

The following true story was written by Thomas L. Sims and is drawn from John Bunyan's autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Quotations from Bunyan have been altered to conform to modern English. All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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ON THE COVER: A stained glass window in the Bunyan Meeting House in Bedford, England depicting a scene from *The Pilgrim's Progress* when Christian finally loses his burden at the cross of Jesus Christ.

✧ ACTION ✧

Reader, if you want to do the will of God, please follow the instructions listed here.



1. If you want to trust Christ as your Savior, then pray and confess to God that you are a sinner. Ask God to be merciful to you and to take away your sins. Tell God that you believe Jesus

is the Son of God who died for you and who arose from the dead. Ask God to give you eternal life by Jesus Christ.

2. Start reading the Bible regularly. Begin your reading with the book of John. After reading John, start reading at the beginning of the New Testament and read all the way through Revelation.

3. Start praying regularly. Speak to God reverently. Thank and worship God in your prayers. Confess your sins, and ask for God's help. Pray for others also. Ask God to guide you to live for His glory.

4. Find and attend a Bible preaching church. Make sure your church obeys the Bible, is trying to win lost people to faith in Christ, and practices right living for the glory of God.

5. Contact us at the address in the front of this booklet if you need spiritual help.

Church in Bedford, and he was in great demand to preach meetings in other places.

John Bunyan was imprisoned a third time and was kept in a cell built on the bridge over the Ouse River. During this stay he wrote the first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In 1680 this important work was completed and published. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegorical story in which the main character, Christian, makes his spiritual journey from being an unsaved man to his entrance into the celestial city (heaven). Countless Christians have drawn great encouragement from this story.

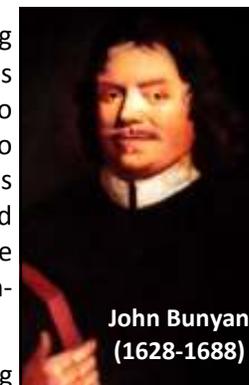


John Bunyan died in 1688 at age 60. He had been ill but rode to London to do a preaching tour anyway. Because he had to ride his horse in a hard rain much of the way, Bunyan arrived soaking wet. He became very ill which led to pneumonia. He died at the home of his host in London and was buried in Bunhill Fields Burial Ground. His death ended a very fruitful life of preaching and writing, but Bunyan's testimony and books continue to be a blessing to many to this day.

Readers, how will God view your life? Will He see it as a valuable life that was lived for His glory? Your life will be a blessing for eternity if you know and love Jesus Christ. Without Christ, your life is a complete waste. God loves you and sent His Son to save you. He gives you the opportunity to honor Him by becoming a Christian. Will you accept God's invitation to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and discover just like Bunyan, God's abounding grace?

✧ ARRESTED ✧

John Bunyan had just finished his opening prayer when the farm house door was thrown open. The constable stormed into the room and thrust an arrest warrant into Bunyan's hand. The preaching meeting was abruptly ended as Bunyan was arrested and led away by the constable. The next day the justices presented the charges against Bunyan.



Bunyan was arrested for the crime of holding illegal religious meetings. Since Charles II had returned as the king of England in 1660, laws had been passed forbidding any church or religious meetings except in the Church of England. Only the priests of the established church could lead services, and the *Common Book of Prayer* had to be used in those services. But Bunyan, like many other preachers in England, rejected the beliefs and practices of the Church of England. He was compelled by his conscience before God to live and preach by the Bible alone.

In the months that followed, Bunyan was put on trial by the local magistrates, who found him guilty of holding illegal meetings. The magistrates offered Bunyan freedom if he would promise not to preach and hold meetings. Bunyan knew that he could not make such a promise. Instead, he answered, "if I were out of prison to-day, I would preach the gospel tomorrow, by the help of God." He must obey God and preach the Word of God. Since he refused to stop preaching, Bunyan was locked up in the county jail in his hometown of Bedford; he was sentenced to be banished from England; and he was threatened with the possibility of being hanged. The sentence of banishment was never carried out, but Bunyan did spend most of the next twelve years in jail. How did all this come about in the life of John Bunyan?

