

“...God has owned
him, and done
much good by him.”

A short biography on the life of John
Bunyan (1628-1688)

Tinker and Pastor





Portrait of John Bunyan by Robert White. c. 1679; Graphite on vellum. British Museum (Gg,1.493)

John Bunyan

...keep your eyes on those
who walk according to the
example you have in us.

- Philippians 3:17

Charles Spurgeon famously affirmed:

Next to the Bible, the book I value most is John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. I believe I have read it through at least a hundred times.

It is a volume of which I never seem to tire; and the secret of its freshness is that it is so largely compiled from the Scriptures. It is really Biblical teaching put into the form of a simple yet very striking allegory.

In addition to this, Spurgeon said of John Bunyan himself: "Why, this man is a living Bible! Prick him anywhere—his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God. I commend his example to you, beloved."

In 1666, Bunyan wrote his own story of God's kindness to him in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. He addressed it to his children - and undoubtedly his desire for them is the same as it is for us:

CHILDREN, Grace be with you. Amen. I being taken from you... [but I] do look yet after you all, greatly longing to see your safe arrival into the desired Haven... I thank God upon every remembrance of you.

We tend to become like those people that we most admire. In Philippians 3, Paul urges us to watch carefully the way of living of Paul himself and of others who lived as he did:

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us (Phil. 3:17).

Their lives show proven worth in pressing on towards Christ. Bunyan is surely among their ranks. Indeed, the title of this booklet comes from Bunyan's wife, Elizabeth, who said of her husband: "God has owned him, and done much good by him." Learning from Bunyan is well worth the time that we can give to him.

With this in mind, my prayer is that you will both enjoy reading this booklet and are strengthened to trust God afresh. Think about God's work within your own life - even though you might be very different from Bunyan – and pray that this would humbly cause you to thank and praise Him.

To Him be eternal glory. Amen.

God bless,
Graham Barnes

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Timeline of John Bunyan's life

1628	Bunyan born at Elstow, baptised 30 th November. Joins his father in tinkering trade at 9 years old.
1644	His mother and sister, both named Margaret, die in an epidemic. His father remarries within two months. Recruited into the Parliamentary army in the Civil War against the Royalists.
1647	Volunteers to go to Ireland, but Bunyan is discharged from the army and resumes tinkering.
1649	Marries his first wife, possibly named Mary.
1650	Birth of Mary, the first of their four children. Mary is blind. They have three more children: Elizabeth, Thomas and John.
1653	Likely baptised upon being received as a member of the Bedford non-conformist congregation.
1655	Had moved to Bedford, less than two miles from Elstow. John Gifford, pastor of the non-conformist church, dies.
1658	First wife dies.
1659	Marries second wife, Elizabeth. They have two surviving children named Sarah and Joseph.
1660	Arrested on 12 th November for illegal preaching and unauthorised gatherings. Elizabeth miscarries.
1662	<i>Act of Uniformity</i> results in over 2000 Puritan ministers being ejected from the Church of England.
1663	Eldest daughter, Mary, dies.
1672	Granted royal pardon and released from

	prison. Begins pastoring the non-conformist church at Bedford.
1676	Arrested and imprisoned a second time late in the year, most likely for not attending the parish church. His father, Thomas Bunyan, dies.
1677	Released from second imprisonment.
1678	<i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i> is published. Fifty-six of Bunyan's books are printed during his lifetime and four after his death.
1685	Draws up a deed of gift leaving his possessions to Elizabeth, probably in anticipation of persecution.
1688	Preaches for the final time on 19th August. Dies on 31st August. Buried on 3rd September.
1691	Elizabeth Bunyan dies.

Introduction

In a room stands a fireplace. It has been lit, and yet there is a man trying to extinguish the flames by throwing water on to them. *Who would win, the flames or the man?*

Without doubt, John Bunyan felt that his life was represented in those flames. In many ways, his life was marked by ordinariness – he was a simple tinker from a small village in England.

Yet, like every Christian, he surely faced times that threatened to extinguish the flame of faith within him. In addition there were other times when he must have been uncertain as to what to do;

Was he right to insist that God be worshipped according to His Word?

Had he made the right decision in submitting to a prison sentence – after all, how could he help anyone whilst in prison?

Should he have instead fled to somewhere safe with his family?

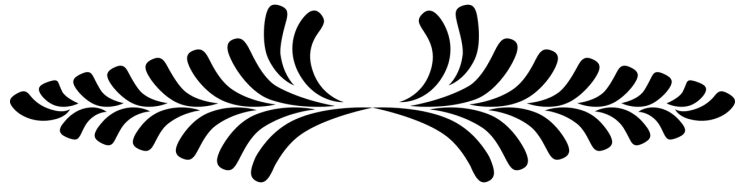
Would it be better for him to simply go back to his job of being a tinker?

As Bunyan told the story of the fire, he said that, amazingly, the fire grew hotter and greater despite the efforts of the man with the water to put it out. The man was the Devil. *But what power could overcome the Devil?*

On the other side of the fireplace, hidden behind a wall, was another *Man* quietly feeding the fire with His own hand, using a vessel of oil. It was Christ and the oil was His grace which maintains the work that He has begun in the heart.

The story introduces the way that Bunyan understood the power of Christ in a Christian's life. In many ways, his testimony is merely an echo of the Apostle Paul's who testified of the Lord,

He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor. 12:9-10).



Playing Tip-Cat

John Bunyan was born in Elstow, about one mile from Bedford and 60 miles northwest of London, in 1628. Elstow was a cluster of a several dozen cottages with a village green and a church.

John's father, Thomas, was a tinker, a type of travelling metal worker or tinsmith. His first wife, Anne, had died only four years into their marriage. Thomas then married Margaret Bentley, and their first child was John. His birth date is unknown, but he was baptised on 30th November 1628 in the village church. Thomas and Margaret would go on to have two more children: Margaret and William.

The surname "Bunyan" has French origins, and was spelt in a variety of ways, including "Bunnion," as on the Elstow baptism register. Bunyan does not appear to have come from a Christian home. His father, Thomas, could likely not read or write given that he signed his will with his thumbprint. Although they attended the local church, probably the Bible was rarely opened in their home.

Tip-cat

Each year in May, Elstow would hold a fair, including dances around a maypole, and it was an opportunity for people to sell goods. As a young boy, Bunyan seems to have joined in the activities of the village. He had reddish hair and was tall. He mentions playing 'tip-cat,' as a young boy. It was played on the village green and the batter would try to hit the 'cat', a wooden block, as far as possible.

As a boy, Bunyan had several close calls with death. With hindsight, he saw God's hand upon him, saving him from his own folly. On one occasion, he fell into a creek and narrowly escaped drowning. On another occasion, he fell from a boat into the Bedford river, but again escaped drowning. Once, he saw a snake crossing the path, and "having a stick in my hand, I struck it over the back. Having stunned her, I forced open her mouth with my stick, and plucked her

sting out with my fingers. By this act, if God had not been merciful to me, I might have brought myself to my end by my desperateness."



Elstow Green

Tinker

Bunyan's father was a tinker – he travelled around the countryside fixing metal pots, pans and other household things. Their family was lowly, yet without living in abject poverty. They were of peasant stock and owned their own home. Bunyan went to school until he was nine years old, when he left in order to help in the family trade. It was a seven-year apprenticeship. Bunyan's anvil, which he would have carried across the countryside, weighs 60 lb, and was discovered in 1905 in a pile of rubbish. It has a spiked end for driving it into the ground, and a round, flat top for working on. Engraved on the sides of it are the words "J. BVNYAN, Helstowe, 1647."



Bunyan's anvil

Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSdc8gJxsiY>

Scorning God

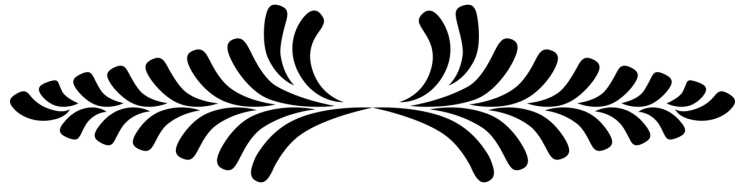
In Jesus' Parable of the Sower, one seed falls onto the hard path, where it never gets a start and is easy pickings for the birds (Mark 4:4,15). As a boy, Bunyan's heart was like that hard path. He was far from God. He remembered with shame:

I had but few equals — especially considering my years, which were tender, being few — both for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God.

Some people bristle at the mention of Christ Jesus' name. Bunyan said that he had not the least thoughts of God or life beyond this world. God, to him, was not the fountain of life and joy, but a hated prison warden, intent on causing misery. Bunyan said,

In these days, the thoughts of religion were very grievous to me. I could neither endure it myself, nor that anyone else should. So that, when I had seen someone read in those books which concerned Christian piety, it would be as it were a prison to me. Then I said to God, Depart from me, for I do not desire the knowledge of Your ways, Job 21.14-15. I was now void of all good consideration; heaven and hell were both out of sight and mind. And as for saving and damning, they were least in my thoughts.

In another of Jesus' parables, He tells of a man leaving his ninety-nine sheep in order to search for his one lost sheep. He rejoices when he finds it (Luke 15:3-7). God is the great Hound of Heaven, and although Bunyan was as far from God as could be, he later could see that, "God did not utterly leave me, but followed me."



Teenager

In the summer of 1644, Bunyan was fifteen years of age when his world was turned upside down. Within the span of two months, his mother, Margaret, and his sister, also named Margaret, died during an epidemic. Bunyan's father remarried within weeks of his wife's death – undoubtedly a difficult thing for young Bunyan to accept.

Bunyan's father and step-mother would go on to have a son that they named Charles, perhaps showing that their political allegiance was with the Royalists.

Solider

Politically, England at this time was at war with herself: Royalists versus Parliamentarians. Bunyan was drafted into the Parliamentary army. His name first appears on the muster roll on 30th November 1644 – he had just turned sixteen years old. He was stationed at a fort in Newport Pagnell, approximately 12 miles west of Bedford. There were a total of 128 foot soldiers based there.

