



# The Heavenly Footman

How to get to Heaven



JOHN BUNYAN

INTRODUCTION BY **J. I. PACKER**

CHRISTIAN  
**HERITAGE**



## CONTENTS

Introduction .....	7
An Epistle to All the Slothful and Careless People...	19
The Heavenly Footman .....	27
1. The Doctrine of the Text.....	28
2. The Word <i>Run</i> Opened.....	29
3. Several Reasons for Clearing this Doctrine .....	30
4. Nine Directions How to Run.....	34
5. Nine Motives to Urge Us On in the Way .....	56
6. Nine Uses of this Subject .....	62
7. Provocation (to Run with the Foremost).....	71
8. A Short Expostulation .....	73



## INTRODUCTION

In the pre-photography world of the seventeenth century, persons of quality by birth and persons of distinction for their achievements were regularly painted, drawn, or engraved by professional artists. Artists, willy-nilly, being the imaginative people they are, interpret their subjects differently, picturing what they think they see as they look at them, so that portraits of the same person may vary in striking ways. So it is with the two surviving likenesses of Bunyan. That by Thomas Sadler, which hangs in London's National Portrait Gallery, shows him as he was in 1685, at the age of fifty-six. He is dressed for the pulpit, has a Bible in his hand, and looks very serious, purposeful and under tension; indeed, he is almost scowling. You feel this is Bunyan the Lord's messenger, looking at you in preparation for preaching to you in an applicatory and admonitory way. But there is also a pencil study

of Bunyan from the same period by Robert White, who we are told had a flair for sympathetic portraiture. White's Bunyan, like Sadler's, looks at us, but in quite a different way: he is relaxed, genial, faintly smiling yet somewhat withdrawn, as man (you would say) with a great deal of inner life, at peace in himself, and ready to share what he sees and knows.

Both date from the days when *Pilgrim's Progress* had catapulted its author into stardom. Maybe White made Bunyan too handsome while Sadler made him too rugged; yet there is truth in both ways of seeing him. His homiletic writings really are tense and fierce, and no doubt his preaching was the same; while *Pilgrim's Progress*, and other writings in the same allegorical and parabolic vein, reveal whimsy and wit, and are sometimes downright comic. These are the two sides of John Bunyan, a faithful minister and a fascinating man.

By birth he was not a person of quality; just the reverse. He was the son of a brazier whose family had come down in the world and who now ran a metal-worker's shop in Elstow, a village of sixty-nine cottages outside the town of Bedford. He was sent to school to learn to read and write, but was soon withdrawn so that he could learn his father's trade. No doubt the plan was that he should work in the shop permanently. In 1644, however, when he was sixteen, his mother and sister died, his father remarried, and he himself was drafted for a two-and-a-half year stint in the Parliamentary army. It is not perhaps surprising that when

he got back to Elstow, a 'veteran' (as today's Americans would say) still in his teens, rather than settle down in the shop he struck out for independence; he became a tinker (that is, a metalworking itinerant), launched himself into poverty by marriage, and so continued till he was jailed in 1660. Tinkers, being itinerants and thus potential getaway artists, were thought of as rascals, like shepherds in Jesus' day and tramps in ours, and the tinkering trade was not one that would make a man rich. It was hardly an auspicious beginning to Bunyan's career.

But by the end of his life he was a celebrity. He was an established Christian writer, whose *Pilgrim's Progress* was a runaway best-seller; he was a popular preacher, who drew crowds of thousands in London and of hundreds when he preached in Bedford, where he now pastored a church, and in the villages around; he was a friend of the great John Owen, who told Charles II that he would gladly give all his learning to be able to preach with Bunyan's power; he was called 'Bishop Bunyan' behind his back; and he sat for two of the top artists of his day. He had, as we would say, arrived.

The story of the progress of this pilgrim divides neatly into three periods, thus:

(1) The years 1648–60 were Bunyan's time of discovery. First, over a five-year period of soul-shaking ups and downs, which he later chronicled for the encouraging of his own converts in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he found peace with God. His spiritual quest

began when he married a godly man's daughter whose dowry consisted of two Puritan works, Arthur Dent's *Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and Lewis Bayley's *Practice of Piety*. He started attending church; stopped swearing, dancing and acting up; read the Bible; met some poor born-again women from a new church in Bedford and came to know John Gifford, their pastor; became Christ-centred and cross-centred through reading Luther on Galatians; spent two years fearing he had committed the unpardonable sin of abandoning Christ; and finally, in 1653, was baptized by Gifford in the river Ouse as a credible convert.

