

The Wicket Gate

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[0 : 00] Well, as you know, this evening we're continuing our study of John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Now, I don't know about you, but the more I read and study this book, the more I'm convinced that the Pilgrim's Progress is a masterpiece.

And what's remarkable is that it was written by the hand of a tinker from Bedford. And it was written while he was confined in a county jail for 12 years.

And, you know, it's safe to say that the Lord used John Bunyan to bless the Church of Jesus Christ with this wonderful book. Because in this allegorical work, we can see so easily, we can see ourselves in it, and we can relate to it in our own experience.

Whether you're still not a Christian or whether you are a Christian, you can relate to it from your own experience. And last week, as we began walking with Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress, we only walked a short distance from the city of destruction to the slough of despond.

But you'll remember that when we were introduced to Christian, his name was actually called Graceless. And we're told that Graceless was standing in the city of destruction.

[1 : 11] He was clothed in rags. He had a book in his hand and he had a burden upon his back. And he was a brilliant illustration of the unconverted friend.

He was an illustration of you, my unconverted friend. Because here was this man. He's graceless and he's godless. He's living in the city of destruction. He was dead in his trespasses and sins. He was following the course of this world. He was following the prince of the power of the air. He was living according to the passions of his flesh and of the mind. And he was by his very nature, as Paul puts it, he was a child of wrath.

And yet what's so beautiful is that this Graceless sinner, he discovers a book. He discovers the Bible and how it changed his life. But you know, strangely, the book at first, it doesn't make things easier for Graceless.

It actually makes things harder. Because Graceless, he realizes that his righteousness is as filthy rags in God's sight. He has this increasing burden upon his back.

[2 : 19] It's a burden of sin. And from what he read in his book, Graceless knew that if he doesn't flee from the city of destruction, he would die in his condition and sink lower than the grave to a place that burns with fire and brimstone.

Graceless knew that if he doesn't take that step of faith, his end will be hell. And you know, this all brings Graceless, it brought Graceless to the end of himself where he was crying, what shall I do to be saved?

What shall I do to be saved? And as a lost and graceless sinner, he needed direction. He needed discipleship, which he found when he met a man named Evangelist.

And like a good pastor and preacher, Evangelist, he pointed Graceless in the right direction. He pointed him into the distance and said, Do you see yonder wicked gate?

Go up directly there. And when you see the gate and when you knock, you will be told what to do. And with that, Graceless, he took his first step of faith.

[3 : 29] He cast his lot in with Jesus and he fled from the city of destruction with his fingers in his ears. But he was confessing at the same time that in Christ and in Christ alone is life, life, eternal life.

And from that point onwards, Bunyan referred to his pilgrim as Christian. Of course, Christian didn't know that he was a Christian at that point.

But he was a Christian. And as you would expect, coming out on the side of Christ wasn't going to be without its challenges. Because Christian's wife and children, they tried to persuade him to stay in the city of destruction.

And then not long after leaving, we saw that Christian's two neighbours, they ran after him in the hope of persuading Christian to go back to the city of destruction. One neighbour we met was called Obstinate.

He had a hardened heart. He had no interest in Christian's book or Christian's burden. The name of the other neighbour, which we also met last week, was Pliable. He had a hollow heart.

[4 : 36] Pliable was like the seed which fell along the rocks. He heard the word, he received it with joy, he believed for a while. But in time of testing, he went back, he fell away.

And Pliable fell away when he and Christian fell into the slough of despond. Of course, Pliable, he escaped the slough of despond because he had never read the book.

He didn't have the burden. But for Christian, he struggled and sank in the slough of despond because he was looking inward at all his faults and failings rather than looking upward at the fidelity and faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

Do you remember it was Robert Murray McShane who said that, for every look at self, take ten looks at Christ. For every look at self, take ten looks at Christ.

And Christian, he continued to sink and to struggle in the slough of despond until a man called help. He put out his hand and he pulled Christian onto solid ground.

[5 : 45] And with that, Christian could say, He took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay and on a rock he set my feet, establishing my way.