☞ THE EARLY YEARS ☞

In 1628 John Bunyan was born in the village of Elstow, England. His family endured great hardships. “My father’s house,” said Bunyan, “was among the poorest and most despised of all the families in the land.” His father worked as a tinker going around fixing pots and pans and doing other small metal repairs. His trade paid very poorly. However, in their poverty, John’s parents managed to send him to school, though he confessed, “I soon forgot what I had learned, almost completely.” He was christened (baptized) as an infant in the Elstow church and attended services there regularly. During his teen years, both his mother and sister died which filled John’s heart with sadness. The grief turned to bitterness when his father remarried only a few months after his mother’s death. Provoked by his father’s remarriage, John joined Parliament’s army (called “Roundheads”) to fight against the army of King Charles I in the English civil war. Following his enlistment he returned home, took a wife, and worked at his father’s craft as a tinker. He said of that time, “we came together as poor as poor might be (not having so much household stuff as a dish or a spoon between us both).” In all those years, Bunyan confesses, “I sinned still, and grew more and more rebellious against God, and careless of my own salvation.”

Reader, you may be wondering why you should be interested in a man who lived so long ago. Though there are more than 300 years between us and Bunyan, his need to know God and to find salvation is very much like ours today. Bunyan’s life and testimony in becoming a man of God is well known. We can look at his life as a true example of what God will do for sinners who turn to Jesus Christ in saving faith. This story is for you, to challenge you to examine your own life and relationship with God.

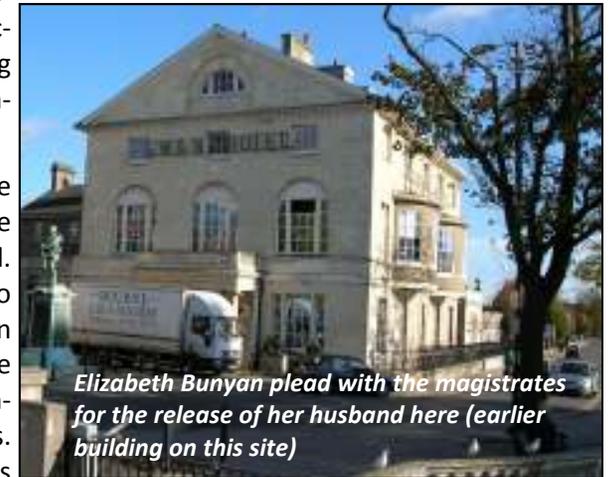


Bunyan’s blind daughter brought him food in this cup

At age 30, only a few years after his salvation, Bunyan’s first wife died, leaving him a widower with four children. His first child, Mary, was blind. At this time his pastor also died, and the church was pushed out of the building where they met. A growing load of ministry was on Bunyan’s shoulders. To help him care for his family, Bunyan married a second time to a young woman named Elizabeth.

Around this time Charles II was made King of England. This is the King who changed the laws in England that made preachers like Bunyan into outlaws. Bunyan’s life was full of uncertainties as the days of imprisonment multiplied. Would he be banished from his homeland, when would he be released, how could he provide for his family? These questions weighed heavily on his mind, but his confidence in the Lord was his strength.

Bunyan used his prison time well in the service of Christ. He preached the gospel to his fellow prisoners and to anyone else he could reach. At times he was allowed out of prison, and he immediately used these opportunities to resume his preaching work. He also used his time to write books. In his lifetime, Bunyan published more than 60 books and pamphlets. He was kept in jail for about six years, was released for a brief time and was imprisoned again for six more years. Finally the King of England decided to ease up on the dissenters like Bunyan, which allowed him to go free. Bunyan was now the pastor of the Independent



Elizabeth Bunyan plead with the magistrates for the release of her husband here (earlier building on this site)

- That Jesus Christ died on the cross in our place to suffer the punishment our sins deserve. *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
- That Christ arose bodily and victoriously from the dead after three days. *That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*
- That God declares faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, as the only way to salvation, forgiveness of sins, and righteousness. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Reader, God invites you to repent of your sins and rebellion and to believe on Jesus Christ for salvation. If you will take this step of putting your trust in the Jesus, God will forgive your sins, reconcile you to Himself in peace, give you eternal life, and make you His own child.

✧ MAN OF GOD ✧

John Bunyan believed on Jesus Christ and was saved. He joined the Independent Church and was baptized in the River Ouse by John Gifford. After a few years of growing in the Lord, he started doing some preaching. God was using Bunyan as an effective preacher of the gospel, and all around the area groups began to call on him to minister the Word of God to them. It was on just such an occasion that Bunyan was arrested for preaching and holding illegal meetings.

Being imprisoned in 1660 was a terrible thing. The prisoners were treated roughly. The jail was unheated, dirty, and provided no human comforts. The prisoners had to provide their own food and every other necessity as well.

