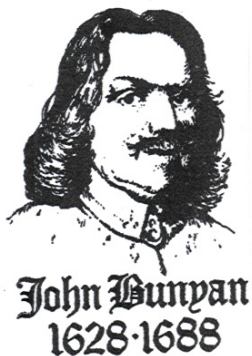

Lesson One INTRODUCTION TO BUNYAN'S LIFE AND BOOK

Before we actually begin the study of the book *Pilgrim's Progress*, it would be of great benefit for us to first of all learn a little something about the author and the book in general. We believe that you will never love the Bible until you meet its Author; therefore, this is also true with the book, *Pilgrim's Progress*. If you do not know something about the man, John Bunyan, and his life in the period in which he lived, you will not fully understand the book and appreciate what he was attempting to set forth. Therefore, we would like to present to you an introduction to the life of Bunyan and also to the book which he wrote, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

John Bunyan was born in the year 1628 in a town outside of Bedford, England. He was born of very poor parents, so poor that his grandfather left his children six pence each, that is equivalent to six pennies. That would mean that if your father passed away today and left you all of his inheritance, you would have received six pennies. This was the situation in which Bunyan was raised; a very poor environment. His father was a brazier which would correspond to a sheet metal worker or a maker of pans and instruments. This trade was also called a tinker, and this was also Bunyan's trade.



An insight into the era in which Bunyan was born is very important to understand this book. The Pilgrims came to America in the year 1620, and Bunyan was born in 1628, so the writing of this book was contemporaneous with that era. It was the time in which the Puritans were speaking out against the established Church of England. The Church of England had so departed from the preaching of the gospel that there arose groups within its ranks called Puritans who desired to purify the church from within. Many of the Puritans found that they could not purify the Church so they withdrew becoming non-conformists and were called Separatists. Some of these people, also known as pilgrims, founded the United States of America. They called themselves pilgrims when they came over on the Mayflower because they were seeking a country wherein they could obtain religious freedom. John Bunyan was numbered among these same people with the same religious and political beliefs and from the same environment, therefore, we can appreciate that the founding fathers of the United States of America were of the same persuasion as this man, John Bunyan. Perhaps this will help us as we go through the book to see that it was due to their religious beliefs about God that enabled John Bunyan, as well as the founding fathers of this country, to suffer the hardships and live the kind of lives that they did.

Bunyan had very little education. He was poor and could not afford a formal education, but in spite of this, he had a great grasp of the English language,

the language of Tyndall. He was also a contemporary of Shakespeare, and he lived during the time that the King James Bible was translated in the year 1611. In 1649, after a term in the military, John Bunyan was married, but six years later, his wife died leaving him with four small children to raise. Their names were, Elizabeth, John, Thomas and Mary. Mary was the daughter who he was very much grieved over because of her blindness. It was his first wife who had a large influence on his coming to know Christ as he did. His conversion is recorded in his autobiography which is entitled *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*.

We now want to focus our attention upon John Bunyan the preacher. Remember in this era, the Church of England was the dominant, established religion. Anyone who was not licensed by the Church of England and who dared to hold an assembly or preach, immediately came under the wrath of the State Church. So Bunyan, in the year 1660, was cast into prison. Bear in mind, this is only five years after his wife died and he is still trying to care for four youngsters. He begins preaching the gospel after his conversion, and for this he is cast into prison. He spends twelve years in prison as punishment for preaching the gospel. His first year in prison came when he was thirty-two years old, in the prime of life. Here is a strong and healthy man who is in his prime, his wife has died, he has the responsibility to raise four children, and yet because he believes so strongly in the gospel, he is willing to endure the wrath of the established church in order that the gospel might go forth. It was during this time in prison, that he experienced much grief due to being separated from his children. He remarried before he was put into prison, so his second wife was given the responsibility of raising the children. Bunyan carried on his trade while in prison, therefore he was enabled to help some with the welfare of his children. Also, several Christian friends

About his experience in jail, Bunyan wrote in his autobiography:

"I would not trade it for anything. I would have never been given the great insights into Christ had I not enjoyed this experience."

