

JOHN BUNYAN'S

LAST SERMON

“Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

—John 1:13

Introduction Compiled & Edited by
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This sermon is believed to be John Bunyan's last, delivered at Gramman's meeting-house near Whitechapel on August 19, 1688. Our reading of this work, as well as the editor's advertisement, come from a three volume collection edited by George Offor, Esq., and entitled, *The Whole Works of John Bunyan*. George Offor's edition of Bunyan's works was published in Glasgow in 1862.



John Bunyan was born in Elstow, England, near Bedford, on November 28, 1628. After squandering much of his life away in worldly wantonness, Bunyan was converted to the Christian faith and soon afterward, became an excellent expositor of the Holy Scriptures. He was imprisoned in November 1660 for the crime of preaching without a license from the state church. He remained incarcerated for twelve years, with only a few, and brief occasions of liberty. Though he may have begun writing his famous *The Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison, Bunyan finished the work a few years after his release in 1672. *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published in 1678. Bunyan also wrote many other excellent works such as *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, *Some Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*, and *A Vindication of Some Gospel Truths Opened*. A contemporary with such men as John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Richard Baxter, John Bunyan is recognized as possibly one of the greatest of the Puritan writers. Bunyan died on August 31, 1688, after taking ill from traveling through inclement weather. He was buried at Bunhill Fields.

George Offor's "Advertisement By the Editor" is not in our audio reading of Mr. Bunyan's last sermon. It is, however, very worth the time to read. It is included below.

ADVERTISEMENT BY THE EDITOR

This sermon, although very short, is peculiarly interesting: how it was preserved we are not told; but it bears strong marks of having been published from notes taken by one of the hearers. There is no proof that any memorandum or notes of this sermon was found in the autograph of the preacher.

In the list of Bunyan's works published by Chas. Doe, at the end of the "Heavenly Footman," March 1690, it stands No. 44. He professes to give the title-page, word for word, as it was first printed. It is, "Mr. John Bunyan's last sermon, at London, preached at Mr. Gamman's meeting-house, near Whitechapel, August 19th, 1688, upon John 1:13, showing a resemblance between a natural and a spiritual birth; and how every man and woman may try themselves, and know whether they are born again or not." Published 1689, in about one sheet in 12mo. From this it appears to have been preached only two days before his fatal illness, and twelve days before his decease, which took place August 31st, 1688. The disease which terminated his invaluable life, was brought on by a journey to Reading on horseback, undertaken with the benevolent design of reconciling an offended father to his son. Having accomplished his object, he rode to London;

on his way home, through a heavy rain, the effects of which appeared soon after this, his last sermon was preached. He bore, with most exemplary patience and resignation, the fever which invaded his body; and, at a distance from his wife and family, in the house of his friend Mr. Strudwick, at Snow Hill, his pilgrimage was ended, and he fell asleep in perfect peace, to awake amidst the harmonies and glory of the celestial city.

GEO. OFFOR.

MR. BUNYAN'S LAST SERMON

“Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”
—John 1:13

The words have a dependence on what goes before, and therefore I must direct you to them for the right understanding of it. You have it thus: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not; but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.”

In the words before, you have two things. First, Some of his own rejecting him, when he offered himself to them. Second, Others of his own receiving him, and making him welcome; those that reject him, he also passes by; but those that receive him, he gives them power to become the sons of God.

Now, lest any one should look upon it as good luck or fortune, says he, they “were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” They that did not receive him, they were only born of flesh and blood; but those that receive him, they have God to their Father; they receive the doctrine of Christ with a vehement desire.

TO EXPLAIN THE TEXT

FIRST, I will show you what he means by blood.

They that believe are born to it, as an heir is to an inheritance—they are born of God, not of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God; not of blood, that is, not by generation, not born to the kingdom of heaven by the flesh, not because I am the son of a godly man or woman—that is meant by blood (Acts 17:26); He “hath made of one blood all nations.” But when he says here, “not of blood,” he rejects all carnal privileges they did boast of: they boasted they were Abraham’s seed; no, no says he, it is not of blood; think not to say you have Abraham to your father; you must be born of God, if you go to the kingdom of heaven.

SECOND, “Nor of the will of the flesh.” What must we understand by that?

