

John Bunyan

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we spent the last couple of months looking into the doctrine of the Word. And we finished up that study just last week. Eight weeks we spent on that study.
- And in our last session on that, we unpacked 2 Timothy 3. And we looked at kind of the bigger picture of verses 10 to 17. And we saw that that passage gives us great reason to continue in the Scriptures, to stick with the Scriptures, to stick with the Word of God in the Christian life.
- And one of the four reasons that we looked at was our history. Both our personal history and the greater church history. We were called to see, remember those who went before you.
- Remember what they believed about the Word. Remember what they expressly taught you. Remember their example that they set before you. And again, not just your personal life, but in all of church history.
- So we spent some time looking at church history. And listening to what God's people have been saying from the 2nd century to the present day. What they had to say about the doctrine of the Word.
- [1 : 1 5] Well, this morning and for the next few weeks, we are going to dive into church history. And we are going to look at particular individuals. And we are going to see what they had to say about the doctrine of the Word.
- Much like we kind of saw a teaser of that last week. But then we also want to see, how did they live in light of what they believed about the Word? How did the Word of God and the doctrine that they held to concerning the Word impact their lives?
- And then may their lives serve as models for us as well. So we are going to look at their whole lives. And we are going to key in at times on how they lived out their convictions concerning the doctrine of the Word.
- So this morning, we are looking at John Bunyan. If you know anything of John Bunyan, you know at least likely that he wrote The Pilgrim's Progress.
- Not that he likely wrote it. He did write it. We likely know that he wrote it. That's not debated. It is a treasured Christian classic. His name is really synonymous with The Pilgrim's Progress.
- [2 : 2 4] It's one of the most well-known books, not just in Christian circles, but truly in all of history, in all of literature. It was first published in 1678.
- If you do the math, that's 345 years ago. It has never been out of print since it was first published. It's been translated into over 200 languages.
- It's been made into a movie many times over. It is how Liam Neeson got his start. It's among the best-selling books of all time. And it has influenced great writers, great preachers, and theologians.
- Of later times. Charles Dickens. C.S. Lewis. Charles Spurgeon was greatly influenced by the book. So influenced that he actually wrote a commentary on it.

And this is how he began his commentary. First words that he writes. 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.

[3 : 28] 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 Scripture. So right there, we're already seeing something of the doctrine of the Word that John Bunyan held to.

He was saturated in the Word, and it came out in his writings. But for as well known as the Pilgrim's Progress is, often less is known about Bunyan himself.

And I will be the first to confess, for many years I knew very little of him. In fact, for many years I confused him with Paul Bunyan. I thought that John Bunyan was like this lumberjack preacher, and I didn't really know if he was a real person or not.

He is a real person. Paul Bunyan is not. So we want to learn more of John Bunyan this morning and the Lord's work in his life. Forget about Paul Bunyan. John Bunyan was born in the parish of Elstow near Bedford, England in 1628, November of that year.

Now we need to know something of what was going on in England at that time in the early 1600s. We need a little bit of historical context for John Bunyan's life.

[4 : 45] So first we want to look from more of a religious perspective and then from a political perspective, and we're going to see those two very much intertwine in England in the 1600s.

So here's the religious landscape of the day. If a Protestant king or queen was on the throne, then the Church of England was the religious authority. Now oftentimes it was this flip-flopping that was happening.

The next king or queen would be Catholic, and if that king or queen was Catholic, then the religious authority of the day obviously was the Catholic Church. So beginning in the 1550s, Mary I ruled England.

She was Catholic. So there was much persecution of Protestants during her day, so much so that she earned that name, Bloody Mary. Then she died. The crown passed to her half-sister, Elizabeth I, and Elizabeth was Protestant.

And so that reversed the religious direction of England. And it was through her that the Church of England was really cemented for a significant period of time as the religious authority. After Elizabeth came James I.

[5 : 52] You hear his name, think King James Bible. It was published in 1611 during his reign. And in 1611, we have to understand that was only 17 years before Bunyan was born.

