulpits

As far back as 1586 a survey found that, of the 10,000 churches in England, only 2000 had regular preachers.⁷ Most had no adequate pastoral care. It is not surprising, therefore, that by the mid-seventeenth century a large percentage of the rectories and pulpits of the national Church were occupied by Puritans. Many of them, though godly in belief and conduct, had never been ordained by a bishop. They were there because they loved the Word of God and knew they had a calling to preach and teach. They loved their people and their nation. They longed to see God’s truth prevail in every strata of their society.

Almost without exception they were men of passion and great zeal. Many were men of significant learning. Not only did they preach, but they also wrote, and this particular era of church history produced a treasure of evangelical literature such as has never been surpassed—both in its quantity as well as in its quality of depth and insight into the truths of Scripture. This vast legacy of Puritan theology has since permeated every level of Christian society and has shaped the course of subsequent church history in a manner probably second only to the impact of the Reformation itself.⁸

Never has the English Church lived under the ministry of such consistently powerful teaching and preaching from the Scriptures as during this Puritan era. The sound doctrine of the Puritans (both inside and outside the Established Church) laid a foundation which produced congregations of extraordinary maturity and godliness. One historian says: ‘Whatever we may think were the weaknesses of the Puritans there can be no denying that it was their activity which had led to a period in which theology was valued, when sound doctrine and fervent Gospel preaching were esteemed, and when Bible reading and spiritual hunger were characteristic of large proportions of the common people.’⁹

But a colossal storm was brewing. The Puritans, by their actions and teaching, had created bitter enemies in the Monarchy, Parliament and the Established Church. The political authorities, fanned by the Church hierarchy, were conspiring to silence the Nonconformists.

The Act of Uniformity and the Great Ejection of 1662

By mid-1662 the storm broke. A Parliamentary Act, first passed back in 1549, was resurrected and reconstituted. This was the infamous *Act of Uniformity*. The Act required that all ministers in the Church of England give ‘unfeigned assent and consent to everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer, [and] re-ordination for those not episcopally ordained.’ It also demanded ‘a renunciation of the Solemn League and Covenant.’¹⁰ Knowing that the Puritans would not submit to such terms, the Authorities framed the Act to secure their expulsion.¹¹

The Act of Uniformity was ratified by Charles II and every pastor was given an ultimatum requiring him to conform or else be expelled from his church. The deadline was the 24th of August 1662. Thus on that fateful day—‘Black Bartholomew’s Day’—more than 2000 British ministers were ejected from their churches for refusing to comply. By this one decree, the vast majority of England’s evangelical

⁶ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 20

⁷ *Ibid.* p 24

⁸ In 1646 the Westminster Assembly produced the Westminster Confession of Faith together with the Longer and Shorter Catechisms. These doctrinal statements of the Christian faith have never been surpassed and were adopted by the Scottish and English Presbyterians and, with some modification, by the Baptists and Congregationalists.

⁹ *Sermons of the Great Ejection* Banner of Truth. 1962. p 8

¹⁰ This referred to a 1643 religious alliance between England and Scotland—accepted by the English Parliament—which guaranteed the maintenance of the reformed Church of Scotland—the Presbyterians—and promised to reform the churches of England and Ireland according to the Scriptures.

¹¹ *Sermons of the Great Ejection* Banner of Truth. 1962. p 7

preachers were immediately silenced. The action was no sudden whim on the part of the King but a deliberately and carefully contrived plot by the Establishment to rid the land once and for all of the greatest preachers the nation had ever known.

Most of those who refused to comply preached their ‘farewell’ sermon to their congregation on the Sunday before the ‘Great Ejection.’ ‘No Sunday in England ever resembled exactly that which fell on the 17th of August, 1662. In after years, Puritan fathers and mothers related to their children the story of assembled crowds, of aisles, standing-places and stairs, filled to suffocation, of people clinging to open windows like swarms of bees, of overflowing throngs in churchyards and streets, of deep silence or stifled sobs, as the flock gazed on the shepherd—“sorrowing most of all that they should see his face no more.”¹² The effect was devastating. It was said that—as a result of the enforcement of the Act—‘religion in the Church of England was almost extinguished and in many of her parishes the lamp of God went out.’¹³ One historian said: ‘After we had cast out so much faith, and zeal, and holiness, after we had in this manner almost cast out the doctrine of Christ crucified from the pale of our church; we had to travel through a century of coldness and dreariness, and barrenness, of Arminianism and Pelagianism, of Arianism and latent Socinianism, all which were found compatible with outward conformity.’¹⁴ Last century Bishop J. C. Ryle wrote that the Great Ejection of 1662 brought an ‘injury to the cause of true religion in England which will probably never be repaired...a more impolitic deed never disfigured the annals of a Protestant Church.’¹⁵

However, the Act of Uniformity did not stop the ejected men from continuing to preach and teach. They began meeting with their congregations in homes and barns or wherever worship could be conducted and the Word of God expounded. This gave rise to the passing by Parliament in 1664 of *the Conventicle Act*.¹⁶ The Act forbade and made illegal the gathering in a house, for worship, of more than five people additional to the family. Thus the Conventicle Act forced the congregations into the countryside. They met deep in the woods and began gathering during the night to worship and hear the Scriptures expounded. The Authorities were infuriated, and so, in 1665 the Parliament passed, and the King ratified, *the Five Mile Act*. This Act forbade and made illegal any religious meetings held by Nonconformist ministers within five miles of any town or village. (This effectively prevented most poor village people—who had no means of transport—from attending any form of worship other than in their local Church of England). Moreover, the Act stated that no Nonconformist preacher or teacher could *live* within five miles of a town or village and, further, he was debarred from teaching in any school—virtually the only occupation open to a deprived minister in those days. Breach of these Acts could be punishable by a fine, by imprisonment, deportation or even death. It was also possible that all one’s belongings could be confiscated. Although these laws could not be strictly enforced, they nevertheless led to appalling persecution and suffering among the Dissenters.

Iain Murray writes, ‘By almost every method which men knew, an attempt was thus made to shut the mouth of Nonconformists, and for continuing to claim the liberty to speak not a few of the Nonconformists lost their lives.’¹⁷ He goes on: ‘There could be few more scathing reproofs for modern English Christianity than for us really to attend to the words of these men who gave up livings, homes, liberties, goods and sometimes lives rather than surrender any part of the teaching of the Word of God. Their highest ambition was to be able to say with William Tyndale, “I call God to record against the day we shall appear before our Lord Jesus, to give a reckoning of our doings, that I never altered one syllable of God’s Word against my conscience, nor would this day, if all that is in the earth, whether it be pleasure, honour, or riches, might be given me.”’¹⁸

The Puritan Conscience.

It is impossible to understand these events unless it is recognised that, to the Puritans, a clear conscience was at the heart of true Christianity. ‘To them, there could be no real spiritual understanding, nor any genuine godliness, except as men exposed and enslaved their consciences to

¹² Ibid. p 13

¹³ Ibid. p 8

¹⁴ Ibid. p 9

¹⁵ Ibid. p 9

¹⁶ Dating back to 1593

¹⁷ *Sermons of the Great Ejection* Banner of Truth. 1962. p 10

¹⁸ Ibid. p 11

God's Word.'¹⁹ 'The conscience must be ruled by him [God]. This must be subjected to him, and to him alone; for he alone is the Lord of the conscience.'²⁰

The Puritans sought to harness their consciences to the Holy Scriptures, for they maintained that only in the Word of God has the mind of God for us been fully revealed. 'What they wanted was to grasp God's truth with the same preciseness of application with which they held that He had revealed it.'²¹ No wonder the Puritans were therefore dubbed 'precisians.' When once asked why he was so precise in his views, Puritan pastor Richard Rogers replied: 'I serve a precise God.' Dr. Packer comments: 'A precise God—a God, that is, who has made a precise disclosure of his mind and will in the Scriptures, and who expects from his servants a corresponding preciseness of belief and behaviour.'²²

The Puritans maintained that a good conscience was God's gift to those who—like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim*—are enabled to look with understanding and faith at the Cross. It is maintained through life by seeking to do God's will in all things, and by constantly keeping the Cross in view.²³ 'The degree of sharp-sightedness which our consciences show in detecting our own real sins (as distinct from the imaginary ones on which Satan encourages us to concentrate) is an index of how well we really know God and how close to Him we really walk—an index, in other words, of the real quality of our spiritual life. The sluggish conscience of a "sleepy," "drowsy" saint is a sign of spiritual malaise. The healthy Christian is not necessarily the extrovert, ebullient Christian, but the Christian who has a sense of God's presence stamped deep on his soul, who trembles at God's Word, who lets it dwell in him richly by constant meditation upon it, and who tests and reforms his life daily in response to it. We can begin to assess our real state in God's sight by asking ourselves how much exercise of conscience along these lines goes into our own daily living.'²⁴

It was this clarity and purity of conscience that was the means by which the Puritans understood a preacher to have power in their ministry to others. It comes—they said—from 'the experience of having God apply His truth powerfully to oneself...[and so] it is those whose own consciences are most deeply exercised by God's truth who have most power to awaken the consciences of others by prudent and piercing applications.'²⁵ It is in this context that Puritan Dr John Owen said: 'If the word do not dwell with power *in* us, it will not pass with power *from* us.'²⁶ Is it any wonder that the vast majority of the Puritans were ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of maintaining their conscience clear before God and man? Is it any wonder that on August 24th 1662, they knew they had no other ethical or moral choice but to submit to the Word of God and to act accordingly?

John Bunyan

One of those caught up in these terrible events of the mid-sixteen hundreds, and who refused to compromise his conscience in the light of Scripture, was a tinker-preacher named John Bunyan.

John Bunyan was born in the lace-making town of Elstow in late 1628²⁷ just at the beginning of the reign of Charles the First. He came from a relatively poor family even though their ancestry could be traced back for many generations in the local records of Bedfordshire residents. His forebears had once been wealthy landowners who most likely came from Normandy soon after the Conquest. But by Bunyan's time the family fortunes had declined considerably.²⁸

Elstow itself was known for its May and November fairs held on the village green. 'These provided an opportunity for cheap-jacks to sell their wares, but also for a variety of entertainers to perform, such as

¹⁹ J.I. Packer. *A Quest for Godliness* Crossway Books. 1990. p 107.

²⁰ D. Clarkson. *Works James Nichol 1865. Vol II* p 475.

²¹ J.I. Packer. *A Quest for Godliness* Crossway Books. 1990. p 114.

²² *Ibid.* p 114.

²³ *Ibid.* p 114.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p 116

²⁵ *Ibid.* p 117

²⁶ John Owen. *Works. Vol XVI.* p 76

²⁷ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth.* 1964. p 5

²⁸ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 10

jugglers, morris-dancers, clowns, acrobats and strolling players. When Bunyan came to describe ‘Vanity Fair’ in *Pilgrim’s Progress* he undoubtedly recalled the days of his youth at Elstow fairs.’²⁹

Bunyan had a meagre schooling and by the time he was nine or ten was living a profligate life. He later wrote: ‘I had but few equals for cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy name of God...I became so settled and rooted in these things that they became a sort of second nature to me.’³⁰ However, he had heard many a Puritan preach from the Scriptures and so his conscience gave him no rest. He was greatly troubled by thoughts of God’s judgment and of his danger of ending up in hell. He began having terrible dreams. ‘These things so distressed my soul that, even in the midst of my many sports and other childish activities and among my thoughtless play fellows, I was often very much depressed and afflicted in my mind with these thoughts; yet I could not let go of my sins.’³¹ Gradually the dreams passed and he soon forgot all thoughts of God and of hell and of judgment. Instead he plunged more and more into a life of ungodliness. ‘He was set to work early at his father’s smithy, apprenticed to his father’s craft of brazier, learning how to use the forge, and to handle the anvil and the other tools of the trade.’³²

Bunyan was deeply distressed by the death of his mother and sister in the flu epidemic of 1644 when he was sixteen. His sorrow turned to anger and bitterness when his father hastily remarried. He became wild and wilful in the extreme. I ‘let loose the reins to my lusts, and delighted in all transgressions against the law of God: so that ... I was the very ringleader of all the youth that kept me company, into all manner of vice and ungodliness.’³³ Bunyan came to loathe any thoughts of God and was intolerant of anyone else who happened to entertain such interests. He came to believe he was free from anything good. Heaven and Hell were both out of sight and out of mind; and as for being saved or being damned, he cared not in the least.³⁴

Near Death Experiences

It was about this time that he experienced a number of sobering incidents. Once he fell into a creek and almost drowned. Another time he fell out of a boat into the Bedford River—he probably couldn’t swim. On yet another occasion he encountered an adder on the road, and after hitting it with a stick proceeded to withdraw its deadly fangs with his bare hands. As he later realised, such folly could easily have cost him his life.

