

The Wicket Gate

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[0:00] Well, there are two events that Pilgrim meets with before he gets to the gate of conversion. And they represent to us two errors that a person who has been awakened to their sin and their desperate state of being under God's wrath, that such a person can fall into before he comes to Christ.

They're represented by the slough of despond and by worldly wise men. And the slough of despond tells us that sometimes sinners who are alarmed by their state actually give up and think, I'm too bad to be saved.

And so they get stuck in that slough of despondency and depression and thinking they have out sinned God's grace. The day of grace is gone for them.

The other error is on the other end of the spectrum that they think that they're good enough to not be lost.

They're too good to be lost. Good enough to be saved. And so they just settle down in the town of morality, in the church of legality. And by attending to a few of the commands of God, or at least their low interpretations of those commands, they think that they have pleased God and that they're fit for heaven.

[1:29] Both of these errors keep Pilgrims from getting to Christ, who is the gate to eternal life. And so I threw out the challenge last week, and I want to lay it down again.

Bunyan says that many people are just very content to settle in the city of morality and to live out their days there. Indeed, Pilgrim would have, had it not been for his experience at the mountain, Mount Sinai, that as he sat under the preaching of the law of God, he didn't feel content and just sit down under such preaching and say, well, I've got that mastered.

I'm good enough for God. He rather was convicted of sin so that he was afraid he was going to be damned. The whole mountain would fall on him. Well, it's not something that's locked up in one system of religion.

It's found across the board. Men tend to rest on their own law-keeping. How do we witness, then, to those dwelling in the city of morality, those who are trusting their own morality to make them right with God?

What's needful, then? We even see it in Pilgrim. What did he need to not let him settle down in this city of morality? How should we evangelize such people?

[2:50] Jason? Jesus taught the spiritual nature of the law that it penetrates to our heart, and that's how he can fix people's sin who are content, just obeying an outward shelf of the law.

Okay. The Sermon on the Mount is an excellent example of that. When people thought, thou shalt not murder, I've never put a knife in anyone's back, so I guess I'm quite comfortable under that command.

And Jesus says, have you ever hated anyone in your heart? Now the spiritual nature of the law is being pressed, and now Pilgrim is saying, I can't even keep the sixth commandment.

And so with every commandment of God, the spiritual nature of it convicts of sin. Can you think of any other people in the Gospels that Jesus had dealings with who were resting in their own morality?

Raj? Mm-hmm. And yet the rich young ruler who came and thought that he had accomplished everything, and the Lord confronted him with the greatest of the second two commandments.

[3:58] I think as we approach people too, I mean, people might think that they're fine, and we confront them with their indifference or lack of thought of God at all when God commands us to love with all of our hearts.

Hmm. That's fine. That's the greatest commandment, and therefore the greatest thing. Hmm. So Jesus says, what are the commands? He recites them, and the young man says, well, all these have I kept from my youth up.

He thinks he's impeccable. And then Jesus puts his finger on, I think especially the last commandment, thou shalt not covet, when he says, okay, then just go sell everything, and give it to the poor, and come follow me.

And because the man had great wealth, he realized, oh, I do have a covetous heart that will not let go. And he went away sad.

So, again, it's a spiritual application of the law to the heart. Well, Evangelist comes back and finds him petrified here, that the mountain of God's commandments are going to bring God's wrath upon him.

[5:09] And it shows us that in our witnessing, we ought to come back to the ones that we've given something of the truth to. Come back to it, and see what they've done with what we gave them, and take them further in the things of the gospel and of Christ.

And so, he's in this straight, because worldly wise men promised an easier way to get rid of his burden. Now, Evangelist listens.

When he says, how'd you get here? And all the rest, and Pilgrim starts to tell him. He doesn't tell him the name of worldly wise men, but Evangelist just listens, and hearing what was said about this man, he is able to identify that it was worldly wise men that led him astray.

He says, Then Evangelist proceeded, saying, Give more earnest heed to the things that I shall tell thee of. I will now show thee who it was that deluded thee, and who it was also to whom he sent thee.

The man that met thee is one worldly wise man, and rightly is he so called, partly because he savoreth only the doctrine of this world, therefore he always goes to the town of morality to church, and partly because he loves that doctrine best, for it saveth him from the cross, and because he is of this carnal temper, therefore he seeks to pervert my ways, though right.