Then, second, he found he had a gift for pulpit ministry. Having gone as a trainee with members of the Bedford church who preached in the villages, and having testified and exhorted in small groups, Bunyan was formally instated as a lay preacher in 1656, and from then on fulfilled his own village ministry with much acceptance. His emphasis was constantly evangelistic: 'I found my spirit leaned most after awakening and converting work.'

Third, he found he had a gift for writing popular Christian literature. He began with polemics: *Some Gospel Truths Opened* (1656) and *A Vindication of ... Some Gospel-Truths Opened* (1657) were against Quakerism. *A Few Sighs from Hell* (1658) and *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded* (1659) came next. Articulate and a fast worker, with remarkable natural powers of analysis and argument, Bunyan never

looked back from this beginning; he wrote and wrote, and by the end of his life had produced sixty treatises of different sizes, amounting in all to something like two million words.

(2) The years 1660–72 were Bunyan’s time of dishonour, when for nonconformity he was confined to Bedford jail. The local magistrates, anxious to establish their identity as servants of the newly restored monarchy and about-to-be-restored Church of England, thought it good to make an example of Bedfordshire’s most popular preacher, indicting and imprisoning him as a subversive who would not promise to preach at non-Anglican assemblies. In prison Bunyan had no heating and slept on straw, but he enjoyed fair health, kept cheerful and wrote books. Also, to support his wife and children, he made ‘many hundred grosse of long-tagged thread laces’ which were then sold. Widely acknowledged as a man of spiritual authority, he counselled visitors, preached to the inmates regularly, and was sometimes let out to preach as well. Charles II’s Declaration of Indulgence brought about his release in 1672. The church had formally appointed him pastor just before that, and pastoral ministry was his role for the rest of his life.

(3) The years 1672–88 were Bunyan’s years of distinction, both as a preacher and as an author. *Pilgrim’s Progress*, begun it seems during a further six month-spell in prison in 1675, was published in 1678, and sold like hot cakes. *The Life and Death of*

*Mr Badman* (1680), *The Holy War* (1682), and part two of *Pilgrim's Progress* (1684), confirmed Bunyan's standing as a writer not simply of devotional treatises in the well-known homiletic manner of a hundred Puritans before him, but of wonderfully vivid, racy, didactic-parabolic-allegorical stories which one way and another anchored evangelical faith in the world of common-man life. Altogether sixty books of different sorts came from Bunyan's pen during the thirty years of his writing career, and they are all worth reading still.

Something more must be said here about *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is both the best of Bunyan and a perfect pictorial index to the Puritan understanding of the Christian life. Secular study sees it as the start of the English novel, by reason of its quest-plot and its interplay of character, but Bunyan himself viewed it as a teaching tool – a didactic parable explaining the path of piety to ordinary people; a series of enlightening similitudes (Bunyan's word) about godliness and its opposite; a biblical dream tale with characters drawn from waking life to illustrate spiritual realities; a story that by God's grace might become the reader's own story as he or she went along. In the versified Apology that introduces part one, Bunyan tells us how it all started.

When at the first I took my Pen in hand  
Thus for to write, I did not understand  
That I at all should make a little Book

In such a mode; Nay, I had undertook  
To make another, which when almost done  
Before I was aware, I this begun.  
And thus it was: I writing of the Way  
and Race of Saints, in this our Gospel-Day,  
Fell suddenly into an Allegory  
About their Journey, and the way to Glory,  
In more than twenty things, which I set down;  
This done, I twenty more had in my Crown,  
And they again began to multiply,  
Like sparks that from the coals of fire do fly ...  
Thus I set Pen to Paper with delight,  
And quickly had my thoughts in black and white,  
For having now my Method by the end,  
Still as I pull'd, it came; and so I penn'd  
It down; until at last it came to be  
For length and breadth the bigness which you see ...  
This Book it chalketh out before thine eyes  
The man that seeks the everlasting Prize:  
It shows you whence he comes, whither he goes,  
What he leaves undone, also what he does;  
It also shows you how he runs and runs  
Till he unto the Gate of Glory comes ...  
This book will make a Traveller of thee  
If by its Counsel thou wilt ruled be;  
It will direct thee to the Holy Land  
If thou wilt its Directions understand ...  
Would'st read thyself, and read thou know'st not what  
And yet know whether thou art blest or not  
By reading the same lines? O then come hither  
And lay my Book, thy Head, and Heart together.

