Lesson One
INTRODUCTION TO PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

Beginning this evening in our series on Pilgrim’s Progress, and before we actually get into the book itself which we hope that most of you have in your possession, it would be of great benefit for all of us to first of all learn a little something about the author and the book in general. Just like the author, you will never love the Bible until you meet the author. The same way with Pilgrim’s Progress, if we don’t know something about the man John Bunyan, and the life and the period in which he lived, we will not really understand the book and appreciate what he is trying to bring out. So we would like to give you a few things tonight about the life of Bunyan and also the book Pilgrim’s Progress.

John Bunyan was born in the year 1628, in a town outside of Bedford in England. He was born of very poor parents. He was so poor that his grandfather left his children six pence each. That’s equivalent to 6 pennies. So young people, that would mean that if your Daddy past away today and left you all his inheritance, you would have 6 pennies to raise your family on. This was the environment in which Bunyan was raised in, a very poor environment. His father was a brazer, which would correspond to a sheet metal worker or a maker of pans and instruments. This trade was called a Tinker. This was Bunyan’s trade. Now the era which Bunyan was born is very important for us to understand this book. In the year 1620, the pilgrims came to America. Bunyan was born in 1628, so he was a contemporary of that era. It was an era in which the Puritans were speaking out in England against the established Church of England. The Church of England has so departed from the preaching of the Gospel that there arose ranks within the church which desired to purify the church from within. They were called Puritans. Many of them found that they could not purify the church and so they withdrew and became non-conformists and were called Separatists. These were the people that founded the United States of America. These were the pilgrims. They called themselves pilgrims when they came over on the Mayflower because they were seeking for a county whereby they could obtain religious freedom. These were the same people with similar religious beliefs that John Bunyan shared. The founding fathers of the United States of America were of the same persuasion as John Bunyan and this will help us as we go through the book to see what will enable him to live the kind of life he did and also what enabled the founding fathers of this country to suffer the hardships that they did. It is directly related to their religious beliefs about God.

Now John Bunyan was an individual with very little education. He was poor and could not afford a formal education. Yet, he had a great grasp of the English language. He was born of the same era as Shakespeare. He was also a contemporary of the same time the King James Bible was translated in the year 1611. While he was very poor without a formal education, he had a great grasp of the English language at
that particular time. In 1649 after a term in the military, John Bunyan was married. In 1655 his wife died. This left him with 4 small children. All 4 were infants. Their names were; Mary, a blind daughter whom he was very much grieved over, daughter Elizabeth, and sons John and Thomas. After his wife died, he was left with the responsibility of raising these 4 young children all under the age of 6. It was his first wife that had a large influence on him coming to know Christ as he did. His conversion is recorded in his autobiography titled *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Remember in this era, the Church of England was the dominant established religion. Anyone who dared to try to hold an assembly or preach who was not licensed by the Church of England, immediately came under the wrath of the state church. In the year 1660, Bunyan was cast into prison. This was just 5 years after his wife died. He still has 4 youngsters to care for. He goes out preaching the Gospel after his conversion and for this he is cast into prison and spends 12 years there. His first year in prison came when he was 32 years old in the prime of life. This man is strong and healthy, his wife has died, he has 4 children in which he has the responsibility to raise, and yet because he believes so strongly concerning the Gospel, he is willing to endure the wrath of the established church in order that the Gospel might go forth.