rallied to the support of his wife and children so they did not go hungry, but yet they had to undergo several years of pain and anguish of being separated during this time. It was while he was in jail that he enjoyed a marvelous experience of Jesus Christ being revealed to him. In Bunyan's autobiography he said, *"I would not trade it for anything. I would have never been given the great insights into Christ had I not enjoyed this experience."* So rather than pining and complaining about his portion in life, he rejoiced in the privilege that he had been enabled to suffer for the cause of Christ. God replaced the absence of his dearly beloved wife and children with a greater manifestation of grace in revealing to him some of the many experiences that all of us go through in our life. That should be a great encouragement to all of us. Maybe you have not experienced adversity in life, but you can bear witness to the truth that to the degree God asks you to suffer for His cause, it will be to the same degree He will add some measure of spiritual grace to offset the suffering. As a result of John Bunyan's suffering, we can study this book about four hundred years after it was written. For four hundred years men, women, boys and girls have rejoiced in the reading of *Pilgrim's Progress*

because a man spent twelve years of the prime of his life separated from his family in order that God might reveal the gospel to him in such a clear way. Whatever God designs in taking things away, He will replace in another aspect. May we trust in the great truth, if you have suffered a loss, or heartache, God will replace that with some greater degree of blessing. Bunyan rejoiced over his prison experience.

John Bunyan was called to his first pastorate while he was still in prison. While he was still in jail, the young pastor of a little congregation, of which he was a member, died and they called Bunyan to be their pastor. Of course, he couldn't assume his duties until he was released. When the persecution let up, and he was finally pardoned, he became the pastor of this congregation that met in a barn. Do we really recognize the privilege of worshiping in air-conditioned churches in contrast to how others in years past have had to meet in barns, catacombs and in places of hiding? Even in recent times individuals in many countries meet secretly in little rooms to share the gospel and study the Bible together. May God help us to be appreciative of the blessings which we have. Bunyan died in the year 1688 at the age of sixty years.

John Owen said of Bunyan:

“I would gladly exchange all of my learning for the tinker’s power to touch human hearts.”

We now must examine Bunyan's doctrine; what did he believe? Theologically, Bunyan was called a Calvinist. That is, he believed that salvation was entirely of God. He believed in all of the doctrines of grace. He did not believe that salvation was a cooperative thing in which God did His part and man does his part. No, Bunyan believed that God was the Author and Finisher of salvation. He preached the great doctrines of the Bible which deal with predestination, election and calling. Bunyan believed in and taught the doctrine of total depravity, that sinners were totally dead in trespasses and sins and, therefore, would not and could not respond to the gospel invitation apart from a divine effectual calling of God. He believed in an unconditional election of God, that God did not just look out upon the scene and see what was going to occur, but that God actually purposed to save individuals and He set out to save them. Bunyan believed that God not only made salvation possible, but He went beyond that and made it actual in the application to individuals' lives and hearts. Bunyan believed in the perseverance of the saints and all of these great doctrines which are

Bunyan believed that religion was an experiential thing, something that you could know and experience, that was real, and that it flowed from a correct understanding of God.

recorded in the historic Baptist Confessions of Faith. The people who founded America came to this country because they had such a strong belief that the Sovereign God had predetermined they were to go to the United States of America and that nothing was going to deter them from that purpose. It takes a proper understanding and vision of how God rules over all, that His ways are not checkmated by man's actions, to give us some

backbone like the Pilgrims who put their families on that Mayflower, kissing Grandma goodbye, and saying, "we're going to America because we believe that is where God would have us go." Where do you think that kind of backbone comes from? It comes from a religious belief in the absolute Sovereignty of God and that nothing would overrule the purpose of God in individuals' lives. The people that set out to found this country and landed in Plymouth Bay in the year 1620 believed that whether they died on the way over here, sunk in the middle of the ocean, or if they made it to the shore, that was the will of God.

Bunyan was what is called an experimental Calvinist. He did not just delve in the intellectual aspects of religion. He believed that religion was an experiential thing, something that you could know and experience, that was real, and that it flowed from a correct understanding of God. He had no time for individuals who would sit in their studies and just piddle over theoretical concepts that did not lead to a practical, vital Christian experience. That is the kind of religion we need today -- the kind of religion that not only talks about theology, but a religion that comes down to where the rubber meets the road, to where we live and in our experience. May God help us to see this and know that God is not a million miles away, but he dwells, rules and reigns in our innermost being.

