

John Bunyan (Quality: Poor, Incomplete)

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[0 : 0 0] as I walked through the wilderness of this world I lighted on a certain place where I was a dead and I laid me down in that place to sleep and as I slept I dreamed a dream that dream has become immortal besides the Bible no book has been so widely translated nor so repeatedly printed as the record of that dream the pilgrim of Bedford Jail has travelled into the souls of the saints and into the marrow of evangelical religion wherever it is found but what of the immortal dreamer

I confess to finding him congenial company born in Bunyan's own particular part of the English countryside myself it was a Bunyan church that nurtured my own early faith and later sent me into the ministry of Christ's church it was another Bunyan church that endured my first preachings and a third where I first became a second minister well do I recall the day back in 1934 when our local newspaper came out red hot with the news that John Bunyan church had unearthed John Bunyan's iron fiddle and how Reginald Leslie Hine our local and learned historian had verified the glare then there was the old lady who tremendously impressed my boyish credulity with the argument that because her father's name was John Bunyan she was most certainly descended from the celebrated tinker at any rate the family name of Bunyan can be traced in the Bunyan country back to the 12th century and forward to the present day

I freely admit that when I was first allowed to preach in my home church half the sense of privilege that I had was the fact that I would occupy the pulpit chair that John Bunyan gave to his friend John Wilson when he became pastor of that church back in 1677 300 years ago this year when I think of people that I knew in my early days in that district I recall that among them were direct descendants of some of Bunyan's closest friends and protectors to whose care and diligence on more than one occasion he owed his life most of the extant Bunyan relics

I have seen most of the places he knew and frequented in the 17th century I am familiar with in their 20th century appearance for all this I am far from dreaming that I am therefore automatically an authoritative on Bunyan all I will say is that when I read my own soul's experiences in the characters of his pilgrim and when I feel my own mind's ascent to his puritan and reformed concept of salvation by grace and grace alone and when I add to this inward spiritual sympathy my outward circumstantial heritage then I call myself a lover of Bunyan but I trust still more of Bunyan's God and Bunyan's God so I am come tonight as an undisguised but also I trust an unbiased and a not altogether uninformed

Bunyan enthusiast now the men who would know his Bunyan must know something about his Bunyan's encamp that is the England of the 17th century in matters of religion the tolerance of the 18th century was born of the travail of the 17th and the travail of the 17th century was conceived in the tardy and confused English reformation of the 16th century should the newly reformed national church keep as much or as little as possible of the doctrine and liturgy and practice of the then repudiated pagan church some affirm the one and some affirm the other but the power of the crown in the church as well as in the state precluded any proper stable settlement and the result was that for a century and a half from the middle of the 16th to the end of the 17th centuries our English history was turned into a puddle of religious politics and politically expedient religion and all this was dominated by a form of life at court which if it wasn't might very well have been the original of Bunyan's

[7 : 34] Vanity Fair hence because of this state of things there arose in the reign of the first Queen Elizabeth what has become known as the Puritan Revolt or the Puritan Revolution a pride from the people of God for purity both in religion and in daily life against the Puritans of their cry the Queen flung her iniquitous 35th statute which said that the Puritans were required to worship in the parish churches with their corrupt clergy and their semi-Rolish liturgy they were forbidden on pain of imprisonment exile or death to worship elsewhere or otherwise but God and truth and conscience held far more reign on purers and hearts than the laws of monarchs when those two were found in conflict there were thousands both ministers and lay folk some

Episcopalian some Presbyterian some Independent who were ready to defy the monarch rather than deny the gospel so there followed in that period the martyrdoms the handing and the harrying of the Puritans into squalid overcrowded prisons the sailing away to Holland and to New England of many who prized God's word written and the liberty of God's spirit by which to perceive its truth and preach it and practice it more than they prized anything else there were it's true during that long period seasons of relief conditions were not consistently bad everywhere and all the time and of course the most notable period of relief was the ten years or so of the commonwealth in the mid-17th century then

Oliver Cromwell once and all set up the twin ideals of religious freedom in the state and gospel purity in the church and these two things he pursued and he achieved to a greater extent than had ever been known before in the land and in some respects greater than has been known since these particular years were years of glorious freedom for the puritans people but for all that the fact remains that from the middle of the sixteenth till the end of the seventeenth century the statute book of this realm was cluttered with legislation directed against the puritans against their desire to worship

