

11. LEARNING FROM A PURITAN CLASSIC: THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

AN INTRODUCTION TO PILGRIM'S PROGRESS¹ (PART ONE: 1678 / PART TWO: 1684)

What sort of book is it?

An experiment... ? the first English novel... an “allegory” teaching readers of the Christian life... ordinary speech, Bible-infused imagery and poignant rhetoric

How does it work?

The Christian life is a pilgrimage to the Celestial City... it is a straight and difficult path... on which we walk together with variety of characters... The book is a narrative and a novel form of typical Puritan ministry.

About the author: John Bunyan (b.1628 – d.1688)

1. *A Puritan to his fingertips.*
“Theologically, however, Puritanism was in essence a commitment to a Reformed piety that sought to make all life ‘holy to the Lord’ by living it within a frame of personal conviction, Bible-based, Christ-centred and God-fearing devotion, and thorough sanctification of family, church and community life; and in this sense Bunyan was as much a Puritan insider as any.” (Packer, p.186).
2. *A very able Puritan.*
3. *A Puritan who suffered.*

1. THE BIBLE: “MADE BY HIM THAT CANNOT LIE” – A MIRROR, A MAP, A SWORD

Now the glass was one of a thousand. It would present a man, one way, with his own features exactly; and turn it but another way, and it would show one the very face and similitude of the Prince of pilgrims himself. Yes, I have talked with them that can tell, and they have said that they have seen the very crown of thorns upon his head by looking in that glass; they have therein also seen the holes in his hands, his feet, and his side. Yea, such an excellency is there in this glass, that it will show him to one where they have a mind to see him, whether living or dead; whether in earth, or in heaven; whether in a state of humiliation, or in his exaltation; whether coming to suffer, or coming to reign. James 1:23; 1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Cor. 3:18.

¹ This introduction is drawn very largely from J.I. Packer, “Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan,” in *The Devoted Life: an invitation to the Puritan Classics* (eds. Kelly Kapic and Randall Gleason), pp183-199. Most of Bunyan’s extracts cited here are those referenced in Packer’s article. *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is widely available. The quotations here are taken from the public-domain version which is reproduced online by the Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL).

But he had in his pocket a map of all ways leading to or from the Celestial City; wherefore he struck a light (for he never goes without his tinder-box also), and takes a view of his book or map, which bids him to be careful in that place to turn to the right hand. And had he not been careful here to look in his map, they had all, in probability, been smothered in the mud; for just a little before them, and that at the end of the cleanest way too, was a pit, none knows how deep, full of nothing but mud, there made on purpose to destroy the pilgrims in. Then thought I with myself, Who that goeth on pilgrimage but would have one of these maps about him, that he may look, when he is at a stand, which is the way he must take?

When he had taken it in his hand, and looked thereon awhile, he said, Ha, it is a right Jerusalem blade.

Valiant-for-Truth: It is so. Let a man have one of these blades, with a hand to wield it, and skill to use it, and he may venture upon an angel with it. He need not fear its holding, if he can but tell how to lay on. Its edge will never blunt. It will cut flesh and bones, and soul, and spirit, and all. Heb. 4:12.

Mr. Great-Heart: But you fought a great while; I wonder you was not weary.

Valiant-for-Truth: I fought till my sword did cleave to my hand; and then they were joined together as if a sword grew out of my arm; and when the blood ran through my fingers, then I fought with most courage.

Mr. Great-Heart: Thou hast done well; thou hast resisted unto blood, striving against sin. Thou shalt abide by us, come in and go out with us; for we are thy companions. Then they took him and washed his wounds, and gave him of what they had, to refresh him: and so they went together.

2. THE GOSPEL: THE WONDERFUL EXCHANGE, JUSTIFICATION, AND THE HEART-CHANGING EFFECT OF GOD'S GIFT OF FAITH IN CHRIST

Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Isaiah 26:1. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back.

He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So

I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, "He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death." Then he stood still a while, to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks. Zech. 12:10. Now as he stood looking and weeping, behold, three Shining Ones came to him, and saluted him with, "Peace be to thee." So the first said to him, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," Mark 2:5; the second stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with change of raiment, Zech. 3:4; the third also set a mark on his forehead, Eph. 1:13, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the celestial gate: so they went their way. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing...

Christian: By laws and ordinances you will not be saved, since you came not in by the door. Gal. 2:16. And as for this coat that is on my back, it was given me by the Lord of the place whither I go; and that, as you say, to cover my nakedness with. And I take it as a token of kindness to me; for I had nothing but rags before. And besides, thus I comfort myself as I go. Surely, think I, when I come to the gate of the city, the Lord thereof will know me for good, since I have his coat on my back; a coat that he gave me freely in the day that he stripped me of my rags. I have, moreover, a mark in my forehead, of which perhaps you have taken no notice, which one of my Lord's most intimate associates fixed there in the day that my burden fell off my shoulders. I will tell you, moreover, that I had then given me a roll sealed, to comfort me by reading as I go on the way; I was also bid to give it in at the celestial gate, in token of my certain going in after it: all which things I doubt you want, and want them because you came not in at the gate.