[6:40] Now, there are three things in this man's counsel that you must utterly abhor. Number one, his turning thee out of the way. Number two, his laboring to render the cross odious to thee.

And number three, his setting your feet in that way that leads unto thee. The administration of death. First, thou must abhor his turning thee out of the way, yea, and thine own consenting thereto, because this is to reject the counsel of God for the sake of the counsel of a worldly wise man.

The Lord says, strive to enter at the straight gate, the gate to which I sent thee. For straight is the gate that leads unto life, and few there be that find it. From this little wicked gate, and from the way thereto, hath this wicked man turned thee to the bringing of thee almost to destruction.

Hate, therefore, his turning thee out of the way, and abhor thyself for hearkening to him. Secondly, thou must abhor his laboring to render the cross odious unto thee.

For thou art to prefer it before the treasures in Egypt. Besides, the King of glory has told thee that he that will save his life shall lose it, and he that comes after him and hates not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, in his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

[8:04] I say, therefore, for a man to labor to persuade thee that thou shalt, that, that shall be thy death, without which the truth is said, thou canst not have eternal life.

This doctrine you must abhor. And third, thou must hate his setting of your feet in the way that leads to the ministration of death. And for this, thou must consider to whom he sent thee and how unbearable, unable that person was to deliver thee from thy burden.

He to whom you were sent for ease, being by name legality, is the son of the bondwoman, which now is and is in bondage with her children and is in a mystery.

This Mount Sinai, which thou has feared, will fall on thy head. Now, if she with her children are in bondage, how can you expect by them to be made free?

This legality, therefore, is not able to set thee free from thy burden. No man was ever yet rid of his burden by him. No, nor ever is likely to be. You cannot be justified by the works of the law, for by the deeds of the law, no man living can be rid of his burden.

[9:13] Therefore, Mr. Worldly Wise Man is an alien, and Mr. Legality is a cheat. And for his son's civility, notwithstanding his simpering looks, he is but a hypocrite and cannot help thee.

Believe me, there is nothing in all this noise that thou hast heard of this sottish man, but a design to beguile thee of thy salvation by turning thee from the way in which I had set thee.

After this, evangelists called aloud to the heavens for confirmation of what he had said. And with that, there came words and fire out of the mountain under which poor Christian stood that made the hair of his flesh stand up.

The words were thus pronounced, As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse. For it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Galatians 3.10 Now Christian looked for nothing but death and began to cry out lamentably, even cursing the time in which he met Mr. Worldly Wise Man, still calling himself a thousand fools for hearkening to his counsel.

[10 : 28] He also was greatly ashamed to think that this gentleman's arguments, flowing only from the flesh, should have had prevalency with him as to cause him to forsake the right way.

This done, he applied himself again to evangelists in words and sense as follows. Sir, what do you think? Is there hopes?

May I now go back and go up to the wicked gate? Shall I not be abandoned for this and sent back to thence unshamed? I'm sorry, I have hearkened to this man's counsel, but may my sin be forgiven?

Then evangelists said to him, Thy sin is very great, for by it thou hast committed two evils. Thou hast forsaken the way that is good to tread in forbidden paths.

Yet will the man at the gate receive thee, for he has good will for men. Only said he, Take heed that thou turn not aside again, lest thou perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little.

[11 : 30] And then did Christian address himself to go back, and evangelist, after he had kissed him, gave him one smile, and bid him Godspeed. So he went on with haste. Neither spake he to any man by the way, nor if any asked him, would he vouchsafe them an answer?

He went like one that was all the while treading on forbidden ground, and could by no means think himself safe, till again he was got into the way by which he left to follow Mr. Worldly Wise Man's counsel.

And then these words, When Christians unto carnal men give ear, out of their way they go, and pay for it dear. For master worldly wise men can but show a saint the way to bondage and to woe.

We may be struck by something of the sternness of evangelists dealings with this poor man shivering under the convictions of sin beneath Mount Sinai.

But he doesn't lessen his sin and discomfort. He's not out to give him hasty comfort, but he's out to prepare him for solid peace. He wants him to see and feel the error of his way, that he not fall into it again.

