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Sermon Notes

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John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Second Stage: The Wicket Gate and Interpreter's House

I. Review of First Stage

- The whole story is cast as a dream which Bunyan had while in prison
- Christian (called “Graceless” at that point) was reading in his book (the Bible) and sighed and groaned because he had come to realize that he lived in the City of Destruction and saw no way to escape
- He is crushed by a terrible heavy burden on his back
- He told his distress to his wife and children and they did not believe anything he said, but they were deeply worried about him
- His distress grew and grew over days; he was tormented by guilt
- Then he met a man name Evangelist who talked with him and pointed him toward the Wicket Gate
- Christian could not see it, but Evangelist directed him toward a distant light which Christian could barely see
- Christian began to run toward the light; his family ran after him, begging him to come home; but Christian put his fingers in his ears and ran crying “Life, life, eternal life.”
- Two neighbors—Obstinate and Pliable—come after him to persuade him to return
- Christian talks with them, seeking to persuade them to join him on pilgrimage to escape destruction and find eternal glory; Obstinate mocks him and refuses, but Pliable decides to give it a try because he is excited about Christian's descriptions of the place where they are going; Obstinate insults them and goes back home
- After a short time, both Christian and Pliable fall into a miry swamp called the “Slough of Despond” (depression)

- Pliable is offended by this trouble and wants to go no further in the journey; since he has no burden on his back, he is able to get out of the swamp with a little effort, and he goes back to his home in the City of Destruction
- Christian is sinking down, but a man named Help comes and lifts him out and sets him on his way
- Soon after, Christian meets with a well-dressed man named Mr. Worldly Wiseman; this man notices the terrible burden on Christian's back and wants to help him get rid of it
- Mr. Worldly Wiseman persuades Christian to leave the path and go to a village called Morality in which lives a man named Legality, who is expert at helping people be rid of such burdens
- But as Christian tries to get to Morality, there came a steep hill which got more threatening, and flashes of fire came out threatening to burn him; also his burden got much heavier
- This represents salvation by lawkeeping... good deeds; and how trying to keep the Law of God only results in greater condemnation
- Evangelist found him and severely rebuked him for leaving the way; he got him back onto the true path

II. The Wicket Gate

A. Christian approached it to knock on the door

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.' [Matt 7:8]

"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."

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."

B. The Gatekeeper (called Goodwill) questioned Christian, and then gladly opened the gate

C. BUT THEN, Goodwill gave Christian a mighty pull and slammed the gate shut behind him

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 them 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.

DQ1) What do those arrows (shot by Satan at someone just about to be converted) represent in real life? [What are some of the temptations and accusations that Satan may use to stop someone who is just about to commit themselves to Christ?]

D. Goodwill questions Christian about why he came alone

GOOD-WILL. But how is it that you came alone?

CHR. Because none of my neighbours saw their danger, as I saw mine.

GOOD-WILL. Did any of them know of your coming?

CHR. Yes; my wife and children saw me at the first, and called after me to turn again; also, some of my neighbours stood crying and calling after me to return; but I put my fingers in my ears, and so came on my way.

GOOD-WILL. But did none of them follow you, to persuade you to go back?

CHR. 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.

GOOD-WILL. But why did he not come through?

CHR. We, indeed, came both together, until we came at the Slough of Despond, into the which we also suddenly fell. And then was my neighbour, 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.

GOOD-WILL. Then said Good-will, Alas, poor man! is the celestial glory of so small esteem with him, that he counteth it not worth running the hazards of a few difficulties to obtain it?

DQ2) How does this show the responsibility all Christians have to persuade people around them to come with them to heaven? How does it give a foretaste of the accountability we will have on Judgment Day to answer to Christ for people that we knew?

E. Goodwill tells Christian the road ahead is perfectly straight

I will teach thee about the way thou must go. Look before thee; dost thou see this narrow way? 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.**

CHR. But, said Christian, are there no turnings or windings by which a stranger may lose his way?

GOOD-WILL. Yes, there are many ways 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. [Matt 7:14]

III. Interpreter's House

Interpreter is to show Christian things that will be helpful for his pilgrimage

A. The Spiritual Guide

INTER. Then said the Interpreter, Come in; I will show that which will be profitable to thee. So he commanded his man to light the candle, and bid Christian follow him: so he had him into a private room, and bid his man open a door; the which when he had done, Christian saw the picture of a very grave person hang up against the wall; and this was the fashion of it. It had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind his back. It stood as if it pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over his head.

CHR. Then said Christian, What meaneth this?

