

# Quest for heaven : salvation through an allegory



Why would a writer choose to write a Christian allegory? It is not a new concept, nor is it easy to create a presentation of the Christian allegory with new and interesting insight to captivate readers. Bunyan wrote his Christian allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, while he was in jail in Bedford, England. He was born in 1628 during a time full of religious turmoil, due to the protestant reformation. He experienced his own “intense spiritual struggle” during Oliver Cromwell's commonwealth, from 1648-1652. After the British Restoration, Bunyan was arrested for not conforming to the Act of Uniformity while preaching in the countryside, and he spent 12 years in jail. After being released, he became pastor of an independent church, but was jailed once again in 1677 for preaching without a license. In his second confinement, he was jailed in a bridge over the River Ouse, where he finished writing *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Initially, this novel was written as a way to entertain his children when they came to visit him in jail. This is very surprising not only because the story is very religiously dependent, but also because it contains many mature concepts. Bunyan may have written this novel as a way to indoctrinate his children and all the children of his church. Since he suffered in finding his own religious affiliation, his motive for writing this book was to help his children find their religion without having to struggle. Bunyan ingeniously uses characters as metaphors for virtues and sins throughout his novel; he also uses multiple metaphors within the allegory to represent important Christian doctrines and realizations.

This novel contains an abundance of characters, each with their own purpose and significance. Bunyan chooses to name his characters according to virtues and sins, and these respective characters exemplify the qualities of

their names. In almost every chapter, a new character is introduced. Many minor characters may only be present for one chapter, but each of these characters possesses a quality, whether it is righteous or immoral, that is an important detail within the Christian allegory. Virtuous characters continuously prevail against devilish ones, which solidifies Bunyan's belief that those who follow God's path will ultimately achieve the rewards of eternal life. Christian and Faithful are both men of integrity who encounter many sinful characters who test their moral strength and teach the pilgrims how to truly live a life guided by Christ. Christian is the protagonist, who is a representation of the strengths and weaknesses of most Christian people. His journey shows the difficulties and rewards of embarking on the journey to Eternal Life. Throughout his journey, he meets many characters who help him, such as Evangelist, Faithful, and the Interpreter. In addition to reverent individuals, Christian also meets sinful characters, such as Mr. Wordly Wiseman and Apollyon. Bunyan uses generalized names such as Christian and Faithful so readers can apply the knowledge and faith learned by these characters in their own lives and not confine spiritual enlightenment to the book and the characters themselves. Christian, like all pilgrims, needs to keep his faith and be strong against all the tribulations he faces along the way to the Celestial City. Bunyan presents the general difficulties all Christians must face in order to go to heaven through Christian's journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City.

Christian's journey begins while he is reading the bible and pondering how he can be saved, he comes across a man named Evangelist. He tells Evangelist he is afraid of death because he is sure the burden he carries on

his back will “ sink [him] lower than the grave” (Bunyan 28). Since Christian is confused about where to go to achieve salvation, Evangelist shows him the narrow gate in front of the shining light because that is where Christian must go to start the journey to salvation. According to the introduction written by Ken Ham, Bunyan bases the character of Evangelist on a man named John Gifford, who helped Bunyan begin on the road to salvation. Bunyan personifies the Holy Spirit as the character of Evangelist when he helps start Christian on his journey. Evangelist sets Christian on his way, and guides him every time Christian is lead off the “ narrow path”. In the bible, people of the Christian faith are said to be “ led by the [Holy] Spirit”, which is the metaphorical purpose of Evangelist (Luke 4: 1). Shortly after Christian begins his journey, he is entreated by Mr. Worldly-Wiseman and finds himself in danger in the presence of Mount Sinai. This is a mountain made of materials that initially seem attractive to Christian and pull him off the narrow path, but then the toppling tower presents an immediate danger to him. These attractive dangers make Mount Sinai a metaphor for the worldly things that distract a Christian from his true purpose and will ultimately lead to destruction. Christian is scared and alone, but Evangelist finds and enlightens him, saying “ Thou must utterly abhor his turning thee out of the way, his laboring to render the cross odious to thee, and his setting thy feet in that way that leadeth unto the administration of death” (Bunyan 53). This is Bunyan’s interpretation of the Holy Spirit that forgives Christians for their faults and continues to set them on the righteous path. Bunyan later uses Evangelist one more time in the story to foreshadow and reflect the limitless knowledge of God. Evangelist meets both Faithful and Christian while they are together, and prophesies that “...one of you must seal the testimony with

blood... and he will yet have the better of his fellow; not only because he will be arrived at the Celestial City soonest, but because he will escape many miseries that the other will meet with in the rest of his journey” (Bunyan 165). Bunyan’s reference to the “ Celestial City” foreshadows Faithful’s eventual execution and also introduces Bunyan’s belief that a Christian who remains faithful even in the face of death will be granted eternal glory. Evangelist is an important character because he serves as a representation of the Holy Spirit, which is what gives Christians the desire for heaven.

