



John Bunyan

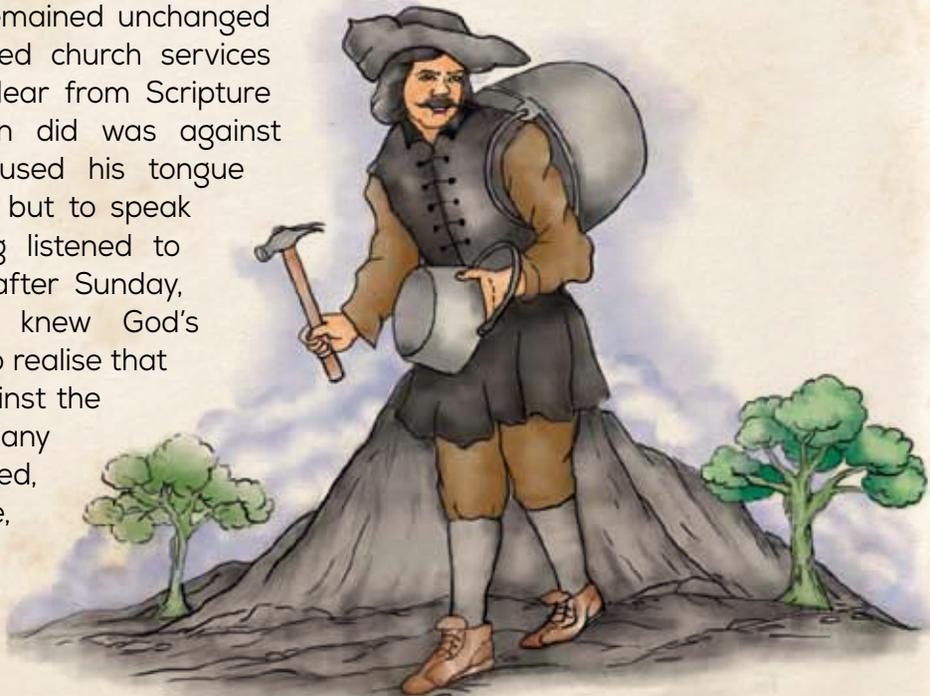
– A Writer and Preacher of the 17th Century

Retold by Jenny Lok Illustrated by Linus Kok

(Retold from 'The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs, written by John Foxe, rewritten & updated by Harold J Chadwick Bridge-Logos Publishers; John Bunyan - Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia)

John Bunyan, born to Thomas and Margaret Bunyan in Elstow (near Bedford), England in November 1628, was a well-known English writer and preacher. He was best remembered for his novel, "The Pilgrim's Progress", his greatest work among many of his writings which were published during his lifetime. His father Thomas was a tinker and would often travel around the neighbourhood mending pots and pans. As for Bunyan himself, he received little education and, not surprisingly, he learnt the trade of a tinker from his father at an early age.

Unlike most young people of his day who engaged in drinking and immoral activities, Bunyan kept himself away from these vices. Nevertheless, he had great struggles with other sins in his life, which included his inability to control his tongue. Frequently, he would curse and swear, tell lies and take lightly the holy name of God. This sinful habit remained unchanged though he attended church services regularly. It was clear from Scripture that what Bunyan did was against God's Word; he used his tongue not to praise God but to speak evil things. Having listened to sermons Sunday after Sunday, Bunyan certainly knew God's Word sufficiently to realise that he had sinned against the most Holy God many times over. Indeed, "the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity:



so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (James 3:6).

On top of this habitual sin, Bunyan also loved dancing and playing a game called "tip cat" (which involved using a bat to hit a small piece of wood), particularly on Sunday after church service. Bunyan knew in his heart that what he had been doing was dishonouring to God, but he could not forsake his sins. On one occasion, he heard a Sunday sermon on the sin of not keeping the Sabbath holy and his heart was deeply troubled. He wanted to give up his sins but he had no strength to do so. Thus, Bunyan was constantly pricked in his conscience and had no peace.

Then came the English Civil War, which saw fighting between the supporters of the Parliament and those of the king. Bunyan was about 16 years old then; he joined the parliamentary army from 1644 to 1647. One day, he witnessed a very shocking incident: a fellow soldier, standing on guard duty, was shot in the head and died right before his own eyes. From that moment, Bunyan was jolted into thinking about the sins in his life and the state of his soul. But he could not find a way to free himself of his sins.