God as God's spirit dictated and of the sufferings that they endured by doing as led by God's spirit and God's word and a conscience void of offence before him of their sufferings the country as a whole was a willing witness well this was Bunyan's England the England into which he was born in the month of November in the year 1628 England he received a modest schooling the civil war broke out and he enlisted in the parliamentary army on or about his 16th birthday in 1644 after two and a half years of soldiering he returned to his native village of

Elstow just outside Bedford married and worked in his father's business then began his spiritual struggle which ran its course for four years before he found peace with God he joined the Puritan Independent Church that had been established in Bedford from about 1650 he was called to preach and he exercised his gift in the villages around while the liberty of Cromwell's regime lasted when the monarchy was restored in 1660 there came of course a return of the old rigor against the

[13 : 40] Puritans conform or else was the mind of the king and of the cavity of parliament but among those who conformed not to the king or to the state religion but to conscience of God and suffered thereby was John Bunyan arrested in 1660 the age of 32 jailed for 12 years released in 1672 when he was 44 he was then pastor of the Ledford Independent Church with varying degrees of liberty and oppression thereafter he preached in

Bedford town and in the country districts of Bedfordshire Buckinghamshire Cambridgeshire Hertfordshire and Essex and often in London and with at least one visit to Leicester and one to Reading and so he went on to his death in 1688 may help us to appreciate Bunyan's place in his times if we recall that when he was born in 1628 Luther had been dead for almost a century Calvin and Knox for just over half a century the authorised version of the Bible was then just 17 years old and the youthful and saintly

Samuel Rutherford of whom I was privileged to speak to you on this occasion last year was then in his second year at Fair Anworth by the Solway when Bunyan was born the Mayflower had arrived in New England eight years before Milton was a young man of twenty and the future eminent John Owen to who Bunyan was to know as a friend indeed was then a boy of twelve and in the same year that Bunyan was born Bromwell was sent in his thirtieth year as Huntingdon's representative in the Parliament of Westminster While Bunyan was a boy played on Elstow

Green or walked his mile and a half into Bedford School Rutherford was banished to Aberdeen the infamous William Lord became Archbishop of Canterbury the Civil War began the Westminster Assembly of Divines began work on their great confession and catechisms and Bunyan's own life was also clouded over by the deaths in the same year of his sister Margaret and then of his mother We look at the calendar from the opposite extreme the opposite end We see that when Bunyan was laid in his friend Stradwick's new vault in Bunhill Fields in London in 1688 another 15 years had to pass before

Wesley another 26 before Whitfield the great 18th century inheritors of the Puritan heritage were given to the world Nor should we forget that while Bunyan's varied years were passing here in England the Scottish Covenanters were enduring the killing times the French Huguenots in spite of the Edict of Non were still being persecuted while across the Atlantic those who had fled to New England for freedom and religious liberty were passing into their second and third generations like all great men Bunyan has suffered a good deal from his biographers some of them who loved the pilgrim from the standpoint of its literature rather more than they loved its author's love of free and sovereign grace have mangled both

[19 : 05] Bunyan's life and his character others who have loved both the dream and the dreamer have themselves dreamed rather more than the evidence warrants about Bunyan the man the truth of the matter is that viewed historically Bunyan's life is easy to romance over but difficult to fully unravel and this is because he never told the whole story himself because he never kept a journal or a diary he wrote about certain spiritual experiences his call to the ministry his arrest and his first imprisonment in his grace of

Andy but he mentions no dates tells us nothing about his family nor about his own free movement and ministry in his periods of liberty puritan modesty is a laudable Christian virtue but it's a tantalizing source of trouble for a historian who wants to be accurate on the things for most of the facts of Bunyan's life we are dependent on other sources but they are incomplete some of them are still coming to light some parts of Bunyan's story biographically are still unknown and will remain so for years to come there are many things about this dear man that we would love to know but which are hid from our eyes we know nothing whatever for instance about the identity of Bunyan's first wife that godly young woman who played her part in his conversion as to the pilgrim's progress of its origin we know only one thing for certain and that is that the first part was written in prison which prison

