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Teaching Notes

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A.C.T.S. Heroes of the Faith

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

I. The Prattle of the Tinker

John Owen, one of the founding fathers of Congregationalism, Dean of Christchurch, and Cromwell's Vice-Chancellor during the Commonwealth, frequently preaching in his church where many of the most famous Puritan leaders heard him preach. Owen's estimation of Bunyan is measured by the following interchange with King Charles II:

The king is reported to have asked Owen one one occasion, how a learned man like him could go "to hear a tinker prate;" to which the great theologian answered, "May it please your majesty, could I possess the tinker's abilities for preaching, I would willingly relinquish all my learning."

- Allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* (1672) 1st place bestseller (apart from the Bible) in all publishing history [amazing achievement for common working-class person whose life was confined to a small area in England in the 17th century
- Why the success? Listen to Dr. Emile Caillet of Princeton University:

In my own estimation, next to the Bible which is in a class by itself, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* rates highest among all classics ... the reason I have to put *The Pilgrim's Progress* next only to the Bible is that as I proceed along the appointed course, I need not only an authoritative book of inspiration and instruction; I need a map. We all do. My considered judgment ... is that Bunyan's masterpiece has provided us with the most excellent map to be found anywhere. Why, having read and reread the book some fifty times, I see that map most vividly unfold under my gaze, in whatever place or situation I find myself. What clearer answer could one find to his basic questions, "What kind of place is this?" and "What should I do in the situation?" What more adequate climax to the human quest for truth?

- J.I. Packer, one of our generation's greatest theologians, says he reads Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* through every year

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place, where was a den;[1] and I laid me down in that place to sleep: and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and, behold, "I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a

great burden upon his back," (Isa. 64:6; Luke 14:33; Psa. 38:4; Hab. 2:2; Acts 16:31). I looked, and saw him open the book,[2] and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, "What shall I do?"

Major Events of John Bunyan's Life

1628	Born in Elstow, Bedfordshire, England
1644	Joined the Parliamentary army
1646	Left the army and married
1653	Baptized by John Gifford, Bedford Baptist Church
1655	Began to preach
1659	Married second wife after death of first
1660	Forbidden by the government to preach, arrested for disobeying, placed in jail
1672	Released from prison and became pastor of Bedford Baptist Church
1677	Placed in jail for another six months
1678	Published <i>Pilgrim's Progress</i> , (First edition)
1688	Died in August while visiting a friend in London
1659	Married second wife after death of first

II. Bunyan's Life of Suffering

A. "To live upon God that is invisible"

2 Corinthians 1:9 "We had this sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God that raiseth the dead."

Bunyan wrote:

By this scripture I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass a sentence of death upon every thing that can be properly 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."

B. A Difficult Era

- Born Nov. 30, 1628, the year William Laud became bishop of London under the reign of King Charles I
- Tremendous conflicts between Parliament and monarchy; Bishop Laud together with Charles I opposed the reforms of the Church of England desired by the Puritans

- Oliver Cromwell elected to Parliament in 1640; civil war broke out in 1642 between forces loyal to the King and those loyal to parliament... Parliament represented the power of the Puritans
- Parliament gained control of the monarchy in 1645; Bishop Laud was executed that year, the Book of Common Prayer was no longer required for worship services
- 1646: Westminster Assembly completed the Westminster Confession for the dominant Presbyterian church
- 1649: King beheaded
- Oliver Cromwell ruled England as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth from 1649-1658 when he died; his main focus was freedom of religion... even including Jews—excluded from England in 1290, allowed to return in 1655
- Richard Cromwell (brother) could not hold government together... fickle people wanted stability of the monarchy; Parliament turned against Puritans and passed a series of laws against men like Bunyan (non-conformists)
- 1660: Charles II restored to throne; Bunyan imprisoned for preaching to unlawful assemblies without a state license
- 1662: Act of Uniformity passed, requiring use of Prayer Book and Episcopal ordination; 2000 Puritan pastors forced out of their churches
- 1674: Declaration of Religious Indulgence resulted in Bunyan's freedom, license to preach as a non-conformist pastor of Bedford congregation
- 1674-1688: Political instability resulted in one more brief imprisonment (1675) during which time he probably wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*

Of his imprisonment and separation from his wife and children:

"The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of my flesh from my bones."

III. Bunyan's Conversion

A. Born into a very lowly family

- son of a "tinker" or "brayser"... common laborer who repaired metal implements
- very limited education
- lowest rung of society

"My father's house [was] of that rank that is meanest and most despised of all the families in the land."

B. Early suffering

- 1644 (15 yrs. old) mother and sister died within one month of each other... sister just 13; father remarried within a month!!
- 1644 (16 yrs.) drafted into Parliamentary army; harrowing moment when a man took his place as sentry and was shot in the head with a musket ball and died

C. Years of unbelief

"I had few equals, especially considering my years, which were tender, for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God ... Until I came to the state of marriage, I was the very ringleader of all the youth that kept me company, in all manner of vice and ungodliness."

D. First marriage

- 20 or 21 years old; wife's name a mystery
- BUT wife began to influence him for the Lord: she left him two Puritan books, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*, and *The Practice of Piety*

"in these two books I would sometimes read with her, wherein I also found some things that were somewhat pleasing to me; but all this while I met with no conviction. But the work of God's drawing him had begun.

- Four children: Mary (blind), Elizabeth, John, Thomas

E. Conversion

- Long, agonizing process, told in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*
- Began pouring over Scriptures to find some peace
- Terrible blasphemies

"A whole flood of blasphemies, both against God, Christ, and the Scriptures were poured upon my spirit, to my great confusion and astonishment How can you tell but that the Turks had as good scriptures to prove their Mohammed the Savior as we have to prove our Jesus?" "My heart was at times exceeding hard. If I would have given a thousand pounds for a tear, I could not shed one."