It is taken for those vehement inclinations that are in man, to all manner of looseness, fulfilling the desires of the flesh: that must not be understood here; men are not made the children of God by fulfilling their lustful desires. It must be understood here in the best sense: there is not only in carnal men a will to be vile, but there is in them a will to be saved also; a will to go to heaven also. But this it will not do; it will not privilege a man in the things of the kingdom of God: natural desires after the things of another world, they are not an argument to prove a man shall go to heaven whenever he dies. I am not a free-willer, I do abhor it; yet there is not the wickedest man but he desires, some time or other, to be saved; he will read some time or other, or, it may be, pray, but this will not do: “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” There is willing and running, and yet to no purpose (Romans 9:16). Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, have not obtained it (Romans 9:30). Here, I do not understand, as if the apostle had denied a virtuous course of life to be the way to heaven; but that a man without grace, though he have natural gifts, yet he shall not obtain privilege to go to heaven, and be the son of God. Though a man without grace may have a will to be saved, yet he cannot have that will God’s way. Nature, it cannot know any thing but the things of nature—the things of God knows no man but by the Spirit of God; unless the Spirit of God be in you, it will leave you on this side the gates of heaven. “Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” It may be, some may have a will, a desire that Ishmael may be saved; know this, it will not save thy child. If it was our will, I would have you all go to heaven. How many are there in the world that pray for their children, and cry for them, and are ready to die [for them]? and this will not do. God’s will is the rule of all; it is only through Jesus Christ: “which were born, not of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Now I come to the doctrine.

Men that believe in Jesus Christ, to the effectual receiving of Jesus Christ, they are born to it. He does not say they shall be born to it, but they are born to it—born of God unto God and the things of God, before he receives God to eternal salvation. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Now, unless he be born of God, he cannot see it: suppose the kingdom of God be what it will, he cannot see it before he be begotten of God. Suppose it be the gospel, he cannot see it before he be brought into a state of regeneration. Believing is the consequence of the new birth; “not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

First, I will give you a clear description of it under one similitude or two. A child, before it be born into the world, is in the dark dungeon of its mother’s womb: so a child of God, before he be born again, is in the dark dungeon of sin, sees nothing of the kingdom of God; therefore it is called a new birth: the same soul has love one way in its carnal condition, another way when it is born again.

Second, As it is compared to a birth, resembling a child in his mother’s womb, so it is compared to a man being raised out of the grave; and to be born again, is to be raised out of the grave of sin; “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” To be

raised from the grave of sin is to be begotten and born (Revelation 1:5); there is a famous instance of Christ; He is “the first begotten of the dead”; he is the first-born from the dead, unto which our regeneration alludeth; that is, if you be born again by seeking those things that are above, then there is a similitude betwixt Christ’s resurrection and the new birth; which was born, which was restored out of this dark world, and translated out of the kingdom of this dark world, into the kingdom of his dear Son, and made us live a new life— this is to be born again: and he that is delivered from the mother’s womb, it is the help of the mother; so he that is born of God, it is by the Spirit of God. I must give you a few consequences of a new birth.

(1.) First of all, A child, you know, is incident to cry as soon as it comes into the world; for if there be no noise, they say it is dead. You that are born of God, and Christians, if you be not criers, there is no spiritual life in you— if you be born of God, you are crying ones; as soon as he has raised you out of the dark dungeon of sin, you cannot but cry to God, What must I do to be saved? As soon as ever God had touched the jailer, he cries out, “Men and brethren, what must I do to be saved?” Oh! how many prayerless professors is there in London that never pray! Coffee-houses will not let you pray, trades will not let you pray, looking-glasses will not let you pray; but if you was born of God, you would.

(2.) It is not only natural for a child to cry, but it must crave the breast; it cannot live without the breast— therefore Peter makes it the true trial of a new-born babe: the new-born babe desires the sincere milk of the Word, that he may grow thereby: if you be born of God, make it manifest by desiring the breast of God. Do you long for the milk of the promises? A man lives one way when he is in the world, another way when he is brought unto Jesus Christ (Isaiah 66). They shall suck and be satisfied; if you be born again, there is no satisfaction till you get the milk of God’s Word into your souls (Isaiah 66:11). To “suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolation.” Oh! what is a promise to a carnal man? A whore-house, it may be, is more sweet to him; but if you be born again, you cannot live without the milk of God’s Word. What is a woman’s breast to a horse? But what is it to a child? there is its comfort night and day, there is its succour night and day. O how loath are they it should be taken from them: minding heavenly things, says a carnal man, is but vanity; but to a child of God, there is his comfort.