Now, even though England was considered Protestant, it was not necessarily the Protestantism of the Reformation that we would most consider. The Church of England, in many ways, was still very Catholic.

And so there were Christians who refused to follow along in the teachings of and the practices of the Church of England. They came to be called non-conformists.

And we need to remember them. We're going to come back to these non-conformists because it was in those circles that the Lord saved Bunyan. So that's the religious landscape. Let's consider briefly the political landscape.

By the time of Bunyan's birth, there was some serious political division in England between Parliament and the King. The King at that time was now Charles I, following after James I, King James Bible.

[6 : 59] Now, Parliament and King Charles I were at odds with each other in how the country should be governed. King Charles had tremendous power. He believed in the divine right of the king to rule.

And so he believed he had the final say, that he should make policy. Parliament obviously had a very different view, more of a republic kind of view. And so there was this religious element as well.

Charles I married to a Roman Catholic, so he was sympathetic to Catholic worship. Parliament, more sympathetic to Protestantism. And so for both political and religious reasons, this civil war broke out in 1642.

And in 1644, at the age of 16, Bunyan joined in this war. He was on the side of the parliamentary army. Now, at one point in the war, Bunyan himself and God's providence narrowly missed death.

Listen to what he said in his famous autobiographical work, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. When I was a soldier, I, with others, were drawn out to go to such and such a place to besiege it.

[8 : 07] But when I was just ready to go, one of the company desired to go into my room, to which when I consented, he took my place. And coming to the siege, as he stood sentinel, he was shot in the head with a musket bullet and died.

So God preserved Bunyan's life. Whoever that man was who called him into his room, convinced him to go in his place, the Lord spared Bunyan in him replacing him. Parliament won the war, and led by Oliver Cromwell, England became something of a republic.

There was no king, but Cromwell functioned very much like a king. He ushered in this period of great religious freedom for non-conformist Protestant groups like Baptists and Congregationalists and Presbyterians.

And in 1647, at the age of 19, Bunyan came home from the war. And he continued working in the family trade of tinkering.

That sounds like what my five-year-old does. He's a tinkerer. Tinkering was the making and repairing of pots and pans. You broke your pot or your pan. You didn't just go get another one.

[9 : 17] You had it repaired. That's what his job was. Bunyan was soon married to his first wife. We don't actually know Mrs. Bunyan's name. And they would go on to have four children together.

Now, up until this time in Bunyan's life, he was unconverted. And he didn't have much desire to seriously consider the things of the Lord. But even though he was not a professing Christian, he went to church.

It was something of a social status, social norm of his day, something that we understand even in our own society. And as one who came to church, he did listen to the preached word.

Now, one Sunday after the sermon, Bunyan was cut to the heart. Now, not directly after hearing the sermon. He actually was cut to the heart as he was playing a game called Tip Cat.

Perhaps Sam knows of this game. I don't know. I had not heard of it. What is Tip Cat? In my researching out, I'm going to say it was a primitive form of baseball. So, to maybe make a little bit of a leap here, I would like to believe Bunyan played baseball.

[10 : 22] And here is what he experienced while he was playing this primitive form of baseball. He would later write, I heard it as clear as day. Won't thou leave thy sins and go to heaven?

Or have thy sins and go to hell? Those are some serious questions to be running through your mind while you're playing a game. So what did Bunyan do about it? Nothing at that time.

He resisted dealing with his sin. This is what he reasoned. For thought I, if the case be thus, my state is surely miserable.

Miserable if I leave my sins, and but miserable if I follow them. I cannot but be damned, and if I must be so, I had as good be damned for as many sins as to be damned for few.

Bunyan's thinking wasn't much different even from the unconverted of our day. I love my sin too much to leave my sin. Perhaps that was some of us.

[11 : 22] Maybe that is still some of us this morning. You recognize, you admit that your sin is making you miserable, but you also think the Christian life kind of sounds miserable.

Submitting myself to God, his word, leaving my sin behind, that sounds miserable to the natural man. And so the thinking is, might as well give myself over to my sin.

