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Sermon Notes

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## **John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: An Introduction and Overview; The First Stage**

I. Who Was John Bunyan?

II. The Success of *Pilgrim's Progress*

A. Written while Bunyan was in the Bedford jail

B. First part published in 1678; Second part in 1684.

*Pilgrim's Progress* is the first place bestseller (apart from the Bible) in all publishing history, an astounding achievement for a common working class person whose life was confined to a rather small area in the seventeenth century.

In Bunyan's own time it was a cause for amazement that an uneducated tinker could have written such a book as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and he felt obliged to defend himself from the charge of plagiarism. At the end of his *Holy War* we find these lines referring to the more famous book:

"It came from my own heart, so to my head,  
And thence into my fingers trickled;  
Then to my pen, from whence immediately  
On paper I did dribble it daintily.  
Matter and manner too was all mine own,  
Nor was it unto any mortal known,  
Till I had done it. Nor, did any then,  
By books, by wits, by tongues, or hand or pen  
Add five words to it, or write half a line  
Thereof; the whole and every whit is mine."

"There was one book, however, that he knew as hardly any other man in any age has known it — the Bible. His knowledge of it was not the scholar's knowledge, for he knew nothing of Greek and Hebrew or even of such Biblical criticism as existed in his own day. What he had was a verbal knowledge of the English versions that was never at fault. Many stories are told of the readiness with which he could produce apposite scriptural quotations, often to the confusion of much more learned men than himself. This intimacy with the Bible, combined with one other element, is enough to account for the substance of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. That other element is his profound acquaintance with the rustic and provincial life about him, and with the heart of the average man."

<http://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/bbunyan5.html>

C. How many editions have there been?

1. Frank Mott Harrison, 1941, had recorded over 1300 editions, but discussed the great difficulty of getting an accurate number
2. One website claimed it has been translated into over 2000 languages, more than any other book than the Bible... other websites have the number closer to between 200 and 300 languages

### III. An Overview of the Whole Journey (Part I)

A. Ten Stages

**THE FIRST STAGE. - Christian's deplorable condition - Evangelist directs him - Obstinate and Pliable - Slough of Despond - Worldly Wiseman -Mount Sinai - Conversation with Evangelist**

THE SECOND STAGE. - The Wicket Gate - conversation with Good-Will - the Interpreter's House - Christian entertained - the sights there shown him

THE THIRD STAGE. - Loses his burden at the Cross - Simple, Sloth, Presumption, Formalist, Hypocrisy - hill Difficulty - the Arbor - misses his roll - the palace Beautiful - the lions - talk with Discretion, Piety, Prudence, and Charity - wonders shown to Christian - he is armed

THE FOURTH STAGE. - Valley of Humiliation - conflict with Apollyon -Valley of the Shadow of Death - Giants Pope and Pagan

THE FIFTH STAGE. - Discourse with Faithful - Talkative and Faithful - Talkative's character

THE SIXTH STAGE. - Evangelist overtakes Christian and Faithful - Vanity Fair - the Pilgrims brought to trial - Faithful's martyrdom

THE SEVENTH STAGE. - Christian and Hopeful - By-ends and his companions- plain of Ease - Lucre-hill - Demas - the River of Life - Vain-Confidence - Giant Despair - the Pilgrims beaten - the Dungeon - the Key of Promise

THE EIGHTH STAGE. - The Delectable Mountains - entertained by the Shepherds - a by-way to Hell

THE NINTH STAGE. - Christian and Hopeful meet Ignorance - Turn-away - Little-Faith - the Flatterer - the net - chastised by a Shining One -Atheist - Enchanted Ground - Hopeful's account of his conversion -discourse of Christian and Ignorance

THE TENTH STAGE. - Talk of Christian and Hopeful - Temporary - the backslider - the land of Beulah - Christian and Hopeful pass the River -welcome to the Celestial city

#### IV. The First Stage

##### A. Christian Begins His Journey

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, and a great burden upon his back. 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 brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, "What shall I do?"

*Acts 2:37-38 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

*Acts 16:29-31 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-- you and your household."*

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: wherefore at length he brake his mind to his wife and children; and thus he began to talk to them: "O 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 lies 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 can be found, whereby we may be delivered." At this his relations 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 got into his head; therefore, it drawing towards night, and they hoping that sleep might settle his brains, with all haste they got him to bed: 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: 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 conduct 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 fields, sometimes reading and sometimes praying; and thus for some days he spent his time.

**Evangelist:**

I saw also that he looked this way and that way, as if he would run; yet he stood still, because, as I perceived, he could not tell which way to go. I looked then, and saw a man named Evangelist coming to him and asked, Wherefore dost thou cry?

He answered, Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand, that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgement; and I find that I am not willing to do the first, nor able to do the second.

Then said Evangelist, Why not willing to die, since this life is attended with so many evils?

The man answered, Because I fear that this burden is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave, and I shall fall into Tophet. And, Sir, if I be not fit to go to prison, I am not fit, I am sure, to go to judgement, and from thence to execution; and the thoughts of these things make me cry.

Then said Evangelist, If this be thy condition, why standest thou still?