In *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Bunyan never explains his opinions on the politics of the time. He doesn't even say which side of the Civil War he fought on – that is known from other records. His concern is always that we should know God. Regarding his time in the army he recalls only one incident:

When I was a soldier, I was drawn out with others, to go to a place to besiege it. But just as I was ready to go, one of the company desired to go in my place. When I consented, he took my place. Coming to the siege, as he stood sentinel, he was shot in the head with a musket-bullet and died.

Marriage

Bunyan spent three years in the army before being discharged in 1647. He had volunteered to go to Ireland, but in the end he

returned to his trade of tinkering. In 1649, King Charles I was executed, giving political power to the Parliament.

Having returned to Elstow, Bunyan married. He was twenty years old and his wife's name is lost to history, however, given that there was a custom of naming the eldest daughter after her mother, it is assumed that her name was Mary. Bunyan said, "we came together as poor as poor might be, not having so much household stuff as a dish or a spoon between us." And yet, she brought into the marriage two books left to her by her late father: *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety*. These were to have an important influence upon Bunyan and he was later grateful that his late father-in-law was a godly man.

Dead religion

At this stage of his life, Bunyan still hated religion. Nonetheless, when he read the two books that his wife brought into their marriage, it roused something within him. In his own words he said:

... these books ... though they did not reach my heart to awaken it about my sad and sinful state, yet they stirred in me some desires toward religion. So that, because I knew no better, I fell in very eagerly with the religion of the times — namely, to go to church twice a day, and do that with the foremost persons.

Yet, by his own admission, his wicked life hadn't changed at all. His religion was little more than superstition. He continues on:

I adored with great devotion, all things belonging to the church — both the high-place, priest, clerk, vestment, service, and whatever else. I counted all things holy that were contained in it. And I especially counted the priest and clerk most happy... their name, their garb, and their work had so intoxicated and bewitched me.

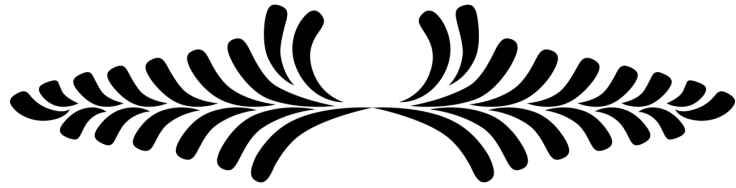
The danger is immediately obvious: he loved the trappings of religion, but not Christ. He said:

... all this while, I was not sensible of the danger and evil of sin. I was kept from considering that sin would damn me, whatever religion I followed, unless I was found in Christ. No indeed, I never thought of Him, or whether there was such a person or not. Thus man, while blind, wanders but wearies himself with vanity.

Lessons

This stage in Bunyan's life teaches us some important lessons;

- Firstly, we never know the influence that we will have upon others, even if unseen by us. Bunyan's dead father-in-law was a godly man whose two books that he left to his daughter were to help *in the providence of God* - to change the course of Bunyan's life. Let that be an encouragement to us; some seeds sown will bear fruit (Mark 4:8; 20). Christ Jesus is risen and alive, therefore we should always be *"always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain* (1 Cor. 15:58)." God in His wisdom is far too wise to allow us to see much fruit perhaps, but fruit will come even if the seed lies dormant for decades.
- Secondly, although these books aroused something within Bunyan, at this stage he still did not know Christ. The allure of dead religion is a warning to us all. Paul told Timothy to avoid those, *"having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power* (2 Tim. 3:5)." Such people may take the name 'Christian', but they know not the power of Christ in their lives. At this stage, the Devil still has Bunyan right where he wanted him.



A Painted hypocrite

By nature we breathe the foul air of self-righteousness. It is part of old Adam within us. It shows itself in a myriad of ways from arrogant pride in ourselves such as in the Pharisees, through to those who loathe themselves, thinking that they are beyond God's help. Either way, both are forms of unbelief, and a symptom of the same disease of self-righteousness. The only cure is to be made new in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit humbles us and changes us – faith makes us see that our only hope in life and death is our faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Yet, despite not knowing Christ, Bunyan's outward behaviour did improve. He says: "From this time forward, I so left my swearing that it was a great wonder to myself to observe it." Whereas before he could not go a sentence without swearing or cursing, he now controlled his tongue. What is more, his neighbours noticed - and were amazed at his changed outward behaviour:

I continued this way for about a year, all of which time our neighbours took me to be a very godly man, a new and religious man... they began to praise, commend, and speak well of me, both to my face and behind my back... when I understood these were their words and opinions of me, it pleased me mighty well.

If only his neighbours knew the truth! Bunyan seems to be like the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and looked, outwardly at least, like the ideal disciple. Even the other disciples seem impressed by him! Yet when Jesus showed him his problem and called on the man to follow Him, he turned his back and walked away sadly. To the amazement of the disciples, Jesus did not go after him (Matt. 19:16-26). He stands in contrast to the little children who were brought to Jesus immediately before this – and Jesus said, "Let the little children

come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:14).” With hindsight, Bunyan confessed:

I was nothing but a poor painted hypocrite, yet I loved to be talked of as one who was truly godly. I was proud of my godliness, and indeed, I did all that I did, either to be seen or to be well spoken of by men. Thus I continued for about twelve months or more.

Similarly, Jesus warned the crowds and His disciples, saying: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Matt. 23:27-28).”

Shaking God's Word out of the head

There were times when Bunyan admits to the conviction of sin. One time after hearing a sermon, he went home under a heavy burden. But arriving home, he found that food distracted him. And then, “when I had satisfied nature with my food, I shook the sermon out of my mind, and I returned with great delight to my old custom of sports and gaming.”

Surely, that shows us that even natural things such as food can be turned against us. In *The Screwtape Letters*, the devil Screwtape recalls how he was able to distract his “patient” with lunch:

I struck instantly at the part of the man which I had best under my control and suggested that it was just about time he had some lunch... by the time I had added “Much better come back after lunch and go into it with a fresh mind”, he was already halfway to the door. Once he was in the street the battle was won.

May we never shake off thoughts about God.

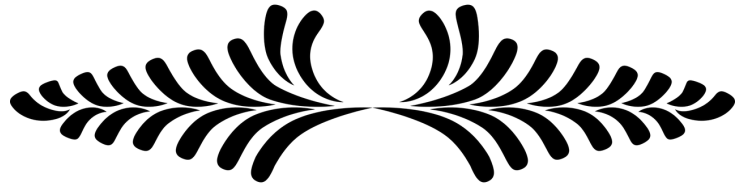
As good as any man in England

Mere moralism will affect us in different ways. On the one hand it may crush us as we fail to live up to the right standard, falling again and again. Or else it will puff us up with pride as we believe we have lived up to the right standard. Either way, we are not trusting in Christ Jesus and God's wonderful grace is absent from our lives. Bunyan would one day come to realise this, but for now he was still in legalism's deadly grip. He said:

I set the commandments before me as my way to heaven. I also strived to keep these commandments and, I thought, if I kept them pretty well sometimes; then I would have comfort.

In all of this, he thought that he was a fairly good man – *surely God would be pleased with him?* If he did occasionally become conscious of sin, then he says: "I would repent, and say that I was sorry for it, and promised God to do better next time, and there get help again. For then I thought, I pleased God as well as any man in England."

Again, for all Bunyan's religious ways, Christ Jesus was completely absent.



Eavesdropping on grace

Around the year 1650, Bunyan's life was again to change dramatically, although innocently enough it was by a visit to Bedford for his work. He tells the story himself:

But one day, the good providence of God called me to Bedford to work on my calling. And in one of the streets of that town, I came to where there were three or four poor women sitting at a door, in the sun, talking about the things of God. And now being willing to hear them discourse, I drew near to hear what they said. For now I was also a brisk talker myself in the matters of religion. But I may say that I heard, but I did not understand, for they were far above, out of my reach. Their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature. They talked about how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted, and supported against the temptations of the devil.

It is amazing the way that God uses the simple events of life to bring about good for His kingdom. Let that be a lesson to us never to despise the little things! As Bunyan eavesdropped on the conversation of these three or four godly women, it became clear to him that they spoke of God in a way that he didn't understand. He said:

I thought they spoke as if joy made them speak. They spoke with such pleasantness of scripture language, and with such an appearance of grace in all they said, that to me it was as if they had found a new world.

In John's Gospel, we meet the disciple Andrew. He was a fisherman, and he is one of the rarely mentioned disciples in the Gospels. Perhaps, this is because he was quieter by nature than the

more exuberant Peter, his brother. Yet surely, his faith was just as earnest as that of the others.

Whatever the case, the one thing that Andrew did do was to introduce his brother to Jesus: "He first found his own brother Simon and said to him: "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus (John 1:41-42)."

Perhaps Andrew, from his perspective, and likewise the three or four Bedford women from their perspective, may have felt that their efforts were feeble and clumsy. But both Peter and Bunyan could later say: "I owe you a debt that I could never repay, because you led me to Christ. And I am so grateful to God for you."

May that be an encouragement to us!

- *Can you trace your own coming to faith in Christ?*
- *Was it through such simple means as overhearing a conversation?*
- *Was it through a parent or grandparent who lovingly, patiently and earnestly showed you Christ over many years?*
- *How did you discover this new world of God?*

Only eternity will reveal the myriad of ways by which the Holy Spirit opens our eyes and draws us to faith in Christ. For now, we must trust God and praise Him.

Three leaps of joy

How do you describe the experience of being forgiven by God? What response wells up within you as you think about the cross of Jesus our Saviour?

In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan was undoubtedly describing his own experience of forgiveness. It is worth quoting at length;

Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation (Isa 26:1). Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load

on his back.

He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said, with a merry heart, "He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death." Then he 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 (Zec 12:10).

Bunyan goes on to describe how three "*Shining Ones*" came to Christian with signs of assurance. The first one declared his sins forgiven. The second removed Christian's rags and gave him new clothes befitting a King's pilgrim. The third marked Christian's forehead and gave him a scroll - and Christian was told to look at the scroll so as to never forget it.

In the passage, Christian's response to forgiveness was gratitude, wonder and joy. His sin was rolled into the grave, never to be seen again. He gave three leaps of joy!

