Last week, we traveled back in time to the little village of Elstow, England in Bedfordshire where John Bunyan was born in November of 1628. The son of a poor tinker, John left home at 16, joined the Parliamentary Army, and later married a woman who bore him four children. After a long spiritual struggle, he trusted Christ, was discipled by Rev. John Gifford, and began to preach the gospel.
Political Background

• Charles I (1600-1649) dissolved the Parliament and, from 1629, ruled without it for eleven years. In public affairs, he displayed a grave lack of trustworthiness and judgment and was beheaded in 1649.

• Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) made England into a republican Commonwealth (1649-1660) and ruled as Lord Protector from 1653 until his death from malaria on September 3, 1658.
Charles I

by Gerrit van Honthorst
Oil on canvas, 1628
National Portrait Gallery
London
Trial of Charles I
Political Background

• Charles II (1630-1685) was in exile in The Hague, Holland until his restoration on May 29, 1660.

• Under the influence of his mother, he had become convinced that established Catholicism was the only religion that could sustain the throne, but the Anglicans resisted his policies and sought to destroy any alternative forms of Christianity.
Charles II (1630-1685)

The studio of John Riley
Oil on canvas
circa 1680-1685
National Portrait Gallery
London
Political Background

• There was much talk about including the Presbyterians in the National Church, but the King never intended for it to be more than talk.

• The old Episcopal clergy were coming forward by scores demanding to be reinstated to the positions they held prior to Cromwell’s Protectorate.
Political Background

• On September 13, 1660, an Act was passed for the confirming and restoring of ministers, and providing that all “formerly ejected or sequestered ministers” still surviving should repossess their positions.

• In Bedfordshire, the county magistrates issued an order “for the publick reading of the Liturgy of the Church of England” and for restoring the Book of Common Prayer.
The Arrest

• On November 12, 1660, Bunyan traveled to Lower Samsell by Harlington, about 13 miles south of Bedford to hold a religious service in a farmhouse.

• When he arrived, he noticed that the crowd’s usual joyful greeting was not present; they knew that the Magistrate, Francis Wingate, had issued a warrant against him if he continued to preach.
The Arrest

• Bunyan replied to their suggestion that they suspend the service: “No, by no means; I will not stir, neither will I have the meeting dismissed for this. Come, be of good cheer, let us not be daunted. Our cause is good, we need not be ashamed of it; to preach God’s word is so good a work that we shall be well rewarded even if we suffer for it.”
Pacing in the Fields

• He had demonstrated that he was courageous in his preaching and had been able to encourage others by God’s mercy; if he were to run now, it would have a very negative impact around the country.

• What would the new converts think if he was not as strong in deed as he was in word?

• If he ran, others may as well.
Pacing in the Fields

• If God in His mercy had chosen him to be the first one to suffer for the gospel in the country, others who followed after him would be discouraged if he ran.
• Unbelievers would see his cowardliness and take the occasion to blaspheme the gospel.
The Arrest

• Bunyan opened with prayer and had them open their Bibles.
• The constable and Mr. Wingate’s man entered and ordered him to stop and go with them.
• Bunyan turned to go and begged the people not to be discouraged, “for it was a mercy to suffer upon so good an account.”
• They stayed in the area over night and left the next morning for Harlington House.
“It is better to be the persecuted than the persecutors.”
The examination of Bunyan took place in Mr. Wingate’s home, the Harlington House.

Wingate asked the constable what he was doing when arrested and he replied that there were a few people who came together to hear the preacher.
Wingate could have acted differently than he did; no new law had been enacted and no overt act had been committed when he issued his warrant. He had to fall back on the old statute of Elizabeth I.

Charles II had made a declaration “promising liberty and consideration for tender consciences.”
An Exchange of Words

• Wingate turned to Bunyan and asked him what he was doing there, and why he did not mind his own business.

• Bunyan modestly replied that he had merely come to instruct the people, get them to forsake their sins, and come to Christ.

• Wingate lost his temper and said he would break the neck of these meetings.
An Exchange of Words

• Bunyan simply replied, “It might be so.”

• The bond was drawn up with Wingate emphatically stating that Bunyan must be kept from preaching until his appearance before the Court.

• Bunyan said that the bond would be useless, because he would surely violate it – he would not stop preaching the Word of God.
The Mittimus

- **Mittimus**, a warrant issued by a justice of the peace, etc., committing a person to custody.
- Wingate left the room to draw up the mittimus for Bedford jail.
- Bunyan left with the constable for the jail.
“Lift Up My Heart to God”

• Bunyan tells us, “I lift up my heart to God for light and strength, to be kept, that I might not do anything that might dishonour Him or wrong my own soul, or be a grief or discouragement to any that were inclining after the Lord Jesus Christ.”
“Thus we parted. And verily, as I was going forth of the doors, I had much ado to forbear saying to them that I carried the peace of God along with me. But I held my peace, and, blessed be the Lord, went away to prison with God’s comfort in my poor soul.”
“Here I lie waiting the good will of God to do with me as He pleaseth, knowing that not one hair of my head can fall to the ground without the will of my Father who is in heaven; that let the rage and malice of men be what they may, they can do no more and go no further than God permits them; and even when they have done their worst, we know that all things work together for good for them that love God.”
Bunyan was indicted for “devilishly and perniciously abstaining from coming to church to hear divine service, and for being a common upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventicles (private, illegal meetings) to the great disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of this kingdom, contrary to the laws of our sovereign lord the King.”
January, 1660

- Bunyan was taken to the Chapel of Herne where he appeared for trial.
- When asked by the clerk of the court what he had to say to the charge, Bunyan quietly answered that he did go to the church of God, and by grace was a member with the people over whom Christ is the head.
January, 1660

• The chairman of the Sessions, Sir John Kelynge, became impatient and asked him, “But do you come to church, you know what I mean, to the parish church, to hear divine service?”

• Bunyan replied that he did not, and the judges began to discuss the merits of praying using the Book of Common Prayer.
• Kelynge said there was nothing to fear, the Prayer Book was in no danger, “having been ever since the Apostles’ time” (Note: the first book was published in 1549!)

• One of the judges asked Bunyan if Beelzebub was not his god, while others told him more than once that he was possessed with the spirit of delusion and of the devil.
“Hear your judgment. You must be had back again to prison, and there lie for three months following; at three months end, if you do not submit to go to church to hear divine service, and leave your preaching, you must be banished the realm: And if, after such a day as shall be appointed you to be gone, you shall be found in this realm, etc. or be found to come over again without special license from the King etc. you must stretch by the neck for it, I tell you plainly.”
The jailer was then ordered to remove the prisoner. As Bunyan was leaving, he gave a parting glance at his judge and said, “I am at a point with you; for if I were out of prison today, I would preach the gospel again tomorrow, by the help of God!”