He answered, Because I know not whither to go. Then he gave him a parchment roll, and there was written within, *Flee from the wrath to come.*

The man therefore read it, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully, said, Whither must I fly? Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder wicket-gate? The man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto: so shalt thou see the gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.

So I saw in my dream that the man began to run.

Now, he had not run far from his own door, but his wife and children, perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, Life! life! eternal life! So he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain.

**Luke 14:26** *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-- yes, even his own life-- he cannot be my disciple.*

**Luke 9:61-62** *Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." <sup>62</sup> Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

**Luke 17:32-33** *Remember Lot's wife! <sup>33</sup> Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.*

## The Neighbours: Obstinate and Pliable

The neighbours also came out to see him run; and, as he ran, some mocked, others threatened, and some cried after him to return; and among those that did so, there were two that were resolved to fetch him back by force. The name of the one was OBSTINATE, and the name of the other PLIABLE. Now by this time the man was a good distance from them; but, however, they were resolved to pursue him; which they did, and in a little time they overtook him. Then said the man, "Neighbours, wherefore are ye come?" They said, "To persuade you to go back with us." But he said, "That can by no means be. You dwell in the city of Destruction the place also where I was born. I see it to be so; and dying there, sooner or later, you will sink lower than the grave into a place that burns with fire and brimstone: be content, good neighbours, and go along with me."

**Obstinate.** "What!" said OBSTINATE, "and leave our friends and our comforts behind us!"

**Christian.** "Yes," said CHRISTIAN, for that was his name; "because that all which you shall forsake is not worthy to be compared with a little of that that I am seeking to enjoy; and if you will go along with me, and hold it, you shall fare as I myself; for there where I go is enough and to spare. Come away, and prove my words."

**Obst.** What are the things you seek, since you leave all the world to find them?

**Chr.** I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away; and it is laid up in heaven, and safe there, to be bestowed, at the time appointed, on them that diligently seek it. Read it so, if you will, in my book.

**Obst.** "Tush," said OBSTINATE, "away with your book; will you go back with us or not?"

**Chr.** "No, not I," said the other; "because I have laid my hand to the plough".

**Obst.** Come then, neighbour PLIABLE, let us turn again, and go home without him: there is a company of these crazy-headed coxcombs, that when they take a fancy by the end are wiser in their own eyes than seven men that can render a reason.

**Pliable.** Then said PLIABLE, "Don't revile; if what the good CHRISTIAN says is true, the things he looks after are better than ours: my heart inclines to go with my neighbour."

**Obst.** What! more fools still? Be ruled by me, and go back; who knows whither such a brainsick fellow will lead you? Go back, go back, and be wise!

**Chr.** Nay. but do thou come with thy neighbour PLIABLE; there are such things to be had which I spoke of, and many more glories besides; if you believe not me, read here in this book; and, for the truth of what is expressed therein, behold, all is confirmed by the blood of him that made it.

"Well, neighbour OBSTINATE," said PLIABLE, "I begin to come to a point; I intend to go along with this good man, and to cast in my lot with him: but, my good companion, do you know the way to this desired place?"

**Chr.** I am directed by a man whose name is EVANGELIST, to speed me to a little gate that is before us, where we shall receive instructions about the way.

**Pli.** Come then, good neighbour, let us be going.

Then they went both together.

**Obst.** "And I will go back to my place," said OBSTINATE; "I will be no companion of such misled, fantastic fellows."

#### Discussion of Heavenly Glory:

Now I saw in my dream, that when OBSTINATE was gone back, CHRISTIAN and PLIABLE went talking over the plain: and thus they began their discourse.

**Chr.** Come, neighbour PLIABLE, how do you do? I am glad you are persuaded to go along with me. Had even OBSTINATE himself but felt what I have felt of the powers and terrors of what is yet unseen, he would not thus lightly have given us the back.

**Pli.** Come, neighbour CHRISTIAN, since there is none but us two here, tell me now further what the things are, and how to be enjoyed, whither we are going.

**Chr.** I can better conceive of them with my mind than speak of them with my tongue: but yet, since you are desirous to know, I will read of them in my book.

**Pli.** And do you think that the words of your book are certainly true?

**Chr.** Yes, verily; for it was made by him that cannot lie.

**Pli.** Well said. What things are they?

**Chr.** There is an endless kingdom to be inhabited; and everlasting life to be given us, that we may inhabit that kingdom for ever.

**Pli.** Well said. And what else?

**Chr.** There are crowns of glory to be given us; and garments that will make us shine like the sun in the firmament of heaven.

**Pli.** That is very pleasant. And what else?

**Chr.** There shall be no more crying nor sorrow; for he that is owner of the place will wipe all tears from our eyes.

**Pli.** And what company shall we have there?

**Chr.** There we shall be with seraphim and cherubim, creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look on them. There also you shall meet with thousands and ten thousands that have gone before us to that place. None of them are harmful, but loving and holy; everyone walking in the sight of God, and standing in his presence with acceptance for ever. In a word, there we shall see the elders with their golden crowns; there we shall see the holy virgins with their golden harps; there we shall see men that by the word were cut in pieces, burnt in flames, eaten of beasts, drowned in the seas, for the love that they bore to the Lord of the place--all well, and clothed with immortality as with a garment.

