

Lesson Six THE WICKET GATE

We are again gathered to continue our study through the book, *Pilgrim's Progress*. We are making progress. We have encountered several characters thus far. We have had several different places develop for us. Now we find the Pilgrim (whose name is now Christian, although he is not yet converted), who has been spared from the influence of Worldly Wiseman, and Evangelist has directed him back to the path which leads to true conversion. In this lesson, we are going to come to one of the most critical parts of the entire book, which will also be one of the critical parts of your life. That is, what we will be discussing certainly involves a crisis, because it involves the nature of true conversion. For the first time in our journey thus far, we are finally going to find the Pilgrim receiving the understanding of what it means to be truly converted, born again, or having received Christ into his life. This will actually be the beginning of his pilgrimage. Up to now, he has been a seeker for the Lord. Now he shall become a possessor of Christ himself.

I will begin reading to you in the book right after Christian's encounter with Evangelist.

Then did Christian address himself to go back; and Evangelist, after he had kissed him, gave him one smile, and bid him God speed. So he went on with haste, neither spake he to any man by the way; nor if any man asked him, would he vouchsafe (or give) 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 which he had left to follow Mr. Worldly Wiseman's counsel.

So in process of time Christian got up to the gate. Now over the gate there was written, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." He knocked, therefore, more than once or twice, saying, "May I now enter here? 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 Good-will, who asked, "Who was there? and whence he came? and what he would have?"

Christian replied, "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 that by this gate is the way thither, know if you are willing

to let me in."

"I am willing with all my heart," said he; and with that he opened the gate. So when Christian was stepping in, the other gave him a pull.

Then said Christian, "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 they that are with him, shoot arrows at those that come up to this gate, if haply they may die before they can enter in."

Then said Christian, "I rejoice and tremble." So when he was got in, the man at the gate asked him, who directed him thither?

Christian replied, "Evangelist bid me come hither and knock, as I did; and he said, that you, sir, would tell me what I must do."

Good-will says, "An open door is set before thee, and no man can shut it."

Christian says, "Now I begin to reap the benefit of my hazards."

Now after he is directed back into the way, we come up to what is known as the Wicket-gate, which stands for true conversion. We are going to read you a passage out of the Bible on which this was based. The words of our Lord in Matthew 7:13-14 are: ***"Enter ye in at the straight gate,"*** (that is the Wicket-gate, compressed, narrow) ***for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat, because straight is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life and few be that find it."*** Here is the basis for Bunyan's setting forth the Wicket-gate, or the small gate. Keep in mind that the gate stands for true conversion. What is the nature of true conversion? That is a very pertinent question for us in this particular day when there are many viewpoints on what it means to be saved, or to be converted. Some have placed all sorts of legalities upon it, others would require nothing but an intellectual nod of the head in order to be converted. But true conversion involves or includes the embracing of Jesus Christ in all of his offices, which are three-fold. That is, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and He is a Prophet, a Priest, and a King. These are the offices which He has established on the basis of grace which was purchased on the cross of Calvary. When a person is truly converted this occurs when he reaches the climax in his life whereby he sees

himself as helpless and undone to be received by God apart from the person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, true conversion means embracing Christ in all of His offices, not just part of them. Here is where many experience the fiery, fatal error of Satan wounding them right at the point of decision or true conversion. That is, many would embrace Christ, but they would not embrace Him in all of his offices. They would love to have Christ as a Savior to pardon them for their sins, but they hesitate in having Him as Lord to rule over their lives and separate them from their sins. That is what the Scriptures mean when it makes conversion something that is narrow and difficult. You see, ladies, gentlemen and young people, we live in an age in which conversion has become viewed in the evangelical realm as a very "easy thing." However, the Bible does not give that picture of true Biblical conversion. Conversion is simple, but it is not easy. In fact, the Bible describes it as such a narrow thing, that very few people find it. It is narrow because it involves the entering through a door into a new life, and in order to go through that door, you must go in stripped of all of your baggage. That is, you can't carry anything through that gate and hope to be truly converted. This is one of the essences of what the Scripture is talking about when it makes conversion a rare thing. Notice, it says **"very few that find it."** It is interesting to consider to whom it was that Christ spoke these words, and maybe we will understand just how rare true conversion is. Christ was speaking these words primarily to the Jewish people. The Jewish people had many privileges because all of the other nations did not have the revelation of God given to them. God had confined His revelation to one nation, to whom were given the oracles of God. Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount to possibly five thousand people of that Jewish nation scattered out there on the hillside. So, instead of all the world being included, instead of the whole nation being included, instead of just the five thousand being included, Jesus said, "out of this group that is listening to Me, very few of you are going to find what it means to really possess eternal life." In another encounter with the Lord, the disciples asked the question, **"Are there few that be saved?"** (Luke 13:23). The Scripture sets forth that it is an extremely rare thing to find true conversion. That is a sobering thought, because that tells me that out of the membership of the First Baptist Church, of about 450 people on the role of this congregation, there are only going to be a few that are will enter in. Out of the individuals who are listening to the sound of the preaching of the gospel, it is going to

