

**JOHN BUNYAN'S**

**PRISON**

**MEDITATIONS**

**DIRECTED TO THE HEART OF  
SUFFERING SAINTS  
AND REIGNING SINNERS**

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**Riverside, California**  
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John Bunyan wrote “Prison Meditations” in 1665, while he was in prison. Our reading of this work, as well as the editor’s advertisement, come from a three volume collection edited by George Offor, Esq., and entitled, *The Whole Works of John Bunyan*. George Offor’s edition of Bunyan’s works was published in Glasgow in 1862.



John Bunyan was born in Elstow, England, near Bedford, on November 28, 1628. After squandering much of his life away in worldly wantonness, Bunyan was converted to the Christian faith and soon afterward, became an excellent expositor of the Holy Scriptures. He was imprisoned in November 1660 for the crime of preaching without a license from the state church. He remained incarcerated for twelve years, with only a few, and brief occasions of liberty. Though he may have begun writing his famous *The Pilgrim’s Progress* while in prison, Bunyan finished the work a few years after his release in 1672. *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was published in 1678. Bunyan also wrote many other excellent works such as *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, *Some Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*, and *A Vindication of Some Gospel Truths Opened*. A contemporary with such men as John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Richard Baxter, John Bunyan is recognized as possibly one of the greatest of the Puritan writers. Bunyan died on August 31, 1688, after taking ill from traveling through inclement weather. He was buried at Bunhill Fields.

George Offor’s “Advertisement By the Editor” is not in our audio reading of Mr. Bunyan’s meditations. It is, however, very worth the time to read. It is included below.

J. CARDWELL.

## ADVERTISEMENT BY THE EDITOR

These verses, like those called “A Caution to watch against Sin,” were first printed on a half sheet, and passed through several editions. The Editor possesses a copy published by the author, a short time before his decease; it is in an exceedingly rare little volume, including his poems of “One thing needful” and his “Ebal and Gerizzim”; with “a catalogue of all his other books.” London: printed for Nath, Ponder, at the Peacock in the Poultry, 1688. On the reverse of the title is a singular advertisement; “This author having published many books, which have gone off very well, there are certain ballad sellers about Newgate, and on London Bridge, who have put the two first letters of this author’s name, and his effigies, to their rhymes and ridiculous books, suggesting to the world as if they were his. Now know that this author publisheth his name at large to all his books, and what you shall see otherwise he disowns.”

Bunyan was imprisoned for teaching the gospel in its purity to the poor, and for refusing conformity to national creeds and ceremonies. This was as absurd as it would be, to imprison such of the inhabitants of a country who refused to swear that all mankind were of one standard in height; sending those who had consciences to prison, until they pretended that they had grown taller or shorter, and were willing to take the oath. Mental decision must be formed on evidence. God can enlighten the mind to see that he alone can guide us to spiritual worship—that his will must be personally consulted, and unreservedly obeyed. Such a man feels that his soul’s salvation depends upon obedience to God, and not to man. If human laws send him to jail for refusing to disobey God, he will write upon the prison wall as William Prynne did upon that in the Tower, “The Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not HIS prisoners.”

‘Christ’s presence hath my prison turn’d into  
A blessed heaven; what then will it do  
In heaven hereafter, when it now creates  
Heav’n in a dungeon; goals to courts translates?’  
‘He is not bound whom Christ makes free; he,  
Though shut close prisoner, chained, remains still free:

A godly man's at large in every place,  
Still cheerful, well content, in blessed case,  
Unconquered; he a sacred heaven still bears  
About within his breast.'...

These were the feelings of all Christ's prisoners. Indomitable was the heroic spirit of Bunyan. He tells his persecutors their folly and their sin, even while suffering under their lash; and after more than twelve years' incarceration, his free spirit is unsubdued. Again for sixteen years he enjoyed the sweets of liberty, and then re-published at all risks his proofs of the wickedness of persecution for conscience' sake. There was no craft, nor guile, nor hypocrisy about his character, but a fearless devotion to the will of his God; and he became one of the most honoured of his saints.

GEO. OFFOR.