Now it was during this time in prison that while he had much grief, being separated from his children he remarried before he was put into prison, so his second wife was given the responsibility of raising the children. Bunyan helped with the welfare of the children because he carried on his trade while in jail. Several of his Christian friends rallied together with support for his wife and children so that they did not go hungry but yet of course they had to undergo much time of pain and anguish due to the separation. It was while he was in jail that he enjoyed this marvelous experience, with Jesus Christ being revealed to him in such a way that he said he “would not have traded it for anything”. He said, “I would never have been given the great insights into Christ had I not enjoyed this experience.” So rather than complaining about his portion in life, he rejoiced in the privilege that he had been able to suffer for the cause of Christ. In the absence of his dearly beloved wife and children, God replaced the loss with a greater manifestation of grace in revealing to him some of the many experiences that all of us go through in our lives. So now, that might be an encouragement to some. Maybe not too many of us have had an adverse portion in life, but you can bear this truth. To the degree that God asks you to suffer for his cause will be to the same degree that he will add some measure of spiritual grace to offset that. As a result, we are studying a book some 400 years later because a man spent 12 years of the prime of his life in separation from his family in order that God might reveal the Gospel to him in such a clear form that men, women, and children for 400 years have rejoiced in the reading of Pilgrim’s Progress. So whatever God designs in taking things away, he will replace in another aspect. May we look to that if you suffer a loss or heartache or something, God will replace that with some greater degree of blessing.
John Bunyan was called to his first pastorate while he was still in prison. A small congregation of people had lost their young pastor to death, so they called Bunyan to be their pastor. Of course he couldn’t until he was released when the persecution let up and he was finally pardoned. When finally leaving prison, he became their pastor and they met in a barn. I wonder, do we really recognize and reflect upon the privilege we have in attending worship in an air conditioned church, in contrast to many who have had to meet in barns, catacombs and places of hiding even as individuals are right now behind the iron curtains. That they might meet in a little room even right now to share the Gospel and study the Bible together. May God help us to appreciate the blessing we have. Bunyan died in 1688 and lived to be 60 years of age.

Bunyan’s doctrine, what did he believe? What did he hold to? Bunyan theologically was called what is known as a Calvinist. That is, he believed that salvation was entirely of God. He believed in all of the doctrines of grace. He did not believe that salvation was a cooperative thing in which God did his part and man does his part. No, Bunyan believed that God was the author of salvation and that he is the author and finisher of salvation. What goes along with these great doctrines are the doctrines of predestination and election. Bunyan believed in the doctrine of total depravity. Total depravity states that sinners are totally dead in trespasses and sins and therefore would not and could not even respond to the Gospel invitation apart from a divine effectual calling of God. He believed in an unconditional election of God. God did not just look out on the scene and see what was going to occur, but he set out with a purpose to save individuals and did it. Bunyan believed that God not only just made salvation possible, but he went beyond that and he made it actual in the application to individuals lives and hearts. Bunyan believed in the perseverance of the saints and all these great doctrines that are recorded in the historic Baptist confessions of faith. These are the people that came to this country of America, and founded this country because they had such a strong belief that the sovereign God had pre-determined that they would go to the United States of America and nothing would overcome that. When we see this vision of God, that his ways are not checkmated by man’s actions, but that God rules over all, then that will give you some backbone to get your little family, as those pilgrims did, put them in that Mayflower and kiss grandma goodbye and say “We’re going to America because we believe that is where God will have us. Grandma, we will probably never see you again.” Where do you think that backbone came from? It came from a religious belief in the absolute sovereignty of God. The purpose of God in individuals lives and that nothing is going to overrule this, but if they die on the way over here than that will be the will of God, if they make it to the shore, that will be the will of God, if they sink in the ocean, that will be the will of God. These are the type of people that set out to found this country that landed in Plymouth bay, some in the year 1620.
Bunyan is what is called an experimental Calvinist. He did not just delve in the intellectual aspects of religion. He believed that religion was an experimental thing. Something that you could know and experience that was real. That it flowed from a correct understanding of God. He had no time for individuals who would just sit in their studies and just piddle over theoretical things if it did not come down to a practical vital Christian experience. That’s the kind of religion we need today. The kind of religion that does not “just talk”. The kind that does not just say this or that, but is real. Where it’s you and I, where we live at. Where we can experience this and know that God is not a million miles away, but he dwells, rules, and reigns in our inner most being. May God help us to see this truth. Bunyan believed in the doctrine of repentance. He believed that repentance was not just a one time act. That is, that repentance was not something that was performed when one was initially converted and that was the last time repentance was ever heard of. Bunyan believed that repentance was a divine gift imparted to nature of man that continued throughout man’s existence until he entered into the Celestial City. It was a repentance that continued to grow and brought a remorse and sorrow over sin. It was a lifelong act that brought a sinner from nature to grace, and from grace to glory. Was that your salvation? Did God’s grace come down and bring you out of nature, dead in trespasses in sin? If it did, that same grace is going to bring you into glory. As so here was a lifelong theme, instead of just saying “I repented once”, Bunyan believed that the act of repentance was an attitude of mind, whereby when the Christian sinned, instead of God just allowing him to go on and on like an unbeliever, God would send his marvelous work of grace and repentance. That individual would be humbled before God because of his sin.