- Satan tempted him greatly

When he thought that he was established in the gospel there came a season of overwhelming darkness following a terrible temptation when he heard the words, "sell and part with this most blessed Christ Let him go if he will." He tells us that "I felt my heart freely consent thereto. Oh, the diligence of Satan; Oh, the desperateness of man's heart. For two years, he tells us, he was in the doom of damnation. "I feared that this wicked sin of mine might be that sin unpardonable. "Oh, no one knows the terrors of those days but myself." "I found it a hard work now to pray to God because despair was swallowing me up."

- Some women's conversation:

He overhears *"three or four poor women sitting at a door in the room, and talking about the things of God."* Later he said: *"I thought they spoke as if joy did make them speak; they spoke with such pleasantness of Scripture language and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new world..."*

- The decisive moment.

One day as I was passing into the field ... this sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And methought, withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he wants [=lacks] my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "The same yesterday, today, and forever." Heb. 13:8. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that from that time those dreadful scriptures of God [about the unforgivable sin] left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God."

- John Gifford's ministry

Gifford, a godly Baptist pastor, baptized him in 1655

- Martin Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*

"The God in whose hands are all our days and ways, did cast into my hand one day a book of Martin Luther's; it was his Comment on Galatians I found my condition in his experience so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my heart I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians, excepting the Holy Bible, before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience."

IV. Bunyan's Ministry

- Whole countryside came to hear him preach (1655)
- Charles Doe's description

"Mr. Bunyan preached no New Testament-like he made me admire and weep for joy, and give him my affections. In the days of toleration, a day's notice would get a crowd of 1200 to hear him preach at 7:00 o'clock in the morning on a weekday. Once, in prison, a whole congregation of 60 people were arrested and brought in at night.

C. Remarried in 1659; wife Elizabeth an amazing person; stood alone to defend her husband against magistrates

She deserves at least one story here about her valor in the way she went to the authorities in August of 1661, a year after John's imprisonment. She had already been to London with one petition. Now she met with one stiff question:

"Would he stop preaching?"

"My lord, he dares not leave off preaching as long a he can speak."

"What is the need of talking?"

"There is need for this, my lord, for I have four small children that cannot help themselves, of which one is blind, and we have nothing to live upon but the charity of good people."

Matthew Hale with pity asks if she really has four children being so young.

"My lord, I am but mother-in-law to them, having not been married to him yet full two years. Indeed, I was with child when my husband was first apprehended; but being young and unaccustomed to such things, I being smayed at the news, fell into labor and so continued for eight days, and then was delivered; but my child died."

Hale was moved, but other judges were hardened and spoke against him. "He is a mere tinker!"

"Yes, and because he is a tinker and a poor man, therefore he is despised and cannot have justice."

One Mr. Chester is enraged and says that Bunyan will preach and do as he wishes.

"He preacheth nothing but the word of God!" she says.

Mr. Twisden, in a rage: "He runneth up and down and doeth harm."

"No, my lord, it is not so; God hath owned him and done much good by him."

The angry man: "His doctrine is the doctrine of the devil."

She: "My lord, when the righteous Judge shall appear, it will be known that his doctrine is not the doctrine of the devil!"

Bunyan's biographer comments, "Elizabeth Bunyan was simply an English peasant woman: could she have spoken with more dignity had she been a crowned queen?"

D. Ministry from Prison

- Twelve years... could be released any time he agreed to stop preaching
- Frequently released by kind jailers to preach in the woods
- Wrote many things during his time in prison

Bunyan quotes:

On Affliction:

“Let us learn like Christians to kiss the rod, and love it.”

On Christ’s Atonement:

“If He hides the sin, or lesseneth it, He is faulty; if he leaves it still upon us, we die. He must then take our iniquity to Himself, make it His own, and so deliver us; for thus having taken the sin upon Himself, as lawfully He may, and lovingly He doth, it followeth that we live if he lives; and who can desire more?”

“As a sacrifice, our sins were laid upon Him; as a Priest, He beareth them; and as an Advocate, He acknowledges them to be His own.”

Description of an evangelist:

“A man, who had his eyes up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon his lips, and he stood as if he pleaded with men.”

Forgiveness of sins:

“No child of God sins to that degree as to make himself incapable of forgiveness.”

God’s imputed righteousness:

“Indeed this is one of the greatest mysteries in the world—namely, that a righteousness that resides with a Person in heaven, should justify me, a sinner on earth.”

Hope:

“Hope is never ill when faith is well.”

God’s dealing with hypocrites:

“Sometimes God takes away a barren professor by permitting him to fall into open profaneness. There is one that hath taken up a profession of the worthy name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but this profession is only a cloak; he secretly practiceth wickedness; he is a glutton, or a drunkard, or covetous, or unclean. Well, saith God, I will loose the reins of this professor, I will give him up to his vile affections. I will loose the reins of his sins before him, he shall be entangled with his filthy lusts, he shall be overcome of ungodly company.”

Christian freedom:

“Wherefore, though the Christian, as a Christian, is the only man at liberty, as called thereunto of God; yet his liberty is limited to the things that are good: he is not licensed thereby to indulge the flesh.”

Prayer:

“You can do more than pray, after you have prayed; but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.”

“Prayer will make a man cease from sin, or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer.”

“When thou prayest, rather let thy heart be without words, than thy words without a heart.”

Sin:

“Sin is the dare of God’s justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, and the contempt of His love.”

Temptations:

“Temptations, when we meet them at first, are as the lion that reared upon Samson; but if we overcome them, the next time we see them we shall find a nest of honey within them.”