Lesson Two
BEGINNING TO SLOUGH OF DESPOND

In dealing with the life of Bunyan, we have found that he lived in the seventh century or the 1600s, and that he was a preacher. He was an outcast by the Church of England which was the established religion. He was not an ordained minister by the Church of England, so when he persisted in preaching the gospel, he was thrown into prison. It was while he was in prison that he decided to record his experiences with Christ there, which resulted in the pages which we have. His deep, abiding relationship with the Lord is recorded in this book which is called Pilgrim’s Progress. It is written in the form of a similitude or a parable - a comparison. We will be looking beyond that which we see on the surface and see the spiritual meaning which Bunyan would have us to see. This is given in the form of a dream. Bunyan did not actually dream this, but he is writing in the form of a dream, as if he had had a dream and he is telling it in this particular standpoint. If you have your books, you might open them as we begin on the first page, and he starts: As I walk through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den.

Now this den is the prison, or the Bedford jail in which Bunyan spent twelve years as a prisoner. He is going to be writing from his jail cell. The first line is filled with meaning just as every sentence is. As he gives us this phrase, "As I walk through the wilderness of this world." The little terms "As I walk" indicates that our existence in this life is a walk, it is not just a dead thing, it is a pilgrimage, as we are walking through the path of life. Notice that he says he likened it unto a wilderness. If we go on a walk, we ought to be observing what is on either side of our pathway and what is in our pathway. So what Bunyan would have us to understand here is that as we are going through the existence of this life, this world is like a wilderness, that is, it is hard to understand what the meaning of life is all about. As we are walking through it, we ought to be asking ourselves some basic questions. You young people, have you ever asked yourself these questions? Why am I here? Where did I come from? and Where am I going? That is, as you are alive, you know that you are here, how did you get here? Where did you come from? Where are you going? As you look out into the world and all the different religions and philosophies, you find yourself in a wilderness, because these answers are not found in the philosophies of this world. It is hard to understand what the purpose of life is all about. So then he says: I lighted upon a certain place where there was a den and 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.

What are the meanings of these particular terms? First of all, he sees this individual clothed with rags, that is, this is a text that is taken from Isaiah 64:6 as he has read from the book in his hand which is the
Bible, that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags". That is, even our best acts in the sight of God are sinful and we appear as an individual clothed with dirty or filthy rags. This individual had his face from his own house. That is, he was seeking for a deeper meaning in life rather than that which he had found in his home, or that place of security in which he had formerly been comfortable in and where he got his comfort from. He no longer can gain comfort in that, and is looking out away from the things of this life. He has his back to his house and his face out looking over the horizon. He has a book in his hand. Bunyan would have us to know that this book is none other than the Bible, he is reading from the Bible now. He has a great burden upon his back, not only is he facing away from the comforts which he formerly had security in, and not only is he looking away and he realizes he is clothed with rags, but now he realizes that he has a sense of sin. This great burden which is upon the individual's back is Bunyan's way of telling us that he has come to a conscious awareness of his sin, or his sinful state before God. If you will turn in your Bible to Romans 8:15, this is what the Bible calls a convicting work of the Holy Spirit which comes before true conversion. That is, after a person is converted, they generally come to a spirit of peace and they have a hope in Jesus Christ. But prior to this there is a work of the Holy Spirit which produces a great sense of remorse, distress and despair. Romans 8:15, here we read, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba Father." That is, those individuals that have been converted, they now have a different spirit than they had prior to conversion. When God is going to convert a sinner and bring them into a relationship with God, before they get settled in that relationship, there is a work of the Holy Spirit which is referred to as the spirit of bondage which brings a fear or a respect of the wrath of God. This is something that is greatly needed and we need to be aware of this that before an individual will truly flee to the cross of Christ they must also first of all have an appreciation of what the wrath of God is and what they need to flee from. This is what the Bible calls the spirit of bondage, the burden upon his back; that is the deep sense of sin.