Bunyan was a Baptist, but of a very mild sort. Many people today and maybe your one of those and God bless you if are, but many people today, you can pluck out the hair on their head and you can read Baptist on it. Many people believe that only the Baptists are going to be in the bride of Christ. The rest are going to shine the shoes and clean the spitoons, while the Baptist rule and reign. This view is called the Baptist Bride view. If you are not a member of the Baptist church then you are not a member of the Bride of Christ. Now Bunyan was a Baptist, but he was a very mild Baptist. In fact, so mild that some have charged him with not even being a Baptist. Now Bunyan believed in believer’s baptism, but at the same time he allowed his wife to have his children christened. Many have risen up and said, “This means that Bunyan was not a Baptist”. But I believe that this shows a tolerant attitude that while he was in prison that he permitted his wife to do this because he did not believe that baptism has any type of cleansing or regenerating effect, but he did permit his children to be christened as infants. Then, he permitted children who were un-baptized to partake of communion in his church. That is, he would allow Presbyterians and others who had been sprinkled to partake of communion. He had a lot of problems with the Baptists of his own age, but he claimed the title of a Baptist. I think that we can say that Bunyan was a Baptist. If you mention him today, immediately all Baptist preachers rise up and say, “He’s our man, we want John, give us John”. If you
mention to them what he believed, they want nothing to do with him. If John Bunyan were here today he would not be accepted by the modern Baptists, he would be a renegade just like many are today that would preach what’s in the Baptist confessions of faith. He would be persecuted for what he believed and taught. Bunyan was a Baptist, but he was a very mild Baptist. We might say he was a Baptist with a Catholic spirit. In that sense, he is looked to by Christians of all groups. In his book you see this. He is loved by Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and so forth, because of his Christian spirit that goes beyond the denomination that he was a member of. Bunyan was a preacher and was heard gladly by the common people. John Owen, the great Theologian of that particular era and tremendous student of the Word says of John Bunyan, “I would gladly exchange all of my learning for the Tinker’s power to touch human hearts.”

Let’s look at the book itself. Pilgrim’s Progress is the greatest book in the world next to the Bible. Its not just my opinion, but many people hold to this persuasion who are critics and give book reviews. If you really want to know what Christianity really is, read Pilgrim’s Progress. If you haven’t read Pilgrim’s Progress, then you haven’t read the greatest book next to the Bible. It’s the Bible with pictures. As you open the book and begin reading it, you will see the Bible begin coming out at you in pictorial form and language. It is experimental in nature. That is, you can go to the Philadelphia confession of faith and the Westminster confession of faith, and you will find in exact words the precise wording of the doctrines of scripture. But if you want to know how that doctrine works out in experience, read Pilgrim’s Progress. Many people say they don’t like doctrine or preaching of just doctrine. Alright, when you go through this book, you will find experience. It will not surprise me that some of my hearers may not like the experiences found in Pilgrim’s Progress. The real rub is between nominal Christianity and “real” Christianity where the rubber meets the road. Because many people have experienced these things that are described in this book, it can be a condemnation to their religious experience, showing it lacking.

