

A Dreamer and his Wonderful Dream: The Story of John Bunyan...

by Alfred P. Gibbs



Chapter 1

It may be well, before we consider the story of "The Pilgrim's Progress" itself, to devote a little time to the history of the man who wrote this book, which has been classed, by those well qualified to judge, as the next best book to the Bible. His biography is as interesting as his book and we shall see later how much of his own life's history has been woven into the texture of his immortal allegory.

Sometime during the year 1628 John Bunyan was born in the little village of Elstow, near to the town of Bedford, in Bedfordshire England.

We know very little of his parentage except that his father was a tinker to trade and extremely poor. John Bunyan, in later years wrote "my descent was of a low and inconsiderable generation, my father's house being of that rank that was the meanest and the most despised occupation of those days." We may be thankful that "God is no respecter of persons," and that He has declared in His word that "Not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty...that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:26-29). It matters not how poor a person may be, or how lowly a station he may occupy in life; the moment that person becomes a Christian he is made a child of God, an heir of God and a joint heir with the Lord Jesus Christ. God delights to "raise the poor out of the dust...that He may set him with princes" (Ps. 113:7,8).

His education was such as the poor people of that day could afford. He had scarcely grasped the elements of reading and writing before he was taken from school in order to help his father mend pots and pans, and thus aid in keeping the ever present wolf from the door. He soon forgot the little he had learned, and tells us that he quickly developed into an idle boy, who for swearing, lying and blasphemy had few, if any, equals in the neighborhood. He was a ringleader in the village wickedness. He cared nothing for God's word or for God's beloved Son; neither gave he any time or thought to his fearful state before

God, or where he would spend eternity. He desired his own way, and nothing pleased him better than when he was indulging in all sorts of sinful pleasures.

This is a graphic description of the natural condition of all. We may not have gone to the same lengths in sin as did John Bunyan, but the fact remains that God in His word has declared, "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one...for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10-12, 22-23).

In his young days Bunyan enlisted as a soldier and took part in the Civil war which was then raging between the Parliament and the King. At the siege of Leicester he was amongst those who were ordered to make an assault; but another man obtained permission to go instead of him, and in the early part of the battle was killed. This caused him to think seriously about eternal things, but like many others he tried to put off these thoughts by plunging deeper into the pleasures of sin, until he became notorious in the countryside for his ungodliness and vice. Time and time again did God speak to him. He was rescued from drowning many times and on other occasions was delivered from death in a wonderful way; but in spite of all these tokens to him of God's love, forbearance, goodness and long suffering, they failed to bring him to repentance. (Rom. 2:4). He seemed determined to go his own way, and become "the master of his fate and the captain of his soul."

At the early age of nineteen John Bunyan was married. All his wife brought to him in the way of wedding presents were two good books that her father, a very poor but godly man, gave her. These books were entitled "The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven," and "The Practice of Piety." By this time he had practically lost the faculty of reading; so his wife encouraged and helped him to read these two excellent books, and persuaded him to turn over a new leaf and adopt a religious life. This John Bunyan seemed quite willing to do, and each Sunday went twice to church, repeating the responses and singing with the best of them; but all the while clinging to his sins. He had to learn, like all others who expect to be in heaven, that reformation and a religious profession are no substitutes for the new birth or regeneration. The words of our Lord Jesus, addressed to the most moral and religious man of his day, need to be carefully pondered, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Scarcely had he taken his bat to play a game called "cat," when suddenly he seemed to hear a voice from heaven saying, "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven; or have thy sins and go to hell?" It seemed to him that Christ was standing face to face with him, and was about to visit well-deserved judgment upon him. He left the game for a few moments, and thought upon these things. As thoughts of a holy God crowded into his mind he argued thus, "If I am already damned, I may just as well be damned for many sins as for a few sins." With this fearful decision he returned to his game again, and none of his companions guessed for one moment what an awful transaction had taken place. Thus did Bunyan again reject the gracious warning of the God Who loved him. Before we judge him for this, let us each ask himself the question, "Have I ever rejected God's message to me?" Think of the many times that God has spoken through some preacher of the Gospel, or some gospel tract, or through the death of some relative and friend. Have we heeded the message and turned to the Saviour; or have we, like Bunyan, hardened our hearts, and turned away our ears from the truth? Give heed to God's voice which speaks to each one saying, "Because there is wrath, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee" (Job 36:18).