INTER. The man whose picture this is, is one of a thousand; he can beget children [1 Cor. 4:15], travail in birth with children [Gal. 4:19], and nurse them himself when they are born. And whereas thou seest him with his eyes lift up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, and the law of truth writ on his lips, it is to show thee that his work is to know and unfold dark

things to sinners; even as also thou seest him stand as if he pleaded with men: and whereas thou seest the world as cast behind him, and that a crown hangs over his head, that is to show thee that slighting and despising the things that are present, for the love that he hath to his Master's service, he is sure in the world that comes next to have glory for his reward. Now, said the Interpreter, I have showed thee this picture first, because the man whose picture this is, is the only man whom the Lord of the place whither thou art going, hath authorised to be thy guide in all difficult places thou mayest meet with in the way; wherefore, take good heed to what I have shewed thee, and bear well in thy mind what thou hast seen, lest in thy journey thou meet with some that pretend to lead thee right, but their way goes down to death.

DQ3) Who does this represent in the Christian life? What attributes does Bunyan present for the true spiritual guide? Why is it important not to be led astray by following false guides? No pastor, mentor, or spiritual leader is perfect. How can we rightly apply these lofty standards without ruling out every possible individual?

B. The Dusty Room

Then he took him by the hand, and led him into a very large parlour that was full of dust, because never swept; the which after he had reviewed a little while, the Interpreter called for a man to sweep. Now, when he began to sweep, the dust began so abundantly to fly about, that Christian had almost therewith been choked. Then said the Interpreter to a damsel that stood by, Bring hither the water, and sprinkle the room; the which, when she had done, it was swept and cleansed with pleasure.

Then said Christian, What means this?

The Interpreter answered, This parlour is the heart of a man that was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the gospel; the dust is his original sin and inward corruptions, that have defiled the whole man. He that began to sweep at first, is the Law; but she that brought water, and did sprinkle it, is the Gospel. Now, whereas thou sawest, that so soon as the first began to sweep, the dust did so fly about that the room by him could not be cleansed, but that thou wast almost choked therewith; this is to shew thee, that the law, instead of cleansing the heart (by its working) from sin, doth revive, put strength into, and increase it in the soul, even as it doth discover and forbid it, for it doth not give power to subdue. [Rom. 7:6; 1 Cor. 15:56; Rom. 5:20]

Again, as thou sawest the damsel sprinkle the room with water, upon which it was cleansed with pleasure; this is to show thee, that when the

gospel comes in the sweet and precious influences thereof to the heart, then, I say, even as thou sawest the damsel lay the dust by sprinkling the floor with water, so is sin vanquished and subdued, and the soul made clean through the faith of it, and consequently fit for the King of glory to inhabit. [John 15:3; Eph. 5:26; Acts 15:9; Rom. 16:25,26; John 15:13]

Matthew 12:43-45 "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

DQ4) What does the first effort to sweep the room represent? Why does such effort at moral reformation apart from regeneration and the power of the Holy Spirit only make things worse? How does the grace of the gospel enable the “room” (the person’s heart/life) to be cleaned? How does this represent sanctification?

C. Passion and Patience

I saw, moreover, in my dream, that the Interpreter took him by the hand, and had him into a little room, where sat two little children, each one in his chair. The name of the eldest was Passion, and the name of the other Patience. Passion seemed to be much discontented; but Patience was very quiet. Then Christian asked, What is the reason of the discontent of Passion? The Interpreter answered, The Governor of them would have him stay for his best things till the beginning of the next year; but he will have all now: but Patience is willing to wait.

Then I saw that one came to Passion, and brought him a bag of treasure, and poured it down at his feet, the which he took up and rejoiced therein, and withal laughed Patience to scorn. But I beheld but a while, and he had lavished all away, and had nothing left him but rags.

Then said Christian to the Interpreter, Expound this matter more fully to me.

So Interpreter said, These two lads are figures: Passion, of the men of this world; and Patience, of the men of that which is to come; for as here thou seest, Passion will have all now this year, that is to say, in this world; so are the men of this world, they must have all their good things now, they cannot stay till next year, that is until the next world, for their portion of good. That proverb, 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush', is of more authority with them than are all the Divine testimonies of the good

of the world to come. But as thou sawest that he had quickly lavished all away, and had presently left him nothing but rags; so will it be with all such men at the end of this world.

Then said Christian, Now I see that Patience has the best wisdom, and that upon many accounts. First, because he stays for the best things. Second, and also because he will have the glory of his, when the other has nothing but rags.

INTER. Nay, you may add another, to wit, the glory of the next world will never wear out; but these are suddenly gone. Therefore Passion had not so much reason to laugh at Patience, because he had his good things first, as Patience will have to laugh at Passion, because he had his best things last; for first must give place to last, because last must have his time to come; but last gives place to nothing; for there is not another to succeed. He, therefore, that hath his portion first, must needs have a time to spend it; but he that hath his portion last, must have it lastingly; therefore it is said of Dives, "Thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." [Luke 16:25]

CHR. Then I perceive it is not best to covet things that are now, but to wait for things to come.