In 1644—when he was 16 years old—Bunyan signed up as a soldier in the Parliamentary army to fight in the great Civil War against the Royalists.³⁵ During his time of service he had a notable experience which left a deep impression upon him. He was assigned to sentry duty during a siege. At the last minute a fellow soldier asked to go in his place. Bunyan agreed, but the man was hit in the head with a musket shot that night while at his post and died.³⁶

Bunyan’s time in the army would have done him no harm as all the regiments were supplied with Puritan chaplains to care for the spiritual welfare of the troops. Not only were all the soldiers issued with a pocket Bible and a Catechism, but they were also expected to read them! ‘Two sermons were preached to the troops every Sabbath and one every Thursday, while prayers, with the reading of a chapter from the Bible, were held every morning before the placing of the guards...A strongly religious atmosphere permeated the Parliamentary ranks...[and] whenever possible battles were preceded by some form of religious services.’³⁷ Although Bunyan later recognised all these events as God’s judgments and mercies, he was nevertheless not lastingly moved by any of them. As he said: ‘None of these things awakened my soul to righteousness.’ So he kept on in his sinful ways and grew more and more rebellious against God and increasingly careless of his own salvation.³⁸

²⁹ Ibid. p 13

³⁰ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 8

³¹ Ibid. p 8

³² Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 16

³³ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 20

³⁴ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 9

³⁵ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 8

³⁶ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 10

³⁷ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 46

³⁸ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 10

Marriage to Mary

After serving three years in the army Bunyan was discharged. Having left home a boy, he returned to Elstow a man. He now set about finding himself a wife. Marriage in 1649 (when he was 21) brought him a new perspective on life, though not without new tensions. They rented a small cottage in the main street of Elstow with a small lean-to at the side to serve as his workshop.³⁹ He and his wife Mary [we think this was her name] lived in extreme poverty, not having even as much as a dish or a spoon or any other household item between the two of them.⁴⁰ Nevertheless Bunyan could later say: ‘My mercy was to light upon a wife whose father was counted godly.’⁴¹ Mary’s father—an Anglican Puritan—had given her two books prior to his death, *The Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven*, and *The Practice of Piety*.⁴² It was as a result of the occasional reading of these two volumes that Bunyan began to think more on the things of God and was stirred to reform his otherwise irreligious life. He later acknowledged that these books did ‘beget within me some desire after religion.’⁴³

Gradually he began to give an outward show of complying with the religion of his times. He started going to church on Sundays—morning *and* evening. He made every effort to show that he was a devout man, and joined heartily in the worship, the prayers and the singing. But secretly he clung to his ungodly ways during the rest of the week.⁴⁴

Bunyan’s religion was filled with superstition. He began to worship anything and everything that belonged to the church. He worshipped the priest, the clerk, the vestments, the service—everything.⁴⁵ All this was happening without him having the slightest twinge of conscience about sin. He never considered that sin would damn him in the end, no matter how much religion he might follow. Nor did he have any comprehension of his need to know Christ as Redeemer and Lord. In fact, he hardly knew if there ever was such a person as Jesus Christ.

One of Bunyan’s great delights was ringing the bells of Elstow’s church. But, over time, he became so afraid of God’s judgement coming upon him that he suddenly quit ‘ringing’ when the thought came to him that one of the bells might fall on him!⁴⁶

The Sermon about ‘The Sabbath’

One Sunday Bunyan heard his vicar—Christopher Hall—preach a sermon about the Sabbath. Suddenly he was conscience-stricken and, for the first time since he was nine or ten, experienced a deep sense of guilt.⁴⁷ He was convinced the parson had purposely preached on the subject just to show him up! ‘I went home when the sermon was ended, with a great burden on my spirit.’⁴⁸

But, by the time lunch was over, all was forgotten and he was back into his usual Sunday afternoon sport. Then, in the middle of the game, he suddenly heard a voice—as if from heaven itself—‘Will you leave your sins and go to Heaven, or keep your sins and go to Hell?’⁴⁹ He was riveted to the spot. What could he say? How could he answer? Surely God was threatening him with some terrible punishment for his ungodly life. Curiously, he decided there and then that it was probably too late for him to think about Heaven.⁵⁰ Fearing that God would not forgive him, he decided he may as well go on in sin. ‘My state is surely miserable; miserable if I leave my sins, and but miserable if I follow them; I can but be damned, and if I must be so, I had as good be damned for many sins, as to be damned for few.’⁵¹

³⁹ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983 p 55

⁴⁰ Ibid. p175

⁴¹ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 13

⁴² Ibid. p 14

⁴³ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 56

⁴⁴ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 11

⁴⁵ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 57

⁴⁶ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 21

⁴⁷ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 12

⁴⁸ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 16

⁴⁹ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 13

⁵⁰ Ibid. p 13

⁵¹ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 24

So there Bunyan stood, in the middle of the field, in front of all his pagan friends, debating with himself about life and death, heaven and hell! Having decided that Heaven was gone, he went back to his game and soon after began to plunge into every form of sin his heart desired. 'I made as much haste as I could to fill my belly with its delicacies, lest I should die before I had my desires, for that was the thing that I most greatly feared...I wanted them with all my heart.'⁵² But Bunyan soon found that sin never seemed to satisfy him. The more he indulged, the more he wanted. It always left him empty inside.

One day he was standing at a neighbour's shop window, swearing and cursing in his usual way, when the neighbour's wife suddenly rebuked him, declaring that he was the ungodliest fellow for swearing she had ever heard.⁵³ She declared that he ought to be ashamed of himself and that he'd be the ruin of all the young people in the village if ever they get into *his* company. Bunyan was silenced by this sudden and unexpected rebuke. He felt ashamed and from that moment stopped swearing. Of course everyone who knew him noticed the change, but no one was more surprised at this turn of events than Bunyan himself. He discovered that he could actually speak better and more pleasantly *without* swearing! Bunyan dusted down his Bible and began reading it once more. He relished the historical parts but could not make head nor tail of the Epistles—especially those written by Paul!

For more than a year Bunyan persisted with a rigorous outward reformation in both speech and conduct. He was determined to keep the Ten Commandments as the way of getting to heaven, and, for most of the time believed that he was managing reasonable well! He began to feel quite proud of his spiritual progress and was convinced that he 'pleased God as well as any man in England.'⁵⁴ His neighbours were amazed at his transformation from rebel profanity to something like a moral and sober life. They praised him and spoke well of him—a fact which gratified Bunyan no end. He later wrote: 'How pleased I was when I heard them say these things about me for, although I was still nothing but a poor painted hypocrite, I loved to be talked about as one who was truly godly. I was proud of my godliness and indeed I did everything I could to be well-spoken of.'⁵⁵ Yet in all this he did not know Christ, or grace or faith, nor did he have any hope of personal salvation.

No doubt Bunyan recalled this period of his life when he was writing *Pilgrim's Progress* and—drawn from his own experience—created the character Mr Legality and the corresponding Town of Morality

The Christian Ladies In Bedford

In the course of his work as a tinker Bunyan had to make a trip one day to the nearby town of Bedford. While there, he came upon three or four poor women sitting in a doorway talking about the things of God. Since he now considered himself as Mr Talkative—that is, 'a brisk talker in [in matters of] religion'⁵⁶—he moved a little closer in order to hear their conversation more clearly. Perhaps he could enlighten them out of his own knowledge and from his recent experiences! To his amazement he discovered that their discussion was way over his head. They were talking about how they were sure they had been born as helpless sinners: of how God had done a work of grace in their hearts; of how they had been born again. They spoke of God having visited them with His love in the Lord Jesus, and then of the great promises He had given them to comfort and help them—especially against the temptations of the Devil.⁵⁷

Their conversation left Bunyan speechless. He'd never heard anything like it before. He began to tremble at the realisation of the insignificance of his own religious life. He suddenly saw that in all his thoughts about religion and salvation he had never once considered his need of this 'new birth.' Nor had he ever considered the treachery and deceitfulness of his own heart in the way these poor women had been talking about theirs. Nor had he taken any notice of his secret, evil thoughts; of his ungodly inner motives; or of his unworthy desires and habits. He now saw himself as nothing less than a Mr Formalist or a Mr Hypocrisy. While returning home, Bunyan pondered deeply what he'd heard. 'I was greatly affected with their words, both because by them I was convinced that I wanted the true tokens

⁵²John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 14

⁵³Ibid. p 15

⁵⁴Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 20

⁵⁵John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 16

⁵⁶ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 64

⁵⁷ Ibid. p 65

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.’⁵⁸

Bunyan couldn’t stay away from these Christian ladies of Bedford and returned often to sit and listen to their conversations about the things of God. The more he listened, the more he realised the seriousness of his situation. He came into a deep conviction that all that they were saying about the teaching of the Bible was indeed true. The Scriptures now became very precious to him, and he began to read with a new desire and with new eyes. But by comparison with the Biblical understanding which these ladies in Bedford had, he very soon came to the conclusion that he was nothing but ‘an ignorant sot’.⁵⁹

Bunyan’s Search For Faith

It was not long before Bunyan could see that those who have no faith have no hope. Without faith he too would perish. But did he have faith? How could he tell whether he had faith or not? What could he do to test whether or not he was a man of faith? Since Bunyan had not spoken to anyone about his inner anguish and longing, it is not surprising that the Devil very soon supplied some answers of his own. He managed to convince Bunyan that if he had faith then he should be able to do a miracle here and there—that would soon prove the point. Thus, on one of his treks between Elstow and Bedford, the idea came into his mind that he should try commanding the puddles on the road to dry up and the dry spots to become puddles! He was about to make his test when it occurred to him that it would be a good idea to pray first. Then the thought came: ‘What if I prayed and then tried and nothing happened? It would be very clear that I had no faith and would be forever lost.’⁶⁰ He decided not to force the issue and so deferred the test for a later date! But the Devil did not give up that easily and would whisper in Bunyan’s ear: ‘It is ordinary for those that have professed themselves His servants, after a while to give Him the slip and return to me: do thou so too, and all shall be well.’⁶¹[These very words were later woven into Bunyan’s text when he described the fierce interchange between Christian and Apollyon in *Pilgrim’s Progress*.]

Bunyan’s Vision

It was about this time that Bunyan had a curious vision. He saw a mountain, one side of which was warm with sunshine and light, the other cold and damp and in the shadows. He saw the simple poor ladies of Bedford basking in the refreshment and warmth of the sunny side of the mountain. At the same time he was shivering with the cold in the snow and dark clouds on the opposite side of the mountain. Between the two of them was a high, impassable wall. No matter how he tried he could not find a way around or over this wall. Then he came to a tiny doorway. It was so small that he could barely get his head and shoulders through, but by a great effort managed at last to squeeze his whole body through the opening. At last he was able to sit with his friends in the warmth and enjoy to the full the sunshine on the other side of the mountain.

Bunyan very soon realised the meaning of his vision. The delectable mountain was the Church of the Living God. The sun which beamed down was the light of God’s very own grace and mercy to His people. The wall that separated His people from the world was none other than the Scriptures—God’s unchanging Word. The door was Jesus Christ, who alone is the way to the Father. Bunyan wrote: ‘The fact that this door was so narrow that I could hardly get in showed me that no one could enter into this life but those who were in real earnest and left the wicked world behind them. For there is room here only for the body and soul and, not for a body, soul and a load of sin.’⁶²

For days the meaning bore down on Bunyan’s soul. He was in agony as to whether or not the day of grace had passed for him. Was he among God’s elect or not?

‘You probably aren’t,’ said a voice.

‘But it may be that I am,’ replied Bunyan.

⁵⁸ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 29

⁵⁹ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 22

⁶⁰ Ibid. p 24

⁶¹ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 28

⁶² John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 25

‘Well,’ said the voice, ‘you may as well forget it. If you are not chosen of God, then there’s no hope of you being saved, for ‘it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God who shows mercy.’⁶³

Bunyan was at his wit’s end over the matter. He was too ignorant to recognise Satan’s lies and did not know that it was the enemy who was feeding him these disturbing and discouraging thoughts. But then there came into his mind the words: ‘Look at the generations of old and see; did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded?’⁶⁴ What an encouragement! Perhaps there was hope for him after all.

Continuing Doubts

But new doubts soon overtook Bunyan and he plunged once more into despair. He became convinced that those in Bedford who were already converted were all that God was going to save in those parts. Obviously he had missed out. He had had his chance to believe and it was now too late. ‘It made me angry with myself to think that I had no more wit than to trifle away my time until my soul and Heaven were lost.’⁶⁵ In spite of his great distress, Bunyan clung to those Scriptures which he had come to know in previous years, especially those where Christ called people to follow Him and to come after Him. Bunyan longed for Christ to call him. He was eager to be converted to Christ and could see clearly that being converted would put him in such a glorious state that he could never be content without a share in it. ‘If I had the whole world, I would have given it ten thousand times over for this, that my soul might be converted.’⁶⁶

Bunyan went on in this agony for months. Finally he told some of his poor friends in Bedford. But the more he talked with them, the more he could see the terrible condition of his heart before God. He began to recognise certain sins and evil thoughts that he’d never noticed before. He felt he was growing worse and worse and further than ever away from conversion. He was terribly discouraged. ‘His incessant self-examination and self-condemnation led him further and further into the Slough of Despond.’⁶⁷ Bunyan nevertheless came to the conclusion that if he was lost and did not have life, it was entirely because of his sin. He understood very clearly that he needed a perfect righteousness with which to be presented without fault before God and that this righteousness could only be found in the person of Jesus Christ. ‘But,’ he writes, ‘my original and inward pollution, that, that was my plague and my affliction...I was more loathsome in my eyes than was a toad; and I thought I was so in God’s eyes too; sin and corruption, I said, would as naturally bubble out of my heart, as water would bubble out of a fountain.’⁶⁸

In spite of the despair which now engulfed Bunyan, he was still thinking through everything with remarkable bursts of insight. What really frightened him was the fact that he’d seen people come under what he called ‘the wounds of conscience’⁶⁹ but who—as soon as this guilt past and they had relief—cared little *how* that peace of heart had been obtained. ‘Though I was thus troubled, and tossed, and afflicted, with the sight and sense of terror of my own wickedness, yet I was afraid to let this sight and sense go quite off my mind; for I found that unless guilt of conscience was taken off *in the right way*, that is, by the blood of Christ, a man grew rather worse for the loss of his trouble of mind, than better.’⁷⁰ ‘What frightened me was that I had seen some people who, while under the wounds of conscience, would cry and pray, but now they felt at ease about their trouble—not pardon for sin—and did not seem to care how they lost their feeling of guilt as long as they got it off their minds. And since they’d gotten rid of it the wrong way, they had become harder and blinder and more wicked than before. It made me afraid and made me cry out to God that it might not be so with me—“*Lord, do not let this sense of guiltiness go away except it be through the blood of Christ and the application of Your mercy through Him to my soul.*”’⁷¹

⁶³ Ibid. p 26

⁶⁴ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 36

⁶⁵ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 28

⁶⁶ Ibid. p 30

⁶⁷ Frank Mott Harrison *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 33

⁶⁸ John Bunyan *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 41

⁶⁹ John Bunyan *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 35

⁷⁰ John Bunyan *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 42

⁷¹ John Bunyan *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 35

Bunyan now went through a prolonged period in which he vacillated between a sweet hope of salvation and the deep despair of someone who was beyond help. He would hear sermons that would encourage him and bring light and understanding to his mind, but within days he would begin to doubt and all would evaporate—plunging him once again into a dark cloud of hopelessness.