[12 : 47] So he sets the warnings of the word of God before him, even if they increase his fears, because he knows that they will produce true repentance, a sorrow that leads to true repentance, a watchfulness against worldly counselors in the future.

And they'll show him the futility of depending on his own good works. So in the end, it will bring about the good of a lasting peace with God. So evangelist sees that he's convicted of his sin and then holds out the promises of the gospel.

Forgiveness is promised to faith. Your sin is great, but forgiveness is promised. Your only hope is in the gospel of Christ, but there is hope for you, my friend. Now, to hate worldly wise men's counsel and to hate his own sin and following it, evangelist points out three things about his sin.

That he had turned out of the right way into the wrong way, rejecting God's counsel for that of unregenerate man. Secondly, you need to consider that this man made the cross odious to you.

Not Christ's cross here, but your own cross. For Jesus says that if anyone would follow him, he must take up his cross and follow him. And that's the thing that got Pilgrim.

[14 : 05] He was laboring under difficulties and he wanted ease without a cross. He wanted ease without difficulty. And so in steps worldly wise men to say, here's a way to get rid of your burden without having such difficulty.

He made the cross odious to you. And thirdly, he sets your feet in the way that leads to death. He sent you to legality to be set free.

But legality is a slave himself in bondage. And you were willing to go to a slave to be set free. A slave cannot help you.

And so he says the whole design of legalism is to trick you, is to cheat you, to beguile you from your salvation. What's so deceiving about legalism?

That's what he says about Mr. Legality. He's a cheat. And he's out to beguile you from your salvation. What is it about legalism that's so deceiving? That people would sit under, sit in churches and think, I'm good to go.

[15 : 20] It's appealing. Appeals to the pride and self-righteousness in man. So he easily falls into that which appeals to his flesh. Yes?

The teachers of this would be very flexible because what is appealing to one person would be fearful for another person.

So legalism can be flexible from the teachers. We see that in the Pharisees, don't we? They were always making their ways around the law. Well, if you give this money to God, then you don't need to take care of your mother and father.

And so they perverted. The fifth commandment made it easier. So they're able to twist the laws in their application and understanding. Yes, Raj?

It really feels for pride because we want to be able to say we have something to do in the current on salvation. I think what we were just studying in James, you know, when we're tempted, we're brought away by our own lusts in a place.

[16 : 24] You know, Satan uses our pride in this way to draw us to the legal way. That's right. And legalism is dressed in a religious garb. That's what makes it so deceitful, too.

It's not the out-and-out profligate life that it's presenting to us. Well, we see that that's going nowhere but to hell. But this is quoting Scripture.

And this is giving us many things from the Bible. And so it's easily, we're easily drawn in. It's usually Christ plus something, as you read in the book of Galatians.

Christ plus circumcision. Christ plus your works. And so they're talking about Christ. I've never heard any legalists say you don't need Christ, present-day Christian religion.

No. It would be, well, sure, we need Jesus, but it all really comes down to what you do. And so Jesus is mentioned and verses of Scripture are mentioned. So evangelists, to wake him up from this stupor and this deception that he was falling into, quotes Galatians 3.10, which says, okay, if you're going to go the works way, you need to know what the works way is.

[17 : 42] The way of works means that you must obey all God's commandments all the time. And if you don't, a curse is on you. And that's why the mountain is shaking. And that's why it looks like it's going to fall on your head.

Because you're under a curse. Because you haven't kept the law perfectly. Thomas Scott comments on evangelists dealing with Pilgrim in this way.

He says, in attempting to encourage those who despond, we should by no means persuade them that their sins are few or trivial. That's not the answer. If somebody's really burdened down for their sin, the answer, oh, brother, it's not that bad.

Or even that they judge too hardly of their own conduct. Nay, we should endeavor to convince them that their guilt is even far greater than they suppose. though not too great to be pardoned by the infinite mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

For this tends to take them off more speedily from every vain attempt to justify themselves. And it renders them more unreserved in relying on Christ alone for acceptance.

[18 : 51] In the midst of the most affectionate encouragements, the faithful minister must also solemnly warn young converts not to turn aside. Well, by the grace of God, Evangelist was able to leave Pilgrim in a better state than when he found him.