Embrace it. Enjoy it. Soak up whatever I can get out of this life. I'm going to hell anyways. So Bunyan was going to indulge himself. Bunyan was going to enjoy the pleasure of this life even if it damned him.

He was the definition of a hedonist. Now Mrs. Bunyan, she was a Christian and God would use her influence upon the life of her husband.

She came from a very poor family. She brought very little into the marriage. No dowry to speak of. This is what she brought. A Bible and two Puritan books.

[12 : 25] That was it. And yet Bunyan read those books. And then he began to attend church more regularly. There was this outward appearance of godliness.

But Bunyan would later write and reflect saying, all this while I knew not Jesus Christ. Neither did I leave my sports and play. He would go on to say, and yet I was nothing but a poor painted hypocrite.

Yet I loved to be talked of as one that was truly godly. So it was all about looking good on the outside. But Bunyan still loved his sin. He was not a Christian.

One day Bunyan overheard a group of women talking. And these women were talking about the truth of the gospel. And they were talking about many things that he was very unfamiliar with.

One of which was being born again. And this is how he described that occasion. And now I may say, I heard, but I understood not.

[13 : 27] For they were far above, out of my reach. For 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.

And then he would go on to say, they were to me as if they had found a new world, as if they were people that dwelt alone and were not to be reckoned among their neighbors.

At this I felt my own heart begin to shake as mistrusting my condition to be not. In other words, I don't have what they have. My condition is not their condition.

For I saw that in all my thoughts about religion and salvation, the new birth did never enter into my mind. Neither knew I the comfort of the word and promise, nor the deceitfulness and treachery of my own wicked heart.

[14 : 29] As for secret thoughts, I took no notice of them. Neither did I understand what Satan's temptations were, nor how they were to be withstood and resisted. So Bunyan recognized there was something profoundly different about these women.

And so what did he do? God in his grace made Bunyan to keep going back to talk to those women. And through these conversations, Bunyan's heart was softened by the spirit.

For the first time, he truly longed to be saved, not to make this outward show of being a Christian, but to truly know the Lord. And yet, he was not yet saved.

He would admit, sin would as naturally bubble out of my heart as water would bubble out of a fountain. It wasn't until he heard a sermon from the Song of Solomon of all places that he had confidence that the Lord had indeed saved him.

The text was Song of Solomon 4.1. Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful. I think it's safe to assume that the preacher took that congregation to Christ in preaching that sermon and extolled the beauty of Christ.

[15 : 43] And for the first time, God in his grace revealed Christ to Bunyan as beautiful. Bunyan said, Now was my heart filled full of comfort and hope, and now I could believe that my sins should be forgiven me.

Yea, I was now so taken with the love and mercy of God that I remember I could not tell how to contain till I got home. I thought I could have spoken of his love and his mercy to me, even to the very cows that sat upon the plowed lands before me.

Bunyan was a changed man, not just in outward appearance, but in his heart. He was so overjoyed with his salvation, he was ready to evangelize the cows. He couldn't contain himself.

But even as a Christian, Bunyan is very honest in his writings about his doubts and his anxieties and his troubles that he felt.

Much of his life he would wrestle with questions of assurance. He said, I thought I was outside his grace. My sins were the worst, for they were against Jesus, surely unpardonable.

[16 : 53] I tried to pray to God, but I would hear it's too late. You are lost. So even a man that we now know of with such spiritual stature, someone whose shoulders indeed we stand upon, even a man like Bunyan was not immune to the whispering lies of Satan, the accuser.

Those whispers would grow quite loud in his mind at times. He would write even of the temptation to abandon his faith, to, quote, sell and part with the blessed Christ, to exchange him for the things of this life, for anything.

He would have the thought, sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that. Sell him. Sell him. And he would think to himself, oh, the diligence of Satan.

Oh, the desperateness of man's heart. His heart was like what we saw in 1 John 3. It was restless. He had a condemning heart. And yet, listen to how he resisted that temptation to abandon his faith.