Bunyan's conscience, however, was ill at ease. In spite of his rejection of the heavenly warning, God graciously continued to deal with him, and sought to bring him to repentance. One day while he was cursing and swearing with some of his ungodly companions, one of the worst women in the village passed by, and hearing his fearful language rebuked him in these words, "You ungodly wretch! I never heard such swearing in my life! You are enough to spoil all the youth in the whole town!" This rebuke put him to shame, coming as it did from a woman of evil reputation. Once again he determined to become a better man and leave off this outwardly vile conduct for the future. This he did, and everyone wondered at the change and spoke well of him, both to his face and behind his back. This pleased him considerably, and he became quite proud of his achievement. He practiced self-denial,

thinking by so doing he would gain more favor with God. He gave up dancing, much as he secretly yearned for it. He used to be very fond of bell ringing but this also he denied himself thinking by so doing he would gain the favor of God. He would often stand outside the belfry tower and look longingly within as his companions rang the bells; but he was afraid to enter, lest God in judgment should cause one of the bells to fall from its place and kill him.

One day this thought came to him, "Supposing the whole tower were to fall and crush me! I should certainly be doomed!" This settled him, and he stayed away from the place altogether, and in the eyes of his neighbors became the model of what a Christian should be.

Alas for John Bunyan! He was making the mistake that many, both before and since his day, have made. He was attempting to get right with God on the ground of his own good works, resolutions and religious exercises; whereas God distinctly and plainly declares in His word that "By grace are ye saved through faith...not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9), and again, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). God does not save sinners because of good works they have done or ever will do; but because of the work His beloved Son accomplished on Calvary's cross, when He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and died in the stead of the sinner, and thus satisfied every claim of God against the guilty one. He who seeks to be justified by his own deeds, thus ignores and rejects the only provision that God in His grace offers to the lost and guilty children of men.

In fact, John Bunyan himself afterward described his condition during this period in these words: "I was nothing but a poor painted hypocrite. I did all I did, either to be seen of, or to be well spoken of by men. I knew not Christ, nor grace, nor faith, nor hope." Let us see to it that we do not fall into this same error, but owning our own need as lost and guilty sinners, let us trust in the finished work of God's dear Son, and receive Him in simple faith to be our own personal Saviour, and thus being justified by faith, have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:1).

However, better times were ahead for one day as he was walking through the streets of Bedford, crying as his trade demanded, "Pots and pans to mend," he saw a few poor women sitting at a door, and they were speaking in such a manner as Bunyan had never heard before. They spoke with assurance of their soul's salvation; of the preciousness of the Lord Jesus; of their knowledge of Him as their

personal Saviour; and at the same time, of the wretchedness of their state by nature. This was all new to him, and he listened with great attention to their conversation and sought their counsel as to his own state before God.

This they willingly gave to him from the word of God, and showed him first of all his need of a Saviour. They unfolded to him for the first time in his life, that all his own righteousnesses, in which he was trusting, were in God's sight like filthy rags, (Isa. 64:6); that in spite of all his efforts to please God it was utterly impossible, for "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). They pointed out to him that "Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish his own righteousness, he had not submitted himself to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). In other words, Bunyan was shown his true state in God's sight, that of a helpless, lost and guilty sinner.

Next, they pointed out God's wondrous love in giving His only Son, Who came from heaven to seek and save the lost and Who, on Calvary's cross suffered the Just One for us, the unjust, that He might bring us to God. He was shown from the Bible that all the work necessary for the salvation of lost and ruined sinners, the Lord Jesus had accomplished to God's entire satisfaction through the sacrifice of Himself. Then they pointed out the "easy, artless, unencumbered plan" of salvation through faith in Christ's finished work and acceptance of Him as Saviour and confession of Him as Lord. (Rom. 10:9, 10).