And he went back with haste so much so that he wouldn't even talk to anyone along the way. He went like one that was treading on forbidden ground and couldn't think himself safe until he was got back into the way that he was pointed out to by Evangelist.

So the psalmist says in 119, 59 and 60, I've considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes. I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.

So he comes then to the gate. The gate of conversion. That's what the gate is. It represents the conversion of this pilgrim to Christ.

Awakening is not conversion. conversion. To be aware that I'm a sinner and that God's wrath is on me. That is not conversion. That's meant to drive us to Christ.

[20:07] But that in itself is not enough. Many people have seen that they were sinners. Judas says, I've betrayed innocent blood. But he went to his place. He's in hell today.

So you may know you're lost and under God's wrath and yet never be saved. No, you must enter the gate to be saved. Jesus says, I am the gate. And he speaks in Matthew 7 which is what Bunyan is quoting that enter through the narrow gate.

For narrow is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life and few there be that find it. Broad is the gate and broad the way that leads to death and many there are on that way.

So, Christ himself is the gate and entering the gate is coming to Christ in faith and repentance. So, with that introduction listen to Pilgrim's experience at the gate.

So, in process of time Christian got up to the gate. Now, over the gate there was written knock and it shall be opened to you. He knocked therefore more than once or twice saying, may I now enter here?

[21:19] Will he within open to sorry me though I have been an undeserving rebel? Then shall I not fail to sing his lasting praise on high. At last, there came a grave person to the gate named Goodwill who asked who was there and whence he came and what he would have.

Christian, here is a poor burdened sinner. I come from the city of destruction but am going to Mount Zion that I may be delivered from the wrath to come. I would therefore, sir, since I am informed by this that by this gate is the way thither.

Know if you are willing to let me in. Goodwill. I am willing with all my heart. And with that he opened the gate.

So when Christian was stepping in, the other gave him a pull and then Christian said, what means that? The other told him, a little distance from this gate there is erected a strong castle of which Beelzebub is the captain.

From thence both he and them that are with him shoot arrows at those who come up to this gate. If happily they may die before they can enter in. Then said Christian, I rejoice and tremble.

[22:40] So, in a process of time, Christian gets up to the gate. It's not always a sudden thing. From the time that you realize you're lost to entering into Christ.

With this man in process of time, he had been through the slough, he had been through the council of worldly wise men, and yet now he comes to the gate.

And now he knocks, and he knocks more than once or twice. It's earnest, persevering prayer for salvation. Jesus says, strive to enter by the narrow gate.

And so he keeps knocking until the door is opened. He's sincere. He really wants Christ. He will not be put off from Jesus Christ. And he knocks until the door is opened.

And we see Christian's view of himself. Isn't it wonderful to see how he talks about himself? Sorry me, undeserving rebel me, poor burdened sinner me. And the person who answers the door is goodwill.

[23:49] That's just a personification of God's own goodness, his goodwill to receive penitent sinners. Not only is he able to save, but he says, I am willing to save.

I am willing to let you in with all my heart, he says. He will not cast out any, regardless of their wicked past.

No need for sinners to be afraid that Christ will reject them. In fact, goodwill goes on to ask, I think I need to read a little bit further here, because he goes on to ask how it is that he came by himself. So when he got in, well, let me stop here. We do have a few things to talk about, this whole jerking of him and all the rest.

But just to see the goodwill of God in saving, he's going to ask Christian, how is it that you came alone? You see, his heart is so large, he's not only willing to let Christian in, he's wondering why there aren't others coming with him.

[25:01] I would gladly let them in too. How is it that you're all by yourself here at the gate? Only one? I'm willing for more. Now, a little distance from the gate of conversion is the strong castle, the stronghold of Satan, from which arrows are shot at travelers nearing the gate.

There's a lesson here for us that Bunyan doesn't want us to miss, and that's that as people are nearing the gate of conversion, that as they get closer to embracing the gospel and trusting in Christ, there are special battles that they will find.

There are special temptations of Satan to keep anyone from entering. It's like his last chance. He's not going to let go of one of his captives, and so even as they're knocking at the gate, he's firing

away a flurry of arrows at them.

He doubles his efforts not to lose one of his own. What would some of those temptations be?