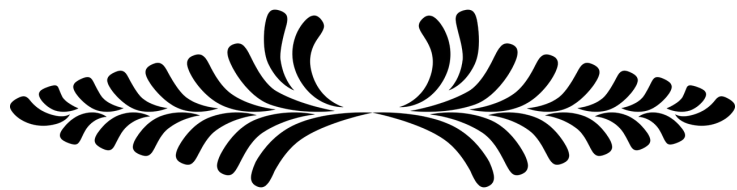
Lessons

The lessons from this are as valuable as they are clear;

- First, you must come to the cross of Christ Jesus for forgiveness. It is remarkable that amongst Peter's first words to Christ Jesus in the Gospels were: "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord* (Luke 5:8)." Yet, Peter later confessed:

“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).” God’s forgiveness in His Son is full, gracious and eternal. It is atoning, meaning that sin’s punishment cannot be demanded twice. Rather God, *“made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).”* Peter said to *“elect exiles”* believers spread across many places that, *“you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Pet. 1:18-19).* In Psalm 86, David remembered the LORD’s goodness and forgiveness, and responded by saying: *“I will give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever (Ps. 86:12).”*

- Secondly, never forget your scroll! A Christian who does not look often *daily* at his or her salvation in Christ is a Christian headed for trouble. Later in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian meets a man, *Little Faith*, who is a true believer, but he has been badly beaten up and robbed by *Faint-Heart*, *Mistrust* and *Guilt*. Thankfully, they did not take his “certificate” it was of no value to them. Nonetheless, Little Faith sadly made little use of his certificate for the rest of his journey. Instead, Christian said that he spent much of his journey complaining bitterly to anyone who he met on the way about how he had been robbed. *Christian, always make use of your salvation in Christ!*



First steps

Just as in life, so in faith: our first steps are often faltering steps – and we should realise how fragile we are, were it not for God who upholds us. Similarly, we should never forget how mightily Satan will fight against anyone who shows signs of thirst for the Living Water of Christ.

Sweet as honey

A hungry baby will be unsettled until he or she is fed. It is a sign of life! So too, amongst the first signs of new life in Christ is a hunger for God's Word. Bunyan found that he couldn't keep away from listening to these three or four poor women. There was something about them that attracted him. He says:

I would often make it my business to go again and again into the company of these poor people; for I could not stay away. And the more I went among them, the more I questioned my condition.

Looking within himself, he started to realise that two things were happening:

The one was a very great softness and tenderness of heart, which caused me to fall under the conviction of what they asserted by scripture. And the other was a great bending in my mind, to a continual meditating on scripture, and on all other good things which at any time I heard or read about.

Whereas before he had filled his mind with whatever interested him, now he filled his mind with the Bible. He simply read it – and God's Word started to taste to him as sweet as honey (Ps. 19:10). In fact, Bunyan says that his mind was now so hungry for God's Word that he was like a "horse-leech" crying out, "Give, Give!"

Despite this new love beginning to grip his heart, Satan would not give up so easily on him, as will become clear.

Ranters

This period of history was a brief window in which there were greater freedoms within that society, but this also drew out greater errors. One of the groups to arise was the Ranters with whom Bunyan came into contact.

In Bunyan's words, some of the Ranters said that they "had attained perfection, and could do what they wanted and not sin." Immediately, this appealed to his fleshly desires! And yet, he knew enough to take hold of his mind and to pray:

O Lord, I am a fool, and not able to know the truth from error: Lord, do not leave me to my own blindness, either to approve of or condemn this doctrine. If it is of God, let me not despise it; if it is of the devil, let me not embrace it. Lord, I lay my soul in this matter at Your foot alone. Let me not be deceived, I humbly beseech You.

About this same time, Bunyan had a falling out with a friend named Harry. Something was changing within Bunyan and he could no longer stand Harry's immoral living. When he challenged him by asking him, "What will become of you if you die in this condition?" Harry replied with anger and joking.

In the end, Harry was one of those who followed the Ranters. He scolded Bunyan – belittling him, by telling him that he had examined all religions, and this was certainly the right one. Bunyan realised that he could keep fellowship with Harry no longer.

Lessons

Below are two further lessons that we may learn from Bunyan's life;

- Firstly, the Ranters twisted the logic of God's grace in order to please their own desires. Their argument was that if we are

saved by God's grace and forgiven, then can't we live as we like? Going further, they thought that logically if we sin more and are therefore forgiven more, then doesn't that prove all the more the power of God's grace in forgiveness? Yet, the Apostle Paul addressed this exact argument in Romans 6. He says: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" His answer is memorable: "By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Rom. 6:1-2)" Paul then explains the way in which believers are united to Christ is His death, burial and resurrection from the dead, so that "we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4)." Grace must always lead to holiness, not licence to sin.

- Secondly, although at this point Bunyan did not know enough to know *why* the Ranters were wrong, he did know enough to cry out to God for protection - and God answered that prayer. Isn't that exactly the way that the Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray? "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Matt. 6:13)." Only eternity will reveal how frequently God the Father in His protective love has answered that prayer, even when we were unaware. May we be wise enough and humble enough to pray as our Lord taught us to pray and as Bunyan did pray. This is a precious lesson.

Satan's struggle

Like a snake struggling all the more to coil around its escaping prey, so Bunyan's softening to God meant that Satan tried all the more to undo the good that was happening within him.

One way that Satan tried to extinguish the signs of faith within Bunyan was by trying to prove that his faith was a sham. In life, we naturally despise things that are fake – they repulse us and we prefer the genuine. One of Satan's best illusions is to make what is genuine seem a sham.

So it was that one day Bunyan was travelling the short distance between Elstow and Bedford, and the temptation came to him in a strong way to test if he had faith by doing some miracle. The test that came to his mind was this:

I must say to the puddles that were in the horse paddocks, Be dry; and to the dry places, Be puddles. And truly, one time I was going to say so indeed.

It was a wager. Satan even brought Bible verses to his mind that seemed to confirm that this was a legitimate way of testing faith. Probably, Bunyan thought of the story of Gideon laying out a fleece and God graciously answering Gideon with a miraculous sign (Jud. 6:36-40).

But then, just as Bunyan was about to do this foolish and unbelieving thing, he suddenly thought that he should first pray. And so going to a nearby hedge he prayed that God would make him able to perform the miracle. Thank God that having prayed, Bunyan saw the dilemma of his test: if he failed, then God must surely reject him. And so, he decided to wait a little longer and he never followed through on the test.

Bunyan had much to learn about the true nature of faith and what it means to place our trust in God.

Lessons

It is easy to imagine ourselves in Bunyan's shoes, desiring to see a miraculous sign that would prove that faith is genuine. Initially, Satan must have watched with delight as Bunyan sought to put God to the test, but then in anger as he backed away from the temptation. Below are three lessons that this incident in Bunyan's life teaches us;

- Firstly, we must learn that God does not accept us on the basis of *how much* faith we have amassed. We are accepted by God on the basis of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but

no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah (Matt. 16:4).” The sign of Jonah was that for three days Jonah was as good as dead in the belly of the great fish. This pointed to Christ’s own death, and resurrection from the dead. His resurrection constitute the ground that the gospel is genuine.

- Secondly, it is important to realise that whilst saving faith is genuine, it is not perfected here on earth. Every Christian will know times when faith wanes, and all we can do is cry out to God for help, as when the father cried out to Jesus: “I believe; help my unbelief (Mark 9:24).” Yet true faith should not test God, but trust God.
- Thirdly, thank God that He keeps and protects us in spite of our own folly. Speaking of the disciples as a whole, Jesus said to Simon Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers (Luke 22:31-32).” Surely, the Lord Jesus likewise protected Bunyan at this time too. Satan’s plan to smother Bunyan’s faith was thwarted, and that gave God more time to work a purer and stronger faith within him. May God likewise protect us as well.

A Dream to Strengthen Faith

At this stage of his life, Bunyan was still struggling with the claims of Christ upon him. He was often miserable and at a loss as to what to do. Yet, God once again intervened, giving Bunyan “a kind of a vision.” In the vision, he saw the poor believers of Bedford on the sunny side of a mountain, refreshed and happy, whilst Bunyan saw himself was in the cold, shivering and surrounded by dark clouds. He saw that between them was a wall. Bunyan wished to pass through the wall and join them in the warmth of the sun, but he could find no way around the wall. Finally, he saw “a narrow gap, like a little

doorway” which he attempted to enter. However, despite trying with all his might to go through the doorway, he was initially unsuccessful.

In the vision, Bunyan then saw that only “with great striving” was he able to slide through the door, headfirst, and with great joy he joined the others in the sun. Bunyan interpreted the dream as follows:

The mountain signified the church of the living God... the wall, I thought, was the word that made a separation between the Christians and the world; and the gap in the wall, I thought, was Jesus Christ, who is the way to God the Father.

But why did Bunyan struggle to get through the door? He understood this part of the dream as meaning that he was still holding on to his sin, and whilst ever he did that he could not enter. He said: “For here there was only room for body and soul, but not for body, soul, and sin.” Bunyan still didn’t know where he stood before the Lord, but this vision taught him to pray and ask the Lord to help him in his distress.



Struggle and Strength

One of the things that must amaze us the longer that we go on in the Christian life, is the various ways that God uses to draw people to Himself:

- On the one hand, for some people there is great struggle in coming to faith in Christ. Saul on the road to Damascus was like a rock, as hard as flint against Christ (Acts 9:1-6). Flint requires something harder than itself to smash it - and the clash is violent. Thank God that He overcome Paul and gave him a heart of flesh to trust in Christ Jesus (Acts 9:18-19).
- On the other hand, for other people the way to Christ is much smoother. Timothy had learned the Scriptures from infancy, having been taught them from his godly mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5). Perhaps his coming to faith in Christ was far gentler.

Whether we come to believe in Christ via a violent shake, or a gentle leading by the hand - or any way in between – all in Him are now members of one body, with Christ Himself as the head. Ephesians 4:4-6 shows that there are seven unbreakable cords that hold us together: *“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

By now, the true seeds of faith were starting to germinate within Bunyan’s life, yet there was still much struggle to come. No believer starts as a strong, sturdy tree, but as a fragile sapling – and once again, Satan attempted to stamp out the sapling before it could grow any stronger.