I will not. I will not. I will not. No, not for thousands, thousands, thousands of worlds. And so instead of abandoning his faith, Bunyan, in those times of great doubt, would turn to the object of his faith.

[18 : 11] One such time, he said, my case being desperate, I thought with myself, I can but die. And if it must be so, it shall once be said that such a one died at the foot of Christ in prayer.

So even in his doubting, even in his uncertainty, his temptation to forsake Christ, he threw himself at the feet of Christ in prayer. He took the example of the psalm writers and he turned toward the Lord in his doubting, not away.

And he found that rest for his restless heart in the promises of God. Listen to what he says here. He doesn't quote a verse, but we hear that he is speaking of Scripture.

God will not likely or easily lose his people. He has provided well for us, blood to wash us, a priest to pray for us that we may be made to persevere.

And if we foully fall, an advocate to plead our cause. His name is Jesus. What does 1 John 2, 1 speak of? That advocate that we have before the throne.

[19 : 17] Now it was in the midst of these struggles that Bunyan began attending the church of those women that he had encountered. They met in the town of Bedford, near where he grew up.

And the pastor of this church was named John Gifford. Bunyan came to affectionately call him Holy Mr. Gifford. And here Bunyan grew in his faith. The church was unlike any that he had been associated with before.

It was a group of nonconformists. Remember them? Those that were not in line with the Church of England, that were not going with the rote religious ritualism of the Church of England.

Their desire was to have a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ, to know him in his word, to be known by him. So this was a body of believers that Bunyan found great refreshment with.

They did things like give their testimonies in order to become members of the church. That's a good tradition. Our church is following in the footsteps of John Bunyan's church. This was something that Bunyan had never witnessed before.

[20 : 23] It was attractive to him because think about how he understood church membership for many years. It was a symbol of your status. It was something you did to look good.

Now, people weren't joining the church because of social status. They were joining the church because they wanted to be counted among God's believers walking together in faith and in accountability. It was different.

And it was through the influence of Gifford that Bunyan grew and matured in Christ. It was through the influence of Gifford that Bunyan then began to preach. By 1655, Bunyan was preaching for his church in Bedford.

He would later write this very humble statement. I consented to their request. At first, I was beyond my ability to believe that God could speak through me. I cried out to the Lord to make my words effectual and I did not meddle in the things of controversy but adhere to speak only of faith and the remission of sins through Christ Jesus.

Bunyan wanted to stick to the word and the word alone. He was soon preaching all over the area and he was developing a reputation of being a very good preacher. He would also write avidly not just allegories like the Pilgrim's Progress but he wrote theological works.

[21 : 42] He defended the deity of Christ in a work entitled Some Gospel Truths Opened and he wrote that after hearing of some in other local churches proclaiming that Jesus wasn't actually God.

He came and said, no, we're going to see what the scriptures say of that. He also wrote a book on prayer called I Will Pray with the Spirit. He talked about praying from the heart not just with the mouth and using scripture as the template for our prayers.

This would run counter in many ways to the more rigid formal ways of praying associated with the Church of England. So Bunyan did a lot of writing and in 1658 Bunyan's first wife died and he married his second wife Elizabeth and they had two children together.

Now by this time in England much of the religious freedom that non-conformists enjoyed was being stripped from them. In 1660 Cromwell's protectorate it came to an end and the monarchy was re-established under King Charles II.

And so to stop these non-conformist churches like Bunyan's Church from growing and thriving the government made it illegal for so-called non-sanctioned people to preach the gospel.

[23 : 01] People were being persecuted now for their faith. Authorities were arresting and they were imprisoning pastors to stop them from preaching. So churches were going underground.

People were expected to attend their local parish church that was associated with the Church of England and Bunyan and his church were saying no, we're not going to do that. We're going to keep meeting together as a local church.

Bunyan kept preaching at illegal meetings. His wife even tried to dissuade him from preaching. She was worried that he would be arrested. This is what he said, I cannot fear what man may do to me.

We must trust God with our fears. People are hungry for Christ. I am his servant. I must go. Now while he was preaching to a group of believers that were meeting in a barn Bunyan was arrested by the local authorities and he was taken to the Bedford jail to await trial.