‘The man that seeks the everlasting Prize ... runs and runs,’ says Bunyan. Though the pilgrim in his story walks most of the way, he starts by running, once Evangelist has given him his first directions, and Bunyan makes a point of it: ‘So I saw in my Dream, that the Man began to run ... the Man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on crying, Life! Life! Eternal Life!’ Running, for Bunyan, is a picture of wholehearted effort to get away from something dreadful and get to something wonderful; in that sense, the pilgrim runs constantly, even when the story shows him walking and talking, as most of the time it does. This brings us to *The Heavenly Footman*. ‘Footman’ here means, not flunkey or foot-soldier, but a traveller on foot (‘Such footmen as thee and I are,’ as Christian says to Hopeful); ‘heavenly’ means heading for heaven as the goal; and the piece itself is a written-up sermon on 1 Corinthians 9:24 of which the burden is, quite simply – run!

When Bunyan wrote it is not certain, for it was not published in his lifetime: his friend Charles Doe brought it out in 1692, four years after his death. But the thoughts that *The Footman* develops are so much an echo of *Pilgrim’s Progress* that it is hard to doubt that the sermon was written very soon after Bunyan finished the allegory. George Offer, Bunyan’s mid-nineteenth century editor, draws this out:

Is there a Slough of Despond to be passed, and a hill Difficulty to be overcome? Here the footman is reminded of ‘many a dirty step, many a high hill,

a long and tedious journey through a vast howling wilderness;’but he is encouraged, ‘the land of promise is at the end of the way.’ Must the man that would win eternal glory draw his sword, put on his helmet, and fight his way into the temple – the heavenly footman must press, crowd, and thrust through all that stands between heaven and his soul. Did Ignorance, who perished from the way, say to the pilgrims, ‘You go so fast, I must stay awhile behind?’ He who runs to heaven is told that the heavy-heeled, lazy, wanton, and foolish professor will not attain the prize. The wicket-gate at the head of the way, is all-important; none can get to heaven unless they enter by Christ, the door and the way, so the footman is reminded that it matters not how fast he runs, he can never attain the prize, if he is in the wrong road. Did the pilgrims so severely suffer from entering upon Byepath-meadow (*sic*), and even after that bitter experience were they again misled into a bye path, by a black man clothed in white raiment? Our footman is warned – Beware then of bye and crooked paths that lead to death and damnation ... Did the poor pilgrims go grunting, puffing, and sighing, one tumbleth over a bush, another sticks fast in the dirt, one cries out, I am down, and another, Ho! where are you? So the footman is told that he will ‘meet with cross, pain, and wearisomeness to the flesh, with briars and quagmires, and other encumbrances,’ through all of which he must persevere. Did Formalist and Hypocrite turn off into bye-ways at the foot of the hill Difficulty, and miserably perish? Did Mistrust and Timorous run back for fear of the persecuting lions, Church and State? So the man

that runs for heaven is cautioned – ‘Some when they come at the cross can go no further, but back again to their sins they go, stumble and break their necks, or turn aside to the left or to the right, and perish. Be not ready to halt, nor run hobbling ...’ Or, as Paul puts it in the text which this sermon opens up, ‘So run, that ye may obtain.’

*The Heavenly Footman*, first to last, is a single sustained exhortation to run, to run hard, and to keep running, along the path of life. Bunyan assumes that his readers already know the objective truths of the gospel that *Pilgrim's Progress* pictures for them, and now concentrates on raising consciousness and generating commitment with regard to gaining heaven and escaping hell. Here, as in other of his homiletical writings, Bunyan's intensity almost overwhelms you. His sense of hell's horrors, and of the truth of God's threatenings to the careless and insincere that match his promises to the faithful, is tremendously strong, and he commands a flow of words that makes him more able than most to make us feel what he feels himself. It is truly 'awakening and converting work' that he is engaged in here. Having formulated the teaching of his text as *they that will have heaven must run for it*, he rings the changes of why and how to run, and deploys motivating thoughts that should set you and keep you running, and jolt you out of any complacent apathy, or laziness, or as he calls it slothfulness, that may have settled down on your spirit. Perhaps the most piercing of all his remarks about this are contained in 'An

Epistle to All the Slothful and Careless People' which he prints as a foreword, but which he undoubtedly wrote after completing the book, while the thoughts he had deployed were still boiling in his mind. Feel the force of these extracts from it:

This I dare to be bold to say, no greater shame can befall a man, than to see that he hath fooled away his soul, and sinned away eternal life. And I am sure this is the next (most direct) way to do it; namely, to be slothful; slothful, I say, in the work of salvation ...