Bunyan struggled with doubts: *Did he truly believe in Christ? Was he truly a Christian?* He also feared that he was too late. He said to himself: "What if the day of grace is now past and gone?" He had been so slow to respond to the truth that he thought that surely God would reject him. Bunyan felt himself worse than a thousand fools! Yet God's Word was to prove his balm at this point:

These words broke in upon my mind: Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled; and yet there is room. Luk. 14.22-23. These words, but especially those, and yet there is room, were sweet words to me. For truly I thought that by them I saw there was room enough in heaven for me.

How many people hold back, thinking themselves the same as Bunyan. *But isn't that, in and of itself, unbelief?*

Like a clog on a bird

Another distress soon gripped Bunyan. He felt his "desires for heaven and life" grow weaker and weaker. He became careless towards God and his own responsibilities to others. He felt that his heart was hindered like a clog on the leg of bird! He felt further from God – and His grace - than ever before. He sunk so low that

I could not believe that Christ had love for me. Alas! I could neither hear Him, nor see Him, nor feel Him, nor favour any of his things.

Joy leached from his life. By this stage, Bunyan was beginning to meet with the believers who formed the non-conformist church in Bedford. They tried to encourage him with the promises of God, but Bunyan found little comfort. He simply felt that God's promises were out of reach.

In the wonderful ways of God, often a single word or a phrase stops us in our tracks. He knows *when* and *how* to give the living water of Christ that we so desperately need. Whilst Bunyan was in this state of despair and depression, he one day heard these words from

Song of Solomon 4:1: "Behold, you are fair, my love, behold, you are fair."

It gripped him! He thought of how the preacher said: "If it is so, that the saved soul is Christ's love when under temptation and desertion, then poor tempted soul, when you are assaulted and afflicted with temptations, and God's face is hidden, yet still think on these two words, 'My love.'"

As Bunyan returned home he couldn't stop thinking about those words. A fire began to kindle in his spirit and twenty times he spoke to himself the words from God, "you are my love, you are my love." As Bunyan meditated upon this, God's Word powerfully took hold of him, filling him with joy:

'You are my love, you are my love, and nothing shall separate you from my love.' And with that, my heart was filled full of comfort and hope; and now I could believe that my sins would be forgiven me.

A single verse was all that it took! Once again Satan was thwarted in his attempt to pull down Bunyan.

John Gifford

It is around this time that Bunyan introduces us to John Gifford who was pastoring the small church that Bunyan began to attend. Gifford had a colourful story. During the Civil War he was a Major in the Royalist army. In 1648, he was taken as a prisoner along with 1400 other Royalists – and Gifford, along with eleven others, was condemned to the gallows.

The night before Gifford was to hang, his sister came to visit him for the last time, but she found the sentinels guarding him asleep. His eleven companions were "heavy throughe drinke," but Gifford took the opportunity to escape past the sleeping sentinels. He made his way through field and ditch – hiding for three days – until the search for him was over.

Eventually, Gifford came to Bedford where he was unknown. Bedford had a population of less than 2000 people at the time. Gifford practiced as a physician ("*physicke*"), but he was a heavy drinker and gambler. His tongue knew no restraint.

There was one man, in particular, whom Gifford despised: Anthony Harrington. Harrington was a cooper and a Christian. He would become one of the founding members of the non-conformist church in Bedford.

One night, after losing £15 at gambling, Gifford was in a rage. Yet, for whatever reason he opened a Christian book by Robert Bolton entitled *Instructions for the Right Comforting Afflicted Consciences*, and "*something therein took hold upon him.*" Gifford realised his sin, and though he wasn't released from this immediately – it took over a month – he did at last discover the forgiveness of sins that comes through Christ Jesus.

Gifford then tried to join the small gathering of believers that met with Harrington, but they were suspicious of him – he had a terrible reputation! Yet in time they witnessed in him the power of God's grace working through the Holy Spirit. Gifford was a changed man.

By 1650, this small Christian fellowship had formed itself into an independent church in Bedford. There are no records of the first six years of the church, but it is known that twelve people began the church, including Anthony Harrington, and probably also the three or four poor women upon whom Bunyan had been eavesdropping. We may think such a small group of people to be a weak beginning, but where the Holy Spirit is at work it is always a genuine work (1 Thess. 1:5). *Let us not despise little things in God's hands.*

The group called John Gifford as their pastor. He was now an utterly changed man, growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet. 3:18).

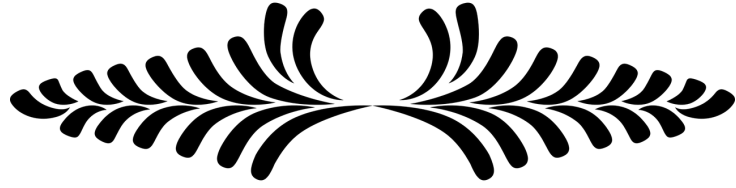
Bunyan's own testimony about Gifford was that "*he did much for my stability.*" Under his shepherding, Bunyan grew in the Lord. He

now saw that there was such a thing as false faith, which comes from man:

But, oh! how my soul was now led from truth to truth by God! Even from the birth and cradle of the Son of God, to his ascension, and second coming from heaven to judge the world! Truly, I then found on this account, that the great God was very good to me.

Bunyan had five years under Gifford's shepherding, before Gifford died in 1655. Five years may not seem like a very long time, but the Lord worked much good in Bunyan's life through Gifford.

When Gifford knew that he was dying, he wrote a letter to the small church in which he says that he had written "in my love to you and care over you, when our heavenly Father was remooving me to the kingdome of his deare Son." Thank God for this changed man.



Arrest

Bunyan joined the small non-conformist church in 1653, and was presumably baptised as part of his admission. Probably, this happened in the Ouse River that flows through Bedford, and given the hostility towards non-conformists, it was a risky thing to do.

By 1655, Bunyan's little family moved from Elstow to Bedford. His health was a problem at times: "I was somewhat inclining to a consumption, wherewith about the Spring, I was suddenly and violently seized with much weakness in my outward man."

Then in 1658, his first wife died, leaving behind Bunyan and their four young children. Along with the death of Gifford, pastor of the small church, it must have been a difficult time for Bunyan.

Preaching

Church records show that at a church meeting on 27th September 1657, Bunyan along with three others were appointed as deacons. Yet it was noted that Bunyan was already, "being taken off by the preaching of the Gospell." There is another note in 1658 calling on Bunyan to fulfil his duties: "bro : Bunyan and bro : Childe having neglected to speake with Sister Chamberlaine and bro : Skelton; were againe reminded of it and required to take care of it against next meeting."

It seems as though preaching was increasingly taking up Bunyan's energy. He said:

It did not please me at all to see people drink in opinions if they seemed ignorant of Jesus Christ. But the worth of their own salvation, sound conviction of sin, especially of unbelief, and a heart set on fire to be saved by Christ, with strong breathings after a truly sanctified soul — that was what delighted me; those were the souls I counted blessed.

Bunyan's preaching was typically puritan: clear, direct and logically laid out expositions of God's Word. The power is in God's Word, as the Holy Spirit works within the hearts and minds of those who hear. No word was to be wasted. As he stated: "In my preaching I have really been in pain, I have, as it were, travailed to bring forth Children to God." He brought God's Word to ordinary people as it was often the "doctors and priests" who "did open wide against me."

John Owen was a Puritan, but unlike Bunyan, he was well educated. Owen had avoided prison and even had the king's ear at times. Despite their different backgrounds, Owen and Bunyan had a strong friendship. Famously, King Charles II once asked Owen why he wanted to hear a poor tinker such as Bunyan preach. Owen replied to the king, "Had I the tinker's abilities for preaching, I would most gladly relinquish all my learning."

People came to hear Bunyan expound God's Word clearly and earnestly, yet there are always dangers in apparent success. Charles Spurgeon mentions that once a friend said to Bunyan: "You preached well." To which, Bunyan replied: "You are too late. The devil told me that before I left the pulpit."

Arrest

By this stage, the Civil War was finished, but nonetheless, these were uneasy days. Following a brief period when the Parliament and the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell were in power, in 1660, the monarchy was restored with Charles II becoming king. This spelled the end of freedom for non-conformists.

On 12th November 1660, Bunyan went to a farmhouse near Harlington, thirteen miles from Bedford, in order to hold a church gathering. Those who met there were anxious for him, because an arrest warrant had been issued for his arrest, although Bunyan himself seemed to be unaware that it had been issued.

Should they continue with the gathering or not? Bunyan could have fled at this stage, but he chose to stay and not resist. He did this

for the sake of those who trusted in Christ. What would those “*newly-converted brethren*” think if he was to run away? It would discourage them and make them afraid to stand. In addition, as “the first to be opposed for the gospel — if I should then flee, it might be a discouragement to the whole body that might follow after.” Bunyan understood that this was God’s chosen path for him to walk.

And so, Bunyan said to his friend:

I will not stir. Nor will I have the meeting dismissed for this. 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, or to this purpose.

The Constable arrived to arrest Bunyan immediately after a prayer asking for God’s blessing on their time together. Bunyan recalled: “When alas! the constable came in, he found us only with our Bibles in our hands, ready to speak and hear the word of God.”

Lessons

What lesson might there be in this for a Christian? Did Bunyan do the right thing or not? Could he have fled with a clear conscience? Whatever the answers to these questions are, below are some of the principles that Bunyan held to;

- Firstly, an adherence to the whole will of God as revealed in the Scriptures. God’s Word is to be our only rule on faith and practice and if freedom means anything, then it means freedom to worship God as the Scriptures reveal that He is to be worshipped. No government should dictate worship, but only God’s Word.
- Secondly, whilst a Christian is free, a Christian is also bound to do what will most honour Christ and encourage His church. Surely, there is a time when it is right for a Christian

to flee. It was right for Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt with the baby Jesus in obedience to a vision from God (Matt. 2:13-14). The Apostle Paul at times fled (Acts 14:6; 17:14), even though sometimes he wanted to stay (Acts 19:30-31)! Ephesians 4:10 urges believers to discern what pleases God. This means moving beyond His revealed will which we know in the Scriptures, to thinking about what would *best* please Him in any given situation. In Bunyan's case, he was convinced that he must stay and face whatever consequences were to come to him. He said: "I lifted up my heart to God, for light and strength to be kept, that I might not do anything that might either dishonour Him, or wrong my own soul, or be a grief or discouragement to anyone who was inclining after the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice the three points on which he based his decision:

- The honour of God,
 - his own conscience, and
 - what would benefit other believers or those seeking Christ.
- Thirdly, Christians should always rejoice in the fact that our cause is good! In the face of trouble, this is a great reassurance. Nobody trusting Christ has ever lived to regret it.