To these things they gave him no answer; only they looked upon each other, and laughed.

3. THE WAY OF THE PILGRIM

Be a spiritual learner:

Evangelist (a gospel minister), the House of the Interpreter (the Holy Spirit as teacher), the Palace Beautiful (the local church), the shepherds (pastoral wisdom).

A constant struggle with sin:

Prudence: Do you not yet bear away with you some of the things that then you were conversant withal?

Christian: Yes, but greatly against my will; especially my inward and carnal cogitations, with which all my countrymen, as well as myself, were delighted. But now all those things are my grief; and might I but choose mine own things, I would choose never to think of those things more: but when I would be a doing that which is best, that which is worst is with me. Rom. 7:15, 21.

Prudence: Do you not find sometimes as if those things were vanquished, which at other times are your perplexity?

Christian: Yes, but that is but seldom; but they are to me golden hours in which such things happen to me.

Prudence: Can you remember by what means you find your annoyances at times as if they were vanquished?

Christian: Yes: when I think what I saw at the cross, that will do it; and when I look upon my broidered coat, that will do it; and when I look into the roll that I carry in my bosom, that will do it; and when my thoughts wax warm about whither I am going, that will do it.

Prudence: And what is it that makes you so desirous to go to Mount Zion?

Christian: Why, there I hope to see Him alive that did hang dead on the cross; and there I hope to be rid of all those things that to this day are in me an annoyance to me: there they say there is no death, Isa. 25:8; Rev. 21:4; and there I shall dwell with such company as I like best. For, to tell you the truth, I love Him because I was by Him eased of my burden; and I am weary of my inward sickness. I would fain be where I shall die no more, and with the company that shall continually cry, Holy, holy, holy.

Resist all persuasions to leave the road: (Demas, the Flatterer, Madam Wanton, By-path Meadow, Giant Despair in Doubting Castle, the Satanic Apollyon, Vanity Fair, etc.)

A Christian man is never long at ease,
When one fright's gone, another doth him seize.

"The hill, though high, I covet to ascend;
The difficulty will not me offend;
For I perceive the way to life lies here:
Come, pluck up heart, let's neither faint nor fear.
Better, though difficult, the right way to go,
Than wrong, though easy, where the end is woe."

The crown is before you, and it is an incorruptible one; "so run that ye may obtain it." 1 Cor. 9:24-27. Some there be that set out for this crown, and after they have gone far for it, another comes in and takes it from them: "hold fast, therefore, that you have; let no man take your crown." Rev. 3:11. You are not yet out of the gunshot of the devil; "you have not resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Let the kingdom be always before you, and believe steadfastly concerning the things that are invisible. Let nothing that is on this side the other world get within you. And, above all, look well to your own hearts and to the lusts thereof; for they are "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Set your faces like a flint; you have all power in heaven and earth on your side... and be you sure that one or both of you must seal the testimony which you hold, with blood; but "be you faithful unto death, and the King will give you a crown of life."

4. THE NEED FOR COMPANIONS ON THE ROAD: CHRISTIAN FRIENDS, & A FAITHFUL PASTOR

"When saints do sleepy grow, let them come hither,
And hear how these two pilgrims talk together;
Yea, let them learn of them in any wise,
Thus to keep open their drowsy, slumb'ring eyes.
Saints' fellowship, if it be managed well,
Keeps them awake, and that in spite of hell."

Christian: Sir, said Christian, I am a man that am come from the city of Destruction, and am going to the Mount Zion; and I was told by the man that stands at the gate at the head of this way, that if I called here you would show me excellent things, such as would be helpful to me on my journey.

Interpreter: Then said Interpreter, Come in; I will show thee that which will be profitable to thee. So he commanded his man to light the candle, and bid Christian follow him; so he had him into a private room, and bid his man open a door; the which when he had done, Christian saw the picture a very grave person hang up against the wall; and this was the fashion of it: It had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon its lips, the world was behind its back; it stood as if it pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over its head.

Christian: Then said Christian, What means this?