Maybe, again, temptations to doubt.

Why should I knock? I'm too great a sinner. He probably won't let me in. Wrong thoughts about God. Wrong thoughts about the gospel. Temptations to go back to the world.

[26 : 22] What would people say? Do it tomorrow. Put it off. All these arrows, you see, are fired away just as they're ready to enter. There's a real danger about lingering around mercy's door.

You need to get in at once. That's the message here. Lest you become another one of those almost persuaded who never enters in. Many linger outside the gate.

The story is told of a woman driving in the country one cold wintry night and she walked up to a farmhouse and collapsed on the steps of the front door and they found her frozen to death in the morning right on the very threshold of the door.

That's the picture that Bunyan is painting for us. You must enter. Don't linger around the gate. It's a dangerous place to linger because Satan is after you.

Spurgeon wrote a book called *Around the Wicked Gate* and he's drawn on Bunyan's metaphor.

Sinners who have heard the gospel are convicted of sin, know a whole lot, but yet they still haven't stepped in.

[27 : 33] They're in church all the time. They're hearing the gospel, but they haven't entered in.

And this whole book was written just for them. Why aren't you entering in? And he presses them over and over.

And it's a good word to us. We must pray and pray and pray for the lost and not quit praying when we see the encouraging signs in them. We must know that as we see encouraging signs, as they're looking like they're coming to trust in Christ, that that's when we must double our prayers and efforts because Satan will double his.

And so just as he was there knocking and was stepping in, goodwill gives him a jerk and pulls him in. And Chris, what's the meaning of that? Well, he wasn't being rude, he was saving him.

and there is a pull of God upon the sinner called the effectual call in which the sinner is pulled, is drawn to Jesus Christ.

Jesus said it himself, John 6, 44, no one can come unto me unless the Father who sent me draws him. It's the same word used for pulling up the nets as a fisherman would pull the nets full of fish up into the boat.

[28 : 51] So God the Father must draw the sinner or they cannot come to Christ. He drew us with cords of love. The effectual call.

And so we have this footnote, he that will enter in must first without stand knocking at the gate, nor need he doubt that is a knocker, but to enter in for God can love him and forgive his sin.

Well, then said Christian, I rejoice and tremble. So when he was got in, the man of the gate asked him who directed him thither. Well, evangelist bid me come hither and knock as I did, and he said that you, sir, would tell me what I must do.

Goodwill, an open door is set before thee and no man can shut it. Christian, now I begin to reap the benefits of my hazards. Goodwill, but how is it that you came alone?

Because none of my neighbors saw their danger as I saw mine. Did any of them know of your coming? Oh, yes, my wife and children saw me at the first and called after me to turn again.

[29 : 59] Also, some of my neighbors stood crying and calling after me to return. But I put my fingers in my ears and so came on my way. But did none of them follow you to persuade you to go back?

It's like he knows all about his struggles. Indeed, God does know. And was there working all along the way? Yes, yes, both obstinate and pliable, but when they saw that they could not prevail, obstinate went railing back, but pliable came with me a little way.

But why did he not come through? We indeed came both together until we came at the slough of despond, into which we also suddenly fell, and then was my neighbor pliable discouraged and would not venture further.

Wherefore, getting out again on that side next to his own house, he told me I should possess the brave country alone for him. So he went his way and I came mine. He after obstinate, and I to this gate.

Then said goodwill, alas, poor man, is the celestial glory of so small esteem with him that he counts it not worth running the hazard of a few difficulties to obtain it.

[31 : 09] And so, Christian must be content to go to heaven alone, few there be that find it. So he finds himself quite alone in this point in his journey.

Not all the way, but right now. And now Christian shows his true colors, his humility. When goodwill says, poor pliable, you mean to tell me that he values eternal life no more than that, that a little difficulty would send him packing?

That he wouldn't value it high enough to go through some difficulties on the way to get it? Truly, said Christian, I have said the truth about pliable, and if I should also say all the truth of myself, it will appear that there is no betterment betwixt him and myself.

It is true, he went back to his own house, but I also turned aside to go in the way of death, being persuaded thereto by the carnal arguments of one Mr. Worldly, wise man.