This book describes the life of a Christian traveling between two worlds; the City of Destruction which he is leaving, and the Celestial City which he is heading toward. Bunyan wrote this book in the form of an allegory. What is an allegory? The Bible speaks in Galations Chapter 4 in an allegory. It’s a similitude, or comparison. It is something that has a deeper or hidden meaning below the surface. I remember back when I was going to Bible college, we had 200 ministers in our English class and we reviewed Pilgrim’s Progress. Everyone was a great theologian. We knew all about the Bible. All first year students know everything there is to know. As time goes on, when you get out, you wonder if you have learned anything. All 200 of us set together and tried to figure out, “What on earth does this mean?” No one in the class knew what it meant. There is a reason for that as we go through it. The school I attended didn’t have any perception of what the doctrines of grace were all about. So they couldn’t decide where on earth Christian is converted. Is he converted at the wicket gate? Is he converted at the cross? Is he converted way on
down here? Does he lose his salvation here? We don’t know what is going on? It’s because they didn’t understand the doctrines of grace as set forth in the Bible and the Baptist confessions of faith. So there was great hassling over that. But it is an allegory. This means that some have been troubled by this when reading it. For example in the first chapter, we will find that Christian leaves his family and heads out towards the Celestial City. This causes great concern to some. Do you mean that this is a man that forsakes his family and wife and children? We must understand this is not in the physical realm, this is an allegory. It’s what is behind the scene that it is teaching. In real life, this man will go home after his job and he will eat supper with his wife and kids. It’s merely showing that his wife and children are not Christians. He has to be willing to depart from the ridicule and being made fun of by his wife and children. So he has to set out alone. It doesn’t mean that in the physical realm that he has left them. He is there sleeping with them, eating with them, playing with them, all the time. But in the spiritual realm he has left them because he has become a Christian and they are non-Christian. We must understand that the whole story is in the form of an allegory. And that it is merely conveying deeper hidden spiritual truth that is not present on the surface. This also causes a problem with many. The more that you love the Bible, the more you will love Pilgrim’s Progress. I guarantee you that. If you don’t like the Bible, you won’t like Pilgrim’s Progress. Charles Spurgeon said that you can just prick ole Bunyan anywhere and out of his veins flows Bibiline, or the Bible. That’s what you are going to find. You will be reading portions in the book and you won’t know if Bunyan’s quoting from the scripture or if he is paraphrasing in his own words. Yet at the same time, you will be able to see the difference between what a real Christian is, and what a false Christian is. Bunyan had a great sense of spiritual discernment to discern the phony from the real. This is the reason why many people don’t like Pilgrim’s Progress. It’s because they see themselves in the book. And if you will be honest, you will find yourself at least once or twice in the book somewhere. That is if you are an honest person and you really want to find yourself. Start looking as we start going through and you will see yourself in there somewhere. The book as has no appeal to people who are all wrapped up in this present world due to it’s searching message. There is a probing activity in the book of Pilgrim’s Progress which will not leave alone the person who is wrapped up in this present world. It finds him out. You may be that type of person. You may be very active in this church. You may read this book and it may find you out. What about that little sin that no one knows about except you and God? When that begins to be revealed, it will upset you, because it causes us to see ourselves as we really are. We may come to Mr. Talkative. You may find yourself written all over him. He loves to talk about religion, but he doesn’t want to do any of it. All he wants to do is talk. We may come to others in the book. Madam Bubble. As we see her and all of the great front she puts on, we may find you there. This is the reason why the unregenerate or non-Christian doesn’t like this book. A Pastor gave it to a business friend of his one time and he read through just a couple of chapters and came and gave it back and said, “You can have it, that's the most depressing thing I have ever read. I want nothing to do with it.” It upsets people, and there’s a reason for it. Because it gets down to searching the human heart.
It brings great despondency in some cases. Beloved, before the Gospel will ever become good news to you, you will first have to reach a place of desperation. That is the way God deals with sinners. The easy-believism of today says, “Just believe in Jesus, everybody that wants to goto heaven raise your hand.” Very few people ever go through a period in which they have to become desperate. That’s why the Gospel has no effect as it is preached today. You find in the Bible that individuals are brought down to a place of despondency before they are given hope. That is, we are brought to the end of ourselves before we will go out of ourselves and hold on to Another. For example, if you are drowning, what is your hope? As long as you think you can save yourself is there any chance of you being saved when you are there struggling? No. We know what happens when an individual goes out to try to save another that is drowning. In their desperate struggle, they will perish and sometimes others with them. The same is true with the Gospel. Until a person comes to the end of their struggles with themselves, and in despair realizes there is no hope and they are sinking, until they reach that point, Jesus Christ will not become precious to them in the Gospel. They will not lay hold in saving faith. This is what the modern hearer of the Gospel does not like. They do not like the idea that they must come to a place of helplessness and then cast themselves upon someone outside of themselves. That’s why the human heart hates the true Gospel. It’s because when you are talking about salvation by grace, it means it’s all of grace, from beginning to the end. If anyone is going to be saved, they are going to have to seek the mercy of God for salvation. It has little appeal to the men of the world.

