

A Man in Rags, With a Book in His Hand and a Burden on His Back

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[0:00] Ed also says that he's purchased some Pilgrim's Progress books. If you'd like to purchase one and read along.

We begin this morning our study of Pilgrim's Progress. I'm going to be, well, let me just say, being a Puritan, John Bunyan's book has a Puritan title, one that keeps going and going and going.

This is the title as it appeared when it was first published. The Pilgrim's Progress from this world to that which is to come delivered under the similitude of a dream wherein is discovered the manner of his setting out, his dangerous journey, and the safe arrival at the desired country.

So in short, we'll refer to it as Pilgrim's Progress. And it is the story of a Christian's life from first being awakened to his own lost condition, to his conversion, and then all the way through till his arrival in heaven.

That's his subject matter. But it's all spoken of in the form of a journey, a trip that someone is taking.

[1:22] And it's the same journey that we are on, even though we never physically leave home. So we need to remember that as we make our way through, that we're dealing here with an allegory, an extended metaphor.

It's a long parable. And that simply means that there is a meaning underneath the surface. In a parable, you have birds and seeds and a farmer and ground and fruit.

That means you've got to use your mind to think, to see. What are the comparisons that are being made from the things that we see to the unspiritual or to the spiritual unseen realm?

And so it will require us to use our thinking caps. We'll see Bunyan's life, his own life experiences in his story. But you should also be able to recognize your life and many things about your experiences in this story.

And that's because he follows the Scripture so closely that set forth the full range of emotion and trials and temptations that come to us on our journey to heaven.

[2:35] It should remind you of people you know and have met along the way. And so there's work involved in this translating of the parable into our lives in the real world.

And to forget that is to miss the point altogether and is just to read a story about a man having interesting experiences along the way. So may the Lord help us then to make the connections to our own lives.

Now at some points we might wonder, what is Bunyan's meaning here? What is the meaning of his allegory? Usually it's very clear. Again, because it's often so closely related to Scripture and even the language of Scripture that it, oh yeah, that's what he's talking about.

It's clear to us. There's also his own comments along the way and Scripture references that he has in the margin of his book. Those two are pointers to the meaning of his allegory.

So he's going to ask you to think and I'll ask you to do the same and to respond as we go along. I'll be using several commentaries on Pilgrim's Progress, the one I mentioned, Cheever's, that's available to you out on the table free and then Alexander White and Thomas Scott and Spurgeon and Ford.

[3:56] We have to remember that when we're studying Pilgrim's Progress, we're not studying an inerrant Bible. We're studying a story that a man wrote while he was in prison.

So we may disagree with Bunyan. We may disagree with each other as to what Bunyan means by his parable. And as I said, we may disagree with Bunyan himself.

That's all right. But I think we'll find that he was so filled with the Bible, as Spurgeon says, that wherever you prick him, it's bibling blood that comes out.

And we may have a hard time finding much amiss in his storyline. Now, I've decided, after I told you otherwise, that I'm going to be using the original edition of Bunyan. And that so is to not miss Bunyan's own expressions, his own way of putting thoughts into words.

Sometimes in the paraphrases they're tampered with. Even his meaning has been tampered with in some of the paraphrases. I don't say that to discourage you. If you're using a paraphrase, we did teach through it the last time using the paraphrase in modern English.

[5:06] And I've read that one more than I have the old one. So that's not to discourage you from that. But I thought as we study, we'll have opportunity to take antiquated words and to put an updated word in its place.

So, are you ready to enter Bunyan's world? Are you ready to take the journey along with him? Well, we begin.

He has a long and extended poem at the beginning in which he's giving a defense for himself as to writing a story that's in a parable form and saying that this is the way that scriptures often come to us.

Indeed, Jesus often spoke in parables. So there's that long poem giving a defense for the form of his teaching method. And then we begin. As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where 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, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back.

[6:22] I looked and saw him open the book and read therein. And as he read, he wept and trembled. And not being able longer to contain, he break out with a lamentable cry saying, What shall I do?

