

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 36 issued May 2002

Index

1. [A Pastor's Letter to his people](#) - Purpose behind starting the Wicket Gate Magazine in January 1967
2. The Story behind the Cover - John Gifford and John Bunyan
3. [Preaching From the Past](#) - "God, even our own God - Psalm 67- 6
4. [This Month Long Ago](#) - Robert Murray McCheyne.
5. [Quotes for your Consideration](#) - Quotes to consider.
6. ["All things were made by Him"](#) - Unique view of Christ and the Cross
7. [Gleanings in the Psalms](#) - Gleanings from Psalm 1.

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The Wicket Gate Magazine - A New Venture?

As regular readers of our "wee" magazine will already know, Pastor Seaton retired from the Pastoral Ministry during the course of the past 2 months. With the kind permission of Mr Seaton, the Elders and Deacons of the Reformed Baptist Church here in Inverness, it is the intention to repeat back articles from the last 35 years of the magazine.

The first edition appeared in January 1967 and the following letter introduces the members of the church, into which Pastor Seaton had recently been inducted, to the magazine.

A Pastor's Letter - Purpose for starting the Wicket Gate Magazine

January 1967

Dear Friends,

This is a very happy occasion for me personally as we launch out with our new Church Magazine. Perhaps you will be a bit puzzled over the cover and title. But, Just let me explain the purpose of the magazine, and then, I think you will agree that "The Wicket Gate" is an apt title for a Church Magazine in these days.

The Concern

"The Wicket Gate" was born out of a concern - a concern caused by the apparent lack of READING among Christians today. There is a tremendous dearth of knowledge among present-day believers when it comes to the things of our faith. Years ago, even the most average believer was well versed in the writings of men like John Bunyan, Samuel Rutherford, Thomas Boston, John Owen, Richard Baxter, John Calvin, Martin Luther, to mention only a few.

They had a working knowledge of most of the principal doctrines of our faith, and a fair outline of the history of the Church of Christ. Nowadays - and I feel confident in saying this - most Christians don't even have a nodding acquaintance with these things. I know that many of the old works are tomes which make even the most ardent reader draw back, but some professedly evangelical Christians today haven't read even so much as the most basic and classic of the Christian books. The Pilgrim's Progress, Grace Abounding, The Remains of R.M. McCheyne, The Letters of John Newton, a Life of Spurgeon - and so "The Wicket Gate" is being produced in an effort to stimulate interest in some of the forgotten treasures of the faith. The articles will be drawn from the Scriptures, the lives of the saints, and the history of the church; small enough to read in a few minutes, and, we trust interesting enough to make you search deeper for yourself.

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The Cover

The cover should be well known to most. It is one of the most famous scenes from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and shows the burdened sinner being pointed to "yonder wicket gate" by the evangelist. It was when the Pilgrim got through the Wicket Gate that he came to the cross and his burden fell off; and it was also through this Wicket Gate that "The House of Interpreter" lay - the man who was to teach him in the things of God. So, it is our desire that through this "Wicket Gate" there will be found salvation for sinners, and establishment in the faith for believers.

And so, my brethren and friends, we lay this new venture before you. We pray you will avail yourself of it, and that it will lead you on to "Search out these things for yourself", and to "study to show yourself approved, a good workman....rightly dividing the word of truth".

Sincerely,
W.J. Seaton



Original Cover - drawn by Mr Donald MacLeod - January 1967

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The Story Behind the Cover

On the first of June 1648, a bitter battle was fought in the town of Maidstone, in Kent, between the Parliamentary forces of the English Government and the Royalists. It took only one night for the Royalist insurrection to be stamped out, but it was a night of much bloodshed and cruelty. Among the prisoners that were taken was a Royalist Major named John Gifford. He was sentenced to be hanged, but on the night before his execution his sister engineered his escape. After some time in hiding in various places, John Gifford at last made his way to the town of Bedford.

Before he had joined the army he had studied medicine, and once he saw that things had eased off a little, he began to practise his old career. Gifford's life in Bedford soon became a public scandal. He hated and persecuted the Christians of that place, reducing himself, in the meantime, through begging, drink and gambling, to the point of suicide.

But let us leave John Gifford at this point; for here we see another man entering the town of Bedford - another "John". This man's name is John Bunyan, the man who is destined to write the world's most famous book, next to the Bible - "The Pilgrim's Progress". At this particular time, however Bunyan is not much better than the dissolute John Gifford, although God does seem to be working in his heart.