The Ministry of Mr Gifford 1653

It was at this time, when Bunyan was 25, that his friends spoke of him to Mr Gifford, the Nonconformist ‘rector’ of St John’s in Bedford. Gifford took an immediate interest in Bunyan and invited him to his home.⁷² Gifford became to Bunyan both Evangelist and Goodwill. His sound Biblical teaching was exactly what Bunyan needed. ‘This man made it his business to deliver the people of God from all those false tests of sound doctrine to which they are prone. He told us to pay special heed not to accept any truth upon blind trust. Instead, to cry mightily to God so that God would convince us of the reality of it and immerse us in it by His own Spirit in the holy Word. “For,” he said, “when temptation comes strongly upon you, if you have not received these things with evidence from Heaven, you will soon find that you do not have that help and strength to resist that you thought you did.”’⁷³

Bunyan’s turmoil was familiar to Gifford because he had been through it all himself. He’d been condemned to death during his Royalist army days for an uprising in Maidstone, but had escaped from prison and gone into hiding. Eventually settling in Bedford he’d lived a profligate life; was an alcoholic; blasphemer; gambler; and a hater of the Puritans and their preaching. His wild and irresponsible life had led him to begging and the brink of suicide. But ‘God laid mighty hold upon him and he came under the power of the truth.’⁷⁴ In time he was appointed as the parish minister of St John’s church in Bedford. There he had devoted himself to the pastoral welfare of those under his care.

Step by step Gifford led Bunyan into a right understanding of the Gospel. ‘He opened up to the troubled tinker the way of salvation—repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.’⁷⁵ Gifford’s faithful ministry drove Bunyan to a more careful search of the Scriptures. He began to read biographies of the lives of some of the great saints. He started reading commentaries such as Martin Luther’s on Galatians—a work which he found ‘most fit for a wounded conscience.’⁷⁶ Shortly after, Bunyan was baptised in the River Ouse. The simple ceremony—with his pastor and friends—took place in the dead of night so as to avoid the inevitable backlash which such public professions of faith attracted in those troubled times.⁷⁷

The Great Storm

It was not long after this that Bunyan entered what he called ‘the great storm.’⁷⁸ All his comforts disappeared and a terrible darkness descended on him. Floods of blasphemies against God and Christ poured over him—causing him to doubt the very existence of God and Christ. He became a captive in Doubting Castle. Satan’s accusations and questionings burned into his soul. He began to ask himself: ‘How can you tell that the Turks may not have as good a Scriptures to prove their Mohammed as the Saviour as we have to prove our Jesus?’ ‘How can you think that the tens of thousands in other countries and kingdoms are without the knowledge of the right way to Heaven—assuming there is a heaven?’ ‘How can you think that you, living in this tiny corner of the earth, are alone blessed with this right knowledge?’ ‘What if all our faith in Christ and the Scriptures were just our imagination?’

Bunyan wilted under this incessant barrage of doubts—even though something within him refused to go along with these terrible thoughts. In the turmoil he began once again to curse and swear, blaspheming God and Christ and speaking evil of the Scriptures. ‘Surely I am possessed of the Devil or perhaps am now become insane.’⁷⁹ Thus he sank into a very deep despair wishing that somehow he could exchange his life for that of a dog or a horse.

⁷² Frank Mott Harrison *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 38

⁷³ John Bunyan *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 45

⁷⁴ Ernest Bacon *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 69

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p 71

⁷⁶ Frank Mott Harrison *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 50

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p 56

⁷⁸ John Bunyan *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 38

⁷⁹ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 47

For a year the storm continued. His heart became hard. He could not weep nor had he any desire to. He had long since given up Bible reading and prayer. Blasphemies continued to pour into his mind. He was caught in the tempest and could see no way out. Occasionally there were times when a strong sense of the presence of God would come and he would be reminded of the Scriptures. In agony he would then cry out for help. But in the midst of his distress the Tempter would whisper in his ear:

‘You are very anxious for mercy, but I will cool you off. This frame of mind will not last forever, you know. Many others have been as warm-hearted as you are, but I have quenched their zeal...I will cool you off little by little so that you will scarcely notice it. And what do I care though it take seven years to chill your heart, if I can do it at last?...I will play it carefully and I will have my end at last. Though you be full of zeal at present, I can pull you from the fire. I shall have you cold before very long.’⁸⁰

Temporary relief

Gradually passages from Scripture came into Bunyan’s mind and he would experience relief. But nothing seemed to last. Even though these times were sweet, they would suddenly be gone. Then one day the Lord graciously delivered him from the guilt of his blasphemies and removed the temptation itself. ‘I was put into my right mind again, as other Christians were.’⁸¹ But, just when Bunyan thought he was making progress and was convinced that he could never again let go of Christ, the Tempter came with an onslaught worse than before. For yet another year, Bunyan was plunged into turmoil and all the blasphemous thoughts returned. This time he was being tempted to part with Christ in exchange for the things of this life. ‘I had almost no other thoughts about Him [Christ] except blasphemies, and neither my hating these thoughts nor my resisting them helped in the least to keep them away. No matter what I thought or did, they were there still.’ All that came into Bunyan’s mind all day and every day was: ‘Sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that; sell Him, sell Him.’⁸²

Bunyan—in the grip of Giant Despair—was terrified by this temptation because he could not be sure that he wouldn’t be overcome by it in the end. He desperately tried to stand his ground, but to no avail. The incessant nagging of the Evil One finally got the better of him and he gave in. ‘Suddenly Satan had won the battle and—as a bird that is shot from the top of a tree—down I fell into mighty guilt and fearful despair.’⁸³ Months went by. Then this sentence came into his mind: ‘The blood of Christ remits all guilt.’⁸⁴ ‘Peace began to steal into my soul and I thought I could see the Tempter stealing away as though ashamed of what he had done. At the same time, I began to see that my sin—when compared to the blood of Christ—was no more than a clod or stone in this vast, wide field where I stood.’⁸⁵ But as on previous occasions, it was not long before Bunyan had sunk back into depression and despair as guilt flooded his conscience once more. No amount of effort on the part of his pastor or friends was able to bring comfort to his anguished heart. For some *two and a half years* these terrible battles had raged in Bunyan’s soul. He fluctuated between times of great joy and comfort in the Word to times of deep, deep torment.

Elizabeth born

These long periods of testing—together with the birth in 1654 of another daughter, Elizabeth—placed Bunyan under colossal strain. Eventually he succumbed to consumption and a growing susceptibility to physical weakness. From this time onwards his otherwise robust health does not seem to have been quite the same. But in spite of these awful periods of doubt and anguish, the Lord would often speak to Bunyan during his fiery trials. On one occasion it was as if He was saying to him: ‘I loved you while you were committing this sin, I loved you before, I love you still, and I will love you forever.’⁸⁶ At another time Psalm 130:3-4 came to him with great force. ‘If thou O Lord shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.’ Bunyan wrote later: ‘These were good words to me, especially the latter part thereof; to wit, that there is forgiveness with the Lord, that He might be feared; that is, (as then I understood it) that He might be loved and had

⁸⁰ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 42

⁸¹ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 51

⁸² *Ibid.* p 57

⁸³ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 52

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p 52

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p 53

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p 68

in reverence; for it was thus made out to me, that the great God did set so high an esteem upon the love of His poor creatures, that rather than He would go without their love He would pardon their transgressions.’⁸⁷

In the midst of these times of faint light and hope the Tempter was not far away. Bunyan would make some attempt to pray and confess his sin only to be told by the voice,

‘Your sin is unpardonable.’

‘Well,’ Bunyan replied, ‘I will pray anyway.’

‘It will not do you any good.’ Satan replied.

‘Still, I *will* pray.’

‘Lord, Satan tells me that your mercy and Christ’s blood are not sufficient to save my soul. Lord, shall I honour You by believing that You can and will? Or shall I honour Satan by believing that You cannot and will not? Lord, I want to honour You by believing that You can and will.’⁸⁸

This was the beginning of a slow but steady change in Bunyan’s life. Though the temptations and trials continued and though Satan never let up in his accusations, more and more of the Scriptures began to speak to Bunyan. Nevertheless he was deeply weighed down by a consciousness of his sin—sin which seemed to him to be beyond remedy.

Discovering Christ’s Righteousness 1655

One day, as he was walking into a field, he was suddenly impressed by the words: ‘Thy righteousness is in heaven.’ In a moment he saw that his righteousness was in Christ, who was now at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He saw in a flash that no matter what he was or what he was doing at the time, he was not without 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...*Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed*, I was loosed from my afflictions 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 love and grace of God...there was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes...I saw my gold was in my trunk at home! In Christ, my Lord and Saviour! Now Christ was all; all my wisdom, all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption...I was joined to Him...I was flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone...Now I saw Christ Jesus was looked on of God and should also be looked upon by us, as that common or public person, in whom all the body of His elect are always to be considered and reckoned; that we fulfilled the law by Him, rose from the dead by Him, got the victory over sin, death and the devil and hell by Him; when He died, we died, and so of His resurrection.’⁸⁹

Overwhelmed by his new-found gift of righteousness, Bunyan reflected on the horrific temptations and trials through which he had passed. He could see that ‘great sins draw out great grace, and where guilt is most terrible and fierce, there the mercy of God in Christ—when it is finally revealed to the soul—appears the highest.’⁹⁰ ‘I had such an amazing understanding of the divine grace of God that I could hardly bear up under it.’⁹¹ But once again doubts came flooding back. His past sins began to haunt him yet again. As he was walking in the house in a most depressed state of mind, God took hold of him and pressed upon him the words of Romans 3:24, ‘You are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.’ ‘Oh what a turn this made upon me! Oh, what a sudden change it made! It was as though I had awakened out of a nightmare. Now God seemed to be saying to me: ‘Sinner, you think that I cannot save your soul because of your sins; behold my Son is here and I look upon Him and not on you, and I shall deal with you according as I am pleased with Him.’ By this I was made to understand that God can justify a sinner at any time by looking upon Christ and imputing His benefits to him.’⁹²

⁸⁷ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 77

⁸⁸ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 71

⁸⁹ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 89-90

⁹⁰ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 86

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p 87

⁹² *Ibid.* p 89

For the first time in his life the great burden Pilgrim had been carrying rolled off his shoulders. At last, Bunyan had been truly set free! Years later he was to carefully record in *The Pilgrim's Progress* the details of Christian coming face to face with the Cross. 'Then he [Christian] stood still awhile, to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the Cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked therefore, and looked again even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks.' Bunyan writes of three shining beings coming to Christian: the first assured him: 'Thy sins are forgiven.' The second stripped him of his rags and clothed him with change of raiment—the robe of the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. The third set a mark on his forehead and gave him a roll with a seal on it—the assurance of his acceptance by God through faith in Christ. 'Then Christian gave three leaps for joy and went on singing.'⁹³

Spiritual growth

Bunyan was now growing and maturing in his understanding of the things of the Lord. He poured over the Scriptures and read widely in the writings of the great men of the past. One day his Christian friends asked him to speak a word of exhortation to them in one of their meetings. Bunyan declined, but they kept at it. Finally he consented and, with feelings of much weakness and inadequacy, spoke twice to a small group of believers. So it was he tested his gift among them. 'It seemed as I spoke that they were being given a blessing. Afterwards many told me, in the sight of the great God, that they were helped and comforted.'⁹⁴ Occasionally Bunyan would accompany his friends to the countryside to teach, and so began a more public ministry as men and women rejoiced as their souls were being edified by the Tinker's words. It was in this quiet way that Bunyan felt the call of God to the ministry of preaching and teaching the Word.