So we're introduced to the subject, to the person right away. And we want to ask, What's the meaning of the fact that this man is clothed in rags?

I'm asking you. What's that conjure up in your mind? Chuck? Our words. Okay. That Isaiah 64, 6. That all of our righteousness is as filthy rags. So right away we see that this man has nothing to commend himself to God. His best deeds are but splendid sins.

Filthy rags. Now he's got a book in his hand. And if you're just listening as I read, you wouldn't know that the book is capital B. So what's the book in his hand?

[7:28] It's the book. It's the Bible. And then we read that there was a great burden on his back. What's that? Sin.

Guilt. Define that. What is guilt? Sin is a transgression of God's law. He's reading the Bible, so he's beginning to understand the sense of his guilt before all of us.

Okay? A deservingness of judgment. That's what guilt is. It says that it realizes that I deserve punishment for my sin.

So he's seeing that. There's David says in Psalm 38, 4. And again, many of these scriptures that I'm quoting are in the margin.

He puts them there as pointers to us of what the meaning of his parable is. Psalm 38, 4 is one of them. Where David says, My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.

[8:32] Hence the great burden on his back. Now this is more than just admitting I'm a sinner. You take a survey on the street and ask anybody, Are you a sinner?

Oh sure, we're all sinners. As if that's nothing. That's not the condition of this man. Some of you know about some of the football players, I think it's on the Knox team, That got caught stealing. And there was a parade in town. And there were supporters that showed up wearing t-shirts with their names on them. And one of the young ladies wearing a t-shirt was interviewed in one of the local papers.

And she just was complaining. Why does society around us have to be so judgmental towards people? We all mess up.

Okay. That's true. We all mess up. We all have broken the eighth commandment. Every one of us here has stolen in our lives.

[9:34] So, why be so judgmental and kick these kids off the team? Well, you see, the point is that just admitting that we're all sinners is not conviction of sin.

And people use that to demonstrate that they're not convicted. They belittle sin by the fact that we all do it. When in reality, the fact that we all sin, we all do this, Ought to cause us all to see what we

deserve.

We all deserve to be kicked off the earth and into hell. So, that's what this man has found. Not just that he's a sinner, But he's feeling the weight of guilt that I deserve to go to hell.

And we'll see that as we read on. That he realizes that he's living in the city of destruction. And fire is going to fall on him for his sin. So, conviction of sin is to realize that we're guilty.

We have no excuse. And it's grief because of that. Grief because we've sinned against this holy, good, gracious God.

[10 : 39] It's to be hurt. In the words of Dr. Luke in the book of Acts, It's to be stabbed in the heart. Remember? Those people that were convicted of their great burden, It says that they were pricked in the heart.

That's conviction. That's what's happening here in this man's life. Now, what is the connection then between the book in his hand and the burden on his back?

They're mentioned right beside each other. There was a book in his hand and a burden on his back. What's the connection? The Bible is the cause. Hmm. Hmm.

The first, the knowledge and understanding of the sin, The trust in the Lord. Okay. Anyone else?

Yes, Linda. You also just believe the burden that it feels like.

You believe it. Okay. We'll look at that. That was what Bunyan himself did for a while, wasn't it? But at this point, it's what he sees in the Bible that gives him the burden on his back.

[11 : 48] At this point, as he reads, his burden just gets heavier. Romans chapter 3 and verse 20.

One of the verses that gives us the spiritual reality. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law.

Rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin. It's through the law that we become aware of our sin. And that's what's happening to this man.

He's reading. And the more he reads, the more he realizes, Oh, no, I'm in big trouble. Romans chapter 7, verse 7. What shall we say then?

Is the law sin? Certainly not. Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law.

And so he tells us, as I was reading the scriptures, as Paul's telling us, as I was reading the law of God and the Ten Commandments, I came to that last one, you shall not covet.

[12 : 52] Oh, I realized my sin. I saw it for what it was. I saw my absolute impotence to do anything to free myself.

Someone has said the law is God's ten bottom plow pulled across the conscience. And each command digs into our conscience and says, You are the man. You are the woman.

