

CHURCH HISTORY LITERACY

Lesson 82

Baptist History – Part Two Pilgrim's Progress

In our study on Church History, we have reached a point where we are examining Baptist heritage. Last week, we had a general overview. This week, we will look at the Baptist preacher/writer John Bunyan and his allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The Pilgrim's Progress is one of the most read allegories written in English. It has been translated into over 200 languages, and since its original publication in 1678, the book has “never been out of print.”¹

Bunyan lived and wrote in England during the topsy-turvy times of the 1600's. He was born in 1628 during the reign of King Charles I. Bunyan's parents were not well off; his father worked as a tinker (he repaired pots!). Bunyan's parents scraped enough money together to get Bunyan a little schooling, but it was only between two and four years worth. Bunyan planned on being a tinker like his father, but when civil war broke out, Bunyan, then 16, joined the Parliamentary army opposing King Charles. Bunyan lived through the civil war, which ultimately resulted in the beheading of King Charles I.

Bunyan was not a pious man during his early life, and he was constantly plagued with dreams of demons trying to take him into Hell. In an effort to find some peace of his soul, Bunyan started reading his Bible. A major breakthrough came when Bunyan visited the Baptist Church in Bedford.² There, in 1653, Bunyan was baptized. Within two years, Bunyan became a deacon of the church and began doing some preaching. His preaching was very popular with the people, but got him in trouble with the local authorities. In 1658, Bunyan was indicted for preaching without a license.

In spite of the indictment, Bunyan continued to preach. In response, the authorities arrested him in November 1660 and put him in the county jail. After three months confinement, Bunyan was offered release upon his agreement not to preach again. Bunyan would not agree to those terms and was locked up for a

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Oxford World Classic Edition 2003) p. xiii.

² This church did not call itself “Baptist” at the time, but was considered a Congregational Independent Church. The church did practice believer's baptism and scholars today would term it a “Baptist” church.

total of 12 years. Most scholars think that Bunyan wrote his first section of *The Pilgrim's Progress* during this prison term.

With the monarchy in England restored, and Charles II on the throne, England passed a Declaration of Religious Indulgence. As a result, Bunyan was released from jail in January 1672. Almost immediately upon release, Bunyan became pastor of his church and returned to preaching. Within a matter of years, Charles II had withdrawn the Declaration of Religious Indulgence and Bunyan was once again imprisoned. The second imprisonment (during which other scholars believe the first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was written) lasted six months. Once Bunyan was released, his popularity was so great, he was not arrested again.

In 1678, the first part of Bunyan's *Progress* was published to great success. Bunyan published Part Two in 1684, four years before Bunyan died. The two parts were always published separately until 1728 when they were combined into one volume. That is how they are published today.

Bunyan wrote his work(s) in verse in typical English for the 1600's in England. Today, it can be read in that original verse or in modern English translations. A modern translation will be used in this class because of its increased readability with most 21st century Americans. There are many fine modern translations. The one we will use is by L. Edward Hazelbaker, published by Bridge-Logos, copyright 1998.

As we discuss the book, the goal we urge is not just an understanding of what the book is, but an identification of the reader with whichever characters in the story seem appropriate.

THE STORY

The Pilgrim's Progress is a Christian allegory. The setting is Bunyan falling asleep in his jail cell (he calls it a "cave" in the story) and dreaming. In the dream, Bunyan sees a man dressed in rags, with his back to his house, Bible in hand, and an incredibly heavy burden on his back. The man was reading the Bible and weeping out of personal sorrow. The man went home and explained to his wife and children that his burden was too heavy, he was unable to find release, and he knew not what to do. What was more, the man understood that the city in which they lived was set for destruction and at the moment, he could see no way out for him or his family. His family thought him crazy.