(3.) A child that is newly born, if it have not other comforts to keep it warm than it had in its mother’s womb, it dies; it must have something got for its succour: so Christ had swaddling clothes prepared for him; so those that are born again, they must have some promise of Christ to keep them alive; those that are in a carnal state, they warm themselves with other things; but those that are born again, they cannot live without some promise of Christ to keep them alive; as he did to the poor infant in Ezekiel 16:8, I covered thee with embroidered gold: and when women are with child, what fine things will they prepare for their child! Oh, but what fine things has Christ prepared to wrap all in that are born again! Oh what wrappings of gold has Christ prepared for all that are born again! Women will dress their children, that every one may see them how fine they are; so he in Ezekiel 16:11, “I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thine hands, and a chain on thy neck; and I put a jewel on thy forehead, and ear-rings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head.” And, says he in Ezekiel 16:13, “Thou didst prosper into a kingdom.” This is to set out nothing in the world but the righteousness of Christ and the graces of the Spirit, without which a new-born babe cannot live, unless they have the golden righteousness of Christ.

(4.) A child, when it is in its mother's lap, the mother takes great delight to have that which will be for its comfort; so it is with God's children, they shall be kept on his knee (Isaiah 66:11): "They shall suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations"; Isaiah 66:13, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." There is a similitude in these things that nobody knows of, but those that are born again.

(5.) There is usually some similitude betwixt the father and the child. It may be the child looks like its father; so those that are born again, they have a new similitude—they have the image of Jesus Christ (Galatians 4). Every one that is born of God has something of the features of heaven upon him. Men love those children that are likest them most usually; so does God his children, therefore they are called the children of God; but others do not look like him, therefore they are called Sodomites. Christ describes children of the devil by their features—the children of the devil, his works they will do; all works of unrighteousness, they are the devil's works: if you are earthly, you have borne the image of the earthly; if heavenly, you have borne the image of the heavenly.

(6.) When a man has a child, he trains him up to his own liking—they have learned the custom of their father's house; so are those that are born of God—they have learned the custom of the true church of God; there they learn to cry "My Father" and "My God"; they are brought up in God's house, they learn the method and form of God's house, for regulating their lives in this world.

(7.) Children, it is natural for them to depend upon their father for what they want; if they want a pair of shoes, they go and tell him; if they want bread, they go and tell him; so should the children of God do. Do you want spiritual bread? go tell God of it. Do you want strength of grace? ask it of God. Do you want strength against Satan's temptations? go and tell God of it. When the devil tempts you, run home and tell your heavenly Father—go, pour out your complaints to God; this is natural to children; if any wrong them, they go and tell their father; so do those that are born of God, when they meet with temptations, go and tell God of them.

THE APPLICATION

The first use is this, To make a strict inquiry whether you be born of God or not; examine by those things I laid down before, of a child of nature and a child of grace. Are you brought out of the dark dungeon of this world into Christ? Have you learned to cry, "My Father?" (Jeremiah 3:4). "And I said, Thou shalt call me, My Father." All God's children are criers—cannot you be quiet without you have a bellyful of the milk of God's Word? cannot you be satisfied without you have peace with God? Pray you, consider it, and be serious with yourselves; if you have not these marks, you will fall short of the kingdom of God—you shall never have an interest there; "there" is no intruding. They will say, "Lord, Lord, open to us; and he will say, I know you not." No child of God, no heavenly inheritance. We sometimes give something to those that are not our children, but [we do] not [give them] our lands. O do not flatter yourselves with a portion among the sons, unless you live like sons. When we see a king's son play with a beggar, this is unbecoming; so if you be the king's children, live like the king's children; if you be risen with Christ, set your affections on things above, and not on things below; when you come together,

talk of what your Father promised you; you should all love your Father's will, and be content and pleased with the exercises you meet with in the world. If you are the children of God, live together lovingly; if the world quarrel with you, it is no matter; but it is sad if you quarrel together; if this be amongst you, it is a sign of ill-breeding; it is not according to the rules you have in the Word of God. Dost thou see a soul that has the image of God in him? Love him, love him; say, This man and I must go to heaven one day; serve one another, do good for one another; and if any wrong you, pray to God to right you, and love the brotherhood.

Lastly, If you be the children of God, learn that lesson— Gird up the loins of your mind, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to your former conversation; but be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Consider that the holy God is your Father, and let this oblige you to live like the children of God, that you may look your Father in the face, with comfort, another day.