You're guilty. You deserve punishment. So, the connection between the book in the hand and the burden on the back is that Bunyan wants to make it clear that God's instrument to bring conviction of sin is his own word.

Parents, if you want to see conviction of sin in your children, use the word of God. That's the very instrument that God has ordained to be the thing that causes your children to feel that there's a burden.

Something's wrong, Daddy. Something's not right. Well, could it be that you have sinned and you've not confessed it to the Lord and you're feeling your burden?

[13 : 59] Do you think that this could be a reason that some people do not read the Bible or don't go to church to hear it preached?

Or why, if they do, they seek out churches where the Bible is not preached? Because God's word brings conviction of sin.

Remember King Ahab wanting to go to war and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, is there. And Jehoshaphat says, well, you know, before we go to war, we ought to inquire of the Lord.

We ought to seek his mind on this. And so King Ahab says, okay, let's call the prophets. And they all say, go, go up to Ramoth and it will be given to you.

And Jehoshaphat says, oh, he saw what was going on. There were 300 of them. They were just all saying what the king wanted to hear. So he says, isn't there a man whom we can inquire of God through?

[15 : 05] Who's a faithful prophet who will tell us indeed what God's word is? And so Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, oh, there is still one man through whom we can inquire of the Lord. But I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad.

His name is Micaiah, son of Imla. Now, don't you love the honesty of King Ahab? Now, there are millions and millions of people in our nation who are thinking exactly like King Ahab. They may have never been so honest as to say it out loud. But the reason they do not attend preaching full of applications to the conscience is because he never says anything good about me, but only what is bad.

And when he speaks, I feel sad and I feel a guilty burden. I feel heavy. And so I don't call for Micaiah. I don't go to that church.

Well, it is true that people see this connection between the book in the hand and the burden on the back and they opt out.

[16 : 17] I was reading recently of Queen Victoria, who, if she didn't like what the preacher was preaching, ordered him out of the pulpit. She was, after all, the head of the state, head of the church as well.

And so she could do so. Some people read for instruction. Some people read to increase knowledge, for pleasure, for pastime.

But here's a man reading a book that made him weep and tremble and cry, what shall I do? Now, can you remember anybody else in the Bible who also cried out under conviction of sin?

What shall we do? Okay, that's an excellent example when the law had been lost and then it was found. Is that the time you're referring to?

And as the law was read, he saw, oh, we've been breaking these commands. We as a nation, I as a king, have not been following the law of God.

[17 : 19] And he tore his robes. He recognized he was in big trouble because of what the law said. How about in the New Testament? Men and brethren, what shall we do?

Acts chapter 2. They had just been preached to that they had killed the Lord's Messiah and he had raised him from the dead and seated him on his throne.

And they were undone and said, what shall we do? Again, what is it that made them cry out? It's the word of God brought home to their heart.

It's the they were pricked in the heart. The Acts says the Holy Spirit thrust the sword of the spirit, the word of God, home to their heart.

We sing that song about the Holy Spirit thrust us through with sense of sin. That's one of his ministries to make us sensible of our sin.

[18 : 17] So if the word of God is the instrument that brings conviction of sin, then why are not all convicted who hear or read the word? If if the book in the hand causes a burden on the back, why isn't that true with everyone?

You know, there's a lot of people who are in churches who will be preaching the word today. Even a lot of people who read their Bible every day who are not convicted of sin.

Why is that? The Holy Spirit, the lack thereof. I could have a piece of paper and I didn't bring in a knife, but I could hold a knife here before you and say, do you believe that this knife can cut this paper?

And you say, well, yes. But why isn't it? Because the hand must take the knife and cut the paper.

And the Holy Spirit is the one who must take the word of God and thrust it into the heart of the sinner or the word of God will not convict him of sin.

That's why Paul, when he describes the sword of Scripture, how does he refer to it? It's the sword of the Spirit. Because that's what the Spirit uses to drive home conviction of sin.

[19 : 39] But we must have the Spirit with the word. That's a sobering reality to any of us who preach the word. It's a sobering reality to any of us who hear the word, who read the word.