Over the next days, the situation worsened with the man until one day, while he was in a field reading his Bible and he cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" At that point, a man named Evangelist came up to the man in turmoil and asked

him what was wrong. When the man declared his personal turmoil and inability to find a solution, Evangelist pointed him toward a light barely discernable in the distance. Evangelist then urged him to go toward the light for there the man would find a narrow gate. By knocking on the gate, the man would find what to do to free himself from the burden and the coming destruction.

Once told, the man began to run for the narrow gate. The man's wife and children tried to stop him, as did neighbors, but the man went on anyway. Two of the neighbors who tried to stop the man by force were named Obstinate and Pliable. Obstinate would not go with the man and merely ridiculed him for leaving. Pliable was willing to journey for a while with the man. While interacting with these two neighbors, we are finally told the man's name -- Christian.

Pliable does not stay with Christian for long. For after the journey begins, the two soon find themselves in the Swamp of Despondence. Christian had not been paying attention and actually fell into the swamp. The mire of the swamp combined with the burden on Christian's back made progress along the journey very difficult. Pliable left for home while Christian sunk deeper and deeper into Despondence. It was there that a man named Help came along and pulled Christian from the swamp. Christian's feet were returned to solid ground and the swamp is explained as a place where fears, doubts, and worries all accost believers who lose sight of their goal and purpose.

As Christian continued on his way, he was met by a man named Mr. Worldly Wiseman (from the town of Carnal Policy!). Wiseman questioned Christian on his direction in life and the burden he carried. After Christian explained his heading, Wiseman suggested that Christian needed to lose his burden as soon as possible. Rather than go all the way to the narrow gate, Christian was told of a quicker way! Nearby was a village named Morality where a gentleman named Legality (or in his absence, his son named Civility) could help release Christian's burden. Wiseman explained that Christian could find release by simply following the rules set out by Legality.

Beguiled by this "wisdom", Christian turned from the road to the narrow gate in search of Morality and its citizens. The road quickly became dangerous and it was soon apparent that continuing would kill Christian rather than simply remove his burden. Stuck and not knowing what to do, Evangelist then showed up again and pointed out the foolishness of Christian's choice.

Evangelist explained that Worldly Wiseman liked the town of Morality, and even went to church there, because it gave him a doctrine that saved him from having to address the cross and the suffering that comes with the cross. Similarly, Legality was not a true answer to the burden. Legality "is a cheat" that would fall like a

mountain on Christian's head, rather than free him of his burden. As for Civility, he is a "cheat." In "spite of his impressive looks, he's nothing but a hypocrite and can't help you" (p. 24).

With that good counsel, Christian was set back on the road and went to the Narrow gate. Over the gate was written, "Knock and the door will be opened to you" and Christian did just that. A serious man named Goodwill came to the gate and asked Christian what he wanted. Christian explained his condition and said he wished for entry. Goodwill opened the gate and pulled Christian inside (It was necessary to pull him in because a nearby ruler named Beelzebub and his forces frequently tried to shoot with arrows those who were seeking entrance but dawdled rather than going straight in.).

After hearing the account of Christian's journey, Goodwill pointed out to Christian that anyone who wanted, regardless of good decisions or bad decisions made previously in life, were welcome to come into the narrow gate. Then, Christian was pointed to the Narrow Road that led to the Celestial City. Christian was told that on that road there was a Place of Deliverance where Christian's burden would fall off his back on its own accord. Christian would also come to the house of the Interpreter who would show Christian important things for the journey.

Christian's journey did in fact lead him next to the Interpreter's house. There, Interpreter showed Christian a number of rooms and gave explanations. Through allegory and situations, Christian is taught the cleansing of the soul through faith and the gospel as opposed to works of law, the importance of Patience over Passion, and the greater enduring work of Christ that meets man's needs regardless of the persecutions of the enemy. Before Christian was allowed to leave, Interpreter also showed him a man who was sadly sitting in a locked cage. When Christian quizzed the man in the cage he found out that the man was in great despair. This was a man who had been on the road to faith but stopped being alert and self-controlled. This man "let loose the reigns of my desires" and "sinned against the Light of the Word and the goodness of God." (p. 43).