## PRISON MEDITATIONS

1. Friend, I salute thee in the Lord,  
And wish thou may'st abound  
In faith, and have a good regard  
To keep on holy ground.
2. Thou dost encourage me to hold  
My head above the flood,  
Thy counsel better is than gold,  
In need thereof I stood.
3. Good counsel's good at any time,  
The wise will it receive,  
Though fools count he commits a crime  
Who doth good counsel give.
4. I take it kindly at thy hand  
Thou didst unto me write,  
My feet upon Mount Zion stand,  
In that take thou delight.

5. I am, indeed, in prison now  
In body, but my mind  
Is free to study Christ, and how  
Unto me he is kind.
6. For though men keep my outward man  
Within their locks and bars,  
Yet by the faith of Christ I can  
Mount higher than the stars.
7. Their *fetters* cannot *spirits* tame,  
Nor tie up God from me;  
My faith and hope they cannot lame,  
Above them I shall be.
8. I here am very much refreshed  
To think when I was out,  
I preached life, and peace, and rest  
To sinners round about.
9. My business then was souls to save,  
By preaching grace and faith;  
Of which the comfort now I have,  
And have it shall till death.
10. They were no fables that I taught,  
Devised by cunning men,  
But God's own Word, by which were caught  
Some sinners now and then.
11. Whose souls by it were made to see  
The evil of their sin;  
And need of Christ to make them free  
From death which they were in.
12. And now those very hearts that then  
Were foes unto the Lord,  
Embrace his Christ and truth, like men  
Conquered by his word.

13. I hear them sigh and groan, and cry  
For grace, to God above;  
They loathe their sin, and to it die,  
*'Tis holiness they love.*
14. This was the work I was about  
When hands on me they laid,  
'Twas *this* from which they pluck'd me out,  
And vilely to me said,
15. You heretic, deceiver, come,  
To prison you must go;  
You preach abroad, and keep not home,  
You are the church's foe.
16. But having peace within my soul,  
And truth on every side,  
I could with comfort them control,  
And at their charge deride.
17. Wherefore to prison they me sent,  
Where to this day I lie,  
And can with very much content  
For my profession die.
18. The prison very sweet to me  
Hath been since I came here,  
And so would also hanging be,  
If God would there appear.
19. Here dwells good conscience, also peace  
Here be my garments white;  
Here, though in bonds, I have release  
From guilt, which else would bite.
20. When they do talk of banishment,  
Of death, or such-like things;  
Then to me God sends heart's content,  
That like a fountain springs.

21. Alas! they little think what peace  
They help me to, for by  
Their rage my comforts do increase;  
Bless God therefore do I.
22. If they do give me gall to drink,  
Then God doth sweetn'ning cast  
So much thereto, that they can't think  
How bravely it doth taste.
23. For, as the devil sets before  
Me heaviness and grief,  
So God sets Christ and grace much more,  
Whereby I take relief.
24. Though they say then that we are fools  
Because we here do lie,  
I answer, gaols<sup>1</sup> are Christ his schools,  
In them we learn to die.
25. 'Tis not the baseness of this state  
Doth hide us from God's face,  
He frequently, both soon and late,  
Doth visit us with grace.
26. Here come the angels, here come saints,  
Here comes the Spirit of God,  
To comfort us in our restraints  
Under the wicked's rod.
27. God sometimes visits prisons more  
Than lordly palaces,  
He often knocketh at our door,  
When he their houses miss.
28. The truth and life of heavenly things  
Lift up our hearts on high,  
And carry us on eagles' wings,  
Beyond carnality.

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<sup>1</sup> jails



29. It take away those clogs that hold  
The hearts of other men,  
And makes us lively, strong and bold  
Thus to oppose their sin.
30. By which means God doth frustrate  
That which our foes expect;  
Namely, our turning th' Apostate,  
Like those of Judas' sect.
31. Here comes to our remembrance  
The troubles good men had  
Of old, and for our furtherance,  
Their joys when they were sad.
32. To them that here for evil lie  
The place is comfortless,  
But not to me, because that I  
Lie here for righteousness.
33. The *truth* and I were both here cast  
Together, and we do  
Lie arm in arm, and so hold fast  
Each other; this is true.
34. This gaol<sup>2</sup> to us is as a hill,  
From whence we plainly see  
Beyond this world, and take our fill  
Of things that lasting be.
35. From hence we see the emptiness  
Of all this world contains;  
And here we feel the blessedness  
That for us yet remains.
36. Here we can see how all men play  
Their parts, as on a stage,  
How good men suffer for God's way,  
And bad men at them rage.