The word of God alone is not sufficient because I am so hard. My heart is so hard. I'm so blind and prejudiced.

I have blind spots. That it will not get in unless there is a divine hand bringing it home to my heart. And that's why the Holy Spirit was sent.

When he comes, Jesus says, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. John 16, 8. So the heart of man is like a castle all closed up to keep the word of God out.

But the Holy Spirit is able to take it right through to our hearts. J.C. Ryle says, the first thing that God does when he makes anyone a new creature in Christ is to send light into his heart and to show him that he's a guilty sinner.

[20:51] It's a good sign when someone's beginning to feel a burden on their back. Why is it needful for a person to be brought under conviction of his sin and guilt before God?

Why is that a good sign? Why is it needed? And my question is twofold. Take either one and run with it. Why do we need to first see that we're guilty of sin?

Tim. We need to feel a need for forgiveness. A need for a savior. Excellent. It's that thing of need. We must see, we must be made to feel our need for Christ.

Without seeing your sickness, do you go to a great physician? Jesus uses that, doesn't he?

No, it's those who know that they're sick that go to the great physician. Without seeing their danger, will they seek relief in the wounds of Christ? Without seeing their filthy rags, will they seek to be dressed in the righteousness of Christ?

[22:06] Without seeing their helplessness, will they cry out for a savior to save them? Or will they try to fix it themselves? And so again, Ryle says, people will never set their faces decidedly toward heaven and live like pilgrims until they feel that they are in danger of hell.

So we must have conviction of our need to drive us to Christ. The answer.

Why so little conviction of sin today? Would you like to take a stab at that one? Raj?

Dale? There's a little biblical teaching, mostly social.

Moral, no real preaching on sin. Okay, good. No preaching on sin. Lou? Life of eating the law of God.

[23:20] Hmm. Not true. Okay. It is the law of God that convinces of sin. And you can preach a lifetime out of the Bible without preaching on the law of God.

You can just go to all the grace passages. All the good news passages. And you can completely avoid the bad news. That's why some preachers never preach without a smile on their face.

Because they never preach about sin. There are sobering realities in the Bible. And if you don't preach them, people are not going to feel the burden. And we have an unwritten law.

In some cases, it's becoming written that we must build up the esteem and the self-importance of our congregation and of one another. Well, the law of God doesn't fit that. And so the law of God's out when self-esteem is king.

So how much conviction? How much conviction do we need in order to be saved? Jason.

[24:32] I think only God knows how much we need. Okay. The reason I say that is people have taken that you need to feel a certain amount and made it prerequisite to be saved.

And that's now the black infeages. Okay. That's the danger. That people can look at John Bunyan, who himself and his poor pilgrim here, we're going to see, goes a long time under this burden before it finally tumbles into the grave.

But I think Bunyan's explaining his own testimony. Remember how he went for years? He's not able to pinpoint just when he was converted, but for years he went struggling with his fear of hell and his lack of peace and assurance.

And so that is one of the ways that God brings sinners home to himself. But if you take Bunyan's experience and you take Pilgrim's experience and if you say, well, you know, I didn't have an experience like that, I might not be saved.

You're not to doubt your salvation because you feel I might not have had sufficient amount of conviction of sin. So how much is enough?

[25:45] Charlie? Enough to drive to Christ. Exactly. Exactly. How much conviction do you need? Enough to see that you are a helpless sinner.

You are a sinner. You deserve hell and you can do nothing to remedy the problem. And Christ can. And so you run to him. With some, a little bit of conviction will send them running to Christ.

Someone says if a pin will cause you to get out of your seat, you don't need a cannon. But some of us are insensitive to pins. And so we need the cannon.

And God is not slow to use the cannon, is he? He steps it up. He steps it up. And once he sets his electing love upon a sinner, he's going to bring them to Christ.

He goes after them. And if the little pinpricks don't do it, he gets out bigger weapons. It's all grace. He's pursuing the sinner to save him.

[26:57] So, yes, how much conviction is needed? Just enough to make you see there's no hope here. It's all in him.