Oh, did he light upon you? He would have had you sought for ease at the hands of Mr. Legality? They are both of them a very cheat, but did you take his counsel? Yes, as far as I durst, I went to find out Mr.

[32 : 29] Legality until I thought that the mountain that stands by his house would have fallen on my head. Therefore, I was forced to stop. Oh, that mountain has been the death of many and will be the death of many more.

It is well you escape being by it dashed in pieces. Why, truly, I do not know what had become of me there had not evangelist happily met me again as I was musing in the midst of my dumps.

But it was God's mercy that he came to me again, for else I had never come hither. But now I am come, such a one as I am, more fit indeed for death by that mountain than thus to stand talking with my Lord.

But oh, what a favor is this to me that yet I am admitted entrance here. Goodwill, we make no objections against any, notwithstanding all that they have done before they come here.

They in no wise are cast out, and therefore, good Christian, come a little way with me and I will teach thee about the way that thou must go. Look before thee. Dost thou see this narrow way?

[33 : 32] That is the way thou must go. It was cast up by the patriarchs, prophets, Christ, and his apostles, and it is as straight as a rule can make it.

This is the way thou must go. But, said Christian, are there no turnings or windings by which a stranger may lose his way? Oh, yes, there are many ways that butt down upon this, and they are crooked and wide, but thus thou mayest distinguish the right from the wrong, the right only being straight and narrow.

And so, the poor sinner coming to Christ doesn't see himself as any better than those who haven't come to Christ. There's no difference between me and pliable, he says, for I went the way of death myself.

And we see him also not only speaking ill of himself, but see him magnifying the mercy of God in Christ. It was God's mercy that evangelist ever came to me again, or I had never come hither.

I'd never been saved had it not been for the sovereign mercy of God. And then the willingness of Christ to save sinners is emphasized. Whatever they've done before coming, they will never be cast out.

[34 : 48] He quotes John 6 37. And then he points out the way he must go. It's the narrow way. In other words, the gate is just the beginning. It's not the end.

Conversion to Christ is not the end. Between Christ, conversion to Christ and heaven, there is a path, a way to travel. There is the life to live.

And that is as narrow and set with difficulties as the gate is narrow. And that's the way you must go. He's giving instruction to this young convert.

And the footnote says, Christian is afraid of losing his way. He says, I'm afraid I've already turned aside before I even got to the gate. What now on this narrow road?

Are there no other roads by which I might be turned away? And he says, oh yes, there are lots of them. But none of them are like this road. This road is straight and narrow.

[35 : 47] All those are wide and winding. And so he's calling him to the straight and narrow, the way of holiness. And it's important that young Christians know that the Christian life is not paved with ease so that when they find themselves in difficulties on the narrow road, they won't begin to think, is this the right?

Did I somehow go wrong? That this is going so difficult with me? No. You must know right up front, that's the right way. It's narrow, it's straight, it's beset with trials.

Don't think it's the wrong road, it's the way. Walk on it. And then we have a quite interesting comment.

I saw in my dream that Christian asked him further if he could not help him off with his burden that was upon his back, for as yet he had not got rid thereof, nor could he by any means get it off without help.

He told him, as to thy burden, be content to bear it until thou comest to the place of deliverance, for there it will fall from thy back of itself.

[37 : 00] So we've got Christian through the gate of conversion, having come to Christ and justified before God, accepted for Christ's righteousness, and yet he's got the burden on his back yet.

This has caused some to say, maybe the gate isn't conversion after all, in the allegory. Remember I told you there's a spiritual meaning to all this story, and commentators argue about what that meaning is.

Some say, well, he's not saved yet, because he's still got the burden on his back. And he's telling him, just be content to bear it until down the road further, where it will fall off by itself.

And that event is when he comes to the cross, and he looks and he looks, and the burden falls off and rolls into the tomb. And some would say, well, that's where he was saved. I'm going to leave you with that, because our time's up.

Where was Christian saved? Was he saved at the gate? Or is he saved later on down the road at the cross? Think over that, and we'll take up our study of Pilgrim's Progress next time with that question.

[38 : 11] But may we love the Savior who's full of goodwill. That's the picture Bunyan's leaving us with today. the goodwill of our God, willing to save whoever you are, whatever you've done.

Let's glory in that sovereign goodness today. We're dismissed.