Thus John Bunyan, for the first time in his life, heard the gospel of the grace of God, Who used the testimony of these simple, but godly women to arouse him to a sense of his deep need of salvation. He now began to read the Bible for himself, and he was confirmed in his belief that what the women had told him was true. The result of this reading of the Scriptures was to produce within him a deep sense of his guilt and sin. As he saw how holy, just, righteous and sin-hating God was, and how grievously he had sinned against Him; he began to realize that his sins were indeed a burden, and that in God's sight he was deserving only of His righteous wrath, condemnation and banishment from His presence for all eternity. I wonder how many of my readers have discovered this for themselves? Perhaps some are trying, like Bunyan, to make themselves fit for God's presence by their good works and religious observances, and ignoring that God has said, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified." (Rom. 3:20). Remember that,

"Your fair pretensions must wholly be waived,

Your best resolutions be crossed;
You never can know yourself to be saved,
Till you own you are utterly lost."

Bunyan now began to ask questions of these Christian women to which they could give no reply. He was possessed of a very vivid imagination, and what would have satisfied most people utterly failed to give him that peace he was seeking. As fast as one difficulty was solved, another would take its place, until he despaired of ever finding the peace he sought. They advised him to go to their pastor, a man named Mr. Gifford, who knew the Scriptures much better than they, and he would probably have all his difficulties solved. Thus counselled, Bunyan went to see Mr. Gifford, and was indeed greatly helped by his soberer judgment, and excellent understanding in the word of God. He was told to study the Bible more carefully, and to rest in childlike faith in what he found recorded therein; for only then could he have a sure foundation on which to rest for the assurance of his eternal salvation.

The result of this further study of the Holy Scriptures was to more deeply impress him with the sense of his guilt; and often, he would retire to the privacy of his little attic, and cry to God for mercy. It seemed to him that the more he strove to obtain peace the deeper his distress became; and the nearer he sought to get to God, the further God seemed to depart from him. He had to learn, as every one who is saved, that "not saved are we by trying, from self can come no aid," and that

"It is not thy tears of repentance nor prayers,
But the blood that atones for the soul;
On Him then Who shed it, thou mayest at once
Thy weight of iniquity roll.
Look! Look! Look and live!" (Isa.45:22)

He would often wander into the fields at evening, and alone with God would cry from the depths of his heart, "What must I do to be saved?" Sometimes he thought he was possessed by a demon. He would have gladly exchanged his life for that of a dog. He regretted the day he had ever been born, and was of all men most miserable. Sometimes he was tempted to take his own life, but he was afraid to do so, because he knew that this would but seal his eternal doom. Truly, there is no trouble like soul trouble: "A wounded spirit, who can bear?" Yet we can thank God for the deep experience through which he passed, for when deliverance came, he was able in a peculiar measure to enter into the soul difficulties of others, and thus be of great help to them.

On one occasion, when particularly depressed, the thought came to his mind that he had committed the unpardonable sin and consequently could not possibly be saved, however greatly he desired to be. In this frame of mind, he consulted a very old Christian and confided this new difficulty to him; but to his dismay, this Christian, who ought to have known better, informed him that probably he was right and had indeed committed the unpardonable sin! Thus did Bunyan prove the truth of the Scripture which says, "Vain is the help of man." The effect of this experience was to drive him more and more to the inerrant word of God that alone can make the sinner "Wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:15).

Perhaps God is dealing with you, my reader, at this present moment, and showing you your need of regeneration, and also your helplessness to save yourself. God does this in order that you may be brought to an end of yourself, and led to see that your only hope for time and eternity is in the work that the Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross when He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (Heb. 9:26). A man once said it took him forty years to learn three things: first, that he could do nothing to save himself; second, that God did not want him to do anything to save himself; third, that the Lord Jesus had finished, fully and completely, to God's entire satisfaction, all the work necessary to save the lost and guilty sinner who simply trusted in Him.