So why has this book enjoyed such great success? It has been translated in over 198 languages. It is used by many missionaries in going into new places, translating Pilgrim’s Progress and using it as a missionary tool. Why has it enjoyed such tremendous success? Because of it’s truth to the form of the Bible. It reveals the heart of the true Christian. Christians of all denominations enjoy this book because of this experience. If you have truly been born again, you are going to love the presentation of Pilgrim’s Progress. But if you have not been born again, you will be miserable before it’s over and I would only hope that it would be a sign of God’s grace working in your heart. May God help us as we go through this, men and women, boys and girls. Another reason for it’s success, is the reality of the characters that are described in Pilgrim’s Progress. You will meet people that are real. People that live here in this small town in Missouri. People who go to the First Baptist Church here. You will meet them. They are here. This is not a book that contains some far-off thing that has no relevance to your life. You are going to meet yourself, and your friends, and your neighbors here. Some experiences that we go through will be shared in common. Mark Twain, who traveled around the world, lived in Hannibal Missouri, and went up and down the river of the Mississippi. In all his travels around the world, he said he never met a person anywhere in the world that he hadn’t already met in Hannibal, Missouri. What he meant by that was simply that characters are fundamental. You only have a few basic characters that you deal with in human nature. You go over to England, and you will find
the same characters you will find in Osceola, Missouri. You are going to find the same experiences that they are going through in England that we are going through here. They will be real, and they will come alive to us. Bunyan’s presentation of the Gospel is relevant because it deals with sin, death, sorrow, and judgment. These are things that are relevant today. We are dealing with the same sin problem, the same penalty of that sin which is death. We are dealing with sorrow, and judgment to come. All of these are relevant just as they were when the pilgrims founded this country here, and in which the era that Bunyan lived. This book has been blessed from God because Bunyan doesn’t miss anyone. He doesn’t miss anyone. I have read this book some 5 or 6 times and I know where I am at in this book. I know where I am at. Maybe we will come across Mr. Fearing in the book. You may find yourself there. Always fearing, never able to come to a true peace. You may find yourself there. You may find yourself as Mr. Valiant for Truth. You may find yourself as Little Faith, or Mr. Temporary. Somewhere in the book, you will find yourself. But the place where you find yourself will be written in the form of Bunyan’s own personal experience in conversion, and it will describe many of the experiences that other Christians go through. Not all of the experiences described in this book, will each one of you go through. That’s important. Not all of the characters in this book will describe you, but some of them will. Some of you, I have been around you long enough to know, that you don’t have much problem with Giant Despair, you always have a positive outlook and so forth. Some of you can go through the Valley of Humiliation with no problem at all. Some of you will have a very difficult time going through that Valley and you will see some things that other Christians won’t see. Some of you will have a very hard time going up the Hill of Difficulty. Others of you will run up that Hill and right down. You won’t have a problem with that. Yet there are some that will struggle and it seems like every day something comes up and it’s a difficulty living your Christian life. All of these are things that are set forth in describing the book Pilgrim’s Progress.