Bunyan believed in the doctrine of repentance, and he believed that repentance was not just a one-time act. In other words, repentance was not something that was just performed when one was initially converted and never experienced again. Bunyan believed, as all of the old-time Baptists did, that repentance was a divine gift imparted to the nature of man that continued throughout man's existence until he entered into the Celestial City. That is, it was a repentance that all through the Christian growth experience it brought a remorse and a sorrow over sin. It was a life-long act which brought the sinner from nature to grace and from grace to glory. Does this describe your salvation experience? Did God's grace come down and bring you out of the natural state you were in--dead in trespasses and sins? If it did, that same grace is going to bring you into glory, from nature to grace and then from grace to glory - a life-long experience. Bunyan believed that the act of repentance was a constant attitude of mind produced by the grace of God in the life of the believer. For example, when the Christian sinned, instead of God just allowing him to go on and on like the unbeliever, He would send His marvelous work of grace in repentance, and that individual would be humbled before God because of his sin.

Bunyan was a Baptist, but of a very mild sort. You can pluck out the hair of many people today and it says "Baptist" on the end of it. These people believe that only the Baptists are going to be in the bride of Christ, and all the rest are going to shine the shoes and clean the spittoons while the Baptists rule and reign. That is called the Baptist-bride view that proclaims if you are not a member of a Baptist church, you are not a member of the bride of Christ. I am not that kind of Baptist. Bunyan was a Baptist, but he was a very mild Baptist. In fact, so mild that some have even charged him with not being a Baptist at all. Bunyan believed in believer's baptism, but at the same time he allowed his wife to have his children christened. Many have stated that because of this, Bunyan was not really a Baptist. But I think it only shows Bunyan's tolerant attitude that he had while he was in prison. He permitted his wife to do this, because he did not believe that baptism had any

cleansing or regenerating effect, so he permitted his children to be christened as infants. Also he permitted unbaptized Christians to partake of communion in his church. Again, for this reason, he is charged with not being a Baptist. He allowed Presbyterians and others who had been sprinkled to partake of communion and on the basis of this, he had many problems with the Baptists in his own age. He claimed the title of a Baptist, therefore I believe that we could say that Bunyan was a Baptist. When you mention his name today, all Baptist preachers rise up and say "he is our man, we want John, give us John," but when you explain what John believed, they want nothing to do with him. If John Bunyan were here today, he would not be accepted by the modern Baptists. He would be persecuted as a renegade for his beliefs, just like many are today who preach the doctrines found in the Baptist Confessions of Faith. Bunyan was a Baptist, but we might describe him as a Baptist with a catholic spirit. In that sense, he is looked to by Christians of all groups. You can see this catholic spirit throughout his book, and he is loved by Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and others because of his Christian spirit that reaches beyond the denomination of which he was a member. Bunyan was a preacher, and he was heard gladly by the common people. John Owen, was a great theologian of that particular era. I have nearly all of John Owen's works in my library. He is a tremendous student and very deep in the Word, but here is what John Owen said of John Bunyan. "I would gladly exchange all of my learning for the tinker's power to touch human hearts." That is, Bunyan had a way of communicating the gospel that Owen said he wished he had, and he would trade all of his learning for the ability to touch the human heart the way that Bunyan did.

Now let us look at the book itself. Down through history, *Pilgrim's Progress* has been considered the greatest book in the world next to the Bible. This is not everybody's opinion, but it is just not my opinion either, but very many people and literary critics who give book reviews hold to this persuasion. It is the greatest book next to the Bible because, if you really want to know what Christianity really is experientially, read *Pilgrim's Progress*. If you haven't read *Pilgrim's Progress*, then you haven't read the greatest book next to the Bible. It is the Bible with pictures. As you open the book and begin reading it, you will see the Bible begin coming out at you in pictorial form and language. It is experiential in nature. That is, you can go to the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and you will find precise definitions of the doctrines of scripture. But if you want to know how that doctrine works out in experience, read *Pilgrim's Progress*. Many people say, "I don't like the preaching of just doctrine." Alright, as we go through this book, you are going to find "experience." But it would not surprise me if some of you find that you do not like the experiences described in *Pilgrim's Progress*. When we get down to where the rubber meets the road, we find the real rub is between real Christianity and nominal Christianity where people are not experiencing these things that are described in this book, therefore it is a condemnation to their religious experience.