Interpreter: The man whose picture this is, is one of a thousand: he can beget children, 1 Cor. 4:15, travail in birth with children, Gal. 4:19, and nurse them himself when they are born. And whereas thou seest him with his eyes lift up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, and the law of truth writ on his lips: it is to show thee, that his work is to know, and unfold dark things to sinners; even as also thou seest him stand as if he pleaded with men. And whereas thou seest the world as cast behind him, and that a crown hangs over his head; that is to show thee, that slighting and despising the things that are present, for the love that he hath to his Master's service, he is sure in the world that comes next, to have glory for his reward. Now, said the Interpreter, I have showed thee this picture first, because the man whose picture this is, is the only man whom the Lord of the place whither thou art going hath authorized to be thy guide in all difficult places thou mayest meet with in the way: wherefore take good heed to what I have showed thee, and bear well in thy mind what thou hast seen, lest in thy journey thou meet with some that pretend to lead thee right, but their way goes down to death.

5. ENTERING THE CELESTIAL CITY

The talk that they had with the shining ones was about the glory of the place; who told them that the beauty and glory of it was inexpressible. There, said they, is "Mount Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect." Heb. 12:22-24. You are going now, said they, to the paradise of God, wherein you shall see the tree of life, and eat of the never-fading fruits thereof: and when you come there you shall have white robes given you, and your walk and talk shall be every day with the King, even all the days of eternity. Rev. 2:7; 3:4,5; 22:5. There you shall not see again such things as you saw when you were in the lower region upon earth; to wit, sorrow, sickness, affliction, and death; "For the former things are passed away." Rev. 21:4. You are going now to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob, and to the prophets, men that God hath taken away from the evil to come, and that are now "resting upon their beds, each one walking in his righteousness."

In that place you must wear crowns of gold, and enjoy the perpetual sight and vision of the Holy One; for "there you shall see him as he is." 1 John, 3:2. There also you shall serve him continually with praise, with shouting and thanksgiving, whom you desired to serve in the world, though with much difficulty, because of the infirmity of your flesh. There your eyes shall be delighted with

seeing, and your ears with hearing the pleasant voice of the Mighty One. There you shall enjoy your friends again that are gone thither before you; and there you shall with joy receive even every one that follows into the holy place after you.

Now, while they were thus drawing towards the gate, behold a company of the heavenly host came out to meet them: to whom it was said by the other two shining ones, These are the men that have loved our Lord when they were in the world, and that have left all for his holy name; and he hath sent us to fetch them, and we have brought them thus far on their desired journey, that they may go in and look their Redeemer in the face with joy. Then the heavenly host gave a great shout, saying, "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb." Rev. 19:9.

6. DYING WELL: CROSSING THE RIVER OF DEATH

you shall find it deeper or shallower as you believe in the King of the place.

These troubles and distresses that you go through in these waters, are no sign that God hath forsaken you; but are sent to try you, whether you will call to mind that which heretofore you have received of his goodness, and live upon him in your distresses.... Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole. And with that Christian brake out with a loud voice, Oh, I see him again; and he tells me, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." Isa. 43:2. Then they both took courage, and the enemy was after that as still as a stone, until they were gone over.

Mr. Standfast had thus set things in order, and the time being come for him to haste him away, he also went down to the river. Now there was a great calm at that time in the river; wherefore Mr. Standfast, when he was about half-way in, stood a while, and talked with his companions that had waited upon him thither.

And he said, This river has been a terror to many; yea, the thoughts of it also have often frightened me; but now methinks I stand easy; my foot is fixed upon that on which the feet of the priests that bare the ark of the covenant stood while Israel went over Jordan. Josh. 3:17. The waters indeed are to the palate bitter, and to the stomach cold; yet the thoughts of what I am going to, and of the convoy that waits for me on the other side, do lie as a glowing coal at my heart.

I see myself now at the end of my journey;
my toilsome days are ended. I am going to see that head which
was crowned with thorns, and that face which was spit upon for me. I
have formerly lived by hearsay and faith; but now I go where I shall
live by sight, and shall be with him in whose company I delight myself.
I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of; and wherever I have seen the
print of his shoe in the earth, there I have coveted to set my foot
too. His name has been to me as a civet-box; yea, sweeter than all
perfumes. His voice to me has been most sweet, and his countenance I
have more desired than they that have most desired the light of the
sun. His words I did use to gather for my food, and for antidotes
against my faintings. He hath held me, and hath kept me from mine
iniquities; yea, my steps hath he strengthened in his way.

Now, while he was thus in discourse, his countenance changed; his
strong man bowed under him: and after he had said, Take me, for I come
unto thee, he ceased to be seen of them.

But glorious it was to see how the open region was filled with horses
and chariots, with trumpeters and pipers, with singers and players upon
stringed instruments, to welcome the pilgrims as they went up, and
followed one another in at the beautiful gate of the city.

As for Christiana's children, the four boys that Christiana brought,
with their wives and children, I did not stay where I was till they
were gone over. Also, since I came away, I heard one say that they were
yet alive, and so would be for the increase of the church, in that
place where they were, for a time.

Should it be my lot to go that way again, I may give those that desire
it an account of what I here am silent about:
meantime I bid my reader FAREWELL.