And now that he's on his way again, we're going to walk a little further with Christian this evening as he journeys from Mr. Worldly Wise Man to the Wicked Gate.

And, you know, I'd like us to consider this short journey this evening. I want us to consider it under three headings. A worldly counsel, a weighty condemnation and a willing confession.

So, a worldly counsel, a weighty condemnation and a willing confession. So, we look first of all this evening at a worldly counsel.

A worldly counsel. You know, as Christian left the slough of despond and he left it behind him with help in the distance and he continued his journey towards the Wicked Gate.

[6 : 45] And we're told that Bunyan writes, he says, Now as Christian was walking solitary by himself, he espied one afar off coming across over the field to meet him.

And their help was to meet just as they were crossing the way of each other. The gentleman's name that met him was Mr. Worldly Wise Man. He dwelt in the town of Carnal Policy, a very great town.

You know, what's interesting is that even though they had never met, Mr. Worldly Wise Man, he had heard all about Christian. Because everyone was talking about Christian's step of faith and commitment.

And as Bunyan says, It had been much noised abroad. That Christian had fled from the city of destruction and was now on his way towards the celestial city.

It had been much noised abroad. And you know, thinking about it, in our own island culture and the community setting that we find ourselves in, where everyone knows one another.

[7 : 49] Most people, even on the west side, they're related to one another. And you know, I've often thought, well, maybe that's something that puts people off taking that step of faith and commitment.

Because maybe they worry that if they're going to flee from the city of destruction, it would be much, as Bunyan put it, it would be much noised abroad. Maybe you worry about that.

You worry that, like Christian, if you were to begin this pilgrim's progress, everyone would be looking and maybe even talking about you. And you know, that may be true.

People may talk about you if you come out on the side of Christ. But it won't last. Because they'll move on to something else. Like they always do.

But you know, my friend, I don't know about you, but I would far rather that people spoke about me while I'm living and know that I was in Christ and saved than them speak about me when I'm dead and know that I was out of Christ and lost.

[8 : 58] I would far rather take that step of faith and everybody know I was a Christian and saved than not to take that step of faith.

And everyone know that when I died, I was lost and out of Christ. But you know, Mr. Worley Wiseman, he knew that it was Christian, not only by what he heard from others, but he could see that there was something different about the way that Christian walked.

Because Christian was slowly carrying his burden of sin while walking with sighs and groans. And with that, Mr. Worley Wiseman, he goes up to Christian and he asks him, where are you going with such a burden?

And when Christian, he explains that he was going to the wicked gate in order to get rid of his burden, Mr. Worley Wiseman, he asks another question. He says, will you listen to me if I give you counsel?

Of course, Christian, he wanted to get rid of this burden upon his back. And in many ways, he was willing to listen to Mr. Worley Wiseman if his counsel was good counsel. And so Mr. Worley Wiseman, he asks yet another question.

[10:11] He says, who told you to go this way? Who told you to go to the wicked gate that you will be rid of your burden? And when Christian explained that it was evangelist who had directed him and disciplined him to go to the wicked gate, Mr. Worley Wiseman, he angrily responds saying, I curse him for his counsel.

There is not a more dangerous and troublesome way in the world than is that into which he hath directed thee. And that thou shalt find, if thou wilt be ruled by his advice, thou hast met with something as I perceive already.

For I see the dirt of the slough of despond that is upon thee. But that slough is the beginning of the sorrows that do attend those who go in that way. And with that, Mr. Worley Wiseman, from the town of Carnal Policy, he proceeded to give worldly counsel to Christian.

He said to him, Hear me. I am older than thou. Thou art like to meet with, in the way which thou goest, wearisomeness, painfulness, hunger, perils, nakedness, sword, lions, dragons, darkness, and in a word, death and what not.

These things are certainly true, having been proved by the words of many people. And why should a man so carelessly cast away himself by giving heed to a stranger?

[11:38] You know, as a writer, Bunyan is brilliant. Because he presents to us this man, Mr. Worley Wiseman. And he's from the town of Carnal Policy.

And Mr. Worley Wiseman, as he describes himself, he's not naive. He's not a naive young man. He's an older man. He's a man with life experience. He's an educated man.