Shortly after he left the army, Bunyan married a godly young woman with whom he had four children – Mary (the eldest, who was born blind), Elizabeth, Thomas and John. The family was poor but Bunyan's wife had two small books on Christianity which proved to be far more precious than silver or gold. After reading the books, Bunyan's faith in God was revived. He found that his love for the past sinful pleasures began to fade away. Most importantly, he had a newfound relationship with God. Gone were the days when he had enjoyed cursing, swearing, lying and using God's name in vain. God's Word had set him free from his sins! He grew spiritually and soon became a preacher, speaking to many in the villages around Bedford about God and His



truths. He was so earnest and passionate in his preaching that many kept coming to hear him.

In 1660, when King Charles II regained his throne, the Church of England began to wield power again. Preachers who refused to submit to the unbiblical practices set by the Church of England would face imprisonment or death. Bunyan was one of those thrown into prison, where he remained for 12 years, with only short periods of freedom in between. When asked if he would promise not to preach again in exchange for his freedom, he had this to say: "If you let me out today, I will preach again tomorrow." Such was Bunyan's determination not to give in to the people who threatened to take away his freedom. To him, preaching God's Word was more important than anything else in this world, even if he had to pay a great price! He had to endure the miserable conditions of the prison and to bear the sadness of being separated from his family. By then, his first wife had passed away, leaving behind his four young children. His second wife, whom he married shortly before his imprisonment, was left to care for them.

In spite of his great sufferings, Bunyan did not allow himself to brood over his problems. He kept himself fruitfully occupied in the prison cell by making tagged shoelaces to support himself and his family. In addition, he pored over two books that he had brought along with him – the King James Bible and (an earlier version of) John Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" – which influenced his later writings in a powerful way. In fact, it was during his imprisonment that he wrote many religious books and pamphlets. In 1666, Bunyan wrote his autobiography entitled "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners". In this book, he described his own spiritual journey in detail, which included "the many battles with Satan", "the merciful working of God" in his life which led him to a new life in Christ, and the "divine call to preach to other sinners", which he obeyed by reaching out to his fellow prisoners with God's Word.

In 1672, King Charles II passed a law to pardon those who had opposed the Church of England. Bunyan was therefore released from prison, only to return to it 3 years later because he started preaching again without permission from the authority, which the law was still against. While in prison, Bunyan wrote the first part of "The Pilgrim's Progress", which traced the journey of a man named "Christian" who was travelling to the celestial city (which is heaven). This masterpiece, published in 1678, was in fact about himself going through many trials and sufferings to reach the "gate" of heaven. Six years later (in 1684), part two of "The Pilgrim's Progress" was published – this time on the spiritual journey of "Christiana" (Christian's wife).

Bunyan's last days were spent mainly ministering to his church at Bedford. To many, he was known as "Bishop Bunyan", being both "a national leader and teacher". However, while on a journey to help a father and son make peace with each other, he was caught in a heavy rain and was soaked to the skin. A very

serious fever developed and Bunyan was soon with the Lord! That was 31 August 1688.

Throughout his life, Bunyan always had an earnest desire to seek God and live a holy life. He was once bound by his own sins and guilt, but the truth of God finally set him free! Though he had lost his freedom on many occasions, yet his soul was ever free. Nothing – not even the chains of imprisonment – could take away the sweetness of his newfound freedom in Christ, which he enjoyed and used for God's glory. His soul soared above his miseries to express his thoughts about God and His gracious work in his life through his writings. His writings have been a great blessing to many down the generations, for they draw attention to the glorious freedom one can have in Christ. Certainly, anyone who enjoys such glorious freedom in Christ, as Bunyan did, will surely be able to sing:

Glorious freedom! Wonderful freedom!
 No more in chains of sin I repine!
 Jesus, the glorious mighty Redeemer!
 Now and forever Jesus is mine.

Truly, our gracious heavenly Father will never turn away any child who sincerely seeks Him, for He alone can give true freedom in Christ – “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32) indeed!





“IF A SON, THEN
AN HEIR OF GOD
THROUGH CHRIST.”
GALATIANS 4:7

BENEFITS OF OUR SONSHIP

Speaker

Pastor Prabhudas Koshy

Venue

Holiday Inn, Cochin, Kerala, India

Date

7-10 September 2015, Mon-Thu

For information, please contact Lok Kwok Wah at **6741 1910**
or send an email to **bwmm.gbpc@gmail.com**.