INTER. You say the truth: "For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." [2 Cor. 4:18] But though this be so, yet since things present and our fleshly appetite are such near neighbours one to another; and again, because things to come, and carnal sense, are such strangers one to another; therefore it is, that the first of these so suddenly fall into amity, and that distance is so continued between the second.

John 12:25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

DQ5) What kind of person does "Passion" represent? How can Christians sometimes behave like that? How does this vignette point us to self-control, especially in lawful pleasures? How do we feed patience so that we learn better to deny ourselves and live for the next world?

D. The Fire Burning Against the Wall

Then I saw in my dream that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a fire burning against a wall, and one

standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the fire burn higher and hotter.

Then said Christian, What means this?

The Interpreter answered, This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the Devil; but in that thou seest the fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that. So he had him about to the backside of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast, but secretly, into the fire.

Then said Christian, What means this?

The Interpreter answered, This is Christ, who continually, with the oil of his grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart: by the means of which, notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of his people prove gracious still. [2 Cor. 12:9] And in that thou sawest that the man stood behind the wall to maintain the fire, that is to teach thee that it is hard for the tempted to see how this work of grace is maintained in the soul.

Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

[Faith is not static. We must have continual infusions of grace to keep our faith alive... and it MUST be kept alive]

Hebrews 7:24-25 because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

John 21:15, 17 "Simon, son of John, do you love me? Feed my sheep!"

DQ6) How does this show the danger all Christians are continually in of the work of grace being extinguished? How does Christ guarantee that it won't be? How does this show how dependent we are on Christ's prayers and the ongoing work of the Spirit in our souls to keep us believing in Christ? How does it show the need all of us have for a constant ministry of the word in our souls?

DQ7) How does this vignette encourage you?

E. The Palace and the Warrior

I saw also, that the Interpreter took him again by the hand, and led him into a pleasant place, where was builded a stately palace, beautiful to behold; at the sight of which Christian was greatly delighted. He saw also, upon the top thereof, certain persons walking, who were clothed all in gold.

Then said Christian, May we go in thither?

Then the Interpreter took him, and led him up towards the door of the palace; and behold, at the door stood a great company of men, as desirous to go in; but durst not. There also sat a man at a little distance from the door, at a table-side, with a book and his inkhorn before him, to take the name of him that should enter therein; he saw also, that in the doorway stood many men in armour to keep it, being resolved to do the men that would enter what hurt and mischief they could. Now was Christian somewhat in amaze. At last, when every man started back for fear of the armed men, Christian saw a man of a very stout countenance come up to the man that sat there to write, saying, Set down my name, Sir: the which when he had done, he saw the man draw his sword, and put a helmet upon his head, and rush toward the door upon the armed men, who laid upon him with deadly force; but the man, not at all discouraged, fell to cutting and hacking most fiercely. So after he had received and given many wounds to those that attempted to keep him out, he cut his way through them all [Acts 14:22], and pressed forward into the palace, at which there was a pleasant voice heard from those that were within, even of those that walked upon the top of the palace, saying--

"Come in, come in; Eternal glory thou shalt win."

So he went in, and was clothed with such garments as they. Then Christian smiled and said; I think verily I know the meaning of this.

Matthew 11:12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.

Acts 14:21-22 Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

DQ8) Why is it vital for us to understand the warfare necessary for each of us to enter heaven?

F. The Man in the Iron Cage

Now, the man, to look on, seemed very sad. He sat with his eyes looking down to the ground; his hands folded together; and he sighed as if he would break his heart. Then said CHRISTIAN, "What means this?" At which the INTERPRETER bid him talk with the man.

Chr. Then said CHRISTIAN to the man, "What art thou?"

Backslider. The man answered, "I am what I was not once."

Chr. What wast thou once?

Backslider. The man said, "I was once a fair and flourishing professor, both in mine own eyes and also in the eyes of others: I once was, as I thought, fair for the Celestial City, and had then even joy at the thoughts that I should get thither."

Chr. Well, but what art thou now?

Backslider. I am now a man of despair, and am shut up in it, as in this iron cage. I cannot get out; oh now, I cannot!

Chr. But how camest thou in this condition?

Backslider. I left off to watch and be sober; I laid the reins upon the neck of my lusts; I sinned against the Light of the World, and the goodness of God. I have grieved the Spirit, and he is gone. I tempted the devil, and he is come to me. I have provoked God to anger, and he has left me. I have so hardened my heart, that I cannot repent.