Sitting Wisely and Soberly

There is a point in *The Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian and Faithful are arrested in Vanity Fair for not wanting to buy the things offered by the fair. This offended the townsfolk who, truth be told, couldn't understand them. In the end, the two pilgrims were held in a cage.

Bunyan's description of what happened next is interesting. Many of the townsfolk took out whatever malice and revenge they had within them on the pilgrims, and Christian and Faithful, for their part, replied with blessing and kindness. Then a different group of

townsfolk who had seen what had happened, had pity upon the pilgrims and thought that those hurling abuse at them had gone too far. A fight erupted between the two groups, and again, all that Christian and Faithful could do was sit in the cage “wisely and soberly.” Surely, Bunyan was in this way recounting some of his own experiences.

A First Hearing

The justice who had issued Bunyan’s arrest warrant, Justice Wingate, was away at the time that the Constable brought Bunyan to the village of Harington. However, the Constable was satisfied with an assurance from Bunyan’s friend that he would not escape, and that he would present himself to Wingate the following morning. This Bunyan did. He recalled this first meeting with Wingate:

He asked the constable what we did, where we had met together, and what did we have with us? I believe he meant whether we had armour or not. But when the constable told him that only a few of us met together to preach and hear the Word, with no sign of anything else, he could not well tell what to say.

Wingate went on to ask Bunyan why he was not content to follow his calling as a tinker. He also said that it was against the law for someone such as Bunyan to do as he did in holding unauthorised meetings. Bunyan replied:

The intent of my coming there and to other places, was to instruct and counsel people to forsake their sins, and to close in with Christ, lest they miserably perish; and that I could do both of these without confusion, i.e., follow my calling, and also preach the Word.

Wingate offered Bunyan release, so long as those offering to put up bond prevented him from preaching. If he did preach, then their bond would be forfeited. Bunyan refused the terms, explaining that

he “could not cease speaking the Word of God — even to counsel, comfort, exhort, and teach the people among whom I came.”

Bunyan was told that he would be sent to prison where he must await the quarterly court sessions. However, just as Bunyan was about to be sent with the Constable to the prison in Bedford, he was called back to see Wingate again, and there he ran into a man named Mr Foster from Bedford.

Foster recognised Bunyan - and he began in a friendly enough way, asking Bunyan why he was there. He then put a proposition before Bunyan: “if you will promise to no longer call the people together, you shall have your liberty to go home.” Foster assured him that Wingate did not want to send him to prison. Bunyan replied:

Sir, I said, I will not force or compel any man to hear me. Yet if I come into any place where people are meeting together, I should, according to the best of my skill and wisdom, exhort and counsel them to seek after the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls.

Foster replied with what was becoming a common reply, namely, that Bunyan should stay with being a tinker as that was his calling in life. Bunyan’s response was that he would do both, tinker and preach.

Foster’s tack then changed. He charged Bunyan with breaking the law by holding unlawful meetings. Bunyan replied that it was his duty to do as much good as he could by both working as a tinker and preaching to the best knowledge that he had of the Word.

Foster accused Bunyan of taking the Scriptures too literally, and that it was only “poor, simple, ignorant people who came to hear” him. Bunyan replied by saying that every part of Scripture was to be understood on its own merit and therefore, where the Scriptures were intended to be literal, they should be taken as literal. Also, as it was “the foolish and ignorant” who most needed teaching, it must therefore be good for him to continue preaching.

A deadlock was reached, and Bunyan was sent to Bedford prison. Bunyan says that he had to bite his tongue from saying aloud that he knew God's peace with him. Sometimes we should not throw our pearls before swine (Matt. 7:6).

On Trial

After seven weeks in Bedford prison, Bunyan was summonsed to the quarterly court hearings. Five justices heard his case. The formal charge against him read:

That John Bunyan, of the town of Bedford, labourer... 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 disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of this kingdom, contrary to the laws of our sovereign lord the King, etc.

From this we see that the two main charges against him were, firstly, that he refused to go to the official church, and secondly, that he was involved in holding unlawful gatherings, which were seen as a threat to the nation.

The justices asked Bunyan to respond to the charges. He said that whilst he belonged to the church of which Christ is the head, he did not attend the parish church in Bedford. Then Bunyan defended his liberty to worship God as God's Word directs us and not as the king directs.

At one point, Justice Keelin said that Bunyan would be free to preach, but only to his family. Bunyan replied with clear logic:

If it was lawful to do good to some, it was lawful to do good to more. If it was a good duty to exhort our families, it was good to exhort others. But if they held it is a sin to meet together to seek the face of God, and to exhort one another to follow Christ, then I must sin; for so we must do.

After this, Bunyan confessed to being involved in many meetings for the purpose praying, exhorting and encouraging one another in the Lord's ways – "I confessed myself guilty in no other way." This was taken as admission of guilt and Bunyan was returned to prison with the threat that if were released and he would not stop preaching, then he would be banished from the realm, and if he returned, then he must "stretch by the neck."

Clerk of the Peace

In April 1661, after five months in prison, a Clerk of the Peace, Mr Cobb, was sent by the justices to demand Bunyan's submission to the law of the land. Bunyan responded that those laws were designed to stop those who did evil in their gatherings, but his meetings sought to worship the Lord and build one another up. Cobb responded by citing a recent insurrection at London made under the guise of religion. In January 1661, Thomas Venner, a cooper, had led a coup against the newly restored monarchy. Bunyan said that he abhorred what Venner had done, and that all because *some* meetings acted that way, it didn't mean that Bunyan's meetings were the same. Bunyan professed his obedience "as a man and a Christian" to the King's government – and that he would gladly prove his loyalty.

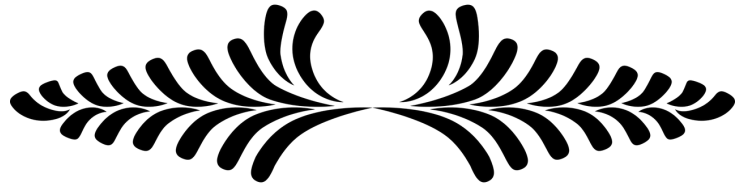
In addition, Bunyan tried to explain that the law under which he was convicted was an earlier law made during the time of Elizabeth I. In his opinion, the intention of that law was not to disrupt "anyone in the way of God."

Cobb then used an altruistic argument – appealing to what he thought could achieve the greater good: "you may do much good to the church of Christ if you would" only speak in private conversation and not call meetings. Bunyan said, as he had regarding his family, that if he was allowed to do good to *one* neighbour, then surely he could do the *same* good to many. He then returned to another point he had made earlier about not tarring all with the same brush. He illustrated his point by saying that just because a thief enters a wood

and steals, that does not mean that everyone who then comes out of the wood is a thief.

In the conversation that followed, Cobb questioned how truth could be known since Bunyan's interpretation of the Scriptures was one way, but others could interpret it another way. Bunyan responded by saying that Scripture will open itself by "comparing one Scripture with another."

In the end, the conversation ended in another deadlock. Yet, Bunyan was impressed with Cobb, thanking him for his civil conversation and even saying, "O! that we might meet in heaven!"



Elizabeth Bunyan

Hebrews 11:38 speaks of those “of whom the world is not worthy.” Bunyan’s second wife, Elizabeth, is certainly amongst them. Every indication is that she was a woman of strong courage and faith in God. Truly, she is the hero of the story – if that can ever be said of a Christian.

Bunyan’s first wife died in 1658. Bunyan was 30 years old, and one year later, in 1659, he married a local lady named Elizabeth. She was not yet 20 years old, and in marrying John she took on caring for his four children under ten years old.

In his writings, Bunyan left few details about his personal life, however he did recall Elizabeth’s faithfulness. It was only one year into their marriage that Bunyan was arrested, and Elizabeth suddenly found herself without her husband and raising four young children. The turmoil of Bunyan’s arrest led to Elizabeth miscarrying.

Several months before Bunyan’s arrest, the monarchy had been restored to the nation, and to mark the king’s coronation on 23rd April 1661, a list of prisoners who were to receive a royal pardon was proclaimed. Yet, surely despite much prayer, in the wisdom and mysterious providence of God, Bunyan’s name was not amongst those listed. It must have been a bitter blow - and seemed like an unanswered prayer. There was now tremendous pressure on Elizabeth’s young shoulders.

How did she not allow bitterness to consume her?

How did she not rail in anger against God and her husband?

How did she not become miserable?

Surely, the answer is found in Jesus Christ’s gracious call: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).” She was sustained by God.

Within the first year of Bunyan's arrest, Elizabeth tried on at least five occasions to have his case fairly heard and for him to be released. This included a fruitless journey to London.

In *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Bunyan recalled the last of these attempts. The occasion was August 1661 – Bunyan had been in prison for nearly one year by this stage – and the quarterly court hearings were in town, involving visiting justices. One of these justices, Sir Matthew Hale, had a reputation as being a fair-minded and generous man. However, the court hearings finished without Bunyan's case being heard, and so Elizabeth, at the encouragement of a kind court official, went to the Swan Inn where the justices, including Hale, were together.

Elizabeth approached Justice Hale, whom she had previously seen, and said to him, "My lord,... I make bold to come once again to your Lordship, to know what may be done with my husband." Hale, however, delivered her devastating news, "Woman, I told you before I could do you no good; because they have taken what your husband spoke at the sessions for a conviction; and unless there is something done to undo that, I can do you no good."

Yet Elizabeth continued, protesting Bunyan's innocence, until one of the other justices, Twisdon, interjected "very angrily," saying, "Your husband is a breaker of the peace, and is convicted by the law."