Bedford had two and what date are still matters of tradition and conjecture we know very little about Bunyan's days as a soldier and because there were long periods when it wasn't safe for the Bedford church to record its activities in its church book we know we know only a fraction of the full story of Bunyan's public ministry now these things I say by way of warning to any who may prefer truth to fiction in these matters because anyone who has investigated Bunyan law knows that scores if not hundreds of volumes and pamphlets and booklets have been penned about the fascinating author of the pilgrim when you read these books and pamphlets about

Bunyan be careful to distinguish between fact and conjecture especially when you read the anonymous biographical prefaces to the various editions of the pilgrim's progress the standard edition of Bunyan's life is that written by Dr.

John Brown who was minister of Bunyan meeting they'd foot around the turn of the present century although Dr.

[23 : 33] John Brown did not share Bunyan's free grace sentiments he was an accurate historian so far as he could go with the sources that were then available too but if you look for this book look for the revised edition of 1928 published on the third centenary of Bunyan's birth edition of 1928 tercentenary edition as it's called edited by Dr.

Frank Mott Harrison I could do no more in one lecture than focus attention on one or two particular periods of Bunyan's life and first let me call attention to the youthful or the unconverted Bunyan view of what he became we are rightly interested in what he was he was born into a humble but not a poverty speaking home his father was in business in the making and mending of pots and pans then known as braziering or tinkering John learned the trade from his father and he learned it at home and when he was old enough he went with or for his father to work in the kitchens of the large country houses of the district it is wrong to think of him as an itinerant wanderer a kind of a gypsy tinkerer that was not his special he was a visitor to these homes in the same way as any tradesman you may call into your home today and this work of braziering was his livelihood certainly up to the time of his first imprisonment even later he modestly describes himself in certain written documents as

John Bunyan of Bidford Brazier was he illiterate this is a question that has to be faced it depends what you mean by the term of course he was certainly no more illiterate than thousands of people in Britain and America are today he tells us quite plainly that he was taught to read and write he was not illiterate in the narrow strict sense of the term but beyond that it is true that his education lay wholly in the broad field of experience and self effort Bunyan is certainly grossly misrepresented by those who portray him in his early years as a species of village idiot there are those who so represent but when you read what he later wrote when you mark the breadth of his thinking when you mark the wealth of his reading his general knowledge his mastery of simple but never crude

English language you can only conclude that the youthful thinker had a mind that was alert and sound and vigorous this I am convinced was the case in spite of certain temperamental predispositions that he had particularly the fact that the immortal dreamer of the future had in his youth the most vivid dreams of heaven and hell judgment and torment the general conduct and behavior of the young man is something about which he speaks in grace about him I come at help feeling that from the latest standpoint of his regenerate

Christian position Bunyan somewhat over blackens his pre-Christian life there is a tendency sometimes when one is brought the other side and sees deliverance to overstress or to exaggerate somewhat the previous position be it as it may Bunyan tells us the essential truth about himself there was an early life of sin I was shocked to ask what those sins were in so far as they may be known and this again I take up because of certain misrepresentations on the part of certain would-be biographers of the heritage Bunyan's early sins were those of Sabbath breaking cursing lying blaspheming the holy name of

[29 : 55] God there are certain other sins that are credited to it by certain people for which there is absolutely no evidence whatever on the other hand and at the opposite extreme some of Bunyan's admirers dislike the fact that he was as a boy and a young man quite wanton in his open sinfulness and in their portraits they present us with a whitewashed Bunyan and I think they are equally mistaken because they rely his own words on the subject they rob us of something that partly explains the tremendous spiritual struggle from which he went and they seem to proceed on the assumption that a brand plucked from the burning couldn't possibly rise to the spiritual heights that their hero afterwards reached but my friends we have no more need of a whitewashed

Bunyan than we have need of a whitewashed sword of Cassis grace is sufficient Bunyan the soldier this is also something that falls in the period of his early his youthful or unconverted life Bunyan the soldier spent most of that two and a half year military career in the little town and garrison of Newport Town just over the Buckingham Sheer border there he drilled there he practised his musketry there he listened to the preaching captains and colonels of Sir Samuel Luke's army however disappointed we may feel on the point we have no real evidence that Bunyan as a soldier ever saw or took part in any fighting there is a tradition that he was present at the siege of