✧ CHIEF OF SINNERS ✧

John Bunyan told the story of his salvation in his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Though he went to church, he lived very sinfully. Speaking of himself as a child of only nine or 10 years of age he says, “It was my delight to be taken captive by the devil...I had but few equals both for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God.” He was often terrified in his bed at night by dreams of hell and the torments of the wrath of God. These fears were brought on by the way Bunyan sinned even when he knew what was right. He said of himself, “I gave myself to my lusts, and delighted in all the transgressions against the law of God: so that until I came to the state of marriage, I was the very ringleader of my companions, in all kinds of evil and ungodliness.” He came to despise the things of God saying, “I no longer cared about anything that was good, heaven and hell were both out of sight and mind; and as for saving and damning, they were last in my thoughts.”

John Bunyan continued to live sinfully after his marriage, resisting the good spiritual influence of his wife. One Sunday the preacher at the Elstow Church preached about the sin of abusing the Lord’s Day by using Sunday as a day for working, playing sports, and such. Because he loved to play games on the village green on Sunday afternoons, this message did not suit Bunyan at all. He also felt that the preacher was aiming this message directly at him. He hardened his heart against the message and went out on the village green that very afternoon to play tip-cat (a favorite sports game of that time). While playing, Bunyan heard a voice that spoke from heaven to his soul, “Will you leave your sins and go to heaven, or have your sins and go to hell?” He looked up to heaven and felt



Bunyan’s anvil

that he could see the eyes of Jesus looking down upon him. At first he felt deeply guilty and without hope before God, but he finally decided, "I resolved in my mind I would go on in my sins...I might as well be damned for many sins, as be damned for a few."



During the years, Bunyan's dirty mouth had only grown worse. One day he was standing near the window of a neighbor's shop "cursing and swearing and playing the madman." The woman who lived there was well known in town as an evil, sinful person. The woman came out of the shop and rebuked Bunyan for his foul mouth saying that he was "the ungodliest fellow for swearing, that she ever heard in all her life; and that...he was going to ruin all the young people in town if they stayed in his company."

Reader, do you see that you are also a sinner before God, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23)? Maybe your sins are not exactly the same as Bunyan's, but we have all broken God's law, been disobedient to His commandments and rebelled against His will. We have all earned the wages of sin which is death (Romans 6:23). You might compare yourself with others and feel that next to them you are a pretty good person. We must all give an account of ourselves before God. When God judges us, He will not be comparing us to our neighbors. God will judge us according to His perfect righteousness. Before you can be saved, you must see yourself as God sees you in all the ugliness of your sins, and you must repent.

not accidents or coincidences. People who have spoken to you about becoming a Christian, preachers who have preached the gospel to you, radio messages you have heard, or gospel tracts you have read are all ways that God is providentially directing you to Himself. How very important it is for you to recognize God's working and respond to Him in saving faith.

✧ GOSPEL TRUTH ✧

John Bunyan suffered through a long period of seeking and doubting before he came to real peace and assurance in his salvation. During the years of struggle, he gave much attention to the Bible as he searched for answers. Growing in his love for the Word of God, he said, "The scriptures now also were wonderful to me; I saw that the truth and verity of them are the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Bunyan also attended the Independent Church and learned much from the preaching of Pastor Gifford. The truths he learned are necessary to true saving faith:



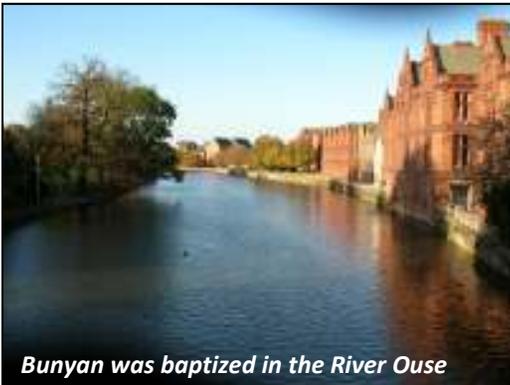
- His own sinfulness before God and how he deserved the condemnation of God in an eternal hell.
- His hypocrisy in trying to earn favor with God by his good works.
- That Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became a man in order to provide our salvation. *God...by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.*

Bunyan. There were many similar influences that entered his life directing him to the true knowledge of God.

Bunyan went into Bedford to do some of his tinkering business and came across a group of three or four women sitting in a doorway talking about the things of God. He was eager to enter the conversation since he was now such a religious man, but they spoke of things he did not understand. "Their talk was about a new birth, the work of God on their hearts, also how they were convinced of their miserable sin nature; they talked how God had visited their souls with His love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed." Bunyan was amazed at their speech saying, "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."