**Pli.** The hearing of this is enough to ravish one's heart. But are these things to be enjoyed? how shall we get to be sharers thereof?

**Chr.** The Lord, the governor of the country, hath recorded it in this book; the substance of which is, if we be truly willing to have it, he will bestow it upon us freely.

**Pli.** Well, my good companion, glad am I to hear of these things: come on, let us mend our pace.

**Chr.** I cannot go so fast as I would, by reason of this burden that is on my back.

### **B. The Slough of Despond**

Now I saw in my dream that, just as they had ended this talk, they drew near to a very miry slough that was in the midst of the plain; and they being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name of the slough was "Despond." Here, therefore, they wallowed for a time, being grievously bedaubed with the dirt; and CHRISTIAN, because of the burden that was on his back, began to sink in the mire.

**Pli.** Then said PLIABLE, "Ah! neighbour CHRISTIAN, where are you now?"

**Chr.** "Truly," said CHRISTIAN, "I do not know."

At that PLIABLE began to be offended, and angrily said to his fellow, "Is this the happiness you have told me of all this while? If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect 'twixt this and our journey's end? If I get out again with my life, you shall possess the brave country alone." And with that he gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mire on that side of the slough which was next to his own house: so away he went, and CHRISTIAN saw him no more.

**PLIABLE'S END:**

Now I saw in my dream that by this time PLIABLE was got home to his house again. So his neighbours came to visit him; and some of them called him a wise man for coming back; and some called him a fool for hazarding himself with CHRISTIAN: others, again, did mock at his cowardliness, saying, "Surely, since you began to venture, you would not have been so base as to have given out for a few difficulties:" so PLIABLE sat sneaking among them. But at last got he more confidence; and then they all "turned tail," and began to deride poor CHRISTIAN behind his back. And thus much concerning PLIABLE.

**The Encounter with Mr. Worldly Wiseman:**

**[Recommended salvation by legalism... but Mt. Sinai overpowered him...]**

Now, as Christian was walking solitarily by himself, he espied one afar off, come crossing over the field to meet him; and their hap was to meet just as they were crossing the way of each other. The gentleman's name that met him was Mr. Worldly Wiseman, he dwelt in the town of Carnal Policy, a very great town, and also hard by from whence Christian came. This man, then, meeting with Christian, and having some inkling of him,--for Christian's setting forth from the City of Destruction was much noised abroad, not only in the town where he dwelt, but also it began to be the town talk in some other places,--Mr. Worldly Wiseman, therefore, having some guess of him, by beholding his laborious going, by observing his sighs and groans, and the like, began thus to enter into some talk with Christian.

**WORLD.** How camest thou by the burden at first?

**CHR.** By reading this book in my hand.

**WORLD.** I thought so; and it is happened unto thee as to other weak men, who, meddling with things too high for them, do suddenly fall into thy distractions;



which distractions do not only unman men, as thine, I perceive, have done thee, but they run them upon desperate ventures to obtain they know not what.

CHR. I know what I would obtain; it is ease for my heavy burden.

WORLD. But why wilt thou seek for ease this way, seeing so many dangers attend it? especially since, hadst thou but patience to hear me, I could direct thee to the obtaining of what thou desirest, without the dangers that thou in this way wilt run thyself into; yea, and the remedy is at hand. Besides, I will add, that instead of those dangers, thou shalt meet with much safety, friendship, and content.

CHR. Pray, Sir, open this secret to me.

WORLD. Why, in yonder village--the village is named Morality-- there dwells a gentleman whose name is Legality, a very judicious man, and a man of very good name, that has skill to help men off with such burdens as thine are from their shoulders: yea, to my knowledge, he hath done a great deal of good this way; ay, and besides, he hath skill to cure those that are somewhat crazed in their wits with their burdens. To him, as I said, thou mayest go, and be helped presently. His house is not quite a mile from this place, and if he should not be at home himself, he hath a pretty young man to his son, whose name is Civility, that can do it (to speak on) as well as the old gentleman himself; there, I say, thou mayest be eased of thy burden; and if thou art not minded to go back to thy former habitation, as, indeed, I would not wish thee, thou mayest send for thy wife and children to thee to this village, where there are houses now stand empty, one of which thou mayest have at reasonable rates; provision is there also cheap and good; and that which will make thy life the more happy is, to be sure, there thou shalt live by honest neighbours, in credit and good fashion.

So CHRISTIAN turned out of his way to go to Mr. LEGALITY'S house for help. But, behold, when he was got now hard by the hill, it seemed so high, and also the side of it that was next the wayside did hang so much over, that CHRISTIAN was afraid to venture farther, lest the hill should fall on his head; wherefore there he stood still, and knew not what to do. Also his burden now seemed heavier to him than while he was in his way. There came also flashes of fire out of the hill, that made CHRISTIAN afraid that he should be burned

[Then Evangelist returned and rebuked Christian for turning out of the way (the correct path) and seek salvation by other means. Christian quickly got back to the right path]