

Banner Articles

A CHURCH CONFERENCE ON BUNYAN'S PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Dr Barry E. Horner is an Australian who is now pastoring in New Jersey, USA. His has been a life-long passion with Pilgrim's Progress: "When five years of age, my older sister took me to an after school meeting for children at the local Baptist church. It was there that I first encountered a never-to-be forgotten colored lantern-slide presentation." For him it has become the 'second best book in the world.'

Dr Horner possesses many editions of the book and in the last decades he has gone around churches introducing Bunyan's Pilgrim to fascinated congregations. If he can have eight sessions with the people his cup of joy is complete but he can pack a lot into six sessions. This is what he was allocated on his visit to Alfred Place Baptist Church (Independent), Aberystwyth, October 8, 9 and 10. There were over a hundred people on Sunday night for the both sessions, 45 on Monday and 55 on Tuesday with two sessions each evening.

"But how does it work?" someone asks, and that was the pastor's question anticipating these sessions. He had never seen what Barry Horner has done so brilliantly and originally. The problem with asking everyone to bring their own copies of Pilgrim's Progress is two-fold, that many do not possess a copy, and that everyone has a different edition, some of them severely abbreviated, and all of them with different numeration.

To overcome this Barry Horner has brought out an edition based on the accurate Revised Text which is published by Reformation Press 160 37th Street, Lindenhurst, NY 11757. It is a large paperback manual of 272 pages with the text and 150 beautiful engravings on the left hand page, while on the right hand page is an outline and analysis of the arguments on the opposite page. (Perhaps the method could be employed in teaching a 'Schaeffer' approach to the Bible's teaching on the contemporary scene. It does not seem possible to teach Owen or Calvin this way, but perhaps Spurgeon's John Ploughman's messages? One advantage of Barry Horner's book is that it is not a workbook with lots of blank pages to write in answers.)

Copies of the book were freely distributed, couples shared, the congregation was directed to the appropriate page and off we went on pilgrimage with Christian. Barry Horner would explain the background, would read a short extract - which we followed - the outline was referred to, and then lessons were drawn and application made to us today. There was the satisfying rustling of pages as we went on in those six sessions through those evocative unforgettable scenes, the flight from the City of Destruction, Obstinate and Pliable, the Slough of Despond, Mr Worldly-Wiseman, the Wicket-gate, the house of the Interpreter, Simple, Sloth, Presumption, Formalist, Hypocrisy, Hill Difficulty, Timorous and Mistrust, the lions, Palace Beautiful, Apollyon, the Valley of the Shadow, Faithful, Talkative, Vanity fair, By-ends, Giant Despair, Delectable Mountains, Ignorance, Little-faith, Flatterer, Atheist, Enchanted ground, Temporary, Beulah Land, River of Death, Heaven and the end of Ignorance. Don't you remember it? Don't you want to read it again?

Fresh insights came home to me. Christian missed the steps and ended in the Slough, but Mrs Christian didn't miss them. She did not go through a time of despondency when she first became a pilgrim. Why did the burden not fall off Christian's back when he first began to follow the advice of Evangelist and go through the Wicket-gate? Why is he still carrying the burden as he goes around the house of the Interpreter? Because the place of Deliverance is not the place of salvation but the place where assurance is given to him that his burden has indeed been lifted. The house of the Interpreter is the local church, as is the Palace Beautiful. Vanity Fair is the City of Destruction seen from a different perspective. Don't you want to read it for yourself?

At the end of the six session we sold 34 copies of Pilgrim's Progress. The Banner of Truth has a most attractive edition in print, plus the complete Works of Bunyan in three volumes. Bunyan writes as clearly as Thomas Watson and is the best introduction to the Puritans. Don't you want to read it?

GEOFF THOMAS