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come down to even a narrower few in that matter. So you see, ladies, gentlemen and young people, it is imperative that we make sure we have pressed into the straight gate, that we have Christ, and that we have not been led astray by one of the false prophets who stand right by the gate to make it wider and to broaden it up so that more people enter in.

Christian gets up to the gate, which stands for true conversion by embracing Christ in all of his offices - Prophet, Priest and King.

There are two things I want us to notice about the gate and the enemies that are right at the gate. Here is where we find Christian, and it is said, "***So in the process of time Christian got up to the gate.***"

That is a beautiful phrase. It means that through his perseverance of continually reading the Scriptures, and as time went by, God gave him understanding of what it meant to be converted. If you don't know what it means to be truly converted, just keep on reading the Bible, keep on asking for light, and in the process of time, you will understand what it means to be truly converted. So Christian gets up to the gate, which stands for true conversion by embracing of Christ in all of his offices - a Prophet to teach us that we are sinners in need of a Savior, a Priest to intercede on our behalf before the Father, and a King to rule over our lives and subdue our wills unto His will. This is why it is so important, and why it is so easy to broaden up this gate to make it wide, because today many would have Christ on what we call, "the installment plan." They would take Him first as Savior and get through the gate. Then modern evangelical teachers would say that they need a second work of grace, or "now they need Christ as Lord." But take note again as the Christian knocks on the gate. In order to enter into life, it involves receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, but that means far more than just a little nod of the head. It means a willingness, because you know that you are perishing, and that you have a hunger in the heart to have Christ in ALL of His offices or capacities. Would you have Him as Savior tonight? Would you also have Him as Lord? Would you also have Him as your Priest. When you have reached that point, it means you no longer are trusting in yourself, but you are wholly laying hold on all of the offices of Christ as He is presented in the gospel. Conversion is set forth here as a narrow gate, and notice that our Lord says, one must "***strive to enter in at the straight gate.***" (Luke 13:24).

I heard an evangelist say one time as he was speaking to his congregation, "Being saved is one of the easiest things in the world to do." What he meant by that is all the person had to do was to move out to the isle and walk to the front of the building. If that is

what conversion is, then it is certainly an easy thing. But I want us to see again that conversion is not an easy thing, or else there would be more people finding it and entering into the gate. Conversion is a very rare thing, because it involves going through a narrow gate. As Christian gets up to the entrance of this gate, he sees a sign that is written over the gate. **"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you."** (Matthew 7:7). That is another passage of Scripture. That is, the individual understands what it means to be converted, but he, himself, has not yet been converted. He understands the nature of conversion, that one must possess Jesus Christ in all of His offices. But he, himself, has not yet prayed or asked the Lord for forgiveness. Notice that the sign says **"Knock and it shall be opened unto you."** **He knocked, therefore, more than once or twice.** How different that is from our modern counseling sessions. In other words, he didn't just go up there expecting that God had an obligation to forgive him or that God was down on His knees begging the sinner to let Him save him. No, this man wanted to know if there was anyone at that gate who would be willing to receive him as a sinner, so he sought the Lord. In other words, he asked God for forgiveness. Look at what Christian says in the poem:

***May I now enter here? 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.***

He prayed that more than once, (the Bible says, more than twice). In other words, he now wanted to personally know - "Is there forgiveness for me? Through His death, has Christ done something for me, and can I, a sinner such as I am, have any interest at all in what Jesus Christ did for sinners?" Then he kept on knocking. The Scripture says, **"Ask and it shall be given you, Knock, and it shall be opened unto you."** However, it didn't happen immediately. Do you mothers remember when your children were little, and they asked, "Can I have a cookie?" At first you didn't pay any attention to them, but then they grab your skirt-tail, and yell, "Mom, I want a cookie!" When you don't do anything, and they just keep on and on, "Mom, I want a cookie, I want a cookie," after four or five times, you see that they really mean business. You then turn around, and if it is permissible, you grant their wish. What are they proving? They are proving that they are earnestly seeking something. This same thing is true in salvation. Many people just say, "Well, Lord save me" which proves they are not interested or very sincere about it. But beloved, if you want eternal life, you have to get down to business with God. You have to be sincere and to mean business when you pray and ask God to make you a partaker of the grace that is in Jesus Christ.