And to make you run to him. I've been so encouraged to hear testimonies of the Holy Spirit convicting people such that they don't go on in life as usual.

By which I mean I've heard of young people, teenagers in high school, upon coming home from school, went into their room and shut the door and did not eat and did not sleep for two days. Because the one thing needful was to be right with God. The burden was so heavy that nothing held any pleasure, nothing held any kind of desire in his heart.

But to be right with God. That's a wonderful thing. I've read a testimony recently of a man that was so burdened with sin that he said, God, save me or kill me. Those are encouraging things.

[28:02] It reminds me of what I read in the book of Acts. And it encourages me to pray, Lord, pour out your spirit upon us as a spirit of conviction of sin. Not so that people just say, oh, I've got a little problem.

And so I need a little fix. Lord, bring them to see that I am undone. And only Christ can remedy the situation.

Let's pray for the conviction of sin upon the lost, upon us when we wonder and stray. And when we are harboring sin in our hearts.

Any comment or question before we go on to the next paragraph? The burden then, coming from the book. So he's reading and weeping and trembling.

In this plight, therefore, he went home and refrained himself as long as he could. That his wife and children should not perceive his distress, but he could not be silent long because that his trouble increased.

[29:08] Wherefore, at length, he break his mind to his wife and children. And thus he began to talk to them. Oh, my dear wife, said he, and you, the children of my bowels.

I, your dear friend, am in myself undone by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me. Moreover, I am for certain informed that this, our city, will be burned with fire from heaven.

In which fearful overthrow, both myself with thee, my wife, and you, my sweet babes, shall miserably come to ruin. Except the which yet I see not.

Some way of escape may be found whereby we may be delivered. And at this his relatives were sore amazed. Not for that they believed that what he had said to them was true.

But because they thought that some frenzy distemper had gotten into his head. Therefore, it drawing towards night and they hoping that sleep might settle his brains. With all haste, they got into bed.

[30:07] But the night was as troublesome to him as the day. Wherefore, instead of sleeping, he spent it in sighs and tears. So when the morning was come, they would know how he did.

And he told them worse and worse. He also set to talking to them again, but they began to be hardened. They also thought to drive away his distemper by harsh and surly carriages to him. Sometimes they would deride. Sometimes they would chide. And sometimes they would quite neglect him. Wherefore, he began to retire himself to his chamber to pray for and pity them. And also to condole his own misery. He would also walk solitarily in the field, sometimes reading, sometimes praying. And thus, for some days, he spent his time.

So he returns home and tries to hold in what's happening. But like a growling stomach, you can't just tell it to go away. It just keeps growling. And so finally, he breaks his silence and shares his problem with him, with his family.

[31:08] And we learn from that that he's concerned not only for himself, but for them. Any sinner that has come to see that the wrath of God is upon him for sin, begins to look over at his wife, her husband, her children, and begins to tremble not just for themselves, but for others as well.

And that's what we see with Pilgrim. That they too are in danger. They too live in the city of destruction, which is the whole world. This whole world is destined for fire and judgment.

And so he sees the absolute necessity of escaping from the situation in which others live without any concern. They're quite secure living in the city of destruction.

He's petrified. What's the difference? He sees reality. They're blind. Blind. The God of this age has blinded the mind of unbelievers.

And they're blind to reality. They're blind to their plight and the danger that they're really in. So the truth of God's word is real to him, but not to them.

[32:16] They think he's nuts. They think he's overworked. He's out of his mind. Remember, Paul found the same when he, in his defense, spoke of the resurrection of Jesus' body from the dead.

And old Festus interrupted him at that point and says, You're out of your mind, Paul. He shouted at him. Your great learning is driving you insane. So anyone who believes the realities of the Bible is

viewed as by one who doesn't yet have their eyes open to the Bible as a bit off the edge. A bit unstable up here. Jeff Townsend from England, when he was here, told us that the press in Great Britain is just having a heyday with Sarah Palin.

And he says, You know the thing that they're going after her for? She believes that God created the world. Hmm. So, well, this is the 21st century.

And anyone who still believes in such an antiquated, old-fashioned idea from the Bible is not fit to lead any country.