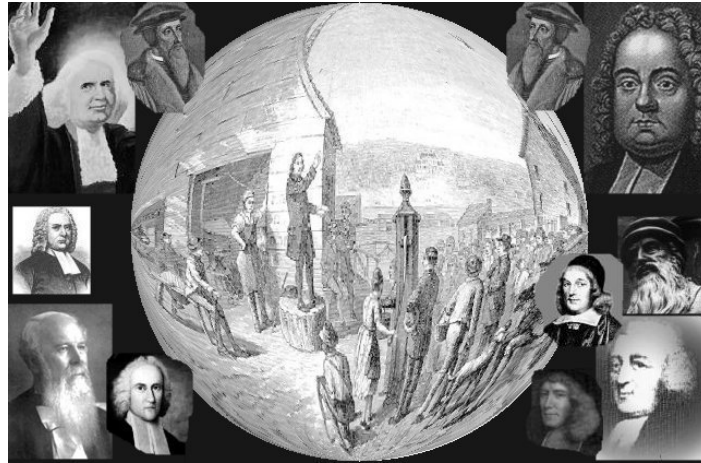
Just listen to how he records this day in his "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners" - the story of his life. "Upon a certain day", he says, "the good providence of God did cast me to Bedford to work in my calling; and in one of the streets of that town I came where there were three or four poor women sitting at the door in the sun and talking about the things of God. But I may say I heard, but I understood not, for they were far above and out of my reach ... About this time I began to break my mind to those poor people in Bedford, and to tell them of my condition, which, when they had heard, they told MR GIFFORD of me At that time also I sat under the ministry of HOLY MR GIFFORD, whose doctrine, by the grace of God, was much for my stability".

A different Mr Gifford from the dissolute Royalist Major? No, the same man, now saved by the grace of God, and ministering of the church at Bedford - the "Evangelist", in fact, in Mr Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Bunyan himself is the man in rags with the burden upon his back; John Gifford is the "Evangelist" who points him to "yonder wicket gate".

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform.

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Preaching From the Past

"God, even our own God" - Psalm 67- 6

It is strange how little use we make of the spiritual blessings which God gives us, but it is stranger still how little use we make of God himself. Though He is "our own God", we apply ourselves but little to Him, and ask but little of Him. How seldom do we ask counsel at the hands of the Lord! How often do we go about our business without seeking His guidance! In our troubles how constantly do we strive to bear our burdens ourselves, instead of casting them upon the Lord, that He may sustain us! This is not because we may not, for the Lord seems to say: "I am thine, soul, come and make use of me as thou wilt; thou mayest freely come to my store, and the oftener, the more welcome".

It is our own fault if we make not free with the riches of our own God. Then, since thou has such a friend, and He invites thee, draw from Him daily. Never want whilst though hast a God to go to; never fear or faint whilst thou hast God to help thee; go to thy treasure and take whatever thou hast need of - there is all that thou canst want.

Learn the divine skill of making God all things to thee. He can supply thee with all, or, better still, He can be to thee instead of all. Let me urge thee, then, to make use of thy God.

Make use of Him in PRAYER. Go to Him often because He is THY God. O, wilt thou fail to use so great a privilege? Fly to Him, tell Him all they wants. Use Him constantly BY FAITH at all times. If some dark providence has beclouded thee, use thy God as a "sun"; if some strong enemy has beset thee, find in Jehovah a "shield", for He is a sun and shield to His people. If thou hast lost thy way in the mazes of life, use Him as

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a "guide", for He will direct thee. Whatever thou art, and wherever thou art, remember, God is just WHAT thou wantest, and just WHERE thou wantest, and that He can do ALL thou wantest.

C. H. Spurgeon

This Month - Long Ago

One of the greatest events in the orthodox Jewish family is the birth of a baby boy. Every Jewish parent who holds fast to the faith of their fathers cherishes the hope that of them Messiah will be born. As Christians, of course, we know that the Messiah has come already - born of the virgin Mary, who was espoused to the carpenter, Joseph. Nevertheless, if we are sincere in our Christian profession, then we should cherish the hope that our children will be born, not as Messiahs, for that is impossible, but that they will be born to grow up Messiah-like. That, in the will of God, they will early come to know Christ as their Saviour, and grow more and more like Him as day follows day.

Such a desire, no doubt was cherished by the parents of a baby boy who was born on the 21st of this month, long ago. He was the youngest child of the family, and was named Robert Murray - Robert Murray McCheyne. Those who have read the life story of McCheyne need no one to tell them that he lived and worked among his fellow men as one who attained to the highest degree of Christlikeness. "You're nae ordinary man", it was said of him by a gang of workmen with whom he stopped to speak about the state of their souls; and he has been well designated "The Saintly Murray McCheyne".

In his early life, Murray McCheyne had an exceptional character. Many regarded him as a sincere born-again Christian on account of his approach to religious matters. Like Richard Sibbes before him, it could almost have been said that "heaven was in him before he was in heaven". His own estimation of those early days, however, leaves us without mistake of what his true condition was. Andrew Bonar, his dearest friend and biographer, tells us that McCheyne himself "regarded these as days of ungodliness - days wherein he cherished a true morality, but lived in heart a Pharisee".

It was not until the death of his brother David, that McCheyne began to feel the sinfulness of sin. Many are hardened by death in the family circle, but he was melted to see himself as lost before the God with whom he had to do. He thought long and often upon the words that his breather had spoken to him about his soul's salvation.