Move to Bedford and call to preach

In 1655 Bunyan moved his house and family to Bedford so as to be closer to the preaching of John Gifford. Here too he would have a better scope for ministry as well as greater opportunities to pursue the much-needed income from his trade as a tinker. Within two years the church in Bedford confirmed his sense of calling, and, after much prayer and fasting, appointed him as deacon to the public ministry of the Word as a Nonconformist preacher.⁹⁵ Bunyan now began to feel a great desire to preach to the unconverted and he could not rest unless he was out exercising the gifts God had given him. 'Though trembling, I used my gift to preach the blessed gospel, in proportion to my faith, as God has showed me in the holy Word of truth. When the word got around that I was doing this, people came in by the hundreds from all over to hear the Word preached.'⁹⁶

Bunyan had a deep concern for the souls of those around him, and especially for those to whom he preached. He spoke with great earnestness to them about their need to be rescued from sin and Satan, and did all in his power to awaken their consciences. It was not long before some began to be touched by the message and to be deeply distressed in their minds because of the greatness of their sins and of their need of Jesus Christ. At first Bunyan was taken by surprise at people's response to his preaching. He hardly dared think that God would actually use *him* to bring others to faith! 'They, in fact blessed God for me—unworthy wretch though I was—and counted me as God's instrument who showed them the way of salvation. And when I saw that they were beginning to live differently as well as speak differently, and that their hearts were eagerly pressing after the knowledge of Christ and rejoicing that God sent me to them, then I began to conclude that it must be so that God had blessed His work through me...And so I rejoiced. Yes, the tears of those whom God awakened by my preaching were my solace and my encouragement.'⁹⁷

Experimental preaching

Bunyan's experiences during his years of temptation, sin and turmoil played a large part in the way in which he preached. He always began where God's Word begins with sinners: that is, to condemn all flesh and to state clearly that—because of sin—the curse of God is upon all men as they come into the world. The terrors of the law and the guilt of his own transgressions still lay heavily on his own

⁹³ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 76-77

⁹⁴ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 92

⁹⁵ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 64

⁹⁶ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 94

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p 95

conscience and so *he preached what he felt*. He would say: ‘I have been as one sent to them from the dead.’⁹⁸

Strange as it may seem, Bunyan was still caught in old guilts and retained many of his previous doubts. For two years he continued to preach in this way, crying out against men’s sins and the fearful state of their souls. ‘I can honestly say that many a time as I have gone to preach, I have been full of guilt and terror right up to the pulpit door, and there it has been taken off and I have been at liberty until my work was done. Then immediately, before I could get down the pulpit stairs, it was upon me as bad as before.’⁹⁹ Gradually a clearer assurance of salvation came to Bunyan and—in typical Puritan ‘experimental’ fashion—this now began to permeate his preaching. ‘Now I tried to show everyone the wonderful Jesus Christ in all His offices, relationships and benefits to the world, and tried to point out and condemn and remove all those false supports on which the world leans and by which it perishes.’¹⁰⁰ As soon as some new glimmer of light or understanding came to him from the Word, Bunyan would *preach it into life* to his regular congregations.

Bunyan never trusted in himself that what he was doing was effectual in and of itself. He knew that God had to own His Word if ever there was to be fruit among his hearers. He would plead for God’s anointing on his preaching. He would intercede lest the enemy snatch the Word from his people before it struck home to their consciences and so proved to be unfruitful in the end. He would always try to speak the Word so that *particular* persons might realise themselves guilty of *particular* sins.

Bunyan often experienced extraordinary insight as to what lay ahead in his ministry. He noted that when there was a particular work that he was to do for God, there would come over his spirit—ahead of time—a great desire to go and preach at a certain place. The names of specific people would be pressed upon his heart—people he did not even know—but for whom he cried out for their salvation. These would be the very ones who would come to faith as a result of his ministry when he went to their town. He said: ‘Sometimes I have noticed that a word cast in, by the way, has done more than all the rest of the sermon. Sometimes when I thought I had done the least, then it developed that the most had been accomplished; and at other times when I thought I had really gotten hold of them, I found I had fished for nothing.’¹⁰¹ In his preaching he was often in real pain—as he said: ‘travailing to bring forth children to God’—and he was never satisfied unless there had been some fruit for his labour. Not surprisingly, after preaching, he would always be full of concern that the Word might have fallen like rain on stoney places. ‘Oh, that those who have heard me speak today will but see—as I do—what sin, death, hell and the curse of God really are, and that they might understand the grace and love and mercy of God’¹⁰²

It was about this time that Bunyan began to understand the mystery of the believer’s union with Christ. He immediately commenced unfolding this great truth to his people...’wherefore that [which] I discovered and showed to them also...’ He goes on to say that ‘when I have been engaged in the doctrine of life by Christ, without works, [it was] as if an angel of God had stood by at my back to encourage me. Oh, it has been with such power and heavenly evidence upon my own soul, while I have been labouring to unfold it, to demonstrate it, and to fasten it upon the consciences of others...’¹⁰³

Temptation to pride

There were times when pride would overtake Bunyan and he would begin to think that he was someone in this world. However, he speaks often of the Lord’s graciousness in this matter. ‘Every day I have been enabled to see the evil of my own heart and my head has hung down in shame, despite the gifts and attainments that He has given to me. So I feel that this thorn in the flesh is the very mercy of God.’¹⁰⁴ Bunyan knew that God had given him many gifts for ministry but he also knew that ‘a little

⁹⁸ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 103

⁹⁹ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 96

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p 96

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p 100

¹⁰² *Ibid.* p 97

¹⁰³ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 104

¹⁰⁴ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 102

grace, a little love, a little of the true fear of God are better than all the gifts.’¹⁰⁵ He wrote: ‘I came to perceive that though gifts in themselves were good to the thing for which they are designed, to wit, the edification of others; yet empty and without power to save the soul of him that hath them, if they be alone; neither are they, as so, any sign of a man’s state to be happy.’ He goes on to say: ‘gifts being alone, were dangerous, not in themselves, but because of those evils that attend them that have them, to wit, pride, desire of vain-glory, self-conceit etc, all which were easily blown up at the applause and commendation of every un-advised Christian, to the endangering of a poor creature to fall into the condemnation of the devil...’¹⁰⁶ Bunyan was convinced that gifts were desirable, but great grace and small gifts are better than many gifts and no grace.

Persecution and trials

Bunyan’s preaching and writings could not fail to attract the criticism of some of his lukewarm brethren in the ministry—especially, no doubt, those who were Conformists. The fervour and power of his preaching also brought down upon his head the scathing denouncements of the Quakers and Ranters—two sectarian groups active in Bunyan’s day. For his part, Bunyan was determined not to return accusation for accusation, nor to enter into any form of controversy among the saints. However, he did take on the heretics and produced several powerfully-argued works proving their error and showing the truth of the Scriptures. Bunyan saw that his *primary* calling was to preach the word with faith and with all the earnestness that he could muster. All these other matters he endeavoured to leave alone—he could see that they only brought strife and discord to God’s people—and he would have no part in them. Nevertheless he had times of great discouragement, and the Tempter never missed such opportunities to strike while he was down.

A new trial descended on Bunyan when Satan stirred up the minds of certain ignorant and malicious people to slander him with vicious accusations. ‘The doctors and priests of the country did open wide against me.’¹⁰⁷ Among other things he was accused of being a witch; of being a Jesuit; and a highwayman. It was rumoured that he had a mistress; that he had his whores and several illegitimate children.¹⁰⁸ He made no reply, but consoled himself with the knowledge that these people would have to give an account before the judgment seat of the Son of God. ‘I have a good conscience and they shall be ashamed who speak evil of me and falsely accuse my good conversation in Christ.’¹⁰⁹

More serious were the growing complaints from parish clergy that Bunyan was not ordained in the Church of England to preach, nor licensed to officiate as an orthodox minister in the Bedford church. They were especially scandalised by his daring to minister in other parish pulpits in the surrounding countryside—contrary to the twenty third article governing the Establishment Church. Bunyan made no reply to these accusations. Nevertheless he and his people knew that the eye of the law was always on him, carefully watching every move of the itinerant preacher.¹¹⁰

Death of John Gifford

Not long after Bunyan moved to Bedford his much loved Pastor and mentor John Gifford died. For seven years Gifford had been to Bunyan the companion Faithful, a Mr Great-heart and Mr Valiant-for-Truth. Bunyan felt this loss deeply. Within months Gifford was replaced by a fine young man—John Burton, but since his health was weak, Bunyan often had to stand in for him as the Sunday preacher. John Burton held Bunyan in great esteem declaring that the author-tinker was ‘not chosen out of an earthly, but out of an heavenly university, the Church of Christ...therefore pray...receive this word...not as the word of man, but as the word of God...and be not offended because Christ holds forth the glorious treasure of the Gospel to thee in a poor earthen vessel, by one who hath neither the greatness nor the wisdom of this world to commend him to thee...through grace he hath received the teaching of God, and the learning of the Spirit of Christ, which is the thing that makes the man both a Christian and a minister of the Gospel...He hath through grace, taken these three heavenly degrees, to wit, union with Christ, the anointing of the Spirit, and experience of the temptation of Satan, which do

¹⁰⁵ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 103

¹⁰⁶ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding* Word Publishing. 1991. p 109-110

¹⁰⁷ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan* Banner of Truth. 1964. p 75

¹⁰⁸ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 105

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p 106

¹¹⁰ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan* Banner of Truth. 1964. p 77

more fit a man for that mighty work of preaching the Gospel, than all university learning and degrees that can be had...'¹¹¹

Birth of two sons and death of Mary

The birth of two sons—John (1655) and Thomas (1658)—occasioned great joy to both John and Mary. But all was not well. His wife's already frail health began to decline rapidly, and before Bunyan was thirty she had passed away. He was bereft. How could he go on? How could he cope alone? How could he attend to the needs of his two young sons? But especially, how could he meet the needs of his beloved blind daughter Mary? In September 1660 Burton died and once again the Bedford people were without a pastor. But worse still, the congregation suddenly lost the use of the building itself. With little warning an Establishment rector was installed at St John's and the Nonconformist congregation not only had to find a new pastor but also a new meeting place.¹¹² The congregation now met wherever they could—in a barn or someone's stable or perhaps in a cowshed. For Bunyan, these were dark days indeed—especially as he could see far more ominous storm clouds rapidly gathering. He became increasingly concerned for the welfare and safety of his children and determined—for *their* sake as much as for his own—that he must marry again. This he did in 1660 just as the storm was about to break.

Political changes

In 1658 Oliver Cromwell had died and, shortly after, his son Richard resigned. This was the prelude to the awful events of 1660 when the Long Parliament was dissolved. In May, Charles II arrived in London heralding the beginning of the restoration of the monarchy—and the Episcopal Church as it had been prior to the Civil War. With this sudden change came the determination on the part of the Establishment to be rid of the Puritans once and for all.

Arrest and prison

In Bedfordshire county the magistrates lost no time in sending out a decree 'for the public reading of the liturgy of the Church of England.'¹¹³ For Bunyan, his greatest trial was now to descend upon him. As his enemies increased rapidly he soon discovered that he was being shadowed wherever he went. But he could not, and would not, bow to the demands of the Established church. He had been proclaiming the Word of God unhindered to his people for five years and he was not about to quit just when they needed him now more than ever.

On November 12, 1660 Bunyan made his way to a small farmhouse about thirteen miles south of Bedford, there to fulfil a regular preaching engagement. His friends were apprehensive and feared for his safety, questioning his wisdom in going ahead with the meeting. 'I will not stir, neither will I have the meeting dismissed. Come, be of good cheer; 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.'¹¹⁴ Bunyan had hardly begun his sermon when the doors were flung open and a constable with one of the magistrate's servants marched into the meeting issuing a warrant for his arrest. 'Brethren and sisters' said Bunyan, 'we are prevented of our opportunity to speak and hear the Word of God, and we are like to suffer for this attempt to do so, but I do desire that you shall not be discouraged. It is mercy—it is a mercy, I say, to suffer upon so good account...we suffer as Christians for well-doing; and we had better be persecuted than the persecutors...'¹¹⁵ Bunyan never finished his exhortation, but was hauled out of the meeting and marched off to the magistrate's house, there to be committed to Bedford jail until his hearing before the Justice.

A week later Bunyan appeared before the Justice at Elstow. He was charged with going about to 'several conventicles in the country, to the great disparagement of the Church of England.'¹¹⁶ Seven weeks later—in January 1661—he appeared before the County Quarter Sessions in Bedford.

¹¹¹ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 89

¹¹² Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 80

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p 82

¹¹⁴ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 95

¹¹⁵ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 88

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p 95

‘John Bunyan, labourer...hath devilishly and perniciously abstained from coming to church to hear divine service, and is a common upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventicles, to the great hindrance and distraction of the good subjects of this kingdom...what say you to this?’

John replied, ‘I am a common frequenter of the Church of God, and I am also, by grace, a member with those people over whom Christ is the Head.’

‘But do you come to church?...you know what I mean, the parish church, to hear divine service?’

‘No,’ answered John, ‘I do not.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because I do not find it commanded in the Word of God.’

‘We are commanded to pray.’

‘But not by the Common Prayer Book.’

‘How then?’

‘With the Spirit. As the Apostle said ‘I will pray with the Spirit and with the understanding.’

‘We may pray with the Spirit, with understanding, and with the Common Prayer Book also.’¹¹⁷

A long debate then followed between Bunyan and the magistrate. In the end he was indicted as one who had encouraged unlawful assemblies and had not conformed to the national worship of the Church of England. Bunyan replied on his own behalf. He truthfully admitted that he had been preaching the Word of God, and that yes, he had been holding meetings in both town and countryside, and no, he would not subscribe to the Prayer Book of the Church of England. Bunyan stood as the sentence was declared.