"At last there came a very grave person to the gate, named Good-will." Here is a new character. We will spend our next session learning about Good-will who is Jesus Christ in the free offer of the gospel. That is, there is good-will for sinners. This very serious man comes to the gate, and He wants to know something, so he asks three questions. He says, **"Who is there? And whence came he? And what would he have?"** Let's suppose that we were being examined tonight by Jesus Christ at the judgment. Because you see, when a person is converted, he is coming under the judgment of God at that time, rather than at a

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later date when he stands before God and gives an account of himself to God for what he has done with the gospel. Here is a sinner applying before the judgment bar of God for forgiveness right now. What does Good-will want to know before he will let

Pilgrim in the gate. First he asked, **"Who is there?"** That is, when you knock on the door desiring entrance, Jesus Christ wants to know who is there. It is very important to take note of Christian's answer. He says, **"Here is a poor burdened sinner."** Now let's pretend you are like one of the Pharisees in the Bible, and suppose you had knocked at the gate. When the question was asked, "Who is there?" You would have said, "Oh Lord, it is I. Don't you know me? I am not like this sinner. Why I fast and I tithe and do all of these things. I am one of the workers and teach a class in the church. I am sure you know who I am, and you are just pretty lucky to have me here to come into your kingdom." Now that type of reply will never enter into life. Those who enter into life are only those who readily acknowledge that they are poor burdened lost sinners. Because you see, salvation is posted "for sinners only." No self-righteous people may trespass into God's heaven. Salvation is for sinners only. So Christian answers rightly. **"I'm a poor burdened sinner."** But Good-will wants to know something else. He says, **"Where have you come from?"** Christian then says, **"I come from the City of Destruction."** That is, "I'm under the wrath of God. I'm not only a burdened sinner, but I'm a condemned sinner, and I have no hope in and of myself." Then the third question would be, **"What do you want here at this gate?"** Christian says, **"Oh sir, I desire to be delivered from the wrath to come."** Now here is a person that knows what it means to be converted. Here is a person who has been brought by the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit to understand what he is doing when he is asking Christ for forgiveness of sin. There are many today who don't have the foggiest idea of who they are, that they are under the wrath of God, and that they desire to be delivered from the wrath to

come. But yet they make professions of faith, are baptized on that profession, and still don't have the foggiest idea as to what they have done. Christian is an individual who can tell you all about himself, where he came from, where he lived, and where he would desire to go.

Later in this lesson we will examine how the modern evangelical approach so deceives individuals at this particular time when there are enemies surrounding the gate. But before we get into that, let's get the Christian actually through the gate. He says, "**Sir, I am informed that by this gate is the way thither, and want to know if you are willing to let me in.**" Then here comes that precious answer by Good-will, the good-will of Jesus Christ toward sinners, "**I am willing with all my heart.**" Now listen, young person or adults, if you have genuinely sought the Lord, and you want the Lord above all things, and you want Him in all of his offices, you are going to find that when you ask Christ to be your Lord and Savior, that there is genuine and warm good-will extended to you, because God has good-will toward sinners through Christ Jesus. He is willing, so the gate is opened.

This is an exciting book. It is not dull, because just as Christian is ready to step through the gate, some arrows start coming. Good-will gives him a tug and pulls him on in through the gate. Christian said, "**What means that?**" In other words, "what did you do that for?" Good-will says,

"A little distance from this gate, there is erected a strong castle, of which Beelzebub (or the Devil as the prince of all demons), is the captain: from thence both he, and they that are with him, shoot arrows at those that come up to this gate, if haply they may die before they can enter in."

In other words, Good-will is explaining to Christian that the devil and all of his other demons are there shooting arrows at those who come up to this gate if perhaps they might destroy someone before they enter in. He is simply saying that true conversion is a crisis, and all the forces of hell will be let loose upon that sinner who is just about to enter into eternal life. When Satan as the "roaring lion" sees that a poor burdened sinner is almost ready to go into eternal life, he will begin to roar, and all of his forces are assailed upon the Pilgrim.