After Christian left the house of Interpreter, he journeyed on to the Place of Deliverance. This was an elevated place with a cross above a tomb. Upon his arrival, Christian's burden fell away immediately and went into the tomb. Christian was filled with joy and relief, amazed at how the cross on its own removed such a heavy burden. While there, Christian was approached by three shining ones who stripped him of his rags (saying "your sins are forgiven" putting rich garments on him, placing a mark on his forehead, and giving him a Document with a seal on it that Christian was to deliver upon arriving at the Celestial Gate).

As Christian was leaving the Place of Deliverance, he found three men asleep and wearing shackles at the foot of the hill. Christian tried to rouse the men so they would not be devoured by the roaring lion that prowled around, but to no avail. One man, named Simple, saw no danger. The second man, Sloth, just wanted to sleep. While the third, Presumption, believed each must do his own thing.

As Christian kept walking, he saw two more men climb over a wall to get on his path (as opposed to entering by the narrow gate). The men were named Formality and Hypocrisy; they were from the Land of Boasting. When Christian asked them for their peculiar way of entering (climbing the wall as opposed to the Narrow Gate), the men said that they typically found short cuts to places. The Narrow Gate was a bit out of their way and they felt fine getting there the way they choose. Christian pointed out that those who did not enter by the narrow gate were deemed a thief or a robber, but the men were not worried. They were justified proceeding in the ways that had always worked for them before. “If we’re in, we’re in... How is your condition better than ours?” the men offered. Christian responded that he was walking by the rule of his master, while they were walking by the rule working of their imaginations, and he had no doubt that at the end, those men would not be allowed in the Celestial City.

From there, Christian began climbing the Hill of Difficulty. Formality and Hypocrisy found what they thought were short cuts around the hill, taking paths named Danger and Destruction. They were never heard from again. Christian continued up the hill, but his walking soon turned to crawling. Halfway up the hill, Christian found a place of refreshment, but rather than merely refreshing himself, Christian decided to take a nap! He actually fell asleep there and accidentally dropped his Document while napping. Once he finally awakened, Christian finished the tough task of getting to the top of the hill. There, he met Fearful and Mistrust who were fleeing the opposite direction from Christian. They both warned Christian against the many perils of the road he was choosing, but Christian kept on anyway.

It was at this point that Christian realized he had dropped his document along the way. Christian had to return to where he ill advisedly slept and retrieve his document. Christian then had to climb the rest of the hill again and was eventually overtaken by darkness before he could get to his resting place for the night. Christian realized that the woes of falling asleep made the journey tougher, not easier, and he pledged to not let that happen again!

Christian arrived at a wonderful palace named Beautiful. He thought twice about going in because lions guarded the Palace, but the lions were chained so Christian came on to the door. The porter was surprised at the lateness of Christian’s arrival and Christian had to explain that he was delayed because of his own napping at the

wrong time. After this explanation was made to the porter and the house family, Christian was allowed in anyway and spent time with the family members, Discretion, Prudence, Piety, and Charity.

These four questioned Christian on why he traveled without his wife and four children, why he wanted to go to Mount Zion (where the Celestial City was), and what had happened on his journey so far. From these virtuous women, Christian received food and rest in a bedroom named Peace. Before Christian left the next morning, the four fitted him with armor for the journey. They showed him the far distant land to which he journeyed and warned him of more problems he would face.

As Christian left, he descended the mountain only to find the descent as bad as the climb! Christian descended into the Valley of Humiliation. In the Valley, Christian came face to face with a monstrous enemy named Apollyon. Christian's first tendency was to turn and flee, but he realized that the armor given him protected his whole body except his backside! So Christian stood his ground. After repeatedly challenging Christian to leave his path and return to Apollyon's kingdom, and after Christian's repeated refusals, Apollyon attacked. Over and over the attacks were devastating, knocking Christian to the ground and almost killing him (and but for Christian's shield, he would have been killed). Finally, Christian saw an opening and was able to use his sword to defeat Apollyon sending him on his way. After the battle, healing hands brought leaves from the tree of life and refreshment to Christian.