‘Hear your judgment. You must be had back again to prison, and there lie for three months following; and at three months’ end, if you do not submit to go to Church to hear divine service, and leave your preaching, you must be banished the realm. And, if after such a day as shall be appointed for you to be gone, you shall be found in this realm, or be found to come over again without special leave from the king, you must stretch by the neck for it, I tell you plainly...Take him away.’¹¹⁸

Bunyan’s reply was simple and to the point:

‘Sir...if I am out of prison today, I WILL PREACH THE GOSPEL AGAIN TOMORROW—by the help of God!’¹¹⁹

The fact is, Bunyan’s trial and imprisonment were illegal. There was at that time no official statute banning the Nonconformists. The Act of Uniformity had not yet been ratified by Parliament, nor had the Conventicle Act been passed. Bunyan was in jail purely as a result of the malice and prejudice of the magistrate and his other detractors. He later immortalised these Quarter Sessions’ events in *Pilgrim’s Progress*—the magistrate being Mr Hategood of Vanity Fair. Thus Bunyan returned to his tiny cell in Bedford jail. Later he wrote: ‘I can truly say, I bless the Lord Jesus Christ for it, that my heart was sweetly refreshed in the time of my examination, and also afterwards, at my returning to the prison.’¹²⁰ True though that was, he was deeply grieving on another account. His wife Elizabeth had

¹¹⁷ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 102

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p 103

¹¹⁹ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 103

¹²⁰ Ibid. p 103

been under great strain from her husband's arrest and conviction. She had just given birth to her first child—but sadly, it was still-born.¹²¹

Comfort in confinement

Bunyan very soon discovered that God does not waste any experience that His people may go through. 'In this condition I have found much contentment through grace, so there have been many turnings and goings upon my heart, from the Lord, from Satan and from my own corruption. After all these things—glory be to Jesus Christ—I have also received much instruction and understanding...I have never in all my life had so much of the Word of God opened up so plainly to me before. Those Scriptures that I saw nothing particular in before have been made, in this place, to shine upon me. Also, Jesus Christ was never more real to me than now; here I have seen and felt Him indeed.'¹²² He goes on to record: 'I have been able to laugh at destruction and to fear neither the horse nor his rider. I have had sweet sights in this place of the forgiveness of my sins, and of my being with Jesus in another world...I have seen things here that I am sure I will never in all the world be able to express.'¹²³

In prison, Bunyan had time to reflect on the Scriptures in a way that he had never done before. He came to see many of the great doctrines of the Bible more clearly than he had done previously. He realised that—in his former trials and temptations—God had wonderfully prepared him for imprisonment. He recalled that—for more than a year prior to his going to prison—he could hardly ever pray without Colossians 1:11 being impressed upon his mind, 'strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.' He now knew that God had been preparing him in heart and mind for a life of patience in the midst of severe suffering. Now that it had come, he was ready for it.

However, what lay heavily upon Bunyan's heart was his wife Elizabeth and the children. This was a deep trial indeed. They had no means of support and no-one to protect them. His concern for them caused him great anguish. He could well imagine the hardships they would be going through and the misery and wants they were likely to meet. Of special concern to him was the welfare of his blind daughter and often his heart would almost break at the thought of her difficulties without him by her side. He knew that she would most likely have to beg to help support his very poor family. He was tortured with visions of her being beaten, or suffering cold, hunger, nakedness and a thousand other calamities. He wrote to them: 'I must venture you all with God, though it cuts to the heart to leave you.'¹²⁴

In the midst of these trials Bunyan was given a perspective of eternity in which to view all his concerns. 'I must suffer properly, I must first pass the sentence of death upon everything that can be in 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...the way not to faint is to "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."¹²⁵ Bunyan derived great comfort from the words of God to Jeremiah: 'Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widow trust in me...it shall be well with thy remnant; verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil'(Jer 49:11, 15:11). He also came to see that if he should venture all for God, then he would be hiring God to take care of all his concerns! He came to see that his family would not be nearly so safe under his own care than under God's if they were left trustingly at His feet.

One lurking fear that worried Bunyan for a time was the prospect of being banished—deported to some foreign country. He began to imagine what would happen to him if he had to suffer hunger and cold or be exposed to nakedness and bitter enemies—only to die in a ditch like some poor lost sheep. A more realistic prospect was that he would go to the gallows. This fear was countered by his determination that he would not mount the steps and be seen to die with a pale face and tottering knees! No, he would pray that God would comfort him and give him strength for whatever dark circumstance awaited him.

¹²¹ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 100

¹²² John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 109

¹²³ *Ibid.* p 109

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p 112

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p 111

Nevertheless, for some time Bunyan was obsessed with thoughts of death, so much so that he often felt he was standing on the ladder with the hangman's rope around his neck.¹²⁶

Elizabeth Bunyan and the Judges

Meantime Bunyan's young wife Elizabeth had not been idle. Although she and the children were allowed to visit the prisoner, she was determined somehow to see him released. She accordingly began petitioning the judges at every opportunity. She even went with a petition to London—to the House of Lords no less—in an attempt to secure her husband's release. A ray of hope came with the coronation of King Charles II in April 1661. As was the custom, thousands of prisoners were pardoned by the king and released. But Bunyan, like Paul before him, was left to languish in his cell.

Elizabeth made several presentations to the Judge who had condemned Bunyan—an extraordinarily courageous move in those days for a woman to undertake. On one occasion her passionate and womanly logic clearly rattled the outraged Judge.

'My Lord, I make bold to come once again to your Lordship to know what may be done with my [poor] husband?...he is kept unlawfully in prison; they clapped him up before there was any proclamation against the meetings; the indictment also is false.'¹²⁷

'He was lawfully convicted' retorted the judge.

'It is false, it is false' protested Elizabeth.

'What! you think we can do as we please? Your husband is a breaker of the peace and is convicted by the law.'

'My Lord he was not, he was not lawfully convicted.'

'He *was* lawfully convicted!'

'It is false. It was but a word of discourse that they took for a conviction.'

'But woman, it is recorded...it is recorded!'

'Then my Lord, you give me neither releasement nor relief...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.'

'Is not your husband a tinker?' questioned the Judge, 'Is he better off running up and down a-preaching than by following his trade?'

'My Lord, it is because my husband is a tinker—and a poor man—that he is despised and cannot have justice.'

Elizabeth's importunity finally seemed to win a concession from the Judge, and there was a faint—though brief—glimmer of compassion from his Lordship.

'I tell thee woman, seeing it is so, that they have taken what thy husband spake for a conviction; thou must either apply thyself to the king, or sue out his pardon, or get a writ of error...but a writ of error will be the cheapest...I am sorry, woman, that I can do thee no good'¹²⁸

Six years in prison

Not only did Bunyan never receive a fair trial, but he was never permitted to appeal—as was the case with many of the other prisoners in Bedford jail. The justices and the clerk of the peace made sure that

¹²⁶ Ibid. p 114

¹²⁷ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer*. The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 108

¹²⁸ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 119-120

his name never came up on the calendar of felons to be heard again by the judge. It was later discovered that the clerk of the peace was one of Bunyan's fiercest opponents.

However, Bunyan's jailer was extraordinarily lenient towards him and not only permitted Bunyan regular visitors but also allowed him out from time to time to preach to his congregation! Bunyan even managed a visit to London on one of his excursions away from prison. On one occasion, when Bunyan was out for the day, he was suddenly overtaken with misgiving and returned to the jail. Within moments the magistrate arrived asking the jailer if all the prisoners were in—especially if John Bunyan was in his cell! With great relief the jailer was able to produce Bunyan for inspection. But his liberty did not last long. Once the Authorities found that he was being allowed out, he was strictly confined to his cell and the jailer threatened with indictment.

Two years after he was jailed the infamous Act of Uniformity was enforced, and on 'Black Bartholomew's Day'—August 24th, 1662—some 2000 British pastors were ejected from their churches for refusing to conform. Most continued to preach and it was not long before the terrible persecutions and arrests commenced. Not long after, the Conventicle and Five Mile Acts were passed, further increasing the hardship of the Nonconformists. Bunyan suddenly had at least thirty or forty other Dissenting ministers for company—although it is hard to know just how much they were able to share in fellowship within the walls of the crowded county jail. Bunyan himself had many visitors who came especially to see him and encourage him during his incarceration.

The years passed and Bunyan occupied his time in prayer and meditation on the Scriptures. Of course his pen was never idle and he spent many hours a day in writing sermons as well as the manuscripts for some of his now well-known books. Little did he realise that he was going to reach more people through his popular writings than he ever could have by his voice! He also took up the menial task of making 'long tagged-laces [for riding boots and other footwear] which he sold to peddlers.'¹²⁹ By this means he was able to provide a meagre—though essential—financial support for his family. Meantime his wife and friends never let up in petitioning and pleading for him to be discharged—even though such support for the prisoner was a risky business for each one of them. They knew—as did Bunyan—that if his release was not obtained he would certainly die a premature death from the appalling conditions in Bedford jail. It was not long before the first of Bunyan's books began to appear in print: in 1663 *Christian Behaviour*; in 1665 *The Holy City*; in 1666 *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Six other soon flowed from his ready pen.

Release from prison

Eventually—after six years—Bunyan was suddenly set free in 1666. This came about 'by the intercession of some in trust and power, that took pity upon his sufferings.'¹³⁰ What a happy reunion this occasioned, not only with his beloved family, but also with his many friends who had so lovingly—and courageously—supported him throughout his time in prison. As soon as possible Bunyan gathered his folk together—even though the law was still being enforced against such meetings. He soon discovered that the political climate had not really changed and men were still being thrown into prison for preaching illegally. There had been some relaxation of the laws because the Romanists were undermining the Church of England and it was thought that by releasing some of the Dissenters this might improve the situation. In fact it did nothing, and the position for the Nonconformists very soon reverted to what it was before. Bunyan encouraged his friends by his example, because—should they happen to end up in a similar situation of suffering—they would need to be able to endure with patience, and a good conscience, to the glory of God. He looked back on his time in prison as a great blessing. 'I would not have missed this trial for a great deal. I am still comforted every time I think of it and I will bless God forever for what He has taught me out of this experience.'¹³¹ Bunyan took full advantage of the political lull and recommenced preaching. The people came from far and wide, finding a wonderful consolation in his discourses and admonitions. He also began itinerant preaching tours, reaching some of the remotest parts of the countryside in order that others might hear the Word. Nevertheless Bunyan moved 'with caution and holy fear, earnestly praying that the impending difficulties which he saw hanging over the heads of the nation for their sins would be somehow abated, and that the nation would not have to be wiped out by God's anger.'¹³²

¹²⁹ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 122

¹³⁰ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983 p 117

¹³¹ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 116

¹³² *Ibid.* p 122

Back in jail 1666

Bunyan's freedom was short-lived. One day he was holding a meeting in an isolated part of Bedfordshire. As on the previous occasion, the constable entered the assembly and issued a warrant for his arrest. After a brief trial Bunyan was once more back within the walls of Bedford jail—but now guarded more strictly than ever.¹³³ He had been free for only a matter of months. Weeks later his sadness was compounded by the death of his much loved blind daughter, Mary. She was 16. A cloud now came over him. He seemed not to be able to pray with fervour as before. His pen was silent. He could not really think clearly. But he did eventually write, producing just two more books: *A Confession of Faith and Reason of my Practice* and *A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification*.

In December 1671 his friends in Bedford were looking for a new pastor, and Bunyan—though still in jail—was chosen by them *in faith* to be their leader! Only three days later Charles II signed a Declaration of Religious Indulgence virtually guaranteeing the freedom of all Dissenting pastors then in prison.

Release, and pastor of the Bedford Congregational Church

Thus, in January 1672, after having spent a further six years in jail, Bunyan found himself not only at liberty once more but the pastor of the local Dissenting congregation! This faithful group of believers had been through many trials. For twelve years they had had no regular meeting place and were forced to assemble secretly within doors, or at night in the open fields or in secluded woods. In spite of taking every precaution, informers had spied on them for reward and so brought persecution and suffering to the little flock.¹³⁴

Now, with a pastor of their own, and with a significant change in the political climate, it was time for the congregation to have a permanent meeting place. Thus, in May 1672, a barn was obtained and duly licensed 'to be a place for the use of such as do not conform to the Church of England who are of the persuasion commonly called Congregational to meet and assemble in, in order to their public worship and devotion.'¹³⁵ The assembly in the barn became known as the 'Bunyan Meeting.' Bunyan himself was officially licensed on May 9th 'to teach as a Congregational Person.'¹³⁶ So popular had Bunyan become since his release from jail that, although the building was large by the standards of the time, on its opening day it proved to be too small for the crowds that gathered and the meeting had to be held outside.¹³⁷

Warrant for arrest

In March 1675 Bunyan's ministry came to a sudden halt—yet again! The Declaration of Indulgences was suddenly revoked by the King himself and a new Test Act drawn up. Nonconformists were once again subject to imprisonment.¹³⁸ For a third time the magistrates issued a warrant for Bunyan's arrest. However, this time the penalty was not prison but a severe fine. Those who failed to pay up would have all their possessions and property confiscated. To Bunyan this was far more serious than going to jail. His wife and family would not only be penniless but homeless. Since the warrant had to be served personally, there was no alternative but for Bunyan to go 'underground.' For eighteen months he was on the run from the authorities. His friends hid him in their homes, sometimes in a chimney or a cupboard, and more than once he had to make a hurried exit through a back door into the woods!¹³⁹

Prison again

During this year and a half Bunyan did not cease preaching. Meetings were held at night in remote locations or else deep in the forest. On one occasion, disguised as a drover with whip hand, he went to Reading and preached.¹⁴⁰ Eventually he was caught and escorted back to Bedford jail. The charge?—

¹³³ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964 p 130

¹³⁴ Ibid. p 134

¹³⁵ Ibid. p 136

¹³⁶ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 123

¹³⁷ John Bunyan. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* Moody Press. 1959. p 122

¹³⁸ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 146

¹³⁹ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 129

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p 129

‘refusing to come to church and receive the sacrament.’¹⁴¹ These new events did not come as a surprise to Bunyan. He was at peace in the certainty that his Lord was providentially ordering all the circumstances of his life as well as those of his family and congregation. No, he would not complain but use the time to full advantage in prayer and meditation and of course, in doing more writing! With this resolve fixed in his mind he dozed off and began to dream.

The Dream

Bunyan’s dream—whenever it may have taken place—was no ordinary dream. It was more like a vision. He saw in his dream a Pilgrim—himself—making his way from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. It was a journey fraught with many perils and hardships. On the way he met, not only other travellers heading for the same destination, but also those who were out to destroy him—Atheist, Giant Despair, the Fiends and of course, Apollyon himself. There were more subtle enemies of his soul such as Mr Worldly-Wiseman, Formalist and Hypocrisy. Serious dangers had to be avoided: the Slough of Despond, The Enchanted Ground, Doubting Castle, the seductions of Vanity Fair and the terrifying Mount Sinai.