This book describes the life of a Christian traveling between two worlds, leaving the City of Destruction and traveling toward the Celestial City. Bunyan wrote this book while he was in prison, and he wrote it in the form of an allegory. The Bible speaks in Galatians chapter four of an allegory. An allegory is a similitude, a comparison, and it is something that has a deeper or hidden meaning below the surface. I remember back when I was going

to Bible College, we had a class of some 200 ministers in our English class. We were given the assignment of analyzing the book, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Everybody in that class considered himself a great theologian; he thought he knew all about the Bible. One thing about being a first year student at a Bible College, you know everything there is to know. Then as time goes on, you wonder if you know anything at all. All of these 200 great theologians tried to figure out what on earth did this book mean? There wasn't anybody in the whole class who could explain what the book meant. No one could make heads or tails of it. There is a good explanation for this confusion. The school that I attended did not have any conception at all concerning the doctrines of grace that Bunyan was talking about. Therefore, they couldn't decide at what point Christian was converted. Was he converted at the Wicket Gate, or maybe it was at the Cross? Was he converted way on down here, and does he lose his salvation here? What on earth was going on? The reason for this confusion was because they didn't understand the doctrines of grace as set forth in the Bible and the Baptist Confessions of Faith. Due to the fact it is an allegory, some have been troubled by various misinterpretations in reading the book. For example in the first chapter, we will find that the Christian leaves his family and heads out toward the Celestial City. This causes a great concern to some. They say, "you mean that here is a man that forsakes his family, his wife and children?" We must understand that this is not written in the physical realm, but this is an allegory. It is teaching what is behind the scene. In real life, this man will go

If you don't like the Bible, you won't like *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Charles Spurgeon said of Bunyan that you could just prick old Bunyan anywhere and out of his veins flows Bibling, or the Bible.

home after his job and he will eat supper with his wife and kids. But it is merely showing that his wife and children are not Christians. He is alone in his experience of coming to the Lord and has to be willing to depart from the ridicule by his wife and children. So he has to set out alone. It doesn't mean that in the physical realm he has left them. He is there sleeping with them, eating with them, playing with them all the time, but in the spiritual realm he has left them because he has become a Christian and they are non-Christians. So we must understand that the whole story is in the form of an allegory and that it is merely conveying deeper, hidden spiritual truth which is not present on the surface. The more that you love the Bible, the more you will love *Pilgrim's Progress*, I can guarantee you that. Likewise, if you don't like the Bible, you won't like *Pilgrim's Progress*. Charles Spurgeon said of Bunyan that you could just prick old Bunyan anywhere and out of his veins flows Bibling, or the Bible. That is what you are going to find. You will be reading portions in the book, and you won't know whether Bunyan is quoting from the Scripture or whether he is paraphrasing, or whether he is using his own words, there is so much Bible connected in it. Yet at the same time you will be able to see the difference between a real Christian and a false Christian. Bunyan had a great sense of spiritual discernment to be able to discern the phony from the real. One reason why many people do not like *Pilgrim's Progress* is that they see themselves in the book. If you will be honest, you ought to find yourself at least once or twice somewhere in the book. If you can be honest with yourself and you really want to find yourself, start looking as we