Elizabeth once again professed that her husband was not lawfully convicted. She was asked if Bunyan would leave preaching, to which she replied, "he dares not leave preaching as long as he can speak." To Twisdon, Bunyan was a breaker of the peace.

Although the situation looked helpless, Elizabeth continued to defend her husband, saying: "he desired to live peaceably, and to follow his calling, so that his family might be maintained." She spoke of how she had been left to raise their four children, one of whom was blind, and the hardships she faced because her husband was in

prison. But Twisdon attacked Elizabeth, accusing her of crying poor – making “poverty her cloak.”

Once again, the issue of Bunyan being a tinker was raised. Elizabeth confirmed, “Yes... and because he is a tinker, and a poor man, he is therefore despised, and cannot have justice.” Justice Hale was looking to help Elizabeth as best as he could, and he suggested several possible avenues of appeal. However, another justice was upset at Hale’s suggestions and said that if Bunyan was released, “he will preach and do what he wishes.” Elizabeth replied, “He preaches nothing but the Word of God.”



The Old Swan Inn

The situation was very tense – Elizabeth even thought that Twisdon might strike her. But again, she bravely defended her husband, saying that he would do no harm, and that “God has owned him, and done much good by him.” Further fury from Twisdon followed.

In the end it was all for naught. Elizabeth said that before she left, “I could not help but break forth into tears.” Yet, her tears were not tears of rage or bitterness, but sorrow, knowing that these justices

– “poor creatures” – will have to give an account one day before the Lord.

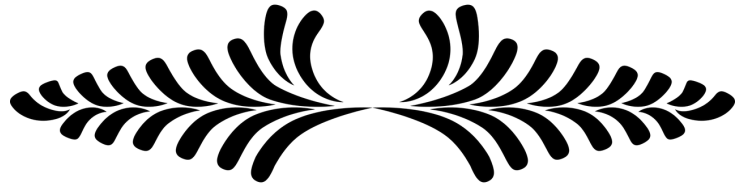
Elizabeth was without her husband in the home as he languished in Bedford prison. They would have two children together – Sarah (b.1665) and Joseph (b.1672) – and Elizabeth would outlive Bunyan by three years, dying in 1691.

There is a final reference to Elizabeth in a gift of deed drawn up by Bunyan in 1685. In it he gives his worldly possessions to her, and calls her, “my well-beloved wife.” Records show that she received a total of 42 pounds, 19 shillings.

Christiana?

Before we leave the story of Elizabeth, it is worth thinking about Bunyan’s most significant book, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The first part of the story, which was published in 1678, is obviously autobiographical, with the story of Christian mirroring Bunyan’s own story of coming to faith in Christ and the Christian life.

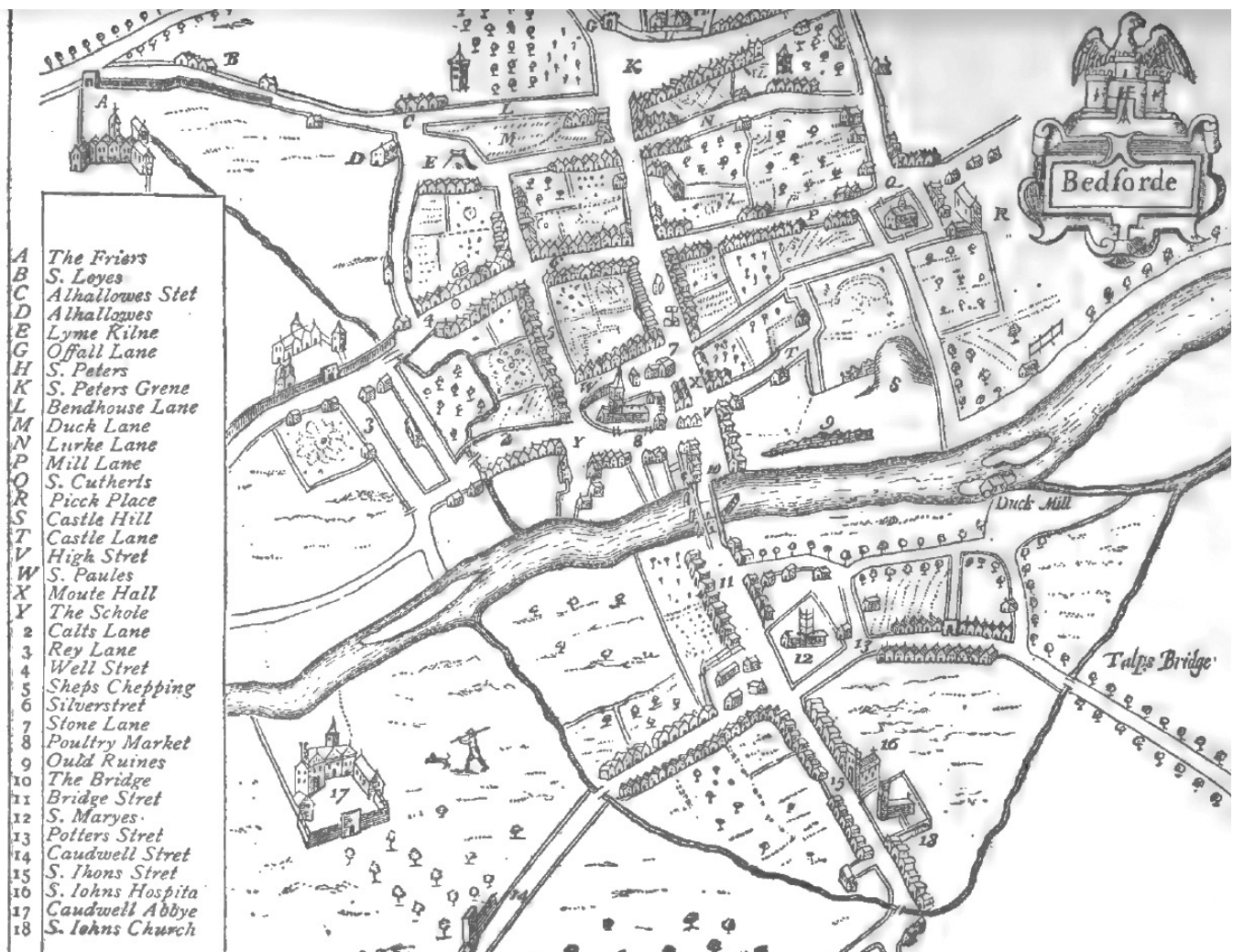
However, the second part of the story, published five years later, tells of Christian’s wife, Christiana, and her journey. Christiana seems calmer and gentler than Christian. She was also a brave woman. Whilst they travel the same route to the Celestial City – sharing the same faith - Christiana has different experiences than her husband did before her. Surely, Bunyan was thinking much about Elizabeth when he wrote this.



Locked up!

Throughout 1661, Bunyan had hoped that his case might be heard by the justices at one of the quarterly court hearings. However, at the hearing in November 1661, his case was overlooked, and in January 1662, his case again was deferred, despite assurances that it would be heard. These must have been difficult outcomes to accept without bitterness. And yet so it was, and Bunyan must have settled into prison life trusting that this was to be where he served the Lord.

In total Bunyan spent over twelve years in Bedford prison, across two separate custodial sentences. The first was from 1660 to 1672, and the second was for approximately six months beginning in December 1676. The bond of surety of his release is dated to June 1677.



Speed's map of Bedford in 1610

There is some debate about where in Bedford the prison was located. Generally, it was thought to be in a building on the bridge over the river Ouse. This building was washed away in 1671 – towards the end of Bunyan's first sentence. The other possible location for the prison was another building in Bedford.

Whatever the case, the prison was later described by the prison reformer, John Howard (1726-1790), as having a ground floor, a first floor and two underground dungeons. The first floor was mostly for debtors and consisted of four rooms, as well as a common room for the prisoners. It is probably here that Bunyan spent most of his time.

Refusing the Bread of Idleness

We can imagine how poor the conditions within the prison must have been. There was likely little ventilation, leaving the air stale. Poor sanitation meant that sickness was common, and a lack of direct sunlight must have made for a bleak environment. Yet, Bunyan used his time as best he could.

One visiting friend said that Bunyan did not, "Eat the Bread of Idleness." Instead, he used whatever opportunities he had in prison to support his family – including making shoelaces to sell:

I have been witness that his own hands have ministered to his and his familie's necessities, making many hundred gross of long Tagg'd Laces to fill up the vacancies of his time.

Freedoms

At certain times during his incarceration, Bunyan did have freedom to leave the prison. He mentions how early during his imprisonment the gaoler allowed him to leave the prison, and he even travelled to London to see other Christians.

He used this freedom to preach God's Word: "taking all occasions that were put into my hand to visit the people of God – exhorting them to be steadfast in the faith of Jesus Christ, and to take heed that they did not touch the Common Prayer, etc."



Bedford prison on Bedford Bridge

However, when Bunyan's opponents found out about his freedoms, they threatened the gaoler with losing his position. They also accused Bunyan of travelling to London in order to plot an insurrection. Bunyan simply says that this was slander. The result was that, "my liberty was more restricted than it was before, so that now I must not even look out the door."

In 1666, six years into his first imprisonment, Bunyan was allowed several weeks release. It seems that some of those in power had compassion on him, but also the bubonic plague had swept through London, leaving, perhaps, up to a quarter of the population dead. The plague had come to Bedford as well, claiming forty lives. It makes sense for the officials to release some of the prisoners deemed low risk, in order to prevent the spread of the disease within close

quarters. It was around this time that *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* – his autobiography written for his children - appeared.

However, Bunyan's freedom didn't last long, and he was again taken back to Bedford prison. When the Constable arrived to remove him, he was preaching on the question, "Dost Thou believe on the Son of God?" Bunyan returned to Bedford prison for six more years.

A company of friends

In 1662, the infamous *Act of Uniformity* – which made the Book of Common Prayer compulsory in church services - was legislated. In protest, over two thousand ministers refused to comply and were forced to resign, with many non-conformist believers ending up in prison. In this way, Bunyan was not always starved of Christian fellowship.