At first his journey was made doubly difficult because of the huge burden he was carrying on his back. This constantly hindered him until one day he saw the Cross. He saw his Saviour there. He saw Him as his righteousness and as the One who had borne all his burdens for him. Immediately the great load slipped from his shoulders and he was free! That did not mean the going became easier. The Hill Difficult almost proved too much for Pilgrim—to say nothing of passing through the Valley of the Humiliation and then the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He had to contend with those who were out to seduce him such as Demas, Mr Money Love, The Flatterer, Mr Facing-Both-Ways, Mr Smoothman, Mr Anything and Mr Two-tongues. He also encountered some who had set out well but who—for one reason or another—had either fallen by the way or had completely mistaken the way. The Man of Despair was such a one. Then there was Formalist, Hypocrisy, Ignorance, poor Discontent and the irritating Talkative!

Christian’s pilgrimage was not without good company, and it is certain that he would never have survived the perilous journey without such companions and friends as Evangelist, Faithful, Hopeful and Interpreter. Nor could he have made such progress without Prudence, Discretion, Piety, Hope and Charity ministering to his needs. Finally he came to the River of Death. There, on the other side was the Celestial City, and so with great joy he crossed over.

As Bunyan dreamed, it was as if his whole life rolled on before his eyes—he was seeing a full-length portrait of himself! All that he had been through up to that point was woven into the story of his Pilgrim. When he woke he knew what he must do—*write it down!* He must record this vision—this allegory—so that all could see and learn from his dream! Thus he began drafting the first part of his now-famous *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Release from prison

Bunyan’s extraordinary patience moved the Bishop of Lincoln to pity his hard and unreasonable sufferings and ordered the tinker’s release in 1677. This had come about largely due to the intervention of Bunyan’s London associates including the Puritan theologian Dr John Owen—who was a personal friend and admirer of Bunyan. It was John Owen who told Charles II: ‘I would gladly give up all my learning for that tinker’s power of preaching.’¹⁴²

Ministry in Bedford and in London

Once released, Bunyan lost no time in heading for London to see Owen. From that time onwards he often ministered in Nonconformist churches in the capital—especially to Dr John Owen’s congregation. At first it was thought that—since he was uneducated—he would have nothing to say worth listening to. As it happened large crowds met regularly to hear him, convinced that he was a man of sound judgement who had a deep knowledge of sacred things. Whereas his past ministry in Bedford had been largely in secret—and at night—the congregations of his very public preaching in London often numbered as many as three thousand.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p 130

¹⁴² Ibid. p 124

¹⁴³ Ibid. p 169

Meantime, Bunyan's pastoral work in Bedfordshire flourished. Out of a population of around fifty thousand, some three or four thousand were Nonconformist, and Bunyan never lacked for crowded congregations flocking to hear him. However, John Bunyan's ministry was carried on with some continuing trepidation. The political climate was unsettled and potentially volatile. Anything could happen. 'Our days indeed had been days of trouble...we began to fear cutting of throats, of being burned in our beds, and of seeing our children dashed to pieces before our faces. But we found we had a gracious king, brave parliaments, a stout city, good lord-mayors, honest sheriffs, substantial laws against them, and *these* we made the object of our hope, quite forgetting the direction in this exhortation: LET ISRAEL HOPE IN THE LORD.'¹⁴⁴

The Holy War and Pilgrim's Progress Part 2

Whenever Bunyan was not out preaching or earning a living tinkering, he was writing. His next great work to be published was *The Holy War*. As with his *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan drew from his own experiences in penning this new work. He had already had what seemed like a lifetime of constant engagement in Christian warfare; wrestling not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers and with the rulers of this world. All this now found expression in his new literary triumph.

Soon to follow was his part two of *Pilgrim's Progress*. In this second volume there is a completely new air. It is a joyous tale of Christiana and her children—also on their way to the Celestial City. 'All those who figure in this second part are real beings and no mere abstractions. Bunyan enjoys traversing the self-same road he passed over with Christian, in which there was little to cheer and much to depress, for a note of music was not heard until the Celestial City was reached. However, in Christiana's pilgrimage there is music all the way: "Music in the house, music in the heart"—as well as music in Heaven!'¹⁴⁵ Nor did his pen rest after this great work. Bunyan continued writing up until his death, producing in his lifetime some sixty-six books in addition to his many published sermons and other writings.

Deed of Gift

Since the times were troubled and the future uncertain, Bunyan was determined to ensure that his wife and children would not be disadvantaged should he be killed or deported. He drew up a Deed of Gift bequeathing all he possessed to his wife Elizabeth—including his house and business. It was dated 1685 and hidden in the roof. As it happened, Elizabeth only survived her husband by two and half years and seemed to have forgotten about the Deed. It was not discovered until 153 years later when their old house in Bedford was demolished.¹⁴⁶

Illness and death

Apart from his preaching and writing skills Bunyan was also a great reconciler—always seeking to draw people together, never dividing them. He disliked controversy and avoided disputes. Although he stood his ground against the enforcement to Church of England worship, Bunyan harboured no malice. He was concerned for purity of conscience—not only for himself but also for all those to whom he ministered.

Bunyan also went out of his way to seek the reconciliation of the unconverted. Such was the case with a neighbour who lived opposite him. There was a seemingly unbridgeable gulf between the father and son. The young man had come to see Bunyan for advice. 'I am no priest-confessor,' said Bunyan, 'I can do but little for thee; but God can and will do all—if thou wilt trust Him! Hast thou told Him what thou hast told me? Thou, my lad, must go repentantly to the Heavenly Father in the name of Christ Jesus our Saviour. Seek His forgiveness, ere I can go to thy earthly father to ask forgiveness of what thou hast done amiss. Let us pray!'¹⁴⁷ The young man came to faith in Christ. Greatly encouraged by his new-found forgiveness and now free from his own guilts, he pleaded with Bunyan to journey to Reading to speak to his estranged father. Bunyan was not well at the time, but since he had a preaching engagement in London, set off on horseback via Reading in an attempt to achieve a reconciliation. At first the offended father was irate with the pastor from Bedford and resented his intrusion. For him, his son was as one dead. But Bunyan was not easily put off and prayerful won over the old man's

¹⁴⁴ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan. Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 164

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p 173

¹⁴⁶ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 168

¹⁴⁷ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 183

confidence. In the end he too was brought to his knees in confession and reconciliation with the Saviour. 'Thus reconciled to God, the parent and child became reconciled one to the other.'¹⁴⁸

Bunyan continued on his way to London but was caught in a drenching storm. He arrived in London exhausted, shivering and soaked through. The next day he was far from well, having passed the night in a feverish restlessness. Nevertheless he set out on Sunday morning to preach at Whitechapel. It was August 19, 1688. 'In times of affliction' he said to his friends, 'we commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of the love of God. The school of the Cross, brothers, is the school of Light...out of dark affliction comes a spiritual light!...I have often thought that the best of Christians are found in the worst of times: and I have thought again, that one reason why we are not better is because God purges us no more. Noah and Job—who so *holy* as they in the time of their afflictions! And yet, who so idle as they in the time of their prosperity?'¹⁴⁹

After the sermon Bunyan closed in prayer and descended the pulpit—never to enter one again. He was now in a raging fever and was immediately rushed to bed in the home of one of his London friends. Two days later the symptoms of pneumonia appeared.¹⁵⁰ Although Bunyan was not an old man, his long periods in prison, together with years of relentless hard work in ministry had taken their toll on his health. He was now fighting for his life.

For ten days—often in a delirious state—he fought for breath. On the morning of August 31, 1688 he said weakly to his friends at his bedside, 'I desire nothing more than to be with Christ, which is far better.' He knew his time had come. Stretching out his arms he declared: 'Take me, for I come to Thee!'¹⁵¹—and with those words Christian waded into the River and crossed over to the Celestial City. Bunyan's pilgrimage had lasted just sixty years—now he was home at last!

On September 3, 1688 Bunyan was buried at Bunhill Fields in London. The funeral being attended by scores of his Puritan friends—mostly from the many London Nonconformist congregations where he had ministered. It was two days before the sad news of his death reached Bedford. Elizabeth and the children were devastated. So too were his friends at the Bedford Meeting. They immediately gathered, and the records show that Wednesday, September 4th, 'was kept in prayer and humiliation for this heavy stroke upon us, the death of dear Brother Bunyan.'¹⁵²

Of Bunyan's character one writer has said:

'Character comes up out of the heart. There are more good minds in the world than there are good hearts. There are more clever people than good people; character, high, spotless, saintly character, is a far rarer thing in this world than talent or even genius. And yet so true is it that the world loves its own, that all men worship talent, and even bodily strength and bodily beauty, while only one here and one there either understands or values or pursues moral character, though it is the strength and the beauty and the sweetness of the soul.'¹⁵³

Of Bunyan's part in the dark days of the seventeenth century, another has put it in these simple words: 'Bunyan, hardly less than any other living man, helped to keep the soul of England alive.'

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p 186

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p 189

¹⁵⁰ Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 174

¹⁵¹ Frank Mott Harrison. *John Bunyan Banner of Truth*. 1964. p 196

¹⁵² Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 174

¹⁵³ Dr Alexander Whyte on Bunyan. Quoted by Ernest Bacon. *Pilgrim and Dreamer* The Paternoster Press. 1983. p 177

JOHN BUNYAN—CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

John's age

1625	Charles 1 became king	
1628	John Bunyan born	
1629	Charles I discontinued meetings of Parliament	1
1642	Civil War started	14
1644	John's mother, Margaret died in flu epidemic	16
1644	John's sister Margaret died in flu epidemic	16
1644	John's father remarried	16
1644	John joined the Army	16
1645	Parliament dissolved the Established Church	17
1646	Civil War ended	18
1647	John discharged from the army	19
1649	Charles 1 executed under Cromwell	21
1649	John married Mary	21
1650	Daughter Mary born	22
1651	Bunyan first attended ministry of John Gifford	23
1653	John Gifford appointed minister at St John's Bedford	25
1653	Bunyan formally received into the Puritan church at Bedford	25
1654	Daughter Elizabeth born	26
1655	Discovered Christ's righteousness ?	27
1655	Moved to Bedford	27
1655	Son John born	27
1655	John Gifford died	27
1656	January. John Burton replaces Gifford	28
1656	<i>Some Gospel Truths Opened</i> First book published	28
1657	Bunyan made deacon of Bedford church	29
1658	Son Thomas born	30
1658	Wife Mary died	30
1658	Published first sermon	30
1658	Death of Oliver Cromwell	30
1660	Restoration of Monarchy—Charles II returns to London	30
1660	Burton died	32
1660	John remarries—to Elizabeth	32
1660	August. Bedford congregation ousted from St John's	32
1660	November 12. Arrested	32
1660	November 14. Jailed in Bedford	32
1660	December. Elizabeth gave birth to still-born child	32
1661	January. in court for trial and sentence	33
1661	April 23. Charles II crowned king	33
1661	December. Corporation Act	33
1662	August 24th. Act of Uniformity invoked	34
1663	<i>Christian Behaviour</i> published	35
1664	May. Conventicle Act passed	36
1665	October. Five Mile Act passed	37
1665	<i>Holy City</i> published	37
1666	Released from jail	38
1666	<i>Grace Abounding</i> published	38
1666	Jailed again	38
1666	Death of blind daughter Mary?	38
1671	Charles II discontinued Parliament	43
1671	December 12. Chosen as Pastor of Bedford church	43
1671	December 15 . King's Declaration of Religious Indulgences?	43
1672	January. Released from jail	44
1672	January 21. Appointed pastor at Bedford	44
1672	The Barn licensed	44
1672	May. Bunyan licensed to preach	44
1672	Sept 13. Bunyan pardoned	44
1672	Nov 16. Son Joseph born	44

1675	March. Warrant for Bunyan's arrest	47
1676	<i>The Strait Gate</i> published	48
1676	Thomas Bunyan—John Bunyan's father died	48
1677	Prison and release	49
1678	<i>Pilgrim's Progress</i> —First part—published	50
1680	<i>The Life of Mr Badman</i> published	52
1682	<i>Holy War</i> published	54
1684	<i>Pilgrim's Progress</i> —second part—published?	56
1685	King Charles II died	57
1685	December—Deed of Gift for Elizabeth	57
1687	James II—Declaration of Indulgence	59
1688	August 31. Bunyan died in London	60
1691	Elizabeth died	

JOHN BUNYAN'S MAJOR BOOKS

1656	Some Gospel Truths Opened
1657	A Vindication of Gospel Truths Opened
1658	A Few Sighs from Hell
1659	Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded
1662	A Discourse Touching Prayer
1663	Christian Behaviour
1664	The Holy City
1665	The Resurrection of the Dead and Eternal Judgement
1666	Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners
1672	A Confession of My Faith
1674	Peaceable Principles and True
1674	Light for Them that Sit in Darkness
1676	Instructions for the Ignorant
1675	Saved by Grace
1676	The Strait Gate—The great Difficulty of Going to Heaven
1678	Pilgrim's Progress—part 1
1678	Come and Welcome to Jesus
1679	A Treatise on the Fear of God
1680	The Life and Death of Mr Badman
1682	The Holy War
1685	Pilgrim's Progress—part 2
1683	The Barren Fig-Tree
1683	The Greatness of the Soul
1683	A Case of Conscience Resolved
1684	A Caution to Stir up and Watch against Sin
1684	A Holy Life—the Beauty of Christianity
1684	Seasonable Counsel—Advice to Sufferers
1685	The Perpetuity of the Seventh-day Sabbath
1685	The Pharisee and the Publican
1687	A Book for Boys and Girls
1688	The Jerusalem Sinner Saved
1688	The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate
1688	The Water of Life
1688	Solomon's Temple Spiritualised
1688	The Acceptable Sacrifice
1692	An Exposition of the Ten First Chapters of Genesis
1692	Of Justification of Imputer Righteousness
1692	Paul's Departure and Crown
1692	Of the Trinity and the Christian
1692	Of the Law and the Christian
1692	Israel's Hope Encouraged
1692	The Desires of the Righteous Granted
1692	The Saint's Privilege and Profit
1692	Christ a Complete Saviour
1692	The Saint's Knowledge of Christ's Love
1692	The House of the Forest of Lebanon
1692	Of Antichrist and His Ruin
1698	The Heavenly Footman

THE DUNN FAMILY'S DESCENT FROM JOHN BUNYAN

John Bunyan (1628–1688)

Thomas Bunyan (1647–1718)

John Bunyan (1670– ?)