proceed through the book, and you will see yourself in there somewhere. The book has no appeal to people who are all wrapped up in this present world. It has no appeal to them because of its searching message. There is a searching-ness in the book of *Pilgrim's Progress* which will not let the person alone who is wrapped up in this present world. It finds him out, and you might be that type of a person. You may be very active in this church. You may read this book, and it may find you out and reveal that little hidden sin that nobody knows about but you and God. When that begins to be revealed, it will upset us because it causes us to see ourselves as we really are. We may come to Mr. Talkative, and you may find yourself written all over him. He loves to talk about religion but he doesn't want to do any of it. All he wants to do is talk. We come to others in the book such as Madam Bubble, and we see what a great front she puts on. We may find you there. This is the reason why the unregenerate or the non-Christian doesn't like this book. A pastor gave it to a business friend one time, and he read through just a couple of chapters. He came and gave it back, and said, "you can have it, that is the most depressing thing I ever read. I want nothing to do with it." It upsets people and the reason for it is because it gets down to a searching of the human heart. It is true, it brings great despondency in some cases. But beloved, before the gospel will ever become good news to you, you are going to have to first of all reach a place of desperation. That is the way God deals with sinners. The little easy-believism gospel of today just says to the individual, "Just believe in Jesus; everybody who wants to go to heaven, raise your hand." Very few individuals ever go through a period whereby they become desperate. That is why the gospel, as it is preached today, produces much superficial Christianity. The true gospel brings individuals down to a place of despondency before they are given hope. That is, we must be brought to the end of ourselves before we will go out of ourselves to take hold of another. For example, if you are drowning, what is your hope as long as you think you can save yourself? Is there any chance of you being saved when you are out there struggling? No. We know what happens when an individual tries to save a person who is going under, don't we? In their desperate struggles, they perish and sometimes others perish with them. The same is true with the gospel. Until a person comes to the realization that there is no hope, and they know they are sinking, until they reach that point, Jesus Christ will not become precious to them in the gospel. They will not lay hold of Him in saving faith. This is what the modern hearer of the gospel does not like. They do not like the idea that they must come to a place of helplessness and then cast themselves upon Someone outside of themselves. That is why the human heart hates the true gospel. It is because salvation by grace is all of grace, from beginning to the end, and if anyone is going to be saved, they have to seek the mercy of God.

The message of *Pilgrim's Progress* has little appeal to the men of the world. Why then, has this book enjoyed such great success? It has been translated into over 198 languages and dialects. It is used by many missionaries in going to new peoples and nationalities. *Pilgrim's Progress* is translated and used as a missionary tool. It has enjoyed such tremendous success because it is true to the form of the Bible. It reveals the heart of a true Christian, and Christians of all denominations enjoy this because it is their experience. If you have been truly born again, you are going to love the presentation of *Pilgrim's Progress*. But if you haven't been born again, I can already tell you that you are going to be miserable before it is over, and I would only hope that this would be a sign of God's grace

working in your heart. May God help us, men women, boys and girls, as we go through this book.

Another reason for its success is the reality of the characters that are described in *Pilgrim's Progress*. You will meet people who are real and live right here in Osceola, Missouri. They may be people who go to the First Baptist Church of Osceola, Missouri. You will meet them, because they are here. This is not a book that will have no relevance to your life. You are going to meet yourself, your friends and your neighbors here. Mark Twain who traveled around the world, lived in Hannibal, Missouri, and went up and down the Mississippi River. In all of his travels around the world, he said this, "He never met a person any where in the world he hadn't already met in Hannibal, Missouri." What he meant by that, was that characters are fundamental. You only have a few basic characters that you deal with in human nature. If you should go over to England, you are going to find the same characters you find here in Osceola, Missouri. Also, you will find the same experiences that those characters are going through in England that we are going through here. So the characters will be real and will come alive to us.

Bunyan's presentation of the gospel is relevant because it deals with sin, death, sorrow and judgment, and these are things which are relevant for us today. We are dealing with the same sin problem that existed in Bunyan's day. We are dealing with the penalty of that sin which is death. We are dealing with sorrow and with the judgment to come. All of these you will see are relevant today just as they were in Bunyan's day and when the pilgrims founded this country.

Another reason this book has been blessed of God, is because Bunyan doesn't miss anyone. I have read the book five or six times and I know where to find myself in the book. We will meet Mr. Fearing in the book. You may see yourself revealed in him, always fearing and never able to come to a true peace. You may find yourself there. You may find yourself as Mr. Valiant for Truth. You may find yourself as Little Faith or Mr. Temporary. Somewhere in the book you will find yourself. Bunyan is writing primarily from his own personal experience in conversion, but he also describes many of the experiences which other Christians go through.

