

PRISON MEDITATIONS

DIRECTED TO THE HEART OF SUFFERING SAINTS AND REIGNING SINNERS

By John Bunyan, in Prison, 1665

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 MEDIATIONS

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| <p>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.</p> <p>2. Thou dost encourage me to hold
My head above the flood,
Thy counsel better is than gold,
In need thereof I stood.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>4. I take it kindly at thy hand
Thou didst unto me write,
My feet upon Mount Zion stand,
In that take thou delight .</p> <p>5. I am, indeed, in prison now
In body, but my mind
Is free to study Christ, and how
Unto me he is kind.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>7. Their <i>fetters</i> cannot <i>spirits</i> tame,
Nor tie up God from me;
My faith and hope they cannot lame,
Above them I shall be.</p> <p>8. I here am very much refreshed
To think when I was out,
I preached life, and peace, and rest
To sinners round about.</p> <p>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.</p> | <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>12. And now those very hearts that then
Were foes unto the Lord,
Embrace his Christ and truth, like men
Conquered by his word.</p> <p>13. I hear them sigh and groan, and cry
For grace, to God above;
They loathe their sin, and to it die,
<i>'Tis holiness they love.</i></p> <p>14. This was the work I was about
When hands on me they laid,
<i>'Twas this</i> from which they pluck'd me
out,
And vilely to me said,</p> <p>15. You heretic, deceiver, come,
To prison you must go;
You preach abroad, and keep not home,
You are the church's foe.</p> <p>16. But having peace within my soul,
And truth on every side,
I could with comfort them control,
And at their charge deride.</p> <p>17. Wherefore to prison they me sent,
Where to this day I lie,
And can with very much content
For my profession die.</p> <p>18. The prison very sweet to me
Hath been since I came here,
And so would also hanging be,
If God would there appear.</p> |
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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, goals 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.
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 goal 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.
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.