Robert Bunyan (1693–?)

Robert Bunyan (1715–1794)

Robert Bunyan (1745–1825)

Elizabeth Bunyan (1769–1800) *m* Charles Robinson

Suzannah Robinson (1798–1851) *m* Charles Seward

George Seward (1829–1920)

Minnie Seward *m* William Dunn

George Dunn (1898–1955) *m* Edith Hall

Mary Dunn
Edward Dunn
William Dunn
Bruce Dunn
John Dunn

BUNYAN'S CHARACTERS AND PLACES IN PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Christian	A traveller from the City of Destruction [this life] to Mount Zion—the Celestial City [Heaven].
City of Destruction	This is the city where Christian and his family lived. He came to realise that his life was in mortal danger and that he must escape from this present world lest he be destroyed by it and with it. This meant leaving all—including [sadly for Christian] his un-believing wife and children—and venturing everything on God alone.
Evangelist	This was the first person Christian met once he had decided to leave the City of Destruction. When Christian cried out: 'What must I do to be saved?' it was Evangelist who directed his attention to a distant light and so set him on his way towards salvation. He warned Christian to flee <i>from</i> the wrath to come and to flee <i>to</i> the Wicket Gate as the only way of escape.[Presumably Evangelist is Mr Gifford—the pastor who first showed the seeking John Bunyan the way of salvation].
Obstinate	A neighbour from Christian's town who mocked and threatened him, attempting to dissuade him from his course and turn him back to his old ways. He was scathing in his criticism of Christian's narrow views of life.
Pliable	Another of Christian's neighbours. Pliable vacillates from one opinion to another. So long as religion walks in silver shoes and there is sunshine on the way, he is content to go along with Christian. Whereas Christian is led on by principle, Pliable is motivated only by impulse.
The Burden	From the moment he left the City of Destruction, Christian carried a huge burden on his back. This is the burden of his sin and guilt and which is constantly weighing him down in his conscience as he seek to find the path to salvation.
Slough of Despond	Christian and Pliable lose sight of the necessity to be watchful as they travel, and so fall into a dangerous ditch—the Slough of Despond. Pliable—with no consciousness of his sin to hinder him—easily escapes the bog and immediately deserts Christian to return to the City of Destruction. This unpleasant experience is more than he'd bargained for. Christian, on the other hand, is so weighed down by his burden that he began—under its weight—to sink still further into the bog.
Help	He arrives just in time to rescue Christian from the Slough of Despond. He instructs Christian with regard to the Slough and explains that most men fall into it; some go on in their pilgrimage wiser and better, whereas others turn back and no longer walk in the Way.
Worldly-wiseman	He is wise in his own eyes and seeks to divert Christian from the path of faith. He is self-righteous, glorying in the law, despising grace, trusting in his own merits, and who will not accept the propitiation of Christ. He is a

legalist who is intent on working his own way to Heaven. He is out to dissuade Christian from following Evangelist's advice, and instead, points Christian to the rules and regulations of the law as the means by which he may get rid of his burden himself. He points Christian to self-justification rather than self-condemnation. He advocates forgetfulness of sin rather than an earnest search for forgiveness of sin.

- Carnal Policy The town where Worldly-wiseman lived.
- Mr Legality A friend of Worldly-wiseman who can instruct Christian how to be rid of his *consciousness* of the burden he carries. If Christian can but learn to practice morality, this will take off his burden. He must trust in the law and thus will be able to justify himself. The method is cheap and avoids all the unnecessary suffering Christian is bound to face if he continues along the Way advocated by Evangelist.
- Civility Mr Legality's son. He is an insipid character, who, in spite of his innocent looks is incapable of helping any one. He is nothing more than a hypocrite.
- Morality The village where Mr Legality and Civility live.
- Mount Sinai Seduced by Worldly-wiseman, Christian began to climb the steep hill to Mr Legality's house. As he did so, he passed under the awful shadow of Mount Sinai with all its legal demands for perfection and conformity. The more he advanced the more he was fearful of the Mount falling on him and crushing him. Far from his burden becoming lighter, it now seemed heavier than ever. Having wandered well out of the Way, Christian is eventually rescued by Evangelist.
- The Wicket Gate Christian knocks to gain entry. This is the 'door' by which he enters onto the King's Highway to the Celestial City. The door is Christ—the only means by which a pilgrim can come to God. Christian is still painfully conscious of his burden, for as yet he has not seen the Cross.
[This was an accurate representation of John Bunyan's experience. Pilgrim's Progress is the account of *one* man's experience in *full*, while it may only be the representation of other people's experience in *part*].
- Beelzebub The evil one who is constantly attacking pilgrims as they approach the Wicket Gate and as they journey on the Way.
- Goodwill He opens the Wicket Gate for Christian and quickly pulls him through warning him of the attacks of Beelzebub upon all who approach and pass through the gate. Goodwill then sets Christian on the narrow path that leads to Mount Zion. He instructs Christian to go to the nearby house of Interpreter.
- Interpreter The Holy Spirit—Christian's guide and teacher. He instructs the pilgrim as to the mind of God. He shows him the great matters of faith, truth, Satan's temptations, inward trials, judgement and final victory. He takes the things of God and shows them to Christian, thus equipping him for the hard journey ahead. In Interpreter's house there are many lessons, parables and revelations by which new light comes to Christian's understanding.

- The Dusty Parlour** This dusty room (that has never been swept) illustrates the heart of the natural man. The dust is his original sin and inner corruptions. As soon as someone began sweeping the room Christian was almost choked by the dust. He who was sweeping the room was Law. Then he saw a second person come and sprinkled water on the dust—the water of the Gospel. By this Christian saw clearly that the Law, instead of cleansing the heart from sin, only revives it and puts more strength into it—the Law has no power to subdue sin. Only through the coming of the Gospel is sin subdued.
- Passion and Patience** Passion is the character of the men and women of the world, whereas Patience is the character of those who belong to the world to come. Passion wants everything now; Patience is content to wait God's providence and time. Passion laughs at Patience. He has what he wants first, whereas Patience has his last. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. But the last gives place to nothing; hence he who has his portion last has it forever. Thus Christian learned not to covet anything but to wait for the things to come.
- The Burning Wall** Christian was shown a great fire burning at the foot of a wall. A man was busily trying to put it out with buckets of water, but the more he tried to quench it the more the fire burned. Interpreter explained that the fire was the work of God's grace in the heart of the believer. The man trying to put it out was the Devil. Christian was then taken and shown behind the wall. There, another man was secretly pouring oil into the fire to sustain it. This was the oil of grace coming directly from the hand of Christ.
- The Man of Despair** Interpreter introduces Christian to a man trapped in a cage in a dark room. He was once a pilgrim on his way to the Celestial City but foolishly listened to Satan and deliberately played with sin—grieving the Spirit and provoking God to anger. Now his heart is hardened and he cannot repent. He is in deep remorse and believes himself to be beyond hope of salvation.
- Dream of Judgement** Interpreter shows Christian a man who has just woken from a dream about the Judgment. He is trembling from what he has seen and heard. In his dream he had been faced with the reality of his sin and of God's righteous condemnation, but he realised that he could do nothing to help himself. He had tried to hide from the wrath of the Lamb but to no avail. Now that he was awake, he was terrified—knowing that he was not ready to face the Judge of all the earth.
- The Wall of Salvation** On each side of the Way upon which Christian travelled there was a wall—the Wall of Salvation. The walls mark out clearly the path forward for the pilgrim.
- The Cross** Christian ascends a steep hill and suddenly comes upon the Cross. In an instant his burden falls from his back and rolls down the slope, falling into a nearby sepulchre. This was the last he ever saw of his burden—his sin and guilt are removed once and for all. Christian is surprised that the sight of the Cross should relieve him of his burden. He just looked and looked at the Cross until the tears cascaded down his cheeks. His conscience was free at last!

Three Shining Ones

The first one greets Christian: ‘Peace be to you.’ The second stripped him of his rags and gave him a new garment—the robe of righteousness. The third set a mark on his forehead and gave him a sealed scroll, urging him to run to the Celestial Gate where he is to hand it in. Overwhelmed by these gifts of pardon, justification and assurance of life, Christian leapt for joy and went on his way singing.

Simple, Sloth and
Presumption

Christian came upon these three men sleeping beside the path, each with shackles on their ankles. Waking them up Christian urged them to be alert because a roaring lion was nearby, and that they must continue immediately towards the Celestial City. Simple—in his folly—said he could see no danger; Sloth—in his indolence—said he wanted to sleep a little longer, and Presumption—in his pride—said he could manage quite well on his own, thank you very much! With that they all went back to sleep.

Formalist and
Hypocrisy

These two men climbed over the left side of the Wall of Salvation to the narrow King’s Highway without having entered through the Wicket Gate or passing via the Cross. As far as they were concerned this was a convenient short-cut, and if they were ‘in’ then that was all that mattered. They had evidence that many had done the same for thousands of years before them. Christian accused them of being thieves who had come in without the Master’s direction and who would go out again without His mercy. If they had made a false start on their journey, they could not be true at the end. They in turn accused him of being the same as they—with the exception of the cloak he was wearing. They concluded that someone had given this to Christian so he could hide his nakedness.

Vain-glory

The land where Formalist and Hypocrisy came from.

The Hill Difficult

All pilgrims sooner or later come upon difficulties along the Way to the Celestial City. For Christian, the Way may have been straight and narrow, but now it was no longer *level*. Christian soon found that he was down on his hands and knees in order to negotiate the steep incline. It was tough going and enough to make a pilgrim want to give up. Finally attaining the summit, Christian rested in an arbor and began reading his scroll. He fell asleep. While he slept on and on his scroll slipped to the ground. [Only later did he discover his loss and—with tears—had to retrace his steps to the arbor in order to recover his precious scroll—his assurance of life].

Danger and
Destruction

The two other ‘ways’ around the Hill Difficult. These paths were chosen by Formalist and Hypocrisy both of whom had no intention of subjecting themselves to the effort of climbing by the Way Christian had taken. They assumed the paths would meet on the other side of the mountain. As it is, both perished on their alternate routes.

Timorous and
Mistrust

Two would-be pilgrims whom Christian met as they hurried *back* along the way they had come. They were full of terrifying stories of lions and other

dangers on the road ahead. In spite of their warnings Christian is determined to go forward.

- The Lions It is not long before Christian comes upon the two lions which had forced Timorous and Mistress to retreat. They were standing on the path outside a palace and there seemed to be no way past the ferocious beasts. He is afraid to go another step.
- Watchful This is the porter outside the palace who encourages Christian to venture past the lions by walking in the *middle* of the path. He explains that the lions are both chained and can actually do him no harm. He instructs Christian that, though such a danger may seem formidable, when closely examined by the eye of faith and with trust in God, it may be overcome. And so, with the help of Watchful, Christian arrives safely at the palace gate—having passed yet another test of faith.
- The Palace Beautiful This is a mansion along the Way where pilgrims could be rested and refreshed. It is the Church. All the inhabitants of the Palace Beautiful had specific gifts with which to minister to weary travellers. In addition to the porter, Watchful, there is Discretion, Prudence, Piety and Charity. They indicate the heavenly virtues and graces of the Spirit which are present in the Church of God. It is in the Palace that Christian—for the first time—is able to share all his experiences with those who not only understand but who are equipped to encourage him and explain in more detail the Way on which he has embarked.
- Discretion This gift relates to the intellect and judgment. She governs the actions of those within the Palace.
- Prudence This gift affects the interests not only of this present life but also that which is to come. She has the oversight of those within the Palace.
- Piety This gift regulates the devotions of soul and spirit. She conducts the worship within the Palace.
- Charity This gift discharges all the duties of love to God and to our fellow-man. She endears the members of the Palace to one another.
- Chamber of Peace The room where Christian slept during his stay in the Palace.
- The Study The room in the Palace where all the records were kept concerning the Lord of the Hill—the Son of the Ancient of Days. Here too were the names of all those who had enlisted in His army—their deeds and exploits for their Lord. They are those whose names are written in the Book of Life.
- The Armoury Another room in the Palace where the weapons of the spiritual warfare were kept. There Christian saw swords, shields, helmets, breast-plates, all-prayer, shoes that would not wear out, and many other things pertaining to the Lord's battle equipment for His servants. [Before leaving to continue his journey, Christian was provided—by the sisterhood of the Palace—with a full set of this important armour].