He's a sophisticated man. He's a learned man. He's an accomplished man. And he's from the town of Carnal Policy. Which means that he's not spiritually minded, but carnally minded.

And as Romans 8, verse 7 says, the carnal mind is at enmity against God. It's not subject to the law of God. Neither indeed can it be.

In other words, Mr. Worley Wiseman, from the town of Carnal Policy, he was focused upon the flesh, the lusts of the flesh, the deeds of the flesh, the works of the flesh.

[12:35] He was obsessed with the outward appearance, which is why he comments on the way that Christian looks. All that Mr. Worley Wiseman focused upon was the looks and lusts of fun, fitness, finance, and flirting.

My friend, Mr. Worley Wiseman, he is an apt description of many people living in 21st century Britain. Because Mr. Worley Wiseman, he loved to be proud of self.

He loved to promote self. He loved to prosper and progress in life. So long as he didn't have to read the book, or bear the burden, or go the way of the wicked gate, or run to the cross.

And you know, with that, Mr. Worley Wiseman, he tried to persuade Christian to ignore the direction and discipleship of evangelists, and listen to his worldly counsel.

But you know, don't you just love the Psalms? Because they're reality, they're relevant, and they're real. And we see that particularly in Psalm 73.

[13:44] You know, when Asaph wrote Psalm 73, he was dealing with his own Mr. Worley Wiseman. You know, Asaph, he looked at the world around him, and he became envious of the fact that they were proud of self, and that they promoted self, and that they prospered and progressed in life.

They were successful, they were happy, they were carefree, they had it all. They had it all without having to read the book, or bear the burden, or go to the wicked gate, or run to the cross.

They had it all. And you know, my friend, you might look at your Mr. Worley Wiseman, that you maybe live with, or live next door to, or work with, and you might look at them and think, well, they're successful, and happy, and carefree.

They have it all, and they don't need to bear the burden, or carry the cross. They don't have all these problems in their life, or worries about sin. But you know, what Asaph said about his Christian walk, when he envied his own Mr. Worley Wiseman, he said, you know, it's so solemn, he said, my feet had almost slipped until I went into the house of God, and I discerned their end.

My feet had almost slipped until I went into the house of God, and I discerned their end. When Asaph entered God's house, he was given an eternal perspective on life.

[15:16] And what he came to discover was that for his Mr. Worley Wiseman, this world was his heaven, because the next world would be his hell.

For his Mr. Worley Wiseman, he discovered that this world is his heaven, because his next world would be his hell. And in that moment, Asaph knew that it was far better to follow the counsel of the Lord than the counsel of any Mr. Worley Wiseman.

That's why he wrote in Psalm 73, Nevertheless, O Lord, I am with thee. Thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me.

Thou with thy counsel while I live wilt me conduct and guide and to thy glory afterward receive me to abide. And you know, you wish that Christian had read Psalm 73 before he listened to the worldly counsel of Mr. Worley Wiseman.

But as we read in the narrative, Mr. Worley Wiseman, he directed Christian. He said, In yonder village named Morality, there dwells there a gentleman whose name is Mr. Legality, a very wise man and a man of very good name that has skill to help men off with such burdens as thine is from their shoulders.

[16:44] Yea, to my knowledge he hath done a great deal of good this way. I am besides he hath skill to cure those that are somewhat crazed in their wits with their burdens. And with that, we're told that Christian turned out of his way to go to Mr. Legality's house for help.

Christian turned out of his way and a worldly counsel it led to a weighty condemnation which is what we see secondly.

A weighty condemnation. A weighty condemnation. You know, as Christian turned out of the way of the wicked gate and followed the worldly counsel of Mr. Worldly Wiseman he didn't have to go far because as Mr. Worldly Wiseman had said the remedy to get rid of this burden upon his back it was only a short walk to the town of morality where Mr. Legality and his son Civility lived.

But what Christian discovered very very quickly was that it may only have been a distance of about a mile to the town of morality but it was a very difficult mile.