This is what he said as he was being led away. Listen to scripture just coming out of him. We are prevented, you see, brethren, of an opportunity to speak and to hear the word of God and are likely to suffer for the same.

[24 : 11] But be not discouraged, my dear brethren. It is mercy to suffer on so good an account. We might have been apprehended as thieves or murderers or for other wickedness, but blessed be God, it is not so.

We suffer as Christians for doing well and we had better be the persecuted than the persecutors. He clearly had God's word on his mind. What does 1 Peter 2 verses 19 to 20 say?

For this is a gracious thing when mindful of God one endures suffering while suffering unjustly. For what credits it if when you sin and are beaten for it you endure?

But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. So Bunyan's trial took place in January of 1661.

Not surprisingly, he was found guilty of illegally preaching. And the punishment for this crime was set initially to be just three months in jail. But there was a caveat.

[25 : 15] After those three months, Bunyan was to stop preaching the gospel or he would suffer further consequences. What do you think his response was? Straight out of Acts 5.

He basically said in so many, or he said in so many words, I will stay in prison until moss grows on my eyelids rather than disobey my God. In Acts 5, as the apostles were said, were told to do the same thing, they responded, we must obey God rather than men.

So he went from three years in prison, three months in prison, to 12 years because he refused to consent to what the authorities wanted. And he certainly didn't let the moss grow on his eyelids during that time.

He wrote at least nine of his books, including his autobiography, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, during that time in prison. He began writing The Pilgrim's Progress during that time as well.

Now, 12 years in prison. It's a long time. How did he endure for all that time? He clung to the words of Scripture. He believed the words of Scripture.

[26 : 27] He reflected on this verse, 2 Corinthians 1.9. We had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.

And this is what he said about that verse written under the inspiration of the Spirit. He said, By this Scripture, I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass a sentence of death upon everything that can properly be called a thing of this life, even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyment, and all as dead to me and myself as dead to them.

The second was to live upon God that is invisible, as Paul said in another place. The way not to faint is to, look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen.

For the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal. In 1672, Charles II issued what is called the Act of Indulgence and it gave this greater religious freedom to non-conformists like Bunyan.

And so as a result, Bunyan was released from jail. That same year, he became pastor of the Independent Church in Bedford. Now this religious freedom was very short-lived.

[27 : 45] In 1673, that act was rescinded, meaning that non-conformists like Bunyan had the crosshairs on them once again. They weren't allowed to meet, they weren't allowed to preach unless they were associating themselves with the Church of England.

And in 1677, Bunyan went right back to prison. In that following year, 1678, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published.

If you're familiar with that book, you know that it's written in two parts. There's actually a third one that's attributed by some to him but it's likely not written by him. So really two parts.

The first part is the most well-known. It tells the story of this pilgrim named Christian as he journeyed from the city of destruction to the celestial city.

And it's this allegory of the Christian life. He begins with that burden upon his back that can only be taken from him at the cross. And this allegory is filled with quotes and allusions and echoes and echoes of Scripture.

[28 : 48] The best of books or the best of the published ones of this book are those that have all of the Scriptures listed out for you. It's almost like a study Bible has Scriptures referenced. You look at those and you see filled, filled with Scripture.

I came across an article that was talking about the *Pilgrim's Progress* and I love how this author said it. Every step of Christian's journey is guided by the light of Scripture.

Every conversation draws from it. Every trusted friend points him back to it. He holds it as precious, especially in his darkest hour.

It makes sense, doesn't it? That the man who clung so closely to Scripture himself would make the main character of his book do the exact same thing. Now the second part of *Pilgrim's Progress* was published in 1684 and it follows the life of this pilgrim's wife.

So the pilgrim Christian has a wife named Christiana. And in this story, at one point, we get this very clear understanding of Bunyan's doctrine of Scripture.

[29 : 54] In the second part of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, he often wrote in a catechism fashion between characters where characters are doing question and answer with one another. We see this in this conversation between a character named Prudence and the children of Christiana.