This same group of women directed Bunyan to their pastor, John Gifford of the Independent Church in Bedford. God used Pastor Gifford to lead Bunyan to saving faith in Jesus Christ, "At this time also I sat under the ministry of holy Mr. Gifford, whose doctrine, by God's grace, stabilized me."

Readers, God is providentially working in your life as well. Maybe you can remember times when you were saved from injury or



Bunyan was baptized in the River Ouse

death in some unusual way. But God is also working in you to save you from the spiritual death that is the result of your sins. The very fact that someone has given you this pamphlet is God working toward your salvation. The events of your life are

↻ SELF-IMPROVEMENT ↻

After John Bunyan was married, he tried to improve himself religiously. His wife read to him in the evenings from the Christian books she owned. Attending church faithfully, twice each Sunday, Bunyan would participate in the singing and service with great enthusiasm. He even developed a superstitious reverence for the priest of his church. When that sinful woman in the shop rebuked him for his bad language, Bunyan decided to make some changes, clean up his life and stop swearing. He did not forsake all his sins, but the changes were enough to be noticed by everyone in town. He began to read the Bible as well. Bunyan says of this time, "I began some outward reformation both in my words and life, and set the commandments before me for my way to heaven; which commandments I tried to keep, and, as I thought, did keep them pretty well sometimes...then I thought I pleased God as well as any man in England." He began to receive high respect in town, "Now therefore they began to praise, to commend, and to speak well of me, both to my face, and behind my back. Now that I had, as they say, become godly."

In actuality, Bunyan was still as lost as ever. He was self-deceived into thinking that he was right with God by all his religious deeds. Many people think their good deeds and religious service will earn them a place in heaven. Good works cannot take away sin or make us righteous before God. *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast* (Ephesians 2:9-10). Bunyan had not yet repented of his sins and believed on Jesus Christ. All the religion in the world is no substitute for God's plan of salvation: *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved* (Acts 16:31).



Bunyan made this iron violin



The Elstow Church and bell tower

Reader, what are you trusting in for eternal life? Please do not make Bunyan's mistake. If you think that being baptized, attending church services, giving offerings, doing good deeds, and being a good neighbor will

take you to heaven; you are terribly mistaken. True faith alone, in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, will save you. *The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord* (Romans 6:23).

☞ FEARS ☞

All through Bunyan's life he had suffered times of spiritual fear. As a boy his bad behavior caused him to have bad dreams. As an adult, the sting of conscience often afflicted him. Even when Bunyan began to practice religious living, he was still full of fears. His fears were the result of his sins which had not yet been forgiven. The plague of fears was proof that Bunyan's religion was just hypocrisy.

Ringings the bells at the Elstow church was one of Bunyan's favorite things to do. The bell tower stands separate from the church building today just as it did when Bunyan was a bell ringer. As his conscience was awakened to his lost condition and pride, Bunyan decided to give up ringing the bells. He would still go watch the ringing, but he became fearful that the bell might come loose and fall on him. He tried to stand in a place that was safe if the bell should fall, but he was soon driven by fear out of the bell tower. Even after this, Bunyan decided to stay completely away from the tower lest the tower should fall down on

him. Growing awareness of his sinfulness drove these unrealistic fears, for he was not at peace with God.

Reader, are you troubled by fears? Maybe no one knows your inner struggles and doubts, but the presence of these fears in your heart shows that something is wrong. When a person is right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, he has peace with God, and God gives peacefulness to his soul. There is no relief quite like knowing that your sins are forgiven. When you are a believer, doubts are lifted by the assurance of the Holy Spirit of God dwelling within you. Real salvation results in real changes in your life. Those who know Christ enjoy a powerful confidence. *For God has not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind* (2 Timothy 1:7).

☞ PROVIDENCE ☞

The word "providence" means God's guidance or care. God's providential work in our lives directs us in His will. John Bunyan's life contains many examples of God's providence.

On several occasions before Bunyan became a Christian, God spared his life. He fell into a creek and only barely escaped drowning. Another time, he fell out of a boat into the Ouse River but was rescued. The most sobering demonstration of God's protection came when Bunyan was in the army. He was selected to go with a company of soldiers to surround an area. Another soldier asked if he might take Bunyan's place on this assignment. The soldier who replaced Bunyan was standing guard duty when the enemy shot him through the head and killed him.

God also worked providentially to bring Bunyan to know and understand the truth of salvation. His first wife came from a godly home, and she tried to help him spiritually. In those days poor people rarely owned books, yet his wife brought a couple of good Christian books into their home and read them often to