Leicester in 1645 but it is only a tradition and it rests on sources that are now discredited he did volunteer for service in Ireland he did march up to Chester or at least beyond Chester to Parkgate on the D which in those days was the port for Ireland to embark the course of events changed before it could happen and the regiment never served a lot of effort has been extended by some Bunyan students to discover the experiences of soldier Bunyan in the Holy War well it's a fascinating but it is a holy contextual pastime some of the officers in

Emmanuel's army of which Bunyan there speaks may indeed have had as their originals in his mind the bible carrying and bible preaching officers of Prongle's new model army but short of any real evidence about any particular character there is no evidence that Bunyan took part in the fighting and therefore all other theories are found unproven and let me come to another period indeed the next period of Bunyan's life and that is the period of what I will call his conversion his call by grace his entering into the life of a Christian man this period is probably the fullest documented period of all

Bunyan's life you'll find his own full and careful account of it in his grace abounding to the chief of sinners it was a classic conversion and his account of it is a classic account a classic fit to stand beside Augustine's confessions and Paschal's thoughts and Kempis' imitation and Rutherford's letters the whole procedure the whole matter from the onset of a law work or conviction of sin to his deliverance from it and his conversion to God extended for the four years and yet it's not the duration of the experience that is its most remarkable feature the most remarkable feature of that experience of

[35 : 58] Bunyan is the fierceness and the intensity and the violence of the struggle between the spirit of God and the spirit of hell in the soul of this man I shall dare no such thing as to try and portray that experience in a few words it cannot be done it's too intimate too sacred too terrifying you will read it if you read Grace about all I shall venture on this subject is a list of the means that God employed to bring that conflict to its final glorious issue and first you cannot study Bunyan's conversion without being impressed by the amazing use that was made of the written word of holy scripture sometimes it was used to stand him sometimes it was used to soothe him sometimes it hurt him sometimes it healed him often it baffled him just as often it enlightened him but if ever a conversion was scriptural in the sense that the very word of

God revealed and recorded in scripture was read and received in the mind and the heart of the man concerned such a case was done and indeed that set the tone for all his succeeding years this is why his books abound in scripture Spurgeon has a saying concerning Bunyan it is something to this effect that all of Bunyan is pure biglene prick him anywhere says Spurgeon of Bunyan and you will find that he's very black he's biblical second equally prominent in the conversion experience of Bunyan was the preaching of the word of God as indeed it always is in any truly spiritual world many a sermon did soldier

Bunyan hear from his God fearing military superiors in the parish church of Newport Pang this before ever his pangs of conviction were felt may well have been their spring and their origin there was a particular sermon after he had left the army from the neo-evangelical Christopher Hall vicar of Elster which was on or shall I say rather against one of Bunyan's pet sins the desecration of the Sabbath that made a profound effect upon him and then at a later stage before this four year period was out Bunyan went and sat under the ministry of John

Gifford the pastor of the independent church in Bedford holy Mr. Difford Bunyan calls him third another means employed as armor for Bunyan's soul struggle was good solid Christian poor though she was two books Bunyan's wife was able to contribute to the frugal furnishing of their cottage home one was the practice of piety by Louis Bailey who was then Bishop of Bangor and the other was The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven written by a puritan Arthur

Dent who was minister of what is now called Schuber in essence in these two books says Bunyan I would sometimes read with them then when he was more fitted to digest it Bunyan stumbled on Martin Luther's great exposition of the epistle to the Galatians when he had read that this is what he said I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians accepting the Holy Bible before all the books that ever I had seen as most fit for a wounded conscience so each volume you see played its part in the battle for man's soul who was

[41 : 51] John Bunyan to fall to sleep there was then the effect of the personal godly life of Christian people upon this young man during his four year ordeal the effect of the personal godly life of Christian people Bunyan's bride came of a godly family and she lived her own godly life before her own godly husband whether she ought or ought not to have unequally yoked herself with him you may debate and discuss and decide as you will but so far as

