

The Pilgrim's Progress: A Study

Week 1: Intro- Bunyan History (Pastor's Notes)

Why Pilgrim's Progress?

Opening Question: Why should a church devote time to the study of any book that is not part of the canon of Scripture? This is a very good question. Answering only on behalf of North Johnson City Baptist Church, the reason is multi-faceted.

1. We have desired to restart our Wednesday evening services with a focus on Christian education, as the lack of Christian education is a major problem for the church at large today. We want to address this need, in our congregation, by using Wednesday nights to devote quarter length classes (13 weeks) to the study of:
 - a. Christian literature's most significant and faithful works (Fiction, Non-fiction, Biography)
 - b. Christian history, Baptist history, and specific periods of historical importance to the church.
 - c. Areas of theological study (such as Biblical theology, Systematic theology, or specific theological subjects such as ecclesiology).
 - d. Quarter length studies of key Biblical books.

Pilgrim's Progress fits into this plan very well.

2. Pilgrim's Progress is a book of incredible importance to Christians. It is the second most published (and read) book in English in history (only second to the Bible). There are many references to it in Christian preaching and writing, and it is important that we know it.
3. While it is true that since its first publication in 1678 Pilgrim's progress has literally never been out of print, there is a danger that we will be the first generation to have largely left this book unread.
4. Our forebears in the faith have recommended this book to us. See attached sheet for other comments about this great work.

Who wrote Pilgrim's Progress?

- The Pilgrim's Progress was written by Baptist minister John Bunyan (1628-1688), who lived in an important moment of history, particularly for Baptists.
- At age 16, he served in the Parliamentarian army during the English Civil war.
- After the war, he married and had four children. Although we do not know the name of his first wife, she had a great impact on him. Her only possessions were copies of two early Puritan works.
- She convinced the young tinker to attend church. Bunyan would later speak of his outward conversion during this time, having been urged to attend church by his wife. Though he improved his behavior publicly, he remained unchanged inwardly. Yet God was at work on Bunyan.
 - When he spent the Lord's day in sport, the young Puritans would scold him.
 - When once he was overheard cursing, a woman took him to task for his immoral behavior.

- One day, Bunyan overheard some women speaking of the grace of God that had transformed them and set them free; it was like music to Bunyan's ears. He heard them speak of their church glowingly, and immediately he desired to attend with them. It was at the Bedford Non-Conforming Church that he met pastor John Gifford, a Royalist veteran of the English Civil War. This man became a great influence in the life of John Bunyan, leading him to Christ.
- Within a few years, Bunyan's life dramatically changed- his first wife died and he remarried. During this time, he also began to write and preach.
- England had changed as well. Since the end of the English Civil War, there had been a unique period of religious freedom. Now, Cromwell had died (1658), turmoil once again reigned, and Charles II was brought back, out of exile, to reign as king (1660).
- Soon, Charles II declared a new Act of Uniformity (1662; differentiating it from Elizabeth's Act of Uniformity in 1558). This act codified the Anglican prayer book and administration of the sacraments, along with requiring Anglican ordination to lead a congregation. It was under this act that John Bunyan was imprisoned for 12 years.
- It was during his imprisonment that Bunyan wrote many of his greatest works, including *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* and most of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Why is it important for us to read this book?

This is a book the Lord's people need to know. It allegorizes the journey of Christians in this world on pilgrimage to the Celestial city. It is a treasure of the church and a gift from God; it will be of great spiritual profit to us. It will also help you to understand references that we make from time to time in sermons.

How will we approach Pilgrims Progress?

We will study this great book over the next 10 weeks.

For next Wednesday night, please read pages 3-11 in the supplied book.

This includes:

- **The Author's Apology for his Book** (page 3)
- **Christian's Pilgrimage** (Page 5)
- and **An Unfriendly Neighbor** (Page 8)

And please fill out the workbook pages that we have provided as a help for your studies.