In fact it was an impossible mile because the town of morality was situated upon this high hill and with such a burden of sin upon his back it was impossible for Christian to climb the high hill all the way to the town of morality.

[18:13] And Bunyan writes he says behold when he was got now hard by the hill it seemed so high and also that side of it that was next to the wayside did hang over so much that Christian was afraid to venture further lest the hill should fall on his head wherefore there he stood still and knew not what to do.

Also his burden now seemed heavier to him than while he was in his way there came also flashes of fire out of the hill that made Christian afraid that he should be burnt. Here therefore he sweat and did quake for fear.

Bunyan's description of the high hill to the town of morality it's based upon Mount Sinai because it was from Mount Sinai that Moses received the law of God and it was while Moses was on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19 that the mountain was you'll remember it was enveloped in thick smoke and there was rumbles of thunder and flashes of lightning but for Christian he couldn't climb this high hill to the town of morality because his burden of sin was not only weighing him down the moral law now was making his burden of sin heavier it was becoming even more burdensome to him to the point that Christian he had to stop climbing and he gave up he gave up altogether and you see my friend Christian had begun his pilgrimage by faith he had taken his first step of the journey towards the celestial city by faith but the worldly council of Mr.

worldly wise man had made him think that he could prosper and progress in his pilgrimage by turning aside from the way and seeking the help of Mr. Legality in the town of morality humanity but you know what Christian came to discover was that his attempt to rid himself of his burden to make his Christian journey quicker and easier it only made it worse and instead of the promised safety friendship and contentment from the worldly council of Mr.

worldly wise man Christian experienced a weighty condemnation he experienced a weighty condemnation and you know what we read earlier from Paul's letter to the Galatians it actually sums up Christian's experience with Mr.

[20 : 44] worldly wise man and his journey towards the town of morality because when Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians he was dealing with a very similar problem the Galatians they had come to commit their life to Jesus Christ by faith they'd heard the gospel they believed the gospel they loved the gospel but sadly there were these you could say Mr.

worldly wise men and they were in the church and they were infiltrating and influencing the church and these false teachers they gave worldly counsel to the church insisting that they needed something more than Jesus they needed Jesus plus Jesus plus good works Jesus plus good living Jesus plus law keeping Jesus plus baptism Jesus plus their Bible reading Jesus plus their prayer life Jesus plus their church attendance Jesus plus their tithing Jesus plus their outreach Jesus plus Jesus plus Jesus plus and they piled it all on and this message of Jesus plus it left the Galatians feeling inferior and inadequate and that they lacked something in their Christianity to the point that like Christian the Galatians they doubted their salvation and they questioned whether they were a Christian at all and the result was that they turned aside from the way and the Galatians they started to believe that their salvation was actually Jesus plus they started thinking that well it must be Jesus plus and you know when Paul wrote to the Galatians he said and you know what he writes you could almost say it to Christian when Paul wrote to the Galatians he says in chapter one I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel not that there is another gospel says Paul but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ and you know throughout his letter Paul reminds and reaffirms to the Galatians that the gospel of grace it's not Jesus plus it's Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone Paul says that our salvation and our assurance of salvation it's not based upon meeting

Mr. Legality living up high in the town of morality he says no our salvation is based and founded upon grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and as Paul assured the Galatians and us he says no one is justified before God by the law by the works of the law shall no man be justified because the righteous shall live by faith the righteous shall live by faith not by works not by what they do not by Jesus plus but the righteous shall live by faith you know Augustus top lady he said in his hymn Rock of Ages he said not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy laws commands could my zeal no respite no could my tears forever flow all for sin could not atone thou must save and thou alone and you know what we see here is that

Paul did to the Galatians what evangelists did to Christian because when Christian experienced that weighty condemnation of the law as he climbed the hill towards the house of Mr.

[24 : 37] Legality in the town of Morality we saw that Christian he had to stop and he had to give up and Banyan writes Christian began to be sorry that he had taken counsel from Mr.