Bunyan is concerned his marriage was providential to his conversion then in the town of Bedford there were certain Christian women whose godly conversation happened as would ordinarily be said happened to be overheard by this young man who so much needed to hear the very things about which they were speaking it was nothing so ostentatious as an open air meeting it was simply the substitution of the things of god for the common gossip of the day in their ordinary conversation on their own familiar doors that Bunyan heard so what this seeker heard from the maidenly lips of his young wife in

Elstow he now heard from the matronly dames of Benthams town I heard he said I heard but I understood not for their talk was all about a new birth how god had visited their souls with his love in the lord Jesus fifthly another element employed in Bunyan's ordeal that preceded his deliverance was the fact that god appointed pastoral counsel and instruction in this business for these Christian women of Bedford introduced the young tinker to their pastor and they sought his help mission now

I may say in passing that of all the attempts to identify the originals in the characters of Pilgrim's progress this much is certain this much is certain Christian is Bunyan himself an evangelist is one John Gifford by name for me formerly an officer in the royalist army he came from Kent he settled in Bedford he had been a debauched apothecary but now through the great mercy of God the minister of God to the members of this Bedford independent church into Gifford's home still standing on used to be the rector next to

St. John's church in Bedford into Gifford's home went the convicted Pinker to talk to reason to listen and to pray with holiness to Gifford and truth to tell this man John Gifford was the beginning of the end of the battle for Bunyan Son evangelist alias John was the earthly captain through whom the Lord of Hosts prepared these then are the means that God used to name them is to see at once that all the influence of preaching of persuasion of literature of pastoral counsel of scripture itself all was taken and mixed and measured and used and sovereignly suited to this man's gasp by the

[47 : 30] Holy Spirit of God the psychologists and the psychiatrists I know will have it otherwise you will be amazed how Buncom's conversion experience has been explained away by those in our age of psychology who think they can explain all things they have superciliously explained that the terrors and the miseries through which Bunyan passed were symptoms of this or that psychopathic condition my friends what psychology never sees what spiritually blind eyes never can see but what John Bunyan saw with the eyes of his soul wide open is the awful holiness of God and the abominable heinousness of sin and when a man's soul sees those two things and that they are irreconciled then his life is hell until it is turned into heaven by free and shall address and that but

God deals with men as individuals and he dealt with Bunyan in Bunyan's actual condition of mind and soul at that time and to lead a man from such a condition to an abiding understanding and experience of Christ's all sufficiency that is something more than moving a neurosis that is a work of grace a triumph of grace and the triumph came and the battle was won and when Charles Wesley says of his own conversion in those well-known words my chains fell off my heart was free I rose went forth and followed thee had he I wonder been reading

Bunyan's conversion for of it Bunyan says no did my chains fall off from my legs indeed I was loosed from my afflictions and irons there was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes no Christ was my all all my wisdom all my righteousness all my sanctification and all my redemption I pass rapidly over the next few years of Bunyan's life pausing only for a few points this conversion experience was completed by 1653 that same year he was baptized by John

Gifford in the River Oves and he joined the Bedford Independent Church two years later he moved his home and family from Elstow into Bedford and he was called to preach three years after that his wife died leaving him as he says with four small children that cannot help himself blind Mary being the oldest a year after that he remarried and when he took his new wife Elizabeth to his cottage in St.

Comfort Street she took his four motherless parents to her heart in a way more providential than either she or anyone else knew at that time and so the scene moves on to the year 1660 that fateful year when Commonwealth being ended the monarchy being restored King Charles the second having promised liberty for tender consciences in matters of religion but immediately threw away his promise when he came back to the throne there came of course in that year the revival of persecution and Bunyan and Bunyan's sufferings under it so now let us glance a little at Bunyan's long imprisonment 1660 to 1672

[52 : 54] Bunyan the prisoner of Jesus Christ there were three separate attempts in Bunyan's life to arrest him the first was in the year that was already saddened by the loss of his first wife 1658 and it failed the second in 1660 succeeded and led to a 12 year detention the third in 1675 or 76 or 77 the date is uncertain also succeeded and it resulted in another confinement a second confinement twice the expounders but it is about the long imprisonment of 1660 to 1672 that I wish to speak how did it come about well in May 1660 the monarchy was restored in

