John Bunyan

**1628 -1688**

[Lawson highly recommends Puritan Thomas Watson as an excellent place to start for those who want to read Puritan writing. Very easy to read.]

John Bunyan never went beyond his sixth-grade education. But John Owen delighted to hear John Bunyan preach. Charles the 2ND asked “Why do you, “the towering intellect of England”, go to hear this “tinker” preach?” John said, “I would give up all my education and all my learning if I could only preach like the tinker from Bedford.” There’s something about John Bunyan that captures the soul.

He became a champion for the Puritans during this era. Though he had a little education, he penned the best-selling book outside of the Bible, Pilgrim’s Progress.

1. **PROFLIGATE YOUTH, 1628-1644:**  Born near Bedford in the village of Elstow, 3 yrs after Charles the 1ST assumed the reign in England. His father was a tinker.  Made his whole livelihood hammering out dents that were in pots and pans and reattaching handles. Poor home with very modest schooling. No benefit from schooling. No retention. By the age of 9 was living a sinful life.  John Bunyan said, “I had few equals for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the Holy Spirit of God. So settled and rude was I in these things that they became second nature to me.” As a youth he sat in church and listened to Puritan preaching. His conscience was often struck by sermons on damnation in hell, and he was shaken. These things distressed his soul. He was often cast down in affliction in his mind. “Yet I could not let go of my sin.” At age 16 his mother died which only opened the floodgates for more sin. A month later, his 14-year-old sister died. His father quickly remarried a third time. John Bunyan was filled with anger and bitterness over these losses in his life, and so he grew up angry. Wicked.

2. **PARLIAMENTARIAN SOLDIER, 1644-1647:** In the army of Oliver Cromwell. In one military battle there was an event that had a very impressionable moment on him. “When I was a soldier, and I with others (16 at the time), I was drawn out to go to such a place and besiege it , and one in the company desired to go in my place. And coming to the seas, he stood sentinel, and was shot in the head with a musket bullet and died.” Realizing this should have been him, he was shaken! He thinks about eternity and his soul, but he could not let go of his sin.

3. **BEDFORD TINKER, 1647:** He got married and lived near Bedford in Elstow. He sank deeper and deeper into rebellion. He and his wife were married into abject poverty. She brought into marriage two Puritan books. They were hard searching books because they were Puritan. And she would often read these books to John at night. The first was - The Plain Man’s Pathway To Heaven. The second, The Practice Of Piety. His wife began to coax him to go to church. But church had no effect on him. Went to church twice a day. Knew how to play the game of church, but remained wicked. Became the ringleader of youth gangs. He began reading with his wife the Bible. Slowly his life began to change though he has not yet been converted. He was convicted of sin. God was plowing up the soil of his hard heart, but the seed is not taking root yet. They had their 1ST child, Mary, and she was born blind. Bunyan was crushed. “My poor blind child nearer my heart then all else beside.”

4. **A CONVERTED BELIEVER, 1653:** Walking through Bedford one day he overheard some women talking about spiritual things. He realized their conversation was on a much higher plateau. They were talking about the new birth, that except you are born again you will not see the kingdom of heaven. Though these things were foolishness to him, he was beginning to get convicted. He was proud of his rotten, self-absorbed, self-centered, self-flattering pride. And he realized that he was nothing more than a hypocrite and in trouble, so he began to search for God in the Bible with new eyes. Still crying out to God that he may know the truth to heaven. God is reeling him in. And he met again with these spiritually minded women in Bedford, and they introduced him to a pastor named John Gifford who met privately with John Bunyan. He came to the knowledge of salvation. He was now a new creature in Christ. His life was dramatically converted at the age of 25. “The Scriptures were now a wonderful thing to me and I saw that the truth is the very keys of the kingdom to heaven.” He becomes a young preacher. And immediately begins to preach Christ. At the same time, in 1654, a a second daughter is born to Elizabeth. They moved to Bedford so he could listen to the preaching of John Gifford. In that same year, Gifford died.

5. **YOUNG PREACHER, 1654-1660:** Bunyan wasn’t ready to preach. He began to talk one on one about Christ out in the countryside. And then he worked his way up, and was appointed by the church to the office of public preaching. He was immersing himself with the Scripture. The Word is coming in and it must come out. His wife bears a 3RD and 4TH son, and then she died. And then the new pastor who replaced John Gifford died. The church lost the use of their church building. Charles the 2ND come backs to England and restores the monarchy. They met in barns, then a stable, and then they moved into a cow shed to meet. And Bunyan was preaching.

6. **ARRESTED CRIMINAL, 1660-1661**: In 1662, under prince Charles the 2ND, “the great ejection” takes place. Bunyan carries on his ministry. He marries a wonderful woman named Elizabeth. And the church officials in Bedford enforce the law of the land and begin to look for John Bunyan. He preached 12 miles out of town in the countryside, and when he showed up at the meeting the host said he must cancel the meeting because there’s a warrant out for his arrest, and he will surely be arrested and taken away if he preaches. Bunyan’s response “No, by no means I will not stir, neither will I have the meeting dismissed for this. Be of good cheer. Let us not be daunted. Our cause is good. We need not be ashamed for it. We will preach God’s Word even if we have to suffer for it.” As the meeting started, the constable had him arrested while he’s preaching. Bunyan then stands before the magistrate and is examined. Bunyan said, “I held my peace and blessed be the prison with God‘s comfort in my poor soul. Taken away to Bedford for a second hearing. Elizabeth, his second wife, under the stress went into premature delivery and gave birth to a stillborn child. As he stood on trial in Bedford before four landowners and an attorney, the indictment was read: John Bunyan of the town of Bedford has devilishly and perniciously abstained from coming to the church of England to hear divine service and is a common upholder of several unlawful meetings to great distraction of this kingdom contrary to the sovereign laws of our Lord, the King. He was taken back to prison and remained there for three months. “If you do not come back and submit to the King in the church of England, and leave your preaching, you must be banished from this realm.” Bunyan responded, “If I am out of prison today, I will be preaching the gospel tomorrow.” When they put them in prison, they never locked the door. He was free to leave at any point. All he had to say was “I will not preach”. He was there by conviction as the prisoner of the Lord, Eph 4:1, by divine appointment. So he became an imprisoned treasonist. Sent to the Bedford prison with thieves, drunkards, and debtors, his crime was failing to attend the local church of England and for preaching without a state license.