How many of you people remember back when you were asking God to be your portion, that you felt a real strange, confused state of mind that you had to struggle with before you reached the point that you knew you were accepted by God? Was it all very

simple, or was it somewhat a struggle, wanting to believe, but yet you felt a pull this way and that way? I know that in my own experience as I first began inquiring about the things of the Lord, Satan sent his fiery darts of doubt. How many are destroyed right at this crisis point? There are enemies right close to true conversion. Satan himself is shooting his fiery darts. How does he shoot them? He doesn't have a physical bow and arrow, but he shoots them through our minds. That is, the sinner will begin to think, "Oh, my, what will my friends think about me if they find out I am a Christian? What will mom and dad say? Oh, what will happen to me with my job?" All sorts of confusing things can be shot through the individual's mind right at this point in the journey. This is a crisis point, and yet it is through God's Sovereign Grace that He reaches down right when Satan attempts to destroy that seeker, and He brings him through the gate. You see, the drawing work of the Holy Spirit is what brought us safely through the gate of conversion.

Now today, in our modern evangelical scene, we have some preachers who are false prophets, and are being used by Satan to destroy many would-be seekers at this point. Many of these false prophets consider themselves as sort of a recruiting Sargent for God. Did you ever come in contact with a recruiter? They say, "Join the Navy and see the world!" "Uncle Sam wants you." They stand on the street corner where there are guys watching the girls go by, telling dirty jokes, and laughing it up. The Sargent will go by that street corner and start talking to these guys. He will say, "Join the Army and see the world. Get a free trip to Hawaii and enjoy all of these privileges." He will make it seem like a great thing so that they lose interest in the girls and say, "Where can I sign up? I can't wait." So they sign up, and maybe a year later one of those young men is lying in a rice paddy in Vietnam with a bullet in his shoulder and blood pouring out of his body. As he is laying there thinking about that recruiting Sargent, bitterness begins springing up within his bosom. He says, "That guy didn't tell me all of it. He didn't tell me the whole thing. He tricked me." Ladies and gentlemen, may I say that there are many ministers today who consider themselves called of God to be God's recruiting Sargents for heaven, to see how many individuals they can chalk up to get them to volunteer to go to heaven. Later on some tragedy comes to these individuals, and they do not know how to deal with it. They think back on that minister with bitterness in their bosom they say, "Is this what he meant was going to happen if I became a Christian? He tricked me, he didn't tell me the whole story." This is repeated time after time in dealing with individuals today. It is a sad thing, but you who are here tonight, listen. Jesus Christ is not that type of an individual. He reads you the fine print before you ever

come through the gate. He makes some great promises that He will keep. He is honest when He promises that in this world you will reap a hundred fold, and you will have eternal life in the next world. Now hear me young people, He also tells you that there will be some costs to pay ahead of time. You should count the cost before you desire to enter into the Christian experience. He would set these forth in large print, not in the fine print down at the bottom of the page. Maybe some of you will remember the vacuum cleaner salesman. Do you remember how they come with the proposition that just for a dollar down you can have this wonderful machine? That sounds great, so you ask where do I sign? So you sign on the line. He leaves a big contract with you, and is gone. A few days later the thing conks out, and you don't know where to find the salesman. So you begin reading some of the fine print. You find out it was only covered for about 10 days' guarantee, and down in the fine print it said that you were going to have to pay a dollar a week for three years for additional coverage. You then see that he deceived you. Jesus Christ does not deceive seeking sinners. He promises them eternal life, but He also promises them a daily cross to bear. I appreciate that, knowing the full truth of what it is going to be in embracing Christ in all of His offices.

The Apostles went out evangelizing making converts, and they would go back to those people later to see if they were still serving the Lord. When they found that those individuals who had embraced Christ were experiencing persecution, they would gather them together and tell them that **"through much tribulation they must enter into the Kingdom of God"** (Acts 14:22). So don't think it a strange thing that by embracing Jesus Christ, you will not be exempt from trials and tribulations. They are going to be there, but there will be Someone with you who has already walked through those trials and tribulations, and He says, **"In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."** (John 16:33). "I have already walked down that road and experienced whatever you will experience, and I will impart grace to you to enable you to continue to walk that road." So Jesus Christ is honest and He lays out the full cost of what it will take to enter into eternal life.