It was while Bunyan was passing through this period of deep exercise of soul, that a book came into his possession that was a great help to him. It was Luther's "Treatise on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians." This book so nearly described his condition, difficulties, doubts, and fears that he thought Luther must have written this book for his special benefit! He valued this book next to his Bible, and spent hours reading it and comparing it very diligently with the Bible. It is no wonder that when Bunyan was saved by the grace of God, he was mightily used of God to help others in the way of life. God has said, "Ye shall seek Me, and ye shall find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." If God is dealing with you now, give yourself no rest or peace until you come to the assurance of salvation revealed in God's precious word through faith in the crucified and risen Son of God.

It is difficult to say just when the soul saving truth burst into the darkened heart of John Bunyan, for the Devil with his fiery darts of doubt was ever ready to quench any little light that he received from the word of God. His book, "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," records his experiences and should be read by all desiring a fuller knowledge of his conversion. In this autobiography, he speaks of an occasion when he asked his wife if she remembered a Scripture

which had in it the words "But ye are come unto Jesus." She could not recall it, so he began to read his New Testament until he came to those words in Heb. 12:22-24, "But ye are come...unto Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel." As he read these words a flood of divine light seemed to fill his soul as he realized that the Lord Jesus Christ was the alone Saviour and Mediator, and that salvation, full, free and eternal was the possession of all who trusted in Him and rested in His finished work. He believed the glad message, and that night he could scarcely sleep for the joy that filled him in the conscious sense of the forgiveness of sins. Yet after this wonderful experience, he was plagued with many doubts, and often was in the depths of despair.

Deliverance came fully and finally one day as he was passing through a field. As he was musing, this sentence fell upon his soul, "Thy righteousness is in heaven." With the eye of his soul he saw that the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of God was his personal righteousness. He perceived that His work on the cross had satisfied God completely on his behalf, in token of which He had been raised from the dead and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour. He saw for the first time the glorious truth of 2 Cor. 5:21. "For He hath made Him [Christ] to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." He discovered that his good frame of mind did not make his righteousness any better, nor did his bad frame of mind make it worse; but his righteousness was a Person, the One Who had loved him and had given Himself for him and Who was the same yesterday, today and forever!

All Bunyan's doubts were now dissolved like mist before the rising sun. He was fully and finally delivered from his slavish fears, and translated into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Henceforth he ceased to be occupied with his own realizations, fears and doubts and looked away from himself to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Would that this were the experience of each reader! We need to remember, however, that all people do not have the same difficulties, doubts and fears, nor the same depth of conviction of sin that Bunyan had. But all who are really and truly saved have taken their place before God as lost and guilty sinners; and as such have believed that Christ died for their sins, took their place at Calvary, and suffered in their stead. They have accepted Him as their personal Saviour, and have the assurance from the word of God that they are saved. Rom. 10:9-10; John 3:16; 5:24; Acts 16:30,31; Eph. 2:8,9. Read these Scriptures for yourself and rest not until you can say,

"O happy day that fixed my choice,

On Thee my Saviour and my God;
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And spread its raptures all abroad—
Happy day! Happy day!
When Jesus washed my sins away!"

Chapter 2

Bunyan now began to confess Christ as his Saviour before men; and seeing from the word of God that believers were baptized upon their profession of faith in Christ, he desired to thus obey the Lord in baptism. He was accordingly immersed in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 10:47; 16:30-33; Rom. 6:3-11, etc.) In the town of Bedford was a company of Christians who were termed "nonconformists" or "Dissenters" because they would not conform to the rules and regulations of the State church. These people believed, and rightly so, that the word of God is the alone rule for faith and practice. With this company Bunyan associated himself and he speaks of the great joy he had as he sat around the Lord's table with the Lord's people remembering the Lord's death till the Lord should come again. Luke 22:19,20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Acts 20:7. Ponder carefully these scriptures, and if you are a child of God you will be glad to hear the voice of the Shepherd (John 10:27) and thus obey Him in these two ordinances that He instituted for all who have trusted Him as their Saviour.