[33 : 28] In fact, they need psychiatric help. So that's what they're hearing in their press. And whatever you think of Sarah Palin, we're in that camp too.

We believe God created the world. And we believe that his wrath is going to fall upon this world. We believe that the world is reserved for fire. And God is going to consume this world in fire. And he's going to come and destroy sinners.

No, the world goes on as it has from the beginning, scoffers say. Where's this coming that he's promised? And so they treat their father and husband as if he's just a little overworked.

So let's put him to bed. He'll feel better by morning. In the morning, he was only worse. Isn't that the way of the world?

Treating a spiritual problem in a physical way. It's like putting a band-aid on a broken heart. There's something missing there.

[34 : 34] There's a spiritual side to man that's wrong. And only spiritual answers will fix it. And so they just put him to bed.

But there is an irresistible work of the Spirit. There is a work of the Spirit that's effectual that you can't shake loose from. And that's what we see this man going through. He's only worse in the morning.

What are some of the ways that the world deals with a guilty conscience? I think that's something of what's opened up to us here when we see the world putting their father to bed.

What are some of the ways the world deals with a guilty conscience? Maybe it's their own conscience. Yes, there.

We start comparing with others. And we ease our burden by saying, Well, I'm better than her. I'm better than him. Good. Yes, Chuck and then Jim. They redefine the law and call evil good and bitter sweet and sweet bitter.

[35 : 45] Medicating. I don't know how many doctors and people in the medical field have told me that over and over. But the greater part of their patients are there for reasons related to sin.

And guilt is a huge one. And it can be medicated. So it's a very real reality in our day. Roger? Roger? 24-7.

Busy, busy, busy. Texting. Online. Music. Anything to keep the mind from thinking for one moment about the God in heaven who's angry with me, the sinner.

That's a very common one. Mark? Excellent. That was Bunyan, wasn't it? He began to be convicted of sin, so he became a religious man.

He went to church. And everybody thought he was so holy. And we love to hear that. But he didn't even have a clue that there was a righteousness of Christ that he needed.

[36 : 49] He was trying to fulfill his own. And so it eased his conscience. Good. Eased his guilt. Dave? We built our self-esteem. All right.

All sorts of ways that we can actually lift up our self-esteem. We can buy into all these messages that are coming on how good we are and how important we are.

And we start to believe that and believe our own press writings about ourselves. So there's many ways to get a false sense of peace.

Some conviction is like the morning dew, Hosea says. It's there in the morning. It's like the frost this morning. You wake up and our backyard was white.

But you know, it's gone in just an hour. Once the sun rises, it's gone. And Hosea says that's the way convictions often are with people. They're there, very visible, and they're very shaken.

[37 : 46] But in a matter of hours sometimes, they're right back to normal. That's not the kind of conviction that our man here is under. The Holy Spirit has set his knife in deep, and he's not pulling it out.

And so he wakes up feeling worse than when he went to bed. We're going to need to stop at that point. We didn't get very far, did we? But I think the beginning issue with Bunyan as it is with J.C.

Ryle and his book Holiness, as it is the Apostle Paul and his book to the Romans and to the Ephesians, is to establish that conviction of sin.

What is sin? And the conviction of sin, that's the groundwork on which then comes the gospel. So any questions before we close or comments?

Yes, Deb. A comment about how we can hide our sin by building up our self-esteem. I think the opposite side of that point is that we can get so down on ourselves and appreciate ourselves that we go into depression and we feel sorry for ourselves and we wallow in that self-pity, which is the same thing as...

A whole different form, but at the bottom it's that self-pity that says, I am important, I am, I deserve better than this, but when I don't get treated that way, then I wallow in self-pity and I downgrade myself.

[39:18] Many devices. Tim. I think we'll actually see that coming up in the slow response a little bit. That's what that's all about is he's gone so far in the opposite direction that he shows his self-love by how much he's just desponding.

Wallowing in. That's good. So read ahead. Yeah. If you get to the slough of despond, read on so you're not stuck in the slough all week, okay?

We're dismissed.