Now then let us look at this individual as he now returns to his own home and begins sharing this experience he is going through with his family. Let us look at their reaction. How they receive him in his home. We read, In this plight, therefore he went home and restrained 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 or revealed his mind to his wife and children, and thus he began to talk with them. "Oh, my dear wife, said he and you the children of my bowls, I your dear friend am in myself undone by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me. Moreover, I am certainly 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 some way of escape may be found whereby we may delivered.
Now here he is under the sense of the guilt of sin. He is concerned about what is going to happen to him and also to his family. But when he shares this with those other members of family, here is their reaction. At this his relations were sore amazed. Not 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 toward night and they hoping that sleep might settle his brains with all haste they got into bed.

They thought he was out of his mind. When he shared this tremendous weight of sin with someone who was very close to him, his wife and his children, they thought that he was losing his mind. Now, some psychologists and a lot of modern ministers at this point say that Bunyan went too far. That is, this is not the real experience of a person. That he went too far in emphasizing the state of mind in which this sinner happened to go under. That it is not healthy. Modern psychologists would intervene at this point and say, that is not healthy for an individual to be in such a distraught state of mind. He is liable to crack, he is liable to go off; therefore, avoid and stay away from anything of this nature. But is this something that has just been invented by a man who was certainly fallible, or is this descriptive of a scriptural experience as revealed in the Bible. Let us look in Psalm 38:4 and let us listen as David describes an experience in his own life. Beginning in verse 1 and we will read down through verse 4. Let us see if we don't find the same thing that Pilgrim found when he shared this with his wife and children.

"Oh Lord rebuke me not in thy wrath, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure, for thine arrows stick fast in me and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head and a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly."

Let's see how Bunyan describes the Pilgrim:

"I go mourning all the day long, for my loins are filled with a loathsome disease and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken, I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all of my desire is before thee and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me, and as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me."
Look in verse 11:

"My lovers and my friends stand aloft from my sore, and my kinsmen stand afar off." See here, they have nothing to do, they have no sympathy with what I am going through with. "They also that seek after my life, lay snares for me, . . ."

So here is a passage in the scriptures, and there are several others that Bunyan would give in his footnotes that would show us that there is an experience of an individual when they come to Christ, that brings a great distress of mind over their lost condition. It is not just a theoretical thing anymore, it is something whereby the wrath of God is laid upon them as a burden is upon their back. Well, he goes on and he tries to sleep through the night and he doesn't get much rest. He gets up the next day and begins walking in the fields.

On the next page: Now I saw upon a time when he was reading in the fields that he was, or as he was accustomed, reading in his book, and greatly distressed in his mind. And as he read, he burst out as he had done before, crying, "What shall I do to be saved?"

Now I want us to note this. This individual didn't have this burden of sin just when he went to church. It didn't leave him there. Many individuals can go to a church and they can hear a sermon and they get sermon sick. But they are just like those that go out to sea. They get sea sick, but as soon as they get back on the land, they are well again. But when an individual is being dealt with by the Holy Spirit of God, they don't get out of this sense of burden just when they walk out the door of the church. A lot of people think that, when somebody came into the church and really got under conviction, the next day they have no time to talk with you about the things of God. An individual who is being dealt with, the Spirit of God follows him. This weight is put upon him whereby he cannot rest until it is settled with peace in Jesus Christ. So he is still crying out, what must he do to be saved?

Then he said: I saw also 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. He knew that he had a need, but he didn't know what to do. He knew that he needed to flee from the wrath of God, but he didn't know which way. He did not yet understand what conversion was all about.
He said: **I looked then and saw a man named Evangelist coming to him who asked, "Wherefore do you cry?"**

Now who is this Evangelist? The Evangelist is the local pastor, in this case with Bunyan, it was his pastor named John Gifford. You read in the rectory of the church of which Bunyan was a member that Bunyan's pastor, John Gifford spent night after night after night explaining the gospel to John Bunyan. in other words, this one man spent many hours leading this individual to Christ. So we will meet the Evangelist quite frequently on through the book. Let us look how this pastor or this Evangelist counsels with this individual. He says, why are your crying? and the Pilgrim answered: Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand that I am condemned to die and after that to come to judgment. And I find that I am not willing to do the first, nor able to do the second.