Worley Wiseman and with that he saw evangelists coming to meet him at the sight also of whom he began to blush for shame so evangelists threw nearer and nearer and coming up to him he looked upon Christian with a severe and dreadful countenance and said how is it that thou art so quickly turned aside for thou art now out of the way like a good pastor and preacher evangelist he questioned Christian he questioned him as to why he had drifted and was no longer on his way towards the wicked gate of course Christian he explains what happened to him he explains his encounter with Mr.

Worley Wiseman and his attempt to get to the town of morality but again like a good pastor and preacher evangelist he brings Christian all the way back to the book because you know my friend whenever we turn aside from the path of righteousness we need to come back to the word of righteousness we need to come back to the book because this book it is the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify God and enjoy him forever and evangelist he said to Christian he says God says in his book quoting from Hebrews 12 verse 25 see that you do not refuse him who is speaking for if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven and with that evangelist he warned Christian about being a procrastinating pilgrim rather than being a persevering pilgrim and

Christian he falls down he feels more conviction of sin and he has this greater burden now than ever and he falls down and he utters the words and echoes the words of Isaiah the prophet woe is me for I am undone but evangelist he doesn't leave Christian in his depression and despondency

instead he exhorts and encourages Christian to pay attention to his teaching because he says Mr Worley Wiseman is an enemy Mr legality is a cheat and his son civility well he's a fraud and with that Christian asks evangelist is there any hope is there any hope for me may I now go back and go up to the wicked gate and like a good pastor and preacher evangelist assured Christian that there's always hope there's always hope so long as he's willing to confess my hope is built on nothing less than

Jesus blood and righteousness I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus name on Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand there's always hope which brings us lastly to consider a willing confession a worldly counsel a weighty condemnation and a willing confession a willing confession chapter two of pilgrim's progress it opens with the words then did Christian begin to go back to the right road and evangelist after he had kissed him gave him one smile and bid him God speed so Christian went on with haste neither spake he to any man by the way nor of any asked him would he give them an answer and then we read that after a time Christian got up to the gate and it says now over the gate there was written knock and it shall be opened unto you the wicked gate gate was a small narrow door situated either alongside or within a large castle door or a city gate and the wicked gate was only wide enough for one person to go through at a time allowing entry through the wicked gate to be controlled and as you know these words written over the wicked gate they were taken from

[29 : 10] Matthew chapter 7 where Jesus says ask and it shall be given to you seek and you shall find knock and it shall be opened unto you for everyone who asks receives the one who seeks finds to the one who knocks it will be opened and of course this is the free offer of the gospel it's the offer of the gospel that whosoever knocks on this gate the gate will open whosoever comes to the gate and knocks it shall open but you know Bunyan he tells us that Christian knocked more than once or twice we're told that he persistently pounded the wicked gate he persistently pounded the wicked gate and you know my friend that's what you need to do because if you're knocking at this wicked gate keep knocking my friend keep asking keep seeking keep knocking keep persistently pounding the door until at last it opens don't stop keep knocking until it opens and when the wicked gate opened for

Christian a man came to the gate whose name was Goodwill now don't you just love those names that Bunyan conjures up in the story and as Goodwill as he opens the gate he asks Christian who's there where did you come from what do you want and Christian responds with a willing confession he says here is a poor sinner I come from the city of destruction but I am going to mount Zion that I may be set free from the wrath to come I would therefore sir since I am told that by this gate is the way thither are you willing to let me in are you willing to let me in and good will responded saying I am willing with all my heart and with that he opened the gate do you remember when a leper asked Jesus a similar question Lord if you are willing you can make me clean and Jesus said I am willing be clean Jesus was willing to save because my friend Jesus is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance and my friend this is the glory of the gospel that Jesus has good will and Jesus is more than willing to receive you if you will only ask seek and knock Jesus is more than willing to make you his and receive you into his kingdom if you will only make a willing confession a confession that he is your Lord and he is your saviour Lord if you are willing you can make me clean tonight Jesus is saying to you my friend I will be clean but you know I love the way Bunyan describes Christian's entrance through the wicked gate because he writes that when