Along with many helpful and religious characters, Christian meets some who are sinful and dangerous, such as Apollyon. Apollyon in Greek literally means “ the destroyer”, and is the angel of destruction in the bible (Revelation 9: 11). Christian’s battle with Apollyon represents the battle that people of the Christian faith figuratively fight every day, against all the devilish forces which seek to destroy them and prevent them from reaching heaven. All people of the Christian faith are obliged to resist Satan, as Jesus himself was “ tempted by the devil” in the desert, but was victorious against sin (Matthew 4: 1). Since Apollyon believes he is “ the prince and god” of the City of Destruction and he is furious at Christian for leaving (Bunyan 118). Apollyon says that because of his godliness he can relieve Christian of the burden he physically carries on his back. When Christian sins and falls farther away from God the burden “ seem[s] heavier to him” (Bunyan 49). His backpack is symbolic of the burden of sin people of the Christian faith carry, which can only truly be remedied by Jesus Christ. Apollyon also uses examples of previous “ transgressors” against him that encountered “ shameful deaths” on their pilgrimages to try to persuade Christian to

abandon his journey (Bunyan 120). When Christian refuses to return back with Apollyon because of his allegiance to God, Apollyon is enraged and begins a physical battle. Christian is able to defeat Apollyon because of the infallible protection of the “Armor of God” he had previously received from the Beautiful Palace (Ephesians 6: 10-18). Bunyan uses the narrative of the battle with Apollyon to symbolize how Christians can defeat the things that seek to destroy them, as long as they are faithful and rely on the “Armor of God” to save them (Ephesians 6: 10-18).

At the end of the character Christian’s journey, Bunyan metaphorically uses the absence of a bridge over the River of Death to show that a person of Christian faith must drown so he or she can be reborn into Eternal Life by Jesus Christ. The only way to cross is to enter the raging water, which inevitably leads to drowning. As Christian enters the water, he begins to drown and fear for his life. Hopeful, another pilgrim whom he was traveling with, tells Christian that the difficult waters are only in place to try Christian one last time, and Jesus Christ is waiting on the other side of the water. As soon as Christian takes faith in Jesus and stops worrying, “[he] presently [finds] ground to stand upon, and so it followed that the rest of the river was but shallow” (Bunyan 275). Christian is forced to cross through the River of Death so he can receive his judgment, as all Christian people must die and receive judgment before they can reach heaven or hell. Christian is Bunyan’s portrayal of the difficulties Christians must face in order to reach heaven.

Bunyan uses various metaphors throughout *The Pilgrim’s Progress* that contribute to the overall allegory of the journey; these metaphors compare Christian’s journey to the Celestial City to the average person’s quest for

heaven. Certain situations occur that contain multiple important components, such as Christian's stops at the House of the Interpreter, the Hill of Difficulty, and the Vanity Fair. Bunyan uses different metaphors to represent some of the main points of the Christian Allegory.

The House of the Interpreter is one of Christian's first stops on his journey. Christian starts on his quest to salvation after reading the bible, and is continuously encouraged by Evangelist, who sends Christian to the House of the Interpreter. The interpreter's purpose is to "show [Christian] that which will be profitable to [Christian]" (Bunyan 64). The house of the interpreter contains various parts: The Picture on the Wall, Parlor of Dust, and the Room with the Fire on the wall. The first room Christian enters into contains the Picture on the Wall. This picture is of a man with "eyes lift up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, and the law of truth writ on his lips", meaning this is a man who looks for salvation, holds the bible, and speaks of God's love (Bunyan 64). The man leaves the world behind him and slights all of the immoral things of the world, because "he is sure in the world that comes next, to have glory for his reward" (Bunyan 65). The Interpreter shows this picture first, because it is an accurate depiction of all the successful pilgrims. The only pilgrims who will finish their journey are the ones that live like the man in the picture, and the rest will die as "their way goes down to death" (Bunyan 65). It is important for Christian to see this initially so he knows what is expected of him in order to reach the Celestial City. Bunyan believes this should be true for all those in search of salvation: Christians should leave the imperfections of the world behind and strive for the glory of Eternal Life. The Interpreter then leads Christian into the Parlor of Dust. This room