Christian then encountered two men who were fleeing from the path before him. They warned Christian not to continue because of the darkness and dangers in the Valley of the Shadow of Death that lay before him. Christian saw the Valley as the way of the path and went on anyway. While the Valley was a struggle, and while Christian's vision was severely limited there, he made it through avoiding the snares and pitfalls. As daylight broke, Christian saw the many remains of those who had not made it through the valley, including two old giants, Pope and Pagan.

At this point in the journey, Christian got a traveling companion. He met a friend on the same journey named Faithful. As Christian was approaching Faithful he called out for the man to wait up. Faithful refused to slow down, concerned for his life, so Christian sped up to catch him. Christian not only caught Faithful, but also sped past him (smugly proud of his speed). In this moment of pride, Christian stumbled and fell, unable to rise again until Faithful caught up to him and helped him up. The two then journeyed together sharing their stories up to that moment.

Faithful's life lesson shared with Christian included encounters with Wanton (who offered him all kinds of contentment except for contentment of conscience!) and Adam the First who offered Faithful many delights if Faithful would choose to settle in and marry his three daughters Lust of the Flesh, Lust of the Eyes and Pride of Life. Faithful had similarly been tempted with Shame who tried to convince Faithful that Faithful was not living as a man. Shame thought that Faithful did not need a tender conscience, and should instead turn his heart and mind to more manly things like natural science or money making. Shame was quite a challenge to Faithful but was finally over come by Faithful's insistence that the very things Shame despised were the things in which Faithful took glory.

As the two journeyed together, they encountered a man named Talkative. "He was a tall man and somewhat better looking at a distance than up close"! (p. 99). At first Talkative was impressive to listen to and Faithful was excited about having his company. Christian knew him, however, by reputation (Talkative was from Gabby Row) and quietly explained to Faithful that Talkative was all talk, no action. "Everything he has lies in his tongue, and making a noise with it is his religion." (p. 103) To put Talkative to the test, they engage him in a conversation about doing as opposed to merely talking. The conversation takes a personal tone to probe whether Talkative's life reflects the bold words he speaks! At this point, Talkative decides he doesn't want Faithful and Christian's companionship any longer! After Talkative leaves, the two men finish their walk through a wilderness and have a surprise run in with Evangelist. After hearing the account of their journeys, Evangelist predicts coming hardships, encourages them and they all move on.

Faithful and Christian then enter into a town called Vanity where a Fair is set up that sells all matters that have no value. The fair has "houses, lands, businesses, honors, promotions, titles, countries, kingdoms, desires, pleasures, and delights of all sorts." (p. 118). Beelzebub is the chief ruler of the Fair. Neither Christian nor Faithful have any desire to purchase anything at the Fair and as a result the townspeople get up in arms. They slander, taunt, and mock the two travelers and eventually accost them and lock them up. Neither Christian nor Faithful change their mind about spending to buy the products at the Vanity Fair and as a result are set for trial as madmen. At Faithful's trial, three bogus witnesses testified, Envy, Superstition, and Gainglory. The witnesses testified that Faithful taught and lived in ways that despised the values and priorities of the Vanity Fair. Further Faithful had spoken against Vanity's leading citizens including Mr. Carnal Delight, Mr. Luxurious, Mr. Desire of Glory, Mr. Lechery and Mr. Having Greedy.

Ultimately, Faithful is found guilty and sentenced to death. After being beaten and stoned, Faithful was burned by the crowd and killed. While the crowd was delighting in Faithful's death, Christian saw a chariot take up Faithful and whisk

him straight away to the Celestial City. By the Grace of God, Christian was released and escaped from Vanity Fair.