The experience through which John Bunyan had passed now stood him in good stead; and he began, as opportunity afforded itself, to speak of the Lord Jesus to both saved and unsaved. He did not rush ahead of God, but gradually blossomed out into a clear rugged preacher of the glorious Gospel of the grace of God, until the calls to preach became so many that after prayerful consideration he decided to give up his tinkering and devote his whole time to the ministry of God's word. Hundreds came to listen to him from all classes and conditions of society. The simple folks loved to hear him preach because he used language that they could understand; and his rough eloquence, born of sincere love for their souls, attracted and held their attention. The rich and educated, too, used to come and hear "the preaching tinker" as they called him; and they marvelled at the ability of one who had received so little education. Many souls professed to be saved under his ministry, and the children of God were strengthened in the faith and "Grew in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 3:18).

It so happened, however, that there was a law in England in those days which decreed that none but ordained ministers, or those intending to be, should be allowed to preach. Bunyan denied the right of the State to say who should, or who should not preach. "His was the mighty ordination of the pierced hands" (John 15:16) and this, to his mind, was all that was necessary. He had his commission from the Commander-in-Chief Who had said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," (Mark 16:15) and in obedience to his Lord he went everywhere preaching the gospel.

This brought him to the notice of the authorities and complaint was lodged against him, but due to the brethren rallying to his support, the prosecution was dropped. Then came the restoration of the Stuarts to the throne of England, and such ministry as Bunyan's was forbidden under severe penalties. For a time Bunyan used to disguise himself in order to pass unnoticed to the place where he was to preach, but at length he decided to dispense with all disguise and boldly preach the word, preferring to "obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). He was asked to preach in the village of Samsell and accepted the invitation. He was warned by his friends that the authorities knew of it and would take measures to stop him, but he went boldly on, determined that nothing should make him afraid. He had the promise of the presence of His Lord, so why should he be afraid what man should do unto him?

Accordingly he went to Samsell to conduct the meeting. After he had opened the service with prayer, he read this text, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" and while he was proceeding to speak from it a policeman walked in, and producing a warrant arrested him on the spot. He was taken before a Justice of the peace named Wingate who tried to get him to promise to cease preaching, and to find sureties who would pledge themselves to see that he kept his word; but this Bunyan resolutely refused to do. Accordingly Justice Wingate on the 13th of November, 1660, committed him to the Assizes when he would be brought up for trial.

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

Without examination of any witnesses for the defences he was found guilty, and Judge Keeling savagely and bitterly condemned him as follows: "Hear your sentence. You must be had back again to prison, and there lie for three months following; and at three month's end, if you do not submit and go to church to hear divine service and leave your preaching, you must be banished the realm; and if, after such a day as shall be appointed you to be gone, you shall be found in this realm, you must stretch by the neck for it." Bunyan's reply is worthy of notice. Unafraid and unawed by these judges that had so unjustly condemned him, he replied, "If I were out of prison today, I would preach again tomorrow, so help me God!"

We may well thank God for such men as John Bunyan. The horrors of the prison together with the separation from his wife and children did not move his dauntless soul. It is to such men, that we, in later years, are indebted for the religious liberty we now enjoy. These men valued a good conscience with God more than a good reputation amongst their fellows. They valued the liberty of heaven more than the liberty of earth. This is the type of Christianity that the world respects. Alas! There are too many so-called Christians who are carried to and fro by men's opinions and threats, and suit their speaking to the likes and dislikes of their audiences, and who love the praise of men more than the praise of God. Verily, such have their reward, but not in heaven. It is, under God, due to such men as Bunyan that we are thus permitted to preach the gospel freely, none daring to make us afraid. Let us ever remember that these privileges we now enjoy have cost the blood and tears of thousands who gladly suffered torture, imprisonment, banishment and death, rather than deny the faith, or besmirch their good conscience before God. May it be ours to rightly value and follow their noble example!

The prison where he was confined was as different from modern prisons as night is from day. It was a dark and damp place situated on the level of the river Ouse, and was often over-crowded, making it one of the most foul and loathsome places of confinement in England. In this fearful place Bunyan spent twelve long years. For some reason the sentence of banishment was never put into effect. His case caused quite a little trouble and came into the courts on several occasions; but this did not help him, as the judges seemed afraid to execute their sentence, yet had not the courage to release him, so he was confined in Bedford jail for that lengthy period. Just think of it! Many of my readers are not yet twelve years of age, and yet for this period of time Bunyan was "a prisoner of Jesus Christ," all because, like Daniel, he had "dared to have a purpose firm, and dared to make it known!"