Prudence wants to know what do they know of the Bible. And at one point, she's talking with Matthew, the oldest son of Christiana. And listen to the back and forth exchange that they have.

Prudence asks Matthew, what do you think of the Bible? Matthew answers, it is the Holy Word of God. Prudence then asks this next question and it's a question of the clarity of Scripture.

Is there nothing written there but what you understand? And Matthew said, yes, a great deal. Prudence then asked, what do you do when you meet with such places therein that you do not understand?

And Matthew said, I think God is wiser than I. I pray also that he will please to let me know all therein that he knows will be for my good. Even that strikes a hint of the sufficiency of Scripture as well.

[31 : 02] The Lord provides what I need for life and godliness. So ten editions of the *Pilgrim's Progress* were published during Bunyan's lifetime alone and was even used in the 19th century by missionaries in their evangelistic efforts all over the world.

Now the Pilgrim's Progress wasn't actually the only Christian allegory that Bunyan wrote. He also authored The Holy War. It was published in 1682. It wasn't nearly as popular but it was still well received.

In total Bunyan wrote over 60 books. 60 books. Lots of time in prison. Lots of time that he spent writing.

During his many years of ministry Bunyan would often travel around preaching to local churches. He was affectionately called Bishop Bunyan by those churches.

On one of those trips he passed through a storm and he got sick and he died August 31st 1688 at the age of 59. We hear 59 and we probably think he didn't live a very long life.

[32 : 13] The Lord took him home earlier than we would hope and yet what a full life that Bunyan lived by God's grace. He left us a great legacy.

A legacy of one who held the scriptures high in what he said and who lived according to those scriptures. He faithfully shepherded God's people with the word.

He endured persecution because he faithfully stuck to the word and even in his doubting even in his uncertainty he turned to the word for his comfort.

The scriptures were his standard. The scriptures were his authority and he wanted that to be the same for those who read his books. I came across this quote from Bunyan at the beginning of one of his books.

It was the introduction and I love it. He didn't just write an introduction. He wrote us a letter. This is what he said in that letter speaking of the book that he had written. Read me.

[33 : 16] Therefore, yes, read me and compare me with the Bible. And if you find that my doctrine and that book of God concur, embrace it as you would answer for the contrary in the day of judgment.

So may that be an encouragement to us. We should read men like Bunyan. We should read other godly men and women who have gone before us and then we should heed the very words that Bunyan wrote to us.

He placed himself under the word of God and he desired his readers to do the same. Well, if you know anything of Bunyan, there's probably one quote that you're thinking, we haven't said this yet.

Because there is something that Charles Spurgeon, again, a man greatly influenced by Bunyan, once said. And I want to close with this quote. He had studied the Bible till his whole being was saturated with Scripture.

And through his writings, he continually makes us feel and say, why, this man is a living Bible. Prick him anywhere and you will find that his blood is Biblicum.

[34 : 24] The very essence of the Bible flows from him. May the same be said of us by God's grace. May we know his words so well that it just comes out of us as we talk, as we share, as we speak with others.

Well, I hope Bunyan was an encouragement to us. I hope we were challenged by his life of godliness and faithfulness and also reminded and comforted of God's perseverance of his people, the preservation of his people, even through the most trying of times.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the life of John Bunyan. We thank you that indeed we can stand on the shoulders of men and women such as him, that we can learn from their lives, that we can glean from the ways in which people like Bunyan faithfully walked with you, held your word high, esteemed your word and lived according to it no matter the cost.

We pray that you would make us to be like John Bunyan. We pray that you would make us to be like him because he is an imitator of Christ and we thank you for the Lord Jesus and that we have hope, confident hope of salvation in him, that we one day will rise from the dead rejoicing to be with you and to be with all of your people who have gone before, even people like John Bunyan.

We pray, Lord, that you would bless the rest of our time together as we gather for worship and that you would be honored in our midst. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. We're dismissed. We're dismissed. We're dismissed.

[35 : 59] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.