September of the same year many of the puritans were turned out of the churches that they had occupied during the commonwealth and the for the most part scandalous and corrupt episcopal clergy were restored in October in October of that year 1660 all the old anti-puritan laws which of course were never enforced in the town of the commonwealth were revived and reimposed in November of that year 1616 knowing all this having preached in the fields and the cottages and the barns all the year through Bunyan went on a particular occasion in that month of November to a farmhouse in the hamlet of Samson 13 miles to the south of

Bedford when he arrived he was told that the local magistrate had issued a warrant for his arrest should he hold the service his friends implored him not to risk his life he sought his God he pondered his position but he declared for holding the service he felt that there was a burning in the bones that could not be held in the service began with prayer bibles were opened Bunyan began to preach and then the door opened and the magistrate's men appeared arrested him took him away to Harlington Manor House for examination before their master and the meeting broke up

Francis Wingate lord of the manor and magistrate lied Bunyan captive with glee but he was a marked man but promised him even then liberty if only he would mind his own business that is keep to the pots and pans Bunyan simply said that while he had liberty and strength to preach the word of God he would refuse to leave off to it so he was committed for trial sent to Bedford in custody and kept in custody against the sessions a few weeks later and in due time he faced his trial charged under that newly revived conventical act of

Queen Elizabeth which had been forgotten all about of course during the Commonwealth but not repealed the law by which any person of sending himself from his parish church for a month might be imprisoned if he remained obstinate for three months he might be sent into permanent exile if he refused to go into exile then he was to be a judge to suffer death so Bunyan was indicted remember he'd gone to conduct what we would call a cottage meeting in a farm this is what was set down against his name on the charge that he devilishly and perniciously abstained from coming to hear divine service and he was 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

[58 : 48] Bunyan must have smiled to have heard his little gathering at Samson described in such ponderous terms then he was called to plead but he determined to say either guilty or not guilty he quietly answered that he did go to the church of God and by grace he was a member with the people over whom Christ was the head there's no doubt that this refusal on his part to plead either guilty or not guilty complicates Bunyan's case in law and he complicated the case thick there there are in fact if you look into the matter long legal treatises that discuss the pros and cons of what happened what might have happened what should have happened to Bunyan's case in law at that time but what actually happened was that when he refused to plead the judge

John Kellynch pronounced and you must he said you must be had back to prison and there lie for three months following and if then you do not submit to go to church and leave off preaching you must be banished the realm and if after that he was told he was found in the country anywhere he would stretch by the neck for it these words in his ears and with his jailer at his back Bunyan gave his reply in the plainest terms he could find I am he said I am at a point with you for if I were out of prison today I would preach the gospel again tomorrow by the help of God so back to jail he went not for three months but for twelve years the threat of exile was never carried out and his case was never heard again because he was never allowed to appear it's at this point that there comes into the story one of those classic noble episodes with which

Puritan womanhood abides Elizabeth Bunyan bereft of husband and income devotedly maintaining and caring for her four small step children and having both born and buried the first child of her own womb that very year only four months before this peasant woman with the soul of a saint and the character of highest refinement went first to London no mean undertaking for such a woman in those days there she petitioned the house of wards for her husband's release the petition failed when it failed she went back to Bedford in time for the summer assizes and on three separate occasions she petitioned the judges of assize pleading for her husband's proper trial in open court that story is set down in

Bunyan's own words in grace of after see that you regulate for the good of your son the sight of this brave woman standing before these judges in the swan chamber part of what is still standing as the swan hotel by the bridge bedford such a sight I say it gives an insight into her utter oneness of union with her husband both in personal loyalty and in Christian tradition she needed John desperately for his sake for her sake for his children's sake well that was not all she needed as much as he did an open Bible and liberty of worship and the right to preach and practice the truths of that blessed book so you see her intercessions on her husband's behalf were not simply personally nor selfishly nor even maternally motivated and when

Judge Twister told her that if her husband would leave off preaching she might send for him there and then she evidently knew her husband's mind and heart very well because she said in reply my lord he dares not leave off preaching were but can they will Artist him but he can tell her