If you would know a sluggard in the things of heaven, compare him with one that is slothful in the things of this world. As 1. He that is slothful is loth to set about the work he should follow: so is he that is slothful for heaven. 2. He that is slothful is one that is willing to make delays: so is he that is slothful for heaven. 3. He that is a sluggard, any small matter that cometh in between, he will make it a sufficient excuse to keep him off from plying his work: so it is also with him that is slothful for heaven. 4. He that is slothful doth his work by the halves; and so it is in him that is slothful for heaven ... 5. They that are slothful, do usually lose the season in which things are to be done: and thus it is also with them that are slothful for heaven, they miss the season of grace. And therefore, 6. They that are slothful have seldom or never good fruit; so also it will be with the soul-sluggard. 7. They that are slothful they are chid (rebuked) for the same: so also will Christ deal with those that are not active for him ...



THE HEAVENLY FOOTMAN

Arise man, be slothful no longer; set foot, and heart, and all into the way of God, and run, the crown is at the end of the race; there also standeth the loving forerunner, even Jesus, who hath prepared heavenly provision to make thy soul welcome, and he will give it thee with a more willing heart than ever thou canst desire it of him ...

I wish our souls may meet with comfort at the journey's end.

This is the true, heartsearching, heartwarming John Bunyan, on full throttle, as indeed he is throughout this book. Let me not keep you from him, or him from you, any longer. As he says, heaven beckons: may we ever be found running for it.

J.I. Packer



## An Epistle to all the Slothful and Careless People

Friends,

Solomon saith, that ‘The desire of the slothful killeth him’ (Prov. 21:25); and if so, what will slothfulness itself do to those that entertain it? The proverb is, ‘He that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame’ (Prov. 10:5). And this I dare be bold to say, no greater shame can befall a man than to see that he hath fooled away his soul and sinned away eternal life. And I am sure this is the next way to do it, namely, to be slothful; slothful, I say, in the work of salvation. The vineyard of the slothful man, in reference to the things of this life, is not fuller of briars, nettles and stinking weeds than he that is slothful for heaven hath his heart full of heart-choking and soul-damning sin.

Slothfulness hath these two evils: first, to neglect the time in which it should be getting of heaven; and by that means doth, in the second place, bring in untimely

repentance. I will warrant you that he who shall lose his soul in this world through slothfulness will have no cause to be glad thereat when he comes to hell.

Slothfulness is usually accompanied with carelessness, and carelessness is for the most part begotten by senselessness; and senselessness doth again put fresh strength into slothfulness, and by this means the soul is left remediless.

Slothfulness shutteth out Christ; slothfulness shameth the soul (Canticles 5:2-4; Prov. 13:4).

Slothfulness is condemned even by the feeblest of all the creatures: 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise' (Prov. 6:6). 'The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold' (Prov. 20:4), that is, he will not break up the fallow ground of his heart because there must be some pains taken by him that will do it. 'Therefore shall he beg in harvest,' that is, when the saints of God shall have their glorious heaven and happiness given to them; but the sluggard shall 'have nothing', that is, be never the better for his crying for mercy, according to Matthew 25:10-12.

If you would know a sluggard in the things of heaven, compare him with one that is slothful in the things of this world. As,

1. He that is slothful is loathe to set about the work he should follow: so is he that is slothful for heaven.

2. He that is slothful is one that is willing to make delays: so is he that is slothful for heaven.

3. He that is a sluggard, any small matter that cometh in between, he will make it sufficient excuse

to keep him off from plying his work: so is it also with him that is slothful for heaven.

4. He that is slothful doth his work by the halves: and so is it with him that is slothful for heaven. He may almost, but he shall never altogether, obtain perfection of deliverance from hell; he may almost, but he shall never, without he mend, be altogether a saint.

5. They that are slothful do usually lose the season in which things are to be done: and thus it is also with them that are slothful for heaven, they miss the season of grace. And therefore,

6. They that are slothful have seldom or never good fruit: so also it will be with the soul-sluggard.

7. They that are slothful they are chid for the same: so also will Christ deal with those that are not active for him. 'Thou wicked or slothful servant, out of thine own mouth will I judge thee; thou saidst I was thus, and thus, wherefore then gavest not thou my money to the bank?' (Luke 19:22). 'Take the unprofitable servant, and cast him into utter darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matt. 25:26-30).

*What shall I say?* Time runs; and will you be slothful? Much of your lives are past; and will you be slothful? Your souls are worth a thousand worlds; and will you be slothful? The day of death and judgment is at the door; and will you be slothful? The curse of God hangs over your heads; and will you be slothful?

