
THE WICKET-GATE

A SOLDIER in the parliamentary army, Bunyan was quite familiar with walled cities and especially the very large gates which would be shut and barred at the time of siege. The “wicket gate” was usually a small man-door cut into the face of a larger door for a quick and convenient way of entry and exit.

Gate, way, door, knocking and *entry* are terms unmistakably used in Scripture as symbols of passage from darkness to light, from a state of exclusion to one of acceptance, and from the condition of death to one of eternal life. It is quite fitting, then, that Bunyan uses the wicket gate as a passage from peril to safety and sanctuary. The one named Goodwill is the emblem of Christ as the doorkeeper of the way which leads to life eternal. No doubt Bunyan had in mind the passage in Matthew 7:13–14 whereby the Spirit pleads with men, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

It is noteworthy that the *entire* allegory is most consistent with the passage quoted above. The gate has a “strait,” or constricted, entry. It is not wide or easily accessed, nor is there room for excess baggage to be brought through. Further, the way is constricted and narrow, and in a very real sense it is simply an extension of the gate. And, as we will discover, the way is fraught with dangers, difficulties

and obstacles, but most important of all, life is found at the end of the way.

Entry is made under conditions of urgency. Christian knocks “more than once or twice,” pleading for the gatekeeper to open immediately, while a hail of arrows streams from Beelzebub’s strong castle situated near the gate. Surely it is common that the more decided one becomes to savingly believe on Christ, the more vehement the powers of darkness become to interfere with the process. Thus come the darts and arrows of doubt, procrastination and confusion. It is only the willingness of Christ in all of His compassion and longsuffering, who lays hold of the anxious sinner and effectually draws him in. There is no reluctance in the words, “I am willing with all my heart, said he, and he opened the door.” It is Goodwill in all of His grace, “who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13).

Bunyan closes with a masterful touch by bringing Pliable to Christian’s mind. Christian exclaims, “I both rejoice and tremble!” realizing his own terrible plight. There is no self-congratulation for making a better and wiser choice than his short-lived companion. Christian confesses that his conduct was as heinous as Pliable’s, deserving wrath and judgment, and acknowledges that the only thing that made the difference was the distinguishing, free grace of God.