Someone has well said that "One's Christian experience is worth just what it cost." It cost the apostle Paul the loss of all things and ultimately his own life. It cost Bunyan twelve years in a foul den. What has ours cost us? What have we suffered for the sake of the Gospel?

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

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

Let us not forget that he had a wife and children. How were his family to live if the bread winner was in prison? Bunyan was able to earn a very little by tagging shoe laces, but this was not sufficient to keep them. How then were they taken care of? The same God Who gives to the birds of the air their nests, and to the flowers of the field their clothing, saw to it that during the whole time of His servant's imprisonment, their needs were all supplied and they wanted for no good thing. Truly, God's promises are not mere empty words, but real truths on which His children may implicitly depend. "My God shall supply all your needs, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). Upon these "exceeding great and precious promises" Bunyan rested in simple faith; and proved, as thousands of others, that "those who trust Him wholly, find Him wholly true."

Whilst his enemies were rejoicing in the fact that they had quieted his dissenting voice by putting him in prison, they little realized they were but fulfilling the purpose of God. They were yet to discover that God worketh all things together for good to them that love Him, who are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28) and that "God makes the wrath of His enemies to praise Him!" It is quite true that Bunyan was shut out from man, but it is equally true that he was shut up to God Who, in a wonderful way, opened up the Scriptures to him. As a result of much Bible study, and prayer, the wonderful story of "The Pilgrim's Progress" was written while he was in Bedford jail and thus accomplished, and is still accomplishing, a work for God that never could have been done had Bunyan been at liberty.

The prison, as it were, became God's university in which John Bunyan was educated in the will of God through the word of God, and thus enabled of God to pen this masterpiece of English literature, this greatest of allegories, which has been used to the awakening and salvation of many thousands of precious souls. May God in His grace

be pleased to use it to your salvation if you have not yet become a Christian! Cowper was right when he sang—

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

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

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

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

"The Pilgrim's Progress" was not published until 1678, six years after Bunyan had been set at liberty. The manner in which he, together with a large number of other Nonconformists, as they were called, obtained his freedom is interesting. Some time after the return to the throne of Charles II, who, during the Civil war had fled to France, he was waited on by a deputation of Quakers, one of whom was a man named Carver. This man reminded the king that during his flight from England after the battle of Worcester, he had aided him in his escape to France, and had been the one who had carried him ashore from a small boat when a privateer had been on the point of capturing him. This the king recalled, and the old sailor interceded with him for the Nonconformists in English prisons and said, "I am now come to ask thee to be kind to my brethren in their distress, as I was kind to thee in thine."

The king replied that Carver might renew his request another time and he would consider it. Without any delay, Carver, joined by other Quakers, appealed for the liberation of all Nonconformists of every name, and the result was that on September 13, 1672, Bunyan, together with many others was set at liberty. Mr. Gifford having died, he was asked to become the pastor of the little congregation in Bedford. After much prayer he decided to do so and thus resumed his preaching of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, and was again mightily used to the

ingathering of many precious souls and the upbuilding of the believers in their most holy faith.

Thus did God deliver His servant after all His purposes concerning him had been accomplished. "The Pilgrim's Progress" had been written. Bunyan had learned the deep things of God in the solitude of his prison cell, and he came out of it a better man. He knew God better; he knew the Lord Jesus more intimately; he knew the Scriptures more fully, and had learned like Paul "in whatsoever state he was, to be content." Truly, "walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage," when those stone walls enclose a child of God; and the iron bars one whom the Son of God has made free. John Bunyan's spirit was unfettered, his conscience was free, and his tongue the pen of a ready writer. Thus did Bedford jail, dark, dank, and dreary, become the birthplace of the next best book to the Bible.