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<sup>2</sup> jail

37. Here we can see who holds that ground  
Which they in Scripture find;  
Here we see also who turns round  
Like *weathercocks* with wind.

38. We can also from hence behold  
How *seeming friends* appear  
But *hypocrites*, as we are told  
In Scripture every where.

39. When we did walk at liberty,  
We were deceiv'd by them,  
Who we from hence do clearly see  
Are vile deceitful men.

40. These politicians that profest  
For base and worldly ends,  
Do now appear to us at best  
But *Machiavellian* friends.

41. Though men do say, we do disgrace  
Ourselves by lying here  
Among the rogues, yet Christ our face  
From all such filth will clear.

42. We know there's neither flout nor frown  
That we now for him bear,  
But will add to our heavenly crown,  
When he comes in the air.

43. When he our righteousness forth brings  
Bright shining as the day,  
And wipeth off those sland'rous things  
That scorners on us lay.

44. We sell our earthly happiness  
For heavenly house and home;  
We leave this world because 'tis less,  
And worse than that to come.

45. We change our drossy dust for gold,  
From death to life we fly:  
We let go shadows, and take hold  
Of immortality.
46. We trade for that which lasting is,  
And nothing for it give,  
But that which is already his  
By whom we breath and live.
47. That liberty we lose for him,  
Sickness might take away:  
Our goods might also for our sin  
By fire or thieves decay.
48. Again, we see what glory 'tis  
Freely to bear our cross  
For him, who for us took up his,  
When he our servant was.
49. I am most free that men should see  
A hole cut thro' mine ear;  
If others will ascertain me,  
They'll hang a jewel there.
50. Just thus it is we suffer here  
For him a little pain,  
Who, when he doth again appear,  
Will with him let us reign.
51. If all must either die for sin  
A death that's natural;  
Or else for Christ, 'tis beset with him  
Who for the *last* doth fall.
52. Who now dare say we throw away  
Our goods or liberty,  
When God's most holy Word doth say  
We gain thus much thereby?

53. Hark yet again, you carnal men,  
And hear what I shall say  
In your own dialect, and then  
I'll you no longer stay.
54. You talk sometimes of valour much,  
And count such bravely mann'd,  
That will not stick to have a touch  
With any in the land.
55. If these be worth commending then,  
That vainly show their might,  
How dare you blame those holy men  
That in God's quarrel fight?
56. Though you dare crack a coward's crown,  
Or quarrel for a pin,  
You dare not on the wicked frown,  
Nor speak against their sin.
57. For all your spirits are so stout,  
For matters that are vain;  
Yet sin besets you round about,  
You are in Satan's chain.
58. You dare not for the truth engage,  
You quake at prisonment;  
You dare not make the tree your stage  
For Christ, that King, potent.
59. Know then, true valour there doth dwell  
Where men engage for God,  
Against the devil, death, and hell,  
And bear the wicked's rod.
60. These be the men that God doth count  
Of high and noble mind;  
These be the men that do surmount  
What you in nature find.

61. First they do conquer their own hearts,  
All worldly fears, and then  
Also the devil's fiery darts,  
And persecuting men.
62. They conquer when they thus do fall,  
They kill when they do die:  
They overcome then most of all,  
And get the victory.
63. The worldling understands not this,  
'Tis clear out of his sight;  
Therefore he counts this world his bliss,  
And doth our glory slight.
64. The lubber knows not how to spring  
The nimble footman's stage;  
Neither can owls or jackdaws sing  
If they were in the cage.
65. The swine doth not the pearls regard,  
But them doth slight for grains,  
Though the wise merchant labours hard  
For them with greatest pains.
66. Consider man what I have said,  
And judge of things aright;  
When all men's cards are fully played,  
Whose will abide the light?
67. Will *those*, who have us hither cast?  
Or *they* who do us scorn?  
Or *those* who do our houses waste?  
Or *us*, who this have borne?
68. And let us count those things the best  
That best will prove at last;  
And count such men the only blest,  
That do such things hold fast.

69. And what though they us dear do cost,  
Yet let us buy them so;  
We shall not count our labour lost  
When we see others' woe.

70. And let saints be no longer blam'd  
By carnal policy;  
But let the wicked be asham'd  
Of their malignity.