As Christian continued on his way, he soon came upon another traveling companion named Hopeful. Traveling together they happened upon another man named Mr. ByEnds (read that “Mr. Secret Agenda”). Mr. ByEnds sounded like he had a virtuous life and was a worthy companion, but once Christian and Hopeful insisted on going the proper way, ByEnds would have nothing of it. So, ByEnds continued on according to his own principles.

Shortly thereafter, Christian and Hopeful saw that ByEnds had been approached by three old school chums, Mr. Holdthetworld, Mr. Moneylove, and Mr. Saveall. These men had all studied together the classes of the Art of Getting by violence, deceit, flattery, lying, or by putting on a guise of religion. After their visiting, the men took the opportunity to catch up to Hopeful and Christian. The men put together arguments that, on their surface, seemed rather compelling about the virtues and propriety of trying to accumulate riches in this life. Similar temptings were in place as Christian and Hopeful came across a luxurious plain named Ease and silver mine named Lucre. The two journeymen saw through the deceitfulness of riches, however, and were not deterred from their path to Mount Zion and the celestial City. As they were leaving, they had occasion to see a pillar that was shaped like a woman. Close examination revealed the inscription on the pillar as reading, “Remember Lot’s Wife.” The sight reminded them of Lot’s wife looking back on Sodom with a covetous heart and they resolved to move forward!

Christian and Hopeful then came upon a pretty meadow that seemed to have a path leading the same direction yet prettier and easier. Christian urged them down this alternate path. They confirmed the way they were going by asking a man named Vain Confidence. The weather took a turn for the worse and the road they were on had many low places where they might drown. Sorrowful that they had come that way, they tried to hunker down for the rain. Ultimately a giant named Despair who ruled that land captured them. The giant imprisoned them and beat them continually, urging them to choose death over their imprisonment. While Christian and Hopeful thought about giving up, they ultimately remembered that among the gifts given to Christian was a key that should open any lock. After trying it, they found the key did in fact unlock the prison of Despair’s castle and they fled back to the narrow Road.

After this, the pilgrims reached the Delightful Mountains. There they encountered four shepherds named Knowledge, Experience, Watchfulness, and Sincerity. The men received encouragement, rest, and direction from those four shepherds and they then continued on their journey.

As the pilgrims continued, they came near a country called Conceit. Near there, they encountered a young spirited lad named Ignorance. Ignorance pointed out that he too was going to Celestial City. But unlike Hopeful and Christian, Ignorance did not have any documents of entry, for Ignorance never entered through the narrow gate. When Christian raised this concern, Ignorance brushed it off. Ignorance told the Pilgrims, “Be content to follow the religion of your country, and I will follow that of mine.” (p. 164)

This part of the journey allowed Christian to tell Hopeful of the story about a man named Little Faith. This man gave over most all of his treasures to three hoodlums named Faint Heart, Mistrust, and Guilt. While Little Faith kept his document, his life was never what it could have been because he let the hoodlums rob him of much of his treasure.

The next obstacle Christian and Hopeful faced came about by their failure to carefully read their map! They came to a road that looked similar to the road they were on. Rather than make their own examination, they took the word of a man they happened upon. This man led them both into a fierce net that ensnared them. While entangled helplessly, they saw their leader’s robe fall off recognizing him as a flatterer! (The shepherds had warned them to stay away from flatterers!) After a bit, a Shining One came to rescue them both and he cut the net’s cords from them. Before letting them resume their way, however, the Shining One chastised them for their failure to read their map and follow the directions given them.