has never been cleaned and is, as the name implies, full of dust. A man is called in to sweep this room, but when the dust is swept it completely fills the air and “ Christian had almost therewith been choked” by all the dust that was simply being moved around (Bunyan 66). A woman is then called into the room to sprinkle water, and afterwards the dust can be swept away easily. The interpreter says “ the parlor is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the Gospel” and “ the dust is original sin” (Bunyan 66). The parlor shows how sin can accumulate within the hearts of those who do not seek God to cleanse their souls. The Interpreter says sweeping is doing what is good because of the law, sweeping with the additional water is doing what is good with the help God’s grace. “ The law doth revive, put strength into, and increase [sin] in the soul, even as it doth discover and forbid it”, meaning even though the purpose of the law is to help, it cannot do what God can do. During the time this novel was written, the British monarchy had nationalized religion and the Anglican Church, and Bunyan was writing from his jail cell for practicing another branch of Christianity. He felt that he was wronged for being punished for practicing his form of salvation. Bunyan believed that the law cannot cleanse one from sin, because only God and Baptism can cleanse sin, and he illustrates this belief in the Parlor of Dust. Another room within the House of the Interpreter is the Room with the Fire on the Wall. As Christian and the Interpreter walk into the room, they see a man pouring water onto a fire that is sprouting from the side of the wall; however, this fire is continuing to grow despite the man’s efforts. As Christian looks further into the room, he sees that the reason that the fire is continuing to burn higher and hotter is that Jesus Christ is on the other side of the wall, secretly adding oil to the fire. The

Interpreter says “ the fire is the work of grace in the heart; that he who casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the devil”, but Jesus is on the other side continuing the fire and defeating the devil (Bunyan 72). This shows Bunyan’s belief that the devil cannot extinguish the work of God within the heart, despite all of his efforts. The House of the Interpreter is important within Bunyan’s Christian Allegory because it taught Christian “ how Christ, in despite of Satan, maintains his work of grace in the heart; how the man had sinned himself quite out of hopes of God’s mercy; and also the dream of him that thought in his sleep the day of judgment was come” (Bunyan 104). This is a lesson Bunyan believes must be learned by all Christians in order to properly be able to start upon the Narrow Way.

Another one of Bunyan’s metaphors is the Hill of Difficulty. This hill represents the quest to find the tools that are necessary for salvation. Both Christian and Faithful find themselves at the Hill of Difficulty, showing that it is inevitable for all pilgrims. Faithful finds his virtue of faithfulness through encounters with characters such as Adam the First and Moses, to be discussed later. Christian meets temptation from the path itself and the arbor, but is then given the Armor of God when he reaches the Beautiful Palace. The metaphor begins at the foot of the hill, where Christian’s temptation arises from the natural landscape. When Christian first arrives at the foot of the hill he sees three paths: the narrow path, the left path, and the right path. “ The Narrow Way lay up right up the hill”, while the other two paths skirted around the steep and treacherous hill (Bunyan 91). Although the other two would be easier options, Christian picked the difficult path that he was directed to by Evangelist. Later, Christian learns the other two paths

were named Danger and Destruction. The difficulty of the Narrow Path is how Bunyan shows the difficulty of living a true Christian life. He believes other ways may initially seem easier; however, one cannot reach eternal life (allegorically the Celestial City) with any other path. Pious Christians must be able to withstand the difficulties of their pilgrimage in order to reach heaven, as shown by the narrow path forcing Christian to climb the Hill of Difficulty. Christian finds an establishment while he is atop the Hill of Difficulty: The Beautiful Palace. The Beautiful Palace is placed on the top of the Hill of Difficulty, to reward pilgrims who endured the steep climb. In this Palace, Christian learns that God will provide the necessities for his followers who are true to him, and he will help on their journey to salvation. The Lord of the house “ is a lover of poor pilgrims” and He is happy to turn “ beggars [into] princes, though they had been born beggars”, but Christian must first be questioned to see if he is worthy to take respite in the palace (Bunyan 111). The three princesses of the palace are named Piety, Prudence, and Charity; accordingly, they ask Christian questions to test his proficiency in each of these values. Piety asks Christian what made him want to be a pilgrim, and about what he has seen on his journey. Despite the various horrors and tribulations Christian has faced, he continues on his journey because of his sole love for God and his desire for salvation, which shows he is pious. Prudence then takes over the inquiry, and asks Christian if he prefers his difficult life as a pilgrim or his easier life when he was living in the City of Destruction. Although Christian realizes that his life was more peaceful in the City of Destruction, he also sees that the city will not serve him well when Judgment Day comes. This shows his prudence. Christian’s wisdom and prudence is exemplified in his desire to reach eternal life, and his decision to