Now beginning next lesson, I would like to give you an assignment in the book, so that you can read this. I would like for you to begin the book and read through to the Slough of Despondency. Here is where Christian falls into the state of despondency and then we will try to cover all of what is in that interval in between. We do not propose to lecture on the book, but we will take the book and follow the narrative. Then we will make a few comments upon it as we go along. We will explain some of the particular hidden meanings that Bunyan will explain in his own marginal notes which are not in your copies. I think it will be good if we look together and read the first paragraph in order to get a taste of what is in store for us.

As I walk through the wilderness of this world I lighted upon a certain place where there was a den. This was a jail. This was Bunyan here in the jail. And there he is going to tell this story in the form of a dream. Not that he had a dream, but that he is going to tell the story in the form of a dream. I lighted upon a certain place where there was a den and laid me down in that place to sleep. As I slept I dreamed a dream. Notice its
written in the first person here. He is describing himself.  I dreamed a dream. Not in the real sense, but he is telling the story in the form of a dream.  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.  And I looked and saw him open the book and read therein, and as he read he wept and trembled.  And not being able longer to contain he break out with a lamentable cry saying, What shall I do?  Now just for introduction, here is the individual who is clothed with rags, that is his own righteousness as filthy rags.  Bunyan would put Isaiah 64:6 in the margin here.  Then, the individual has a book in his hand.  This is the Bible.  That is we'll never come to see ourselves as a person who really has no righteousness if we neglect the Bible.  The Bible is the source whereby we come to see ourselves as sinners in the sight of God.  Then he was shown with a great burden on his back.  This burden is the sense of the guilt of sin upon him.  This is something that is greatly lacking in the modern presentation of the Gospel.  We just assume that everyone knows that they are a sinner.  Bunyan believed that an individual had to have a sense of the guilt of sin before he could be converted.  He had to have a weight (so to speak) upon his back.  He had to be aware personally that he was under the wrath of God.  If a person doesn't realize that, he will never embrace the true Gospel of saving grace.  There is no Gospel to a person who has no real sense of sin.  Then, as he continues, he looks and opens the book and the longer he reads the more miserable he becomes.  Finally he reaches a state in which he cries out, “What shall I do?”  This is of course a reference to the Philippian jailor.  It will be a most interesting time as we see where this man finally reaches the point where he is converted and what he goes through prior to that.  So we will stop here, and merely say to you, please read and don't be concerned about going ahead.  As we go through and review the City of Destruction where the man lived, we will view his family and their reaction when he begins to talk about his conviction of sin.  We will see they laugh at him.  They will try to call it a nervous breakdown or something.  We will see the neighbors begin to mock him when he begins to say he is lost.  When he sets out of the city, Mr. Pliable and Mr. Obstinate will set out after him to try to get him to come back.  Mr. Pliable will go along and get all excited about heaven, and then all of a sudden he will go back too.  Let's examine these characters in the next lesson.  Let's close with a moment of prayer, asking God to bless the introduction, and that God will enable us to find a closer relationship with Christ as we go through these experiences of the pilgrim on his way to the Celestial City.

Shall we pray:  Our Father in Heaven, we do ask for a measure of grace to be able to have your Son revealed to us in the free pardon of sin.  May our hearts be opened in this study.  May we look unto your Word and not only see the doctrines of the scripture, but how those doctrines work out in our personal experiences.  May we become stronger Christians and may we be able to see the beauties which are in Christ.  Help us as we labor together here, and as we do so, may the ministry of the Holy Spirit speak to human hearts.  May you speak to my heart. Give me a tender heart, a humble heart, as we see the
magnitude of the work of Christ on my behalf and others behalf. May Christ become precious and real and personal to us. We ask these favors in Christ’s name and for his sake, Amen.