Besides, the devils are earnest, laborious, and seek by all means every day, by every sin, to keep you out of heaven, and hinder you of salvation; and will you be

slothful? Also your neighbours are diligent for things that will perish; and will you be slothful for things that will endure for ever?

Would you be willing to be damned for slothfulness? Would you be willing that the angels of God should neglect to fetch your souls away to heaven when you lie a-dying, and the devils stand by ready to scramble for them? Was Christ slothful in the work of your redemption? Are his ministers slothful in tendering this unto you?

And, lastly, If all this will not move, I tell you God will not be slothful or negligent to damn you – ‘whose damnation now of a long time slumbereth not’ – nor will the devils neglect to fetch thee, nor hell neglect to shut its mouth upon thee.

Sluggard, art thou asleep still? Art thou resolved to sleep the sleep of death? Will neither tidings from heaven or hell awake thee? Wilt thou say still, ‘Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,’ and ‘a little folding of the hands to sleep?’ (Prov. 6:10). Wilt thou yet turn thyself in thy sloth, as the door is turned upon the hinges? Oh that I was one that was skilful in lamentation, and had but a yearning heart towards thee, how would I pity thee! How would I bemoan thee; Oh that I could, with Jeremiah, let my eyes run down with rivers of water for thee! Poor soul, lost soul, dying soul, what a hard heart have I that I cannot mourn for thee! If thou shouldst lose but a limb, a child, or a friend, it would not be so much, but poor man it is *thy soul*: if it was to lie in hell but for a day, nay, ten thousand years,

22

it would (in comparison) be nothing. But Oh it is for ever! Oh this cutting *ever*! What a soul-amazing word will that be, which saith, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into *everlasting* fire'!

*Objection.* But if I should set in, and run as you would have me, then I must run from all my friends; for none of them are running that way.

*Answer.* And if thou dost, thou wilt run into the bosom of Christ and of God, and then what harm will that do thee?

*Objection.* But if I run this way, then I must run from all my sins.

*Answer.* That is true indeed; yet if thou dost not, thou wilt run into hell-fire.

*Objection.* But if I run this way, then I shall be hated, and lose the love of my friends and relations, and of those that I expect benefit from, or have reliance on, and I shall be mocked of all my neighbours.

*Answer.* And if thou dost not, thou art sure to lose the love and favour of God and Christ, the benefit of heaven and glory, and be mocked of God for thy folly; 'I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;' and if thou wouldst not be hated and mocked, then take heed thou by thy folly dost not procure the displeasure and mocking of the great God; for his mocks and hatred will be terrible, because they will fall upon thee in terrible times, even when tribulation and anguish taketh hold on thee; which will be when death and judgment comes, when all the men in the earth, and all the angels in heaven, cannot help thee (Prov. 1:26-28).

*Objection.* But surely I may begin this time enough, a year of two hence, may I not?

*Answer.* (1) Hast thou any lease of thy life? Did ever God tell thee thou shalt live half a year, or two months longer? Nay, it may be thou mayest not live so long.

And therefore, (2), Wilt thou be so sottish and unwise as to venture thy soul upon a little uncertain time?

(3) Dost thou know whether the day of grace will last a week longer or no? For the day of grace is past with some before their life is ended: and if it should be so with thee, wouldst thou not say, Oh that I had begun to run before the day of grace had been past and the gates of heaven shut against me.

But (4), If thou shouldst see any of thy neighbours neglect the making sure of either house or land to themselves, if they had it proffered to them, saying, 'Time enough hereafter,' when the time is uncertain; and besides, they do not know whether ever it will be proffered to them again, or no: I say, Wouldst thou not then call them fools? And if so, then dost thou think that thou art a wise man to let thy immortal soul hang over hell by a thread of uncertain time, which may soon be cut asunder by death?

But to speak plainly, all these are the words of a slothful spirit. Arise, man, be slothful no longer; set foot and heart and all into the way of God, and run, the crown is at the end of the race; there also standeth the loving forerunner, even Jesus, who hath prepared



*An Epistle to All the Slothful and Careless People*

heavenly provision to make thy soul welcome, and he will give it thee with a more willing heart than ever thou can desire it of him. Oh therefore do not delay the time any longer, but put into practice the words of the men of Dan to their brethren, after they had seen the goodness of the land of Canaan: 'Arise,' say they, 'for we have seen the land, and behold it is very good; and are ye still.' Or do you forbear running? 'Be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land' (Judg. 18:9). Farewell.

I wish our souls may meet with comfort at the journey's end.

John Bunyan