pick the more difficult life so he can please God. The questioning then passes to Charity, who asks what happened to Christian's wife and children when he left the city of destruction, leaving them behind. Christian said he did what he could to convert his family, but they did not want to leave their material lives behind. Christian demonstrates Charity because he attempts to help his family at no cost to his own, and this shows that he is altruistic. Christian's responses to these various questions prove he has the important qualities which will allow him to rest in the Beautiful Palace. Bunyan uses the Palace to teach that God will help everyone reach eternal life if they show they are pious, prudent, and charitable, proving they are worthy to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Another metaphorical setting Bunyan uses is the Vanity Fair. It is called the Vanity Fair because it is in the "town where it is kept lighter than vanity, and also because all that is there sold... is vanity" (Bunyan 167). This fair has a history that begins in the time of Jesus. The heads of the fair are Beelzebub, Apollyon, and Legion, who are all legendary henchmen of the devil himself, showing vanity itself is a direct output of the devil's work. Jesus himself was forced to walk through the Vanity Fair, and was tempted by the "lusts, pleasures, and delights of all sorts" that were sold by the "murderers, thefts, and adulterers", who were the merchants of the fair (Bunyan 168). Bunyan uses the Vanity Fair to present the temptation of material things and how people of Christian faith must fight vanity. As soon as Christian and his fellow pilgrim, Faithful, enter the fair, they cause a ruckus. To begin with, they look like bedlams to the men of Vanity, but the pilgrims believed they were "fools for Christ" (1 Corinthians 4: 10). The language of Christian and Faithful is the

“ natural language of Canaan” which differs so much from the language of Vanity that many people of the fair could not even communicate with the travelers (Bunyan 169). In essence, the pilgrims speak the language of God. The biggest difference between the travelers and the men of the fair: Christian and Faithful did not want to purchase any of the vanities available to them. The men of the Fair mocked and jeered at the pilgrims, because they believed “[their] only trade is in heaven” and that “[they] only purchase the truth” (Bunyan 170). The pilgrims showed their faithfulness to God in their differences from the men of the fair. Bunyan believes that in order to survive the temptations of vanity, good Christian people must be able to present their love for God in all that they do: their presence, speech, and actions. The pilgrim’s disinterest in vanity showed how close they are God; however, their actions disenchant the rest of the men of the fair. The people of Vanity deemed the pilgrims as madmen, who then “ took them and beat them, and besmeared them with dirty, and then put them into a cage, that they might be made a spectacle to all the men of the fair” (Bunyan 171). Bunyan uses this embarrassing punishment to show although Christians may be persecuted, God will lead them through the tribulations of life if they keep their trust in Him. The pilgrims do not blame God for their pain, and forgave all who jested at them within the cage. Forgiveness is an important Christian virtue that the two exemplify, but it further angers the lords of the fair. To serve as an example to others, the men of Vanity chain the pilgrims and force them to parade around the fair. This journey through the town greatly resembles the Stations of the Cross. Bunyan parallels Christian and Faithful to Jesus Christ because people of Christian faith must strive to act as similarly to Jesus as possible, in an attempt to defy the difficulties of the

material world and draw closer to God. This is not an easy task, and ultimately leads to death for Jesus and Faithful. Faithful's execution as a martyr shows his true faithfulness to God. After Faithful died, he rose in "a chariot and a couple of horses [towards the] nearest way to the celestial gate" (Bunyan 179). His faithfulness allows him to reach the Celestial City even if it was through persecution. Christian, however, survived mortal trials of the Vanity Fair and continued on his journey to eventually reach the Celestial City as well. Bunyan uses the Vanity Fair to show as long as Christian people remain faithful to God, they can ultimately escape the snares of the material world.

Bunyan expresses the Christian allegory clearly through Christian's journey to salvation. The most important aspects of *The Pilgrim's Progress* are various metaphors and characters that represent the difficulties of the journey to heaven, and the necessary characteristics pilgrims must need to be successful in reaching eternal life. The use of generalized names for all of the characters allow this book to be applied to every-day life, so readers may see themselves as pilgrims on the journey of salvation. Bunyan wrote this novel to effectively persuade people to reform their lives and dedicate them to God, and eternal life will come in return.

## **Works Cited**

Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrim's Progress*. N. p.: Answers in Genesis, 2014. Print.

The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books: New Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford UP, 1989. Print