He said: I have been reading here in this book that I am going to die and he said, I don't want to do that. And not only that, but I read that after I die, I am going to come to judgment. "It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment." He says, I don't want to die and yet I am not able to stand before God's judgment. He says I am just miserable, I am in great distress of mind. Now it is very important that we watch how the pastor counsels with the individual at this point. Modern counseling of converts, or individuals with the gospel is that the main goal of the layman or the soulwinner is to immediately give this individual assurance of his standing with God. In other words, they go through just 3 or 4 little questions and say, you pray this prayer, and now then, everything will be all right. Now let us see if that is the way this pastor counseled with this individual. We will see that it is exactly the opposite. We will see that this pastor is wanting this individual to **experience**, now did you get that? to experience salvation, not just to be able to have a theoretical knowledge of salvation. So rather than just giving him so many facts, and saying now do you believe this? and then have him nod his head, he is going to deal with him in what may seem a very crude fashion, maybe even harsh.

Then said the Evangelist, **"Why not willing to die, since this life is attended with so many evils."**

Now, isn't that different? If you are so burdened with all of this, why don't you just die? Does this sound like a modern preacher? Does this sound like someone who is really trying to help somebody else? If you are really so burdened with all of this, why don't you just die? You remember what Job's wife said to him? "Why don't you just curse God and die?" Why did he ask a question like that? Why would he not try to relieve this burden that the individual has? There is a reason for it. This man, this Evangelist, this pastor is wanting to make sure that this individual is not just concerned about
problems dealing with this life, but that he has a vision of what lies beyond this life. That is, he wants to make sure that the man has just not got problems at home, or at the job, he has lost his finances, and he is sorry about that, but he wants to see whether this is a real work of the Holy Spirit or whether it is just a worldly sorrow that the man has. Notice how the Pilgrim answers the Evangelist. Because I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave and that I shall fall into topit, (that is hell) and Sir, if I be not fit to go to prison, I am not fit to go to judgment, and from thence to execution, and the thoughts of these things make me cry.

Now see, there is the beauty of it. What type of an answer did he give? Why didn't he want to die? He said because there is a life beyond and I am not prepared to meet God. And that is what the pastor was wanting to draw out of him. To see whether he really had this burden for his standing with God or whether he just had some worldly cares that had made him sorry or sad or burdened.

Now listen to this: Then said Evangelist, if this be thy condition, why are you standing here?

If you are of such distress and you are not fit to meet God, why are you standing here? Now notice he didn't press him for a decision. Oh, I hope we see that. The individual is not yet ready to decide for Christ. Modern day soul-winners would immediately now have anybody that expressed an interest about going to heaven, they would immediately put the pressure on them, come and make a decision. Notice he did not press him for a decision. He didn't have enough information to know what to decide. If a person is not ready to decide, you can't make them decide, you may trick them psychologically but they will not be ready to really come to Christ. So he answered: Because I know not whither to go?

I don't understand how to get to heaven. I don't understand how to flee from the wrath of God. Then he gave him a parchment roll and there was written within, "Flee from the wrath to come."