Then said CHRISTIAN to the INTERPRETER, "But is there no hope for such a man as this?" "Ask him," said the INTERPRETER.

Chr. Then said CHRISTIAN, "Is there no hope, but you must be kept in the iron cage of despair?"

Backslider. No, none at all!

Chr. Why? The Son of the Blessed is very pitiful.

Backslider. I have crucified him to myself afresh; I have despised his person; I have despised his righteousness; I have counted his blood an unholy thing; I have done despite to the Spirit of grace: therefore I have shut myself out of all the promises, and there now remains to me nothing but threatenings--dreadful threatenings --fearful threatenings, of certain judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour me as an adversary.

Chr. For what did you bring yourself into this condition?

Backslider. For the lusts, pleasures, and profits of this world; in the enjoyment of which I did then promise myself much delight; but now everyone of those things also bite me and gnaw me like a burning worm.

Chr. But canst thou not now repent and turn?

Backslider. God hath denied me repentance. His Word gives me no encouragement to believe: yea, he himself hath shut me up in this iron cage; nor can all the men in the world let me out. Oh, eternity! eternity! how shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in eternity?

Inter. Then said the INTERPRETER to CHRISTIAN, "Let this man's misery be remembered by thee, and be an everlasting caution to thee."

Hebrews 10:26-27 "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

DQ9) How does this dreadful image help us to fight sin in this present age? How does spiritual laziness and habitual sin tend to have a hardening effect on the heart? Why is this so dangerous?

G. The Dream of Judgment Day

So he took Christian by the hand again, and led him into a chamber, where there was one rising out of bed; and as he put on his raiment, he shook and trembled. Then said Christian, Why doth this man thus tremble? The Interpreter then bid him tell to Christian the reason of his so doing. So he began and said, This night, as I was in my sleep, I dreamed, and behold the heavens grew exceeding black; also it thundered and lightened in most fearful wise, that it put me into an agony; so I looked up in my dream, and saw the clouds rack at an unusual rate, upon which I heard a great sound of a trumpet, and saw also a man sit upon a cloud, attended with the thousands of heaven; they were all in flaming fire: also the heavens were in a burning flame. I heard then a voice saying, "Arise, ye dead, and come to judgement"; and with that the rocks rent, the graves opened, and the dead that were therein came forth. Some of them were exceeding glad, and looked upward; and some sought to hide themselves under the mountains. [1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thes. 4:16; Jude 14; John 5:28,29; 2 Thes. 1:7,8; Rev. 20:11-14; Isa. 26:21; Micah 7:16,17; Ps. 95:1-3; Dan. 7:10] Then I saw the

man that sat upon the cloud open the book, and bid the world draw near. Yet there was, by reason of a fierce flame which issued out and came from before him, a convenient distance betwixt him and them, as betwixt the judge and the prisoners at the bar. [Mal. 3:2,3; Dan. 7:9,10] I heard it also proclaimed to them that attended on the man that sat on the cloud, Gather together the tares, the chaff, and stubble, and cast them into the burning lake. [Matt. 3:12; 13:30; Mal. 4:1] And with that, the bottomless pit opened, just whereabout I stood; out of the mouth of which there came, in an abundant manner, smoke and coals of fire, with hideous noises. It was also said to the same persons, "Gather my wheat into the garner." [Luke 3:17] And with that I saw many caught up and carried away into the clouds, but I was left behind. [1 Thes. 4:16,17] I also sought to hide myself, but I could not, for the man that sat upon the cloud still kept his eye upon me; my sins also came into my mind; and my conscience did accuse me on every side. [Rom. 3:14,15] Upon this I awaked from my sleep.

CHR. But what is it that made you so afraid of this sight?

MAN. Why, I thought that the day of judgement was come, and that I was not ready for it: but this frightened me most, that the angels gathered up several, and left me behind; also the pit of hell opened her mouth just where I stood. My conscience, too, afflicted me; and, as I thought, the Judge had always his eye upon me, shewing indignation in his countenance.

IV) Christian leaves interpreters house and resumes his journey

Then said the Interpreter to Christian, Hast thou considered all these things?

CHR. Yes, and they put me in hope and fear.

INTER. Well, keep all things so in thy mind that they may be as a goad in thy sides, to prick thee forward in the way thou must go. Then Christian began to gird up his loins, and to address himself to his journey. Then said the Interpreter, The Comforter be always with thee, good Christian, to guide thee in the way that leads to the City. So Christian went on his way, saying--

"Here I have seen things rare and profitable; Things pleasant, dreadful, things to make me stable In what I have begun to take in hand; Then let me think on them, and understand Wherefore they showed me were, and let me be Thankful, O good Interpreter, to thee."