One friend said that when he went to visit Bunyan in Bedford gaol, "there was above three-score of dissenters beside himself there." We can only imagine how that little common room in the prison became a centre for praise and fervent prayer to God! Bunyan once recalled this event:

Upon a certain first day, I being together with my brethren in our prison chamber, they expected that according to our custom, something should be spoken out of the word for our mutual edification; but at that time I felt myself, it being my turn to speak, so empty, spiritless, and barren, that I thought I should not have been able to speak among them so much as five words of truth with life and evidence.

Yet, God in His goodness heard and answered Bunyan's prayer for blessing:

"the Lord Jesus... did forthwith grant according to his grace; and helping me to set before my brethren, we did all eat and were well-refreshed."

Isn't it marvellous that God chose the most unlikely place – a foul prison – to be the place where His praise rose and rose?

Books and poetry

Apart from making shoelaces in prison, Bunyan used his time to soak in God's Word and other Christian books. He said:

I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now. The Scriptures that I saw nothing in before are made in this place to shine upon me. Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now. Here I have seen him and felt him indeed.

In prison, Bunyan had access to books such as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Luther's commentary on Galatians and the two books that his first wife brought into their marriage. In addition, he wrote many books. In total, Bunyan wrote sixty books that were published in his lifetime or just after his death.

He wrote about salvation and the new birth – "it is not enough for the old nature to go forth in holiday clothes, there must be a new creation in righteousness and true holiness" – as well as prayer and Christian living. Bunyan's first published book was against the mysticism of the Quakers, which tended to downplay or reject the historicity of the Gospels. At one point, Bunyan says that, "I was told to my face that I preached up an idol because I said that the Son of Mary was in heaven with the same body that was crucified on the Cross."

In 1665, he wrote, *"Prison meditations: Dedicated to the Heart of Suffering Saints and Reigning Sinners: By John Bunyan, in prison, 1665."* Many of his books were his sermons written down. Some of his books were allegorical stories, such as *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Yet, Bunyan also wrote poems. An example of his poetry is this:

*For though men keep my outward man
Within their bolts and bars,*

*Yet, by the faith of Christ I can
Mount higher than the stars.*

*Here dwells good conscience, also peace,
Here be my garments white;
Here, though in bonds, I have release
From guilt, which else would bite.*

*The Truth and I, were both here cast
Together, and we do
Lie arm in arm, and so hold fast
Each other: this is true.*

Printers

The publishing of Bunyan's books could not have happened without printers willing to print his books. In 1662, the Licencing of the Press Act for "for preventing the frequent Abuses in printing seditious treasonable and unlicensed Books and Pamphlets" was enforced. There was a Censor of the Press, Roger L'Estrange, who would seize any 'unlicensed' books by people such as Bunyan. He became known as the "Bloodhound of the Press."

Nonetheless, one of those who published Bunyan's books, especially early on, was Francis Smith – known by the name 'Elephant Smith' in reference to the sign above his shop "Elephant and Castle." Smith, like Bunyan, was a believer with Baptist convictions. So too, like Bunyan, Smith often found himself in trouble with the authorities. He spent time in prison - and was even charged £7 15s for a three-night stay in prison. Additionally, he was fined and was forced to flee the country. Despite it being illegal for him to print unlicensed books, he did it anyway – censor or not.

Some people have observed that John Bunyan was a late bloomer in terms of his writing. He was 47 years old when he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* part 1, and 52 years old when he wrote part 2.

What do we say to that, except that it pleased God to first work within Bunyan before letting him blossom as a writer.

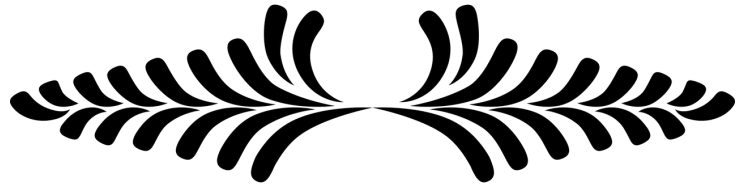
Finally free!

Bunyan was released from his first imprisonment in 1672 following a decree of tolerance towards non-conformists. His life in prison was undoubtedly miserable at times, and yet he said during the early days of his arrest:

And truly... I met my God sweetly in the prison again, comforting me and satisfying me that it was His will and mind that I should be there.

In all of this, we could ask: What did Bunyan learn from his time in prison? He recalls two lessons. Firstly, in prison he had to learn to die to the things of this world, including the good things. Secondly, he had to:

... live upon God, who is invisible...I see the best way to go through sufferings, is to trust in God through Christ, as touching the world to come.



Grief and resurrection

There is one part of Bunyan's life in prison that was perhaps the most difficult time he experienced. Waves of sorrow crashed over him, and his loneliness must have been crushing.

Bunyan's eldest daughter, Mary, was born blind in 1650 to his first wife. She was baptised as an infant in the small church at Elstow. By the time of her father's arrest, she was 10 years old. It is said that blind Mary would carry soup in a jug, sent from Elizabeth to her husband in gaol.

Bunyan's pain at being separated from his family life can be heard:

Parting with my wife and poor children has often been to me in this place, like pulling the flesh from my bones... I would often have brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor family was likely to meet with if I were taken from them —

especially my poor blind child who lay nearer my heart than all besides. Oh! thoughts of the hardship I thought my poor blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces.



Bunyan's vestry jug

It was Mary, in particular, who he yearned to be able to help:

Poor child! I thought, what sorrow are you likely to have for your portion in this world! You must be beaten, must beg, suffer hunger, cold, nakedness, and a thousand calamities, though I cannot now endure that the wind should blow upon you.

Bunyan learned that he must entrust his family, including Mary, into God's hands. Greater grief was to come though, when three

years into his prison sentence Mary fell sick and died at the age of thirteen years old.

How do we respond to pain and sorrow in life? How do we respond to the tragic and innocent death of a young one? Many people try moralizing in the face of death by saying that it teaches us to enjoy each day that we have - *live life to the full*. But that is cold comfort to a man such as Bunyan who has seen his beloved daughter die.

Bunyan does not appear to have written directly about Mary's death – perhaps it was a wound too raw to touch. Yet, in the years following, he wrote a 190-page book on the resurrection. It was Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead – and the proof that He now lives – that gave Bunyan hope. *All in Christ* will rise to life, not condemnation. This gave him hope in sorrow.

Published in 1665, its title begins with the words, *The Truth of the Resurrection of the bodies, both of good and bad at the last day, asserted and proved by God's Word...* The book is largely based upon Acts 24:14-15,

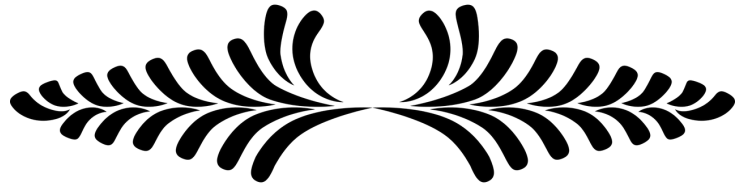
But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

Bunyan quoted Romans 8:28 – “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” – and he remembered that “Christ will have a special eye on us, and a tender and affectionate heart, to recompense to the full every good thing that any man does for his name in this world.”

He declared his hope that on the day of Christ:

... then shall the saints of God not only be, but appear as their Saviour, being delivered from their graves, as he is from his, and glorified in their bodies, as he is in his.

Surely, Bunyan trusted that his young daughter was now in the arms of her Saviour, and that one day they would be re-united in the "better country (Heb. 11:16)." On that great day God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:4)."



Music

Puritanism has mockingly been defined as, "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." Puritans, such as Bunyan, were not shallow people – no Christian should be – and yet without being trivial they enjoyed all good things given by God.

We have already touched on Bunyan's books and poetry, and it would be good to examine this more as an obvious outlet for his creativity.

Whilst in prison Bunyan made a flute from a chair leg, and owned a metal violin. He wrote a number of poems and even riddles, such as this:

"A man there was though some did count him mad,
the more he cast away the more he had."

Poetry was one of the ways in which he connected with ordinary people. His best-known poem is, appropriately enough, one dealing with being a pilgrim:

*Who would true valour see,
Let them come hither;
One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather.
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim.*

The importance of music is seen in *The Pilgrim's Progress part 2*, where Christiana and Mercy take up the violin and lute. Together, with their little band of pilgrims, they dance at the downfall of Giant Despair. Amongst them was a man named *Mr Ready-to-Halt* who,

“could not dance without one crutch in his hand but I promise you, he footed it well.”

Bunyan’s poems were often short, and about homely things, yet intended to teach us spiritual lessons. He wrote a book of poems for children, published after his death. One of the poems is:

Upon the Frog

*The frog by nature is both damp and cold,
Her mouth is large, her belly much will hold
She sits somewhat ascending, loves to be
Croaking in gardens, though unpleasantly.*

Comparison

*The hypocrite is like unto this frog,
As Like as is the puppy to the dog.
He is of nature cold, his mouth is wide
To prate, and at true goodness to deride.
He mounts his head as if he was above
The world, when yet 'tis that which has his love.
And though he seeks in churches for to croak,
He neither loveth Jesus nor his yoke.*

Another of his poems connects birds with the lessons of faith:

Upon the Swallow

*This pretty bird, O! how she flies and sings,
But could she do so if she had not wings?
Her wings bespeak my faith, her songs my peace;
When I believe and sing my doubtings cease.*

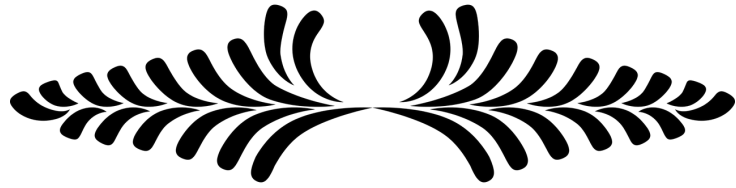
Lessons

God has designed human beings so that music and poetry have a particular power within us. Bunyan’s poetry teaches us the way that

creativity can be used in God's service. Below are three simple lessons about music and poetry:

- Firstly, learn to look at the world around and see spiritual lessons in ordinary things. For Bunyan, each frog, bird, flower or spider could become an illustration to either warn or encourage us in spiritual truths.
- Secondly, learn that when we sing truth about God, it helps to quell doubts. Singing about Him feeds our souls in a way that little else can. Therefore, we must never despise our singing together with God's people. Though we may struggle at times, God is at work within us: *"Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col. 3:16)."* Perhaps, you can think about the Christian hymns and songs that have helped strengthen you in the Lord you over the years.
- Thirdly, learn that music is the pilgrim's weapon, and in the end, heaven will resound with the greatest music and song!
And they sang a new song, saying,
"Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

- Rev. 5:9



Life on the outside

Bunyan served a second, shorter prison sentence of about six months beginning in December 1676. Probably he was imprisoned for not attending the parish church. Little is known about this time, although *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published the following year. George Whitefield, born twenty-six years after Bunyan's death, said of it that "it smells of the prison. It was written when the author was confined in Bedford jail. And ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross: the Spirit of Christ and of Glory then rests upon them."

