

The Wicket Gate

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

When a person becomes aware of his or her sinfulness and need for a savior, he or she may experience a sudden and dramatic spiritual rebirth. Many Christians today and throughout church history have attested to their lives being instantly transformed through an encounter with Jesus Christ. For others, conversion can be a lengthy process, through which Christ gradually draws a sinner to Himself. Such was John Bunyan's experience, and such is the experience of Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*. In this message, we will witness firsthand the dangers and challenges that Christian faces as he treads the path from conviction of sin toward the Savior's arms.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 7:13-14; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To illustrate the importance of conviction of sin in the process of repentance and faith.
2. To describe many of the spiritual obstacles that people encounter as they come to understand their need for salvation.
3. To warn against the danger of seeking security in one's own good works.
4. To affirm that salvation and peace with God are only possible through the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

QUOTATION

I thought no man in England could please God better than I. But, poor wretch as I was, I was all this while ignorant of Jesus Christ, and going about to establish my own righteousness; and had perished therein, had not God, in mercy, showed me more of my state of nature.

—John Bunyan

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. The Slough of Despond

- A. As Christian made his way toward the wicket gate, two of his neighbors from the City of Destruction overtook him.
 - i. Obstinate demonstrates the immovable stubbornness of those who are opposed to the gospel.
 - ii. Pliable reveals a fickle readiness to believe anything for a time.
- B. When Obstinate failed to convince Christian to abandon his journey, he returned to the City of Destruction.
- C. For a while, Pliable journeyed alongside Christian.
 - i. Pliable was eager to attain a heavenly inheritance, but he was not burdened by a sense of his own sin.
 - ii. Pliable was like the seed in Matthew 13:20-21 that responded well initially but never took root.
- D. As they journeyed, Christian and Pliable arrived at the Slough of Despond and began to sink in quicksand.
 - i. Because he did not have a burden, Pliable removed himself from the quicksand and returned to the City of Destruction.
 - ii. Weighed down by his burden, Christian sank into the quicksand until Help pulled him out.
- E. Help explained that those who bear a burden like Christian's often fall into the Slough of Despond.
 - i. Though many had attempted to fill in the slough, it remained just as perilous as ever.
 - ii. Nevertheless, the king had constructed stairs in the slough so that pilgrims could find a firm foothold and climb out.

II. The Allure of Morality

- A. As Christian continued toward the wicket gate, he met Mr. Worldly Wiseman.
 - i. Seeing Christian's burden, Worldly Wiseman suggested that he visit the village of Morality.
 - ii. In Morality there lived a man named Mr. Legality, who was skilled at removing burdens such as the one Christian carried.
 - iii. By following the path of moral obedience, Christian could be free from his burden without having to find the wicket gate.
- B. As Christian began to climb the steep hill to Morality, his burden seemed to grow greater and heavier.
- C. Seeing Christian wander from the true path, Evangelist rebuked him and warned him of the danger that awaited him on the path to Morality.

III. Entry through the Gate

- A. Returning to his true path, Christian made his way to the wicket gate.
- B. As he approached the gate, he came within range of arrows being fired from Beelzebub's castle.

- C. The gatekeeper, Goodwill, pulled Christian through the gate to safety.
- Christian had at last been graciously brought through the wicket gate.
 - Though he was on the right path, his burden had not yet been removed.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- When he failed to deter Christian from his quest, Obstinate _____.
 - Asked Mr. Worldly Wiseman to distract Christian
 - Sought consolation in the village of Morality
 - Convinced Pliable to desert Christian
 - Returned to the City of Destruction
- Christian escaped from the Slough of Despond by _____.
 - Fixing his gaze on the light beyond the wicket gate
 - Help pulling him out of the quicksand
 - Finding the steps that the king had placed in the slough
 - Asking for Mr. Worldly Wiseman's assistance
- Mr. Worldly Wiseman told Christian that there was a faster and easier way to remove his burden than by following the path to the wicket gate.
 - True
 - False
- What happened when Christian was climbing the steep hill to Morality?
 - His burden fell off
 - Evangelist saw his distress and helped him up the hill
 - Christian's burden seemed heavier than it had been before
 - Mr. Legality came down the hill to meet Christian
- Christian avoided Beelzebub's arrows by quickly pulling himself through the wicket gate.
 - True
 - False

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How are Obstinate and Pliable different from each other? In what ways are they alike?
- Where did the Slough of Despond come from, and why could it not be fixed? In what ways do Christians experience the Slough of Despond today? What has God given His people to help them through the slough?

3. What is Christian's burden? What are ways that people, both in Bunyan's story and in actual human experience, try to escape from their burdens? What is needed for a person's burden to be truly removed?
4. As a Calvinist, John Bunyan believed that God is the one who sovereignly and graciously brings sinners to faith in Jesus Christ. How have you noticed God's sovereignty at work in Christian's life? What are some ways that God has displayed His sovereignty in your story of faith?