One more word: It is important to know that you will not go through all of the experiences described in this book. Not all of the characters in this book will describe you, but some of them will. I have been around some of you long enough to know that you probably don't have much problem with Giant Despair, because you always have a positive outlook. Some of you can go through the Valley of Humiliation with no problem at all, but others of you have a very difficult time going through this valley, and you may see some things in that valley that other Christians don't see. Some of you are having a very hard time climbing what Bunyan calls the Hill of Difficulty. Others of you just run right up that hill with no problem at all. On the other hand, there are some of you who find there is a struggle every day, when something difficult comes up in your Christian experience, and you just can't seem to make it up the hill. You will find yourself there in that particular experience. So all of these are things that are set forth in describing the book, *Pilgrim's*

Progress.

Before next Sunday evening, I would like to give you an assignment to read through to the Slough of Despondency. We will try to cover all of this portion of the book next Sunday evening. We do not propose to lecture on the book, and we are not going to read it all, but we are going to follow the narrative of it. Then we are going to make a few comments upon it as we go along and explain some of the particular hidden meanings that Bunyan explains in his own marginal notes, which are not in the particular copy that you have. Let us read the first paragraph so that we might get just a taste of what is in store for us:

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted upon a certain place where there was a den.

This is Bunyan in the jail where he is going to tell this story in the form of a dream. It is not that he actually had a dream, but that he is going to tell the story in the form of a dream. He said:

I lighted upon a certain place where there was a den and laid me down in that place to sleep. And as I slept, I dreamed a dream.

Notice it is written in the first person here, he is describing himself when he said, "I dreamed a dream." He is telling the story in the form of a dream.

Behold I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place with his face from his own house, a book in his hand and a great burden upon his back. And I looked and saw him open the book and read therein and as he read, he wept and trembled, and not being able longer to contain he brake out with a lamentable cry saying, What shall I do?

For just an introduction, here is an individual who is clothed with rags, that is, his own righteousness as filthy rags. At this point, Bunyan inserted in the margin Isaiah 64:6. This individual has a book in his hand, which is none other than the Bible. We will never come to see ourselves as a person who really has no righteousness if we neglect the Bible. The Bible is the source whereby we come to see ourselves as sinners in the sight of God. Then he had a great burden upon his back. This burden is the sense of the guilt of sin upon him. Something that is greatly lacking in our modern presentation of the gospel is that we just assume that everybody knows that they are sinners. Bunyan believed that before an individual could be converted, he had to have a sense of the guilt of sin; he had to have a weight, so to speak, upon his back. He had to be aware personally that he was under the wrath of God. If a person doesn't realize that, they will never embrace the true gospel of saving grace. There is no gospel, you see, to a person who does not have a real sense of sin. Then as he continues, he opens the book and the longer he reads, the more miserable he becomes. Finally, he reaches a state in which he cries out, "What shall I do?" In Acts 16:29

it was the Philippian jailor who said ***"What shall I do to be saved?"***

It will be a most interesting time as we go through the book and see how this man finally reaches the point where he is converted and what he goes through prior to his conversion. We will have to stop here with that and ask you to please read that portion which I assigned. If you want to read further than that, fine, but make sure you have read up to this point by next Sunday evening so we can go through the City of Destruction, where the man lived, watch his family and their reaction when he begins to talk about his conviction of sin, and see how they laugh at him and say, "Oh, you are just having a nervous breakdown." We will see the neighbors begin to mock him when he begins to say "I'm lost" and when he sets out for the City, Mr. Pliable and Mr. Obstinate will go out after him trying to get him to come back. Pliable will go on and get all excited about heaven and then all of a sudden he will go back too. We will examine these characters next Sunday evening.

Let us close now with a moment of prayer asking God to bless the introduction and give you a little taste of what is in store for us, and that God might enable you to find a closer relationship with Christ as we go through these experiences of the Pilgrim on his way to the Celestial City. Shall we pray. Our Father in heaven, we do ask for a measure of grace to be able to have Your Son revealed to us in the free pardon of sin. May our hearts be opened in this study. May we look into your Word and see not only the doctrines of the scripture, but how those doctrines work out in our personal experiences. May we become stronger Christians, and may we be enabled to see the beauties which are in Christ. Help us as we labor together here and as we do so, may the ministry of the Holy Spirit speak to human hearts, May you speak to my heart and give me a tender heart, a humble heart as we see the magnitude of the work of Christ on our behalf. May Christ become precious, and real and personal to us. For we ask these favors in Christ's name and for His sake. Amen.