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

"The Pilgrim's Progress From This World To That Which Is To Come. Delivered under the similitude of a dream. Wherein is discovered the manner of his setting out, his dangerous journey, and safe arrival at the desired country. By John Bunyan. Licensed and entered according to order. London, printed for Nathaniel Ponder at the Peacock in the Poultry near Cornhill 1678."

Its popularity was immediately assured. Old and young, educated and uneducated, churchmen and dissenters alike, purchased the book, and within ten years twelve editions had been published. Before Bunyan died, over 100,000 copies had been sold in England alone. Since then, it has been translated into over one hundred languages and has a sale second only to the Bible. Monuments have been erected to the memory of Bunyan, but these, like all monuments, will crumble and fall. The greatest monument to his memory is the book he has written, that lives in the hearts and lives of thousands who, through the reading of its pages, have been brought to see their need of the Lord Jesus Christ, and led to accept and confess as Saviour and Lord, the One whose precious blood secured their pardon.

Bunyan also wrote many more books, the greatest of them being "The Holy War," a book every Christian should read. Lord Macauley declared that had "The Pilgrim's Progress" not been written, "The Holy War" would have been the greatest allegory in existence. Amongst his other books, "The Life and Death of Mr. Badman" and "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners" are best known. In all, Bunyan

wrote and published about sixty volumes.

During the sixteen years between his release and his home call, Bunyan was a busy man. Crowds flocked to hear him preach. Sometimes he would have 1,200 people by seven o'clock on a winter morning and everywhere he went, the people would crowd to hear him, many being unable to gain admission to the building. He had only one message. The all sufficiency of the living Word—Christ, and the "written word"—the Scriptures, to meet all the needs of both sinner and saint; and these truths, preached in the power of the Holy Spirit of God, were blessed to the salvation and edification of thousands of souls.

John Bunyan died in the year 1688. The cause of his home call was as follows. A young man had run away from his home, thus incurring the displeasure of his parents. The young man desired a reconciliation and asked Mr. Bunyan if he would try to use his influence to bring this about, which he promised to do. Accordingly, Bunyan started out on horseback to see the parents of this boy and secured their promise to receive him back. On the return journey he was overtaken in a severe rainstorm which gave him a severe chill. Due to his enfeebled constitution, the result of his prison experiences, this developed into something more serious, and after a comparatively short illness, the "Immortal Dreamer," as he was called, passed into the presence of the Lord he had loved and served so well. As his friends stood weeping at his bedside, watching their beloved friend's life slowly ebbing out, Bunyan rallied himself and exclaimed, "Weep not for me. We shall meet ere long to sing the new song and remain everlastingly happy, world without end!"

The place of his death was Snow Hill and his body was laid in the Bunhill Fields, the nonconformist burial ground. There it awaits that time when his spirit, which is already with Christ shall, at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, be reunited to a changed and glorified body, according to the power whereby the Son of God is able to subdue all things unto Himself, (Phil. 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:13-17). The plain inscription of the tombstone is "John Bunyan, Author of 'The Pilgrim's Progress,' Born 1628. Died 1688."

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

Progress!"

The story itself is told as though it were a dream and is written in allegorical form. That is, it is similar to a parable or an earthly story with a spiritual meaning. The Christian life from the beginning to its end is described as a journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Each person who appears in the story has a name that exactly describes his character. Thus a person named Mr. Good will be a good man, and a person named Mr. Bad, a bad man, and so on. Carefully remember the names of those who are introduced in this allegory, and it will give you a key that will help to unlock its treasures, and will explain many things that would otherwise be difficult to understand.

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

The Pilgrim's Progress is a most important book for three reasons. First, because it tells us about the most important journey that anyone can go on, namely, a journey from this life to the life to come—from time to eternity. Second, because it reveals the most important persons that will be met on that journey, and warns or counsels us as to how we should receive or reject their instructions. Lastly, this book unfolds the most important subject in this world, namely, salvation from the penalty of sin (which is eternal separation from God) through faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ; salvation from the power of sin through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer; and salvation from the very presence and possibility of sin through being at home with Christ at the end of the journey.

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