What is this parchment roll? It is not the same as the Bible, because the individual already had a book in his hand. I have here a different copy, but on the particular copy that I have, later on in the book, when he is coming down the hill of difficulty, he had lost this parchment and on this page, it explains what this scroll was. For this roll was the assurance of his life and acceptance at the desired haven. That is, this was the plan whereby he must follow in order to enter into the Celestial City or to flee from the wrath of God. We find an individual as we would come to the end of the first part of the book, whose name is Ignorance. He walks right up to the gates of heaven and knocks and expects to
be permitted to enter. Only, when they open the gate, they ask him, where is your scroll? and he has none. That is, he has no awareness of his need to enter into heaven by the way in which it is prescribed. Thereby the scroll is the plan he must follow to enable him to enter into heaven. It is his ticket to heaven. Now remember, he is not yet converted, but he has been given step by step understanding of what is going to be necessary to lead him to a true state of conversion and then on into everlasting life. Turn with me to Matthew 3:7. We have here John the Baptist preaching one day and he had baptized many people. Starting in verse 6, "And there went out unto him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region round about Jordan and were baptized of him in Jordan confessing their sins. These people that John the Baptist baptized confessed that they were sinners. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, "O, generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" You see that? The people that were baptized, confessed they were sinners, but the Scribes and Pharisees, they saw themselves as righteous people, needing no repentance. So John said, I am not going to baptize you until you give evidence of repentance, until you acknowledge that you are a sinner under the wrath of God. So who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? So this parchment scroll was written therein, "Flee from the wrath to come."

Then the man read it and looking upon Evangelist very carefully said, Well, whither must I fly? Or which way do I go? Then said the Evangelist, And this is very very important, I hope you pay particular attention to this, Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder wicket gate? And the man said, No. No, I don't see it. Now what is he asking him? Do you see yonder wicket gate? And the man says no, he is honest. He said, I can't see it. Then he says, do you see yonder shining light? And he says, I think I do. Now what does he mean by this? The wicket gate is that which is found in Matthew 7:13: "Enter ye in at the straight gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in there-at; because straight is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life and few there be that find it." What is the wicket gate? It is true conversion. This is how Bunyan would liken it, he viewed that very few of the people in the Church of England at that time were really converted. There was no gospel preached, it was a cold, dead type of religiosity. In those huge state churches, maybe you have seen some pictures of a huge state church, they had a huge door, which on Sundays they would open and the multitudes would go in. But when they would shut those doors, inside that huge big door, there was a little door that you could go in during the week time. So you wouldn't have to open those huge doors. Were any of you raised on a farm in which you had a barn door like that? Did anybody ever have one like that? Do you remember when you were haying and you opened the whole big doors and you backed the hay truck in there, and you could get everything in there, but when you wanted to go in during the week, you had a little door cut into that big door so you didn't have to swing that
big door back open. What Bunyan was saying, is that in the big entrance into the established church, there is a narrow way. And there are many people going through the established church who are not going in at the straight gate that is true conversion. They go in through church membership, they go in through baptism, they go in through all the ways that lead unto destruction but few be it that find what it means to be truly converted. So what is he asking the man? He says, do you understand what it means to be converted, and the man says, no. You see, now he is honest. Now then he asked him another question, Do you see yonder shining light? And Bunyan has in his footnotes, Psalm 119:105 - "The word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." What is he saying? Are you getting light from the Bible? If you don't understand what it is to be converted, are you getting any help when you read the Bible? And now the man says Yes, I think I am, I think I am. I don't understand what it means to be converted, I don't see the wicket gate, but I think I am getting some light, I think I am learning a little more than what I normally knew. And so, you see how this man is counseling him? He is bringing him out into step by step whereby he can experience his relationship with Christ. He is just not giving him some theoretical knowledge and then saying, now you are converted, now everything is all right. Then notice what the Evangelist says: Keep that light in your eye and go up directly thereto so shall thou see the gate, at which when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what to do.

Do you see that beloved? He has not yet pressed him to make a decision for Christ. The man doesn't understand what it means to be truly converted, and so he says, yes, I am getting a little light, so then keep your eye on that light and go to it. Keep reading, keep praying, keep asking for understanding and don't let anything distract you from that light. Don't let anything come along which would take your eye off from the understanding you are getting from that light. We are going to see in our next setting that he allows something to happen to get that light off of his eye.