The Pilgrims next ventured into the Enchanted Ground of which they were earlier warned. This was a ground where it was easy to lay down and sleep, rather than continue on the journey to the Celestial City. The two companions walked through the tempting drowsiness staying awake and alert by discussing the account of Hopeful’s conversion. The gospel story is vividly retold here including Hopeful’s prayer,

God be merciful to me a sinner, and make me to know and believe in Jesus Christ; for I see that if His righteousness had not been, or I have not faith in that righteousness, I am utterly cast away. Lord, I have heard that you are a merciful God and have ordained that your Son Jesus Christ should be the Savior of the world; and moreover, that you are willing to bestow on such a poor sinner as I am – and I am a sinner indeed—Lord. Take therefore this opportunity, and magnify Your grace in the salvation of my soul through Your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen. (p. 184)

At this point, the men look back and see that Ignorance is still following along the path. They call out to Ignorance to see if he will walk with them, but he refuses, explaining he enjoys walking alone. They take the time to probe Ignorance a bit more, but find that he is happy with his own thoughts of goodness. Ignorance relates that he has no real reason to have good thoughts, but claims to have them nonetheless. Christian then presses him on whether the thoughts are indeed “good.” Christian urges Ignorance to see that truly good thoughts are those that align with the Word of God and with God himself. Ignorance refuses to accept this and insists that his own thoughts are good because his heart tells him they are! As for God and Christ, Ignorance explains, “I believe that Christ died for sinners... and that I’ll be justified before God from the Curse through His gracious acceptance of my obedience to his Law.” (p. 193). Christian calls this a “bizarre faith” noting that such a belief is nowhere in the Word, and that it is deceitful. For Christ seeks to justify the person, and not the works of the person. Ignorance considers Christian out of line and notes that such teaching, as Christians would negate the need for people to live holy lives of personal righteousness.

Christian then tells Ignorance that he comes by his name honestly. Christian explains that Jesus extends righteousness to the person and the person is then won over to the heart of God and lives right for that reason. Ignorance is not convinced.

Finally, Christian and Hopeful arrive in the land of Beulah and approach the Celestial City. Before they enter, however, they have a last obstacle; there is a rushing river they must cross. They are told the river is shallower in some places, depending on the faith of the person crossing. While crossing Christian, fears that he will not make it, and loses sight of many of the promises and lessons of his journey. Through the help of Hopeful, however, he regains his footing and finds the river passable. The two pilgrims lose their human bodies during this crossing and arrive at the City Gates. The City is beyond compare with streets of Gold and constant sunlight.

Once the documents are seen and in order, the men are welcomed with trumpets blaring and shouts of victory. The King himself declares the gates open to the men who are given harps with which to praise the Lord and crowns in token of the honor they have been given. The last view back showed the men Ignorance coming up to the gates as well. Ignorance, however, had no document of entry and was sent out to Hell and not allowed in.

At this point, Bunyan explains he awoke, and leaves it to the reader to explain the dream to him. Here concludes Part One of the story.

As mentioned, there was a second part published a few years later. It tells the story of Christian's wife and children coming to faith and their journey to meet up with Christian. You should read it!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. Who are we in terms of your walk with God? Are we Christian? Faithful? Hopeful? Heaven forbid we answer that we are Ignorance or Worldly Wise! There is a narrow gate "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Mt. 7:14) This gate is Jesus, he is the "way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," Jesus explains in John 14:6. Similarly, Jesus points out that "the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber." (Jn 10:1).
2. Who are we when you meet others on the road? Are we Helpful? Faithful? Hopeful? Evangelist? Do we lead them astray or encourage them? We should seek to "encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today" (Heb. 3:13). We should "encourage one another and build each other up." (1 Thes. 5:11). We have a message of hope and peace that we should gladly take to others. Our feet are "fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace." (Eph. 6:15).
3. Where are we in our journey? Have we entered through the narrow gate? Laid our burdens at the foot of the cross? Are we using the armor of Christ? "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." (Eph. 6:14-16). Let us not get distracted by talkers "for the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." (1 Cor. 4:20). Let us see the Vanity Fair for what it is. Christ went "through the fair" without buying anything! In his temptations, he was offered, glory, honor, cheap bread and satisfaction of hunger and much more, all outside God's will and hence all vain. (Matt 4:1-11). He said, "No." and so should we.