- Delectable Mountains From the roof of the Palace Christian could see—with the eye of faith—these distant mountains to which he was headed. He could make out beautiful woods, vineyards, fruits of all sorts, flowers, springs and fountains. It was a most desirable sight for the pilgrim and much closer to hand than he had imagined.
- Immanuel's Land The country to which Christian was heading and where he had seen—at a distance—the Delectable Mountains.
- Valley of Humiliation A place of trial and conflict through which Christian passed immediately after leaving the Palace Beautiful.
- Apollyon Christian encountered this foul fiend (named the 'destroyer') in the Valley of Humiliation. The monster had scales like a fish, wings like a dragon, feet like a bear, a mouth like a lion, and belched fire and smoke. In great fear, Christian is inclined to retreat but realises he has no armour for his back and so presses forward. This foe is none other than Satan himself—Christian's worst and most dangerous enemy.
- Apollyon challenges Christian and wants to know why he has run away from the City of Destruction since this is *his* territory and he is the prince of that land. Christian is one of *his* subjects and is deserting—changing from a bad to a worse! A great battle then followed between the two, and at times it seemed Christian would be destroyed by this powerful enemy. One of the weapons Apollyon used to get at Christian was the nagging accusation: 'You have already been unfaithful in your service to your new Master; and so how do you think you are likely to receive wages from him now?' The battle raged on for half a day, Apollyon hurling his flaming darts at the besieged pilgrim. In one terrible moment Christian let go of his sword [the Word of God] and was only able regain it at the last moment just as Apollyon was about to do him in once and for all. With a mighty thrust of his sword Christian wounds Apollyon so that he is forced to withdraw.
- The Valley of the Shadow of Death Another place of trial—worse than the Valley of Humiliation—through which Christian had to pass in order to reach the Celestial City. Just as he reached the Valley he met other pilgrims who were returning by the way they had come for fear of what lay ahead in this dark and lonely place of testing. This is where Satan gathers his minions—demons, dragons, evil powers and the like—to aid him not only in tempting and testing Christian, but in attacking him in order to destroy him.
- There seemed to be no clearly defined pathway—no stepping stones—and there were many pits and ditches into which one could easily fall if not careful. The mouth of hell itself—belching fire and smoke—is right next to the exceptionally narrow track upon which Christian must make his way. Here he must carefully choose his every step. His primary weapon in this terrible place is not his sword but *all-prayer*.
- At the end of the Valley Christian came upon the awful sight of previous pilgrims who had not survived the ordeal. Their blood and bones and ashes and mangled bodies were everywhere.
- Pope and Pagan Two giants who once lived in a cave next to the Way and whose power had tyrannised pilgrims in by-gone days.

- Faithful Another traveller heading for the Celestial City whom Christian met on the Way. He became Christian's companion and close friend as they journeyed on together. These two engaged in endless pleasant conversations about their experiences along the Way and of their hopes for all that lay ahead.
- Adam the First Faithful relates to Christian his struggle with his secret inclination for Adam the First—his old ways of the flesh.
- Discontent, Pride,
Arrogance, Shame,
Self-conceit,
Worldly-glory. Other detractors and enemies whom Faithful had met on the Way who had tried to divert him from his pilgrimage to the Celestial City.
- Talkative A man whom Christian and Faithful met on the Way. He at first deceived Faithful by his persuasive religious chatter, but Christian saw through it all and exposed him for the charlatan that he was. He knew that there was no place for true religion in Talkative's life but he was all words and no doing. He was in fact ignorant of the truth. It took some time for the two travellers to be rid of this pestilent fellow. [Bunyan was drawing from his own experience when—before his conversion—he once thought himself to be a great talker in matter of religion].
- Say-well The father of Talkative
- Prating-row Where Talkative and Say-well lived.
- Vanity Fair A town through which Christian and Faithful had to pass during the course of their journey. Here the inhabitants are absorbed in their own worldly and pleasurable pursuits, all of which are vain and pointless when compared to the real issues of life. Here there were performers, jugglers, plays and many other diversions. Here too there was theft and murder and adultery and other crimes. It was a place of human wisdom but no faith or piety. It was a place often visited by the prince of this world. Christian and Faithful could not avoid Vanity Fair but although they found themselves *in* it, they knew they were not *of* it. Of course the inhabitants mocked and taunted the pilgrims and did all they could to seduce them to the ways and pleasures of Vanity Fair. When Christian and Faithful refused to take part in the activities of Vanity Fair they were bitterly accused. When the pilgrims declared that they were only interested in the truth and were on their way to the New Jerusalem they were immediately attacked and confined to a cage—bound hand and foot—there to wait trial by the Judge of the town. [This episode is an account of Bunyan's own experience of prison for the sake of the Gospel, and those who accused the pilgrims mirror the character of those who accused Bunyan during his trial and incarceration].
- Lord Hate-good The judge who brought the indictment upon Christian and Faithful.
- Envy, Superstition,
Pickthank Witnesses who testified at the trial of Christian and Faithful.

Beelzebul	The evil one and 'noble prince' of Vanity Fair.
Lord Old-man, Lord Carnal-delight, Lord Luxurious, Lord Desire-of- vain-glory, Lord Lechery, Sir Having Greedy.	Nobles and other prominent citizens of Vanity Fair who were highly offended by the talk and conduct of Christian and Faithful.
Mr Blindman, Mr No-good, Mr Malice, Mr Love-lust, Mr Live-loose, Mr Heady, Mr High-mind, Mr Enmity, Mr Liar, Mr Cruelty, Mr Hate-light, Mr Implacable.	Members of the jury who were assembled to hear the indictment against Christian and Faithful. They eventually conclude that Faithful is a heretic of the worst kind and worthy only of death. Thus the Judge orders his execution. Christian manages to escape martyrdom and continued on his way alone.
Hopeful	Another pilgrim whom Christian meets shortly after his escape from Vanity Fair.
By-ends	A traveller on the Way whom Christian and Hopeful meet.
Fair-speech	The town where By-ends came from.
Lord Turn-about, Lord Time-server, Lord Fair-speech, Mr Smooth-man, Mr Facing-both-ways, Mr Anything, Lady Feigning	Other prominent residents of the town Fair-speech.
Mr Two-tongues	The parson in the town of Fair-speech.
Mr Hold-the-world, Mr Money-love, Mr Save-all	Three close friends of By-ends

Mr Gripman	A schoolmaster who taught By-ends and his friends
Love-gain	The town where Mr Gripman taught.
Coveting	The county where the town of Love-gain was situated.
Ease	A level part of the pathway where Christian and Hopeful were able to walk with great content.
Lucre	A hill on the other side of the plain Ease. Here there was a silver mine which often enticed pilgrims to divert from the Way—usually to their destruction.
Demas	A ‘gentleman’ whom Christian and Hopeful met just near the mine Lucre. He would call pilgrims to turn aside to view the mine. Hopeful was all for having a look, but Christian wouldn’t be in it, sensing the danger and believing it to be a subtle trap.
The Pillar of Salt	A monument of a woman made from salt and set beside the Way just beyond the silver mine. It bore the simple inscription: ‘Remember Lot’s wife.’
The River	Christian and Hopeful arrive at this pleasant spot—which may be called ‘the river of God’ or ‘the river of the water of life.’ The pilgrims derived great comfort and refreshment from the River. They were able to safely relax by its banks to regain their strength after the recent trials and so to prepare themselves for the difficult times ahead.
By-path Meadow	An attractive alternate path running parallel (or so it seemed) to the Way to the Celestial City. Christian and Hopeful, having diverted to By-path Meadow found—at first—the going much easier than on the Way. Little did they realise the path led to great danger and possible death.
Vain-confidence	A fellow traveller on By-path Meadow. Because he was not looking where he was going he very soon fell into a pit and was lost.
Doubting Castle	A foreboding castle which stood right alongside By-path Meadow. The ground on which Christian and Hopeful slept that night was part of the grounds of the Castle and so they were arrested as they awoke next morning—charged with trespassing. They were immediately thrown into a dungeon to await their fate.
Giant Despair	The fierce owner of Doubting Castle.
Mrs Diffidence	Wife of Giant Despair
Promise	The name of the scroll that Christian had been given at the commencement of his journey. It was by referring to Promise that Christian and Hopeful discovered it to be the key by which they could escape from the dungeon of Doubting Castle.

Knowledge,
Experience,
Watchful,
Sincere

Shepherds whom Christian and Hopeful met at the foot of the Delectable Mountains. These encouraged and refreshed the pilgrims as they prepared for the last part of their difficult journey. The Shepherds led the two along the Way through the early part of the Mountain route.

The Hill Error

A dangerous and precipitous cliff next to the Way in the midst of the Mountains where many previous pilgrims had fallen to their death as a result of not carefully following the Truth.

Mount Caution

A lookout on the Mountains from which the pilgrims could look back and see those who had foolishly strayed into the easy-going By-path Meadow and so ended up prisoners in Doubting Castle. From this vantage point they could now see the terrible end of those who had not escaped—as they had been able to do. It was a sobering lesson.

By-way to Hell

A door in the Mountains where Christian and Hopeful could see into Hell—the place of doom for hypocrites and the like.

The Hill Clear

Another high vantage point in the Mountains from which Christian and Hopeful could faintly see—with aid of the telescope of faith—the very gates of the Celestial City.

Ignorance

A fellow traveller who is wise in his own eyes and thinks he is on the right path to the Celestial City. He is content to pursue his own ‘religion’ and leaves Christian and Hopeful to pursue theirs. As it is, he does in fact follow the two pilgrims, but always at a distance. They later have opportunity to instruct him in the Truth of the Gospel. Although he *said* he believed in Christ for justification, he did not appear to have a *saving* faith. His was a false faith, a presumptuous faith, a deceptive faith. He had no right fear of God before his eyes and so eventually drew back and walked with the pilgrims no longer.

Conceit

The country where Ignorance came from.

Crooked Lane

The path which Ignorance took by which he supposedly gained entry to the Way. He had not passed through the Wicket Gate nor come via the Cross.

Turnaway

A man who once travelled on the Way to the Celestial City but fell away and no longer journeyed forward.

Apostasy

The town where Turnaway now lived.

Little-Faith

A fellow traveller who was weak in faith and not mindful of the dangers along the Narrow Way.

Dead-man's Lane	A dangerous path leading into the Narrow Way by which false pilgrim could enter. Little-Faith had foolishly fallen asleep at the junction and so been attacked by several false and treacherous travellers.
Broadway-gate	The town where Dead-man's Lane comes from.
Faint-heart, Mistrust, Guilt.	Three false pilgrims who had come down Dead-man's Lane from Broadway-gate. On encountering Little-Faith, they overcame him and robbed him of his spending money. Thankfully his precious jewel—the treasure of his heart—was safe.
Great-Grace	The King's champion—the one who came to the rescue of Little-Faith.
Good-Confidence	The town where Great-Grace lived.
Flatterer	Satan disguised as a false prophet—dressed as an angel of light—who leads Christian and Hopeful astray by diverting them onto an alternative path running parallel to the Narrow Way. Though they had been warned by the Shepherds to avoid the seductions of Flatterer they had clean forgotten and were taken in by his smooth words.
The Net	The trap into which the pilgrims fell as a result of following Flatterer's leading.
The Shining One	He comes to the rescue of the pilgrims. This is a ministering spirit exemplifying the goodness of God the Father who rebukes, chastens and rescues his erring children.
Atheist	A man—blinded by the god of this world—whom Christian and Hopeful met along the Way. He was greatly amused by the pilgrim's account of their journey and their desired destination. He took delight in ridiculing them for their folly and wasted effort. As far as he was concerned Mount Zion and the Celestial City did not exist!
The Enchanted Ground	A place where pilgrims were inclined to be at ease, to grow drowsy and fall asleep, whereas in fact, they should be awake and alert to the ever-present dangers around them.
Temporary	A man whom Christian knew who professed a great knowledge of religion. He was a backslider in the end.
Turnback	He lived next door to Temporary
Graceless	The town where Temporary and Turnback lived.
Honesty	A town next to Graceless.

- Saveself He seduced Temporary and turned him aside from following the Way.
- The Land of Beulah Beulah means ‘married’ and describes the final blessing of the believer in the ultimate marriage to Christ the Bridegroom. Christian and Hopeful are now entering this land and are within sight of the very gates of the Celestial City—Mount Zion, the City of God. Their journey is almost at its end and they are overjoyed by the glorious prospects that are ahead of them.
- The River of Death Between the pilgrims and the Gate of the City there was a River—the River of Death. There was no bridge, and all travellers had to cross this deep and foreboding torrent. [Only two others in history have been privileged to avoid the River—Enoch and Elijah]. Christian is now very despondent believing he will surely sink in the dark waters. Nevertheless he is encouraged by his companion Hopeful who urges him on until they both eventually make it to the other side and so to the Gate of the City.
- Two Shining Men Ministering spirits sent to help and assist those who have become heirs of salvation, ascended the Hill of the Lord and arrived at the Gate of the City.
- As the two pilgrims entered the Gate, Bunyan saw in his dream that they were instantly transformed and he longed that he might be with them. They were now in the presence of their Living Lord and were seeing Him as He is. Bunyan heard the bells of the City ringing as Christian and Hopeful entered, and he also heard them both singing—together with all the others inhabitants of the City—‘Blessing and honour and glory and power be to Him that sits on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.’
- Vain-hope Ignorance, who had been following Christian and Hopeful at a distance, engaged this ferry-man—Vain-hope—to get him across the River in a his boat. But Ignorance arrived at the Gate only to find that it was barred against him. He had no certificate, no pledge, no robe of righteousness, and no wedding garment to entitle him to an entrance into the City. Instead, the King commanded the Shinning Ones to bind him hand and foot and take him away. Thus Bunyan saw that, even from the gates of heaven itself, there is an immediate path to Hell for the sinner who has refused to come to faith and walk in the Way of Salvation.