As we get up to the gate, and the arrows are hitting all around, we are reminded that there are enemies in the way. The Christian experience is going to be an exciting one, but here at the beginning of it, it is a most dangerous time. After coming right up to the gate, how many individuals are led off into the broad way by a false prophet who is standing right

there by the gate? There are enemies abounding everywhere, and the enemies are not all going to be on this side of the gate. There will be some on the other side, in fact, all the way to the Celestial City. But an individual has the promise of God to lead him right into the chilly waters of Jordan and into that Celestial City. So it is important that it be understood that there will be enemies in the way.

When Christian understood Good-will's explanation, that Satan was trying to destroy him, he said, "**Oh, I rejoice and tremble.**" That is the attitude of a person who is truly converted. True conversion brings a spirit of rejoicing. Do you not rejoice in what you have in Christ Jesus? However, accompanying the rejoicing, there is another spirit, and that is the spirit of trembling when you see that if it had not been for the grace of God in Jesus Christ, you would have perished just like many others. You won't find the Pharisee or Worldly Wiseman rejoicing and trembling, but you will find the true convert doing so. Do you rejoice tonight in Christ Jesus? I don't expect some of you young people who are 12, 13, or 14, to experience the same degree of joy that some of those have who have been converted for 20 years or more, and have experienced many more things of the Lord. But I want to ask you, "Kids, do you rejoice that you are a Christian? Do you have an appreciation and a joy in your heart in knowing that you are a child of Jesus Christ? At the same time, have you ever contemplated that what made the difference between you and many other kids at school is only one thing, and that is the grace of God in Christ jerking you through the door? Do you see that you cannot overcome Satan in your own power, and you cannot overcome the old Adamic will if it were not for Good-will pulling you through the door of safety in Christ Jesus. The characteristic of a true convert is that he will manifest a dual spirit of rejoicing in Christ Jesus and yet a spirit of humility when he trembles at just how close he has come to being destroyed by the forces of evil. I see this more all the time when I see just what power Satan really has over the minds of men, and how he can deceive. The Bible describes this great fiend as the devil that deceives individuals. Yet when I see that if it had not been for God's purpose in Christ Jesus for me, I would have gone right on being deceived by Satan. It is because of what Christ has done, and is doing for me in Himself, that He has delivered me from the powers of darkness and has set me on the straight and narrow way. Now as you grow older in the Lord, and you have a few bouts with Satan, you might be able to appreciate that. I think some of you here tonight have already experienced that, if you have been in the Lord very long. If you are an old person and have never had any rounds with Satan, I would look around. Satan doesn't bother Worldly Wiseman, the one that is sitting

down in Carnal Policy, and Civility, the one who just believes in decent living. The one that Satan attacks the most is the one who would embrace Jesus Christ and try to live as He would have him to live. Do you experience the onslaughts of Satan? Does it cause you to tremble and to rejoice at the same time when you know that Christ has overcome the power of the devil, that Satan cannot touch you, that you are a shielded child just like Job was, and the only way he can get through that hedge is if God permits him to?

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Someone once said "What in the world did Job get into, and how did he go through all of that?" All that was going on in Job's life was that God and Satan were using Job's heart for a battle field, and they just didn't bother to inform Job as to what was going on. So God would win one battle and He would permit Satan to win the next, and old Job's heart was just rising and falling. He didn't know what was going on. You know our hearts are like that as believers. We find ourselves not understanding what is going on, and Christian is going to go through some of those experiences. We will close with this, when we have entered the gate, there is a hedge built around the true Pilgrim, and Satan cannot touch that Pilgrim without God permitting it. He will permit it for the Pilgrim's own good, for **"All things will work together for good,"** (Romans 8:28) and if God thinks you need a little bit of chastening or a little bit of strengthening in the faith, He will let the devil loose on you a little bit, but the devil can go no further than what God will permit him to go. That is a great hope for the believer. That means that Satan cannot gain the victory. We may think that he has won many times, but it will be just like the cross of Jesus Christ. Satan thought he had won the victory when Jesus Christ died on the cross. Years ago in the presidential election of Truman and Dewey, the headlines in the paper were "Dewey wins the election." He went to sleep that night thinking he had won, but woke up the next morning to find out that he had been upset. My friend, that is what happened in the gospel. Satan thought he had won the victory in defeating the purpose of God. He went to bed that night, and three days and three nights later Jesus Christ rose from the dead and announced victory had come, and that the power of darkness of this age had been broken for the people who are in Jesus Christ.