Christian was stepping in through the wicked gate goodwill gave him a pool although Christian was willing to enter the wicked gate goodwill pulls him through the wicked gate and Christian asks well why did you do that and goodwill explains that only a little distance from the wicked gate is satanic opposition because the castle of Beelzebub he says is just there he's the evil one and he shoots arrows at the wicked gate so that some may fall and even die before they enter through you know my friend if you're asking seeking and knocking to enter the wicked gate be sure that there's always going to be satanic opposition that will try and hamper and hinder you from entering into the kingdom of God always remember that the last thing the devil wants is for you to commit your life to Jesus Christ but

I assure you tonight I assure you that that's what you should want you should be willing to enter this gate and seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and you know that's why Spurgeon wrote a little book for those who are asking seeking and knocking he wrote a little book and it's

called Around the Wicked Gate Around the Wicked Gate you know it's a brilliant book I'd encourage you to read it you can even read it online if you don't want to buy it it's got lots of stories and illustrations of how to become a Christian and Spurgeon says that his earnest desire in writing that little book was to get his hesitating unconverted friends over the threshold of the wicked gate that's why he wrote the book Around the Wicked Gate and you know in one chapter of the book Spurgeon he writes he says it comes to this my friend as it did with

[34 : 35] John Bunyan a voice now speaks to you and says wilt thou keep thy sin and go to hell or wilt thou leave thy sin and go to heaven in the name of God says Spurgeon I ask you which shall it be Christ and salvation or the favourite sin and damnation there's no middle course he says waiting or refusing to decide will practically be a sure decision for the evil one so my friend which one will it be which one will it be will thou have thy sin and go to hell or will thou leave thy sin and go to heaven and so after following the worldly counsel of Mr.

worldly wise man after experiencing the weighty condemnation of Mr. legality and after making a willing confession at the wicked gate we're told that Christian he turned again to his journey with goodwill pointing him in the direction that he should go and that he would come to the house of the interpreter at whose door he should knock and he would show him excellent things then Christian took leave of his friend we're told and he again bid him God speed God willing next week we'll see what Christian discovered at the interpreter's house as we continue in the pilgrim's progress well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray together our heavenly father we give thanks to thee this evening that there is a wicked gate at all that there is a narrow gate by which we must enter and

Lord we pray that we would enter by faith for as Jesus says that straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life and few there be that find it O Lord we pray that none of us would be found on the broad road that leads to destruction that we would not listen to the counsel of Mr.

worldly wise man that we would not fall aside from the way or be led astray by him but that we would listen to the counsel of the Lord and follow his teaching that we would consider what thy book says and know that it is the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify God and enjoy him forever keep us Lord in the way keep us on the path of righteousness for thy no name's sake bless us then we pray even as we go into another week a week that is unknown to us but known only to thee help us to trust thee with everything to know that thou art there a God who promises never to leave and never to forsake cleanse us we ask for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake amen we're going to bring our service to our conclusion this evening by singing the words of psalm 73 psalm 73 we're singing from verse 23 down to the end of the psalm as we mentioned earlier this psalm was written by

Asaph when Asaph was considering how the worldly wise men around him were prospering and proudly going on in life and yet they had no worries they were carefree and yet it was when he entered God's house that he was given an eternal perspective an eternal perspective on life that for the worldly wise men this is their heaven but in the next world it will be their hell and what Asaph said he said he wanted to follow the Lord's counsel and that's what we need to do we need to follow the Lord's counsel that's what he writes in verse 23 nevertheless continually O Lord I am with thee thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me thou with thy counsel while I live wilt me conduct and guide and to thy glory afterward receive me to abide I sing

[38 : 53] Psalm 73 from verse 23 down to the end of the psalm to God's praise song ever the best continue O Lord I am with thee thou trust me hold by my right hand and still thou hold me see thou with thy counsel why I live with me conduct and light and do thy glory after fight receive me through the night who have

I in the heavens fly but me O Lord alone and in the earth whom I desire he died he there is none my flesh and heart grow thin and ill I thought I feel thee never for all my heart all years to strength and turn h and h and to me the one to

Ruth and Honda hope and may and may from below thou dost be joy alone but surely it is good for me that I don't hear to call in God I trust that all thy word I may declare a throne