7. **BUNYAN IN BEDFORD PRISON**: His family brought his Bible and concordance to him. His blind daughter, Mary, was permitted to visit him. He spent his time in prison devouring the Bible. Spurgeon would say of him, “He was a walking Bible. Prick him anywhere and he will bleed bibline”. He doesn’t have the diploma, and he doesn’t have the formal training, but he has been saturated with the word of God, such that Spurgeon said “his speech and vocabulary were nothing but the Bible flowing out of his mouth.” He was allowed to leave prison for short lengths of time and sometimes to meet underground for short lengths of time with the church. There was some latitude given to him by the jail keeper. But rewards were offered to anyone who would inform the authorities of where these separate meetings were taking place. To support his family, as he sat in the cell, he made laces for boots and shoes.

**CHARLES II BECOMES KING, 1660**: In that same year Charles the 2ND is crowned as the king of England which further solidifies the dominance of the Church of England over the nonconformists. Bunyan’s preaching without a license is treason. His wife Elizabeth travels to the House of Lords to present the case for her husband to be released, and she’s turned down. She then goes multiple times before a local magistrate pleading for the release of her husband, but for no avail. With brilliant mind and with the Scriptures, she answered all the judges and magistrates, but she could not secure his departure. In her last appearance, she was asked if her husband would relinquish preaching. She responded, “O my Lord, he dares not leave as long as he can speak.” And the cleric of peace ordered Bunyan to remain in prison for four more years. He would be there for a total of 12 years. Spurgeon said, “When you read Pilgrim’s Progress, it has the smell and the stench of the prison on every page.” In prison he had three books, the Bible, the concordance, and Fox’s Book Of Martyrs. In 1668, Bunyan was released from prison and returned home. He resumed his preaching. He was arrested again and was returned to prison. That very same year his blind daughter died. In 1672 Charles the 2ND issued a declaration of indulgence, the only compassionate thing he did towards nonconformists. Bunyan is released from prison. He’s given freedom, and a license to preach and to teach according to his conscience. He is now appointed the pastor of The Bedford Church. A Baptist independent church.

8. **A POPULAR AUTHOR. 1662-1688**: In 1662 he wrote a book about spontaneous prayers. This is the year of the Act of Uniformity. Pastors have to read the prayers that have already been written out for them to read. Echo chambers of what someone has written. Bunyan‘s book is a defense of spontaneous prayers that are offered by the Holy Spirit. In 1664 he wrote, “One Thing Is Needful.” In 1666 he wrote his own autobiography, entitled, Grace Abounding to The Chief Of Sinners. In the preface he writes, “In this discourse of mine you may see much of the grace of God towards me. I thank God that I count it much for it was above my sins.” He was aware of what a wretched sinner he was. But the grace of God was yet greater than his sin. Grace abounding. “And Satan‘s Temptations too, I can remember my fears and doubts and sad moments with comfort they bring afresh into my mind a remembrance of my great help and support from heaven and the great grace that God extended to such a wretch as I.” Between 1672 and 1677, he wrote the first part of Pilgrim’s Progress, and it was published in 1678. The book begins with these famous words, “As I walk through the wilderness of this world, I lied it on a certain place where there was a den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep and as I slept I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and, behold, I saw a man clothed with rags standing in a certain place with his face from his own house. A book in his hand and a great burden on his back. I looked and saw him open the book and read therein, and as he read, he wept and trembled and was not being able longer to contain, he broke out with a lamentable cry, saying what shall I do? (See end of Roman seven). Spurgeon said of Pilgrim’s Progress, “next to the Bible, the Book I value is Pilgrim’s Progress. Spurgeon said he thought he had read through the book at least 100 times. Not exaggerating. The secret of its freshness is that it is so largely compiled of the Scriptures. The book shows Bunyan’s progress in his spiritual life which applies to every one of us who are believers here today. It is a story of a believer’s journey from this earth to heaven. The temptations and the snares. A couple of years later he wrote The Holy War.

9. **TRAVELING ITERATE 1688**: He traveled about England on extended preaching tours. One person indicated, “When Mr. Bunyan preached in London, if there was but one days’ notice given, there would be more people come to hear him preach than could be held in the meeting hall. I’ve heard him preach in the dark of winter at 7 AM to 1200 in the audience, and to an audience of 3000 on the Lords Day.” He was a powerful preacher.  In 1688 he traveled by horseback. He went into a heavy storm and became sick. He came to the end of his life. And his last sermon was: The New Birth, John 1:13 - born of God. He developed pneumonia with a high fever, and by the end of the week his friends gathered together and he said “Brothers, I desire nothing more than to be with Christ. Which is far better, and he raised his arms upward into heaven and cried out take me for I come to you.” He was buried in Bunhill Fields.