Following his final release from prison, Bunyan had a little over a decade left to live in this earthly life.

Controversy

There was one incident that was to no doubt cause distress in Bunyan's life. Agnes Beaumont was a young lady who lived with her father. At first he had shown some interest in the things of God, but then he turned back and opposed Bunyan. Yet, Agnes herself seems to have trusted in God and supported Bunyan. She was admitted to membership of the church in November 1672, and she confessed to knowing God's love:

"Many time in a day would the Lord lead me into his banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."

One winter's day in February 1674, Agnes resolved to go to a Friday church meeting in Gamlingay. She had arranged to ride double with another local man, Mr John Wilson. When he didn't appear she was upset. Then Bunyan rode past on his way to the same meeting. Although at first Bunyan refused to take her, in the end, he consented.

Agnes' father discovered what was happening and he was furious. He locked Agnes outside the house for two days, until Agnes

agreed to stop attending church meetings. Then, tragically, he died suddenly three days later. The shock and tension of those days must have been high, and Agnes was accused by a neighbour, Mr Feery, of killing her father. Feery said to Agnes' brother: "Do you think your father died a natural death?... I believe your sister poisoned him." Despite the allegations, the Coroner ruled that her father had died of natural causes.

Agnes, for her part, later wrote an account of what happened in which she defended herself. She recalled the night in the barn:

And it was secretly put into my mind to spend the night in prayer, seeing my father would not let me come in. So into the barn I went, and indeed it was a blessed night to me; a night to be remembered to my life's end. The Lord was pleased to keep scares out of my heart and, though it froze vehemently, I felt no cold.

Nonetheless, the whole incident must have caused much sorrow and, surely, regret for them all.

Shepherd of God's people

When Bunyan was released from his second imprisonment in 1677 the situation in the country was still uncertain. Nobody knew if things would turn out for good or ill. Perhaps Bunyan would be able to live a peaceful life, which he desired, or maybe he would return to prison. Bunyan's gift of deed for Elizabeth, written in 1685, seems to have been written out of a concern that he could lose all his property.

Earlier, in 1671, whilst Bunyan was still in prison for the first time, but anticipating his release, the church in Bedford passed a resolution to appoint him as their pastor:

After much seeking God by prayer, and sober conference formerly had, the congregation did at this meeting with joynt consent (signified by solemne lifting up of their hands) call forth and appoint our brother John Bunyan to the pastorall

office or eldership. And he accepting thereof gave up himself to serve Christ and his church in that charge.

And so, once he was granted his freedom he set about shepherding the nonconformist church in Bedford. He seems to have dealt with people as they were – seeking to bring God’s Word as incisively as he could to their situation.

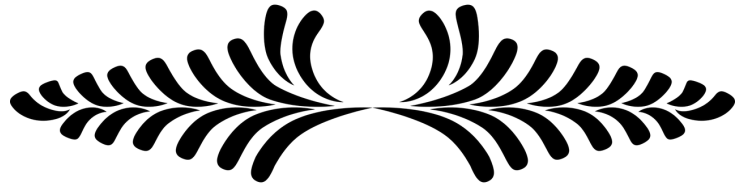
There are few church records of this time, although it is known that in 1672 the church purchased a barn and orchard for £50, licensing the barn as their place of meeting. Ironically, it was purchased from one of the Justices that had refused Bunyan bail. Yet, amongst the records that survive, the following points seem to become clear:

- **Small encouragements** – there are records of new church members joining the church upon profession of Christ, and further evidence of those who earnestly desired to grow in Him. As an example, there is a letter in Bunyan’s own handwriting sent to a church in London asking that “Brother William Breeden... be helped forward in his Christian course” and be admitted “into all Christ’s ordinances.”
- **Troubles** – church discipline is a mark of the true church and at times it was sadly necessary. One brother was “admonished by the Church of his evill in abuseing his wife and beateing hir often for very light maters. Hee promised us reformation and seemed sorry for his fault.” Some members were rightly held back from the Lord’s Supper until they turned back to God.
- **Prayer** – the church bound themselves together in the Lord, and to one another in love. At one church meeting in 1679 they “did sollemnely glue them selves up to the lord and one unto another, and did promise in the strength of Crist to walke more in loue one with another” and to pay more attention to their

duties. Another time the church resolved, "That the first in every month be kept in prayr for to beg God's blessing upon the preaching of the word, ffor the conversion of our children and for the mercie and blessing of God upon the king and governors."

1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

In 1689 *The Act of Toleration* was passed by Parliament and over one hundred Baptists churches gathered together in order to endorse the *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*. It was based upon *The Westminster Confession* (Presbyterian) and *The Savoy Declaration* (Congregationalist), but expressed Baptist distinctives. Bunyan tried to avoid division over issue such as baptism and the Lord's Supper. His view was to leave the Lord's Supper open to all who would make an honest profession of faith. When asked by what name he wished to be known, he replied, "I am, A CHRISTIAN, a believer, or other such name which is approved by the Holy Ghost."



Crossing the River of Death

Bunyan's earthly life came to an end a few months short of his sixtieth birthday. Yet, for every believer the end is only the beginning, as all belonging to Christ Jesus will wake in His presence forevermore.

Little is known about the final years of his life, although he continued to give himself to shepherding the church in Bedford and writing. From the time that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published in 1678 until Bunyan's death ten years later he published over thirty books. His most pressing responsibility was as husband to his wife, Elizabeth, and father to his five surviving children.

Interestingly, in his gift of deed to Elizabeth in 1685, he still described himself as a "*brazier*" – or tinker.

How Deep are the Waters of Death?

In August of 1688, Bunyan was travelling on horseback to preach in London. However, he first detoured fifty miles to Reading, in order to see an acquaintance – a neighbour - who had had a falling out with his father. Bunyan had been asked to bring about reconciliation between them if he could. Bunyan "used arguments and reason against anger and passion" and, thank God, the situation was calmed. By the end of the meeting, the father's "bowels yearned towards his returning son."

Leaving Reading, Bunyan began the forty mile journey to London in the pouring rain. He arrived at the home of his friend John Strudwick, who, at 34 years old, was much younger than Bunyan and yet they had a close friendship. Strudwick was a grocer and chandler.

Bunyan preached on Sunday 19th August 1668 what was to be his last sermon. His passage was John 1:13 – "born, not of blood nor

of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" – and amongst his last words were these:

Do you 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.

But Bunyan was sick – and, in fact, dying. By Tuesday a fever had struck him – and ten days later it was to claim his life.

There is a memorable part in *The Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian and Hopeful must pass through the River of Death. They asked if there was not another way, such as a bridge, over the river to the gates of the Celestial City. When they realise that they must go through the waters, they ask how deep the waters are. The memorable reply was: "you shall find it deeper or shallower, as you believe in the King of the place."

Christian struggled with the River of Death and was very afraid, but Hopeful encouraged him by reminding him of the promises of the King. Then Christian found his footing and they both crossed over to the Celestial City.

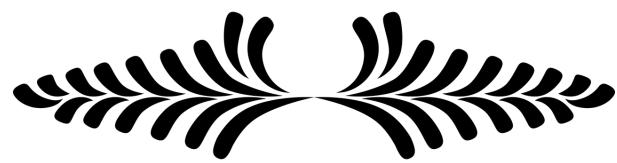
Bunyan died in the home of his friend John Strudwick on Friday 31st August 1688. He was buried on the Monday in a graveyard in the corner of a field used to bury many non-conformist people. Elizabeth does not seem to have been able to be at the funeral. She died three years later.

Let the final word be Bunyan's own words. Published after his death, they nonetheless show his eternal hope:

There is no good in this life but what is mingled with some evil; honours perplex, riches disquiet, and pleasures ruin health. But in heaven we shall find blessings in their purity, without any ingredient to embitter, with everything to sweeten them.



Old Honest blessing boys by John Flaxman (1755-1826); Pen and grey ink. British Museum (1862,0308.22)



Resources

For those hungry to know more about John Bunyan, the following resources are a good start;

- **The Pilgrim's Progress.** Published by Banner of Truth (2017). This publication includes part II of the story with Scripture references in the side margin.
- **The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come,** edited by C. J. Lovik. Published by Crossway (2019).
- **The Pilgrim's Progress,** edited by Cheryl V. Ford. Tyndale Momentum (2016).
- **The Pilgrim's Progress,** with an introduction by John Piper, foreword by Leland Ryken and a preface by John Newton. Available as hardcopy or download from *Desiring God*.
- **Dangerous Journey: The Story of Pilgrim's Progress.** Lion Hudson Ltd (2021). A 128-page illustrated abridged version for children. First published in 1985.
- **John Bunyan: His Life, Times, and Work,** by John Brown (1885).
- **A Pilgrim's Path: John Bunyan's Journey,** by Faith Cook. Published by Evangelical Press (2017). A 178-page biography of Bunyan's life.
- **Fearless Pilgrim: The Life and Times of John Bunyan** by Faith Cook. Published by Evangelical Press (2008). A 528-page biography on Bunyan's life.
- **The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd,** by John Piper. Available as hardcopy or download from *Desiring God*.

All Scriptures are from the ESV.

All quotes from *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* are from George Offor's 1853 edition.

Unless otherwise indicated, all illustrations are from **The Pilgrim's Progress.** Published by Ingram Cooke and Co. (1853).

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