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Eleven years after the death of his brother he wrote to a friend, "This day eleven years ago, I lost my loved and loving brother, and began to seek a Brother that cannot die". The "Brother that cannot die" was found by McCheyne, and in the brief life that followed on this earth he did all in his power under the Holy Spirit to emulate the One who had captured his heart. "Make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be", was his continual prayer; and from what we know of his life, it would seem that the Lord answered this his prayer in a very real way.

He was ordained to the ministry in the year 1835, and only 7 years later was taken to be with the Saviour whom he tried so hard to please and imitate. But, in those seven years, he left an impression on the Church of Christ equal to most who had died "in a full age".

His first charge was at Larbert, and from there he moved to the place of his most famous labours and his death, at St. Peter's in Dundee. We often speak of Bunyan and Bedford, Newton and Olney, Edwards and Northampton, Baxter and Kidderminster; and in the same way, we might speak - many may do - of McCheyne and St. Peter's. Afflicted with ill-health, he, nevertheless, drove himself to every extreme of hardship in the service of Christ. He laboured with fervent prayers and preaching among his won people; faithfully sowing the seed of the Word of God.

His labours were not confined to Dundee, however, and he travelled a great deal of the country on preaching missions, crossing the sea to Ireland on several occasions, and undertaking the enquiry into the evangelisation of the Jews when he travelled with Andrew Bonar and other to the Holy Land. It was during this trip that he was laid most low in his physical health, and yet elevated most high in his spiritual office. During his absence, the pulpit at Dundee was occupied by the great evangelist, W.C. Burns, and it was to him that God gave the sickle to reap the harvest that McCheyne had so faithfully sown and watered. On his return to Scotland, he took up his labours once more, and had the joy of seeing many, many souls brought to the saving knowledge of faith in Jesus Christ.

One of Murray McCheyne's saying was: "Live so as to be missed"; and when he departed this life on 25th March 1843, Andrew Bonar tells us that "every Christian countenance was darkened with sadness". Like David Brainerd, Robert Murray McCheyne had not reached his 30th year. "On the day of his burial", Bonar tells us, "business was quite suspended in the parish. The streets and every window, from the house to the grave, were crowded with those who felt that a prince in Israel had fallen. His tomb may be seen on the pathway at the north-west corner of St. Peter's burying ground. He has gone to 'the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense, till the day break and the shadows flee away'".
(The length of the present sketch is quite inadequate to give a full picture of the life of this man. May I recommend "The Memoir of Robert Murray McCheyne" by Andrew Bonar)

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Quotes for Consideration

Basil

The best way to find out truth is to be much in the study of the Scriptures

Thomas Watson

"How slow is God to anger - He was longer in destroying Jericho than in making the world".

"All things were made by Him"

The Maker of the universe
As man to man was made a curse;
The claims of law which He had made
Unto the uttermost He paid.

His holy fingers made the bough
That grew the thorns that pierced His brow;
The nails that pierced His hands were mined
In secret places He designed.

He made the forest whence there sprung
The tree on which His body hung;
He died upon a cross of wood,
Yet made the hill on which it stood.

The throne on which He now appears
Was His from everlasting years —
But a new crown adorns His brow,
And every knee to Him shall bow.

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Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 1

Whole Psalm - This whole psalm offers itself to be drawn into these two opposite propositions: a Godly man is blessed, a wicked man is miserable.

Sir Richard Baker

Whole Psalm - This Psalm may well be called a Christian's Guide, for it discovers the quicksands where the wicked sink down in perdition, and the firm ground on which the saints tread to glory.

Thomas Watson

Verse 1 - "Blessed is the man".....Where the word BLESSED is hung out as a sign, we may be sure that we will find a Godly man within.

Sir Richard Baker

Verse 2 - "...and in his law doth he meditate....." In the plainest text there is a world of holiness and spirituality; and if we in prayer and dependence upon God did sit down and study it, we should behold much more than appears to us. It may be, at one reading or looking, we see little or nothing; as Elijah's servant went once and saw nothing; therefore, he was commanded to look seven times. "What now?", says the prophet. "I see a cloud rising like a man's hand", and by and by the whole surface of the heavens was covered with clouds. So you may look lightly upon a scripture and see nothing; MEDITATE OFTEN UPON IT, and there you shall see a light like the light of the sun.

Joseph Caryl

Verse 2 - "...meditate...." Meditation is the touchstone of a Christian; it shows what metal he is made of. It is a spiritual index; as an index shows what is in a book, so meditation shows what is in the heart.

Thomas Watson

Meditation chews the cud, and gets the sweetness and nutritive virtue of the Word into the heart and life: this is the way the Godly brings forth much fruit.

B. Ashwood

Verse 3 - "... (He) bringeth forth his fruit in his season..." Fruit is expected, fruit is borne, and it comes also in the time in which it should come. A godly education, under the influences of the Divine Spirit - which can never be with-held where they are earnestly sought - is sure to produce the fruits of righteousness; and he who reads, prays and meditates, will ever SEE the WORK which God has given him to do; the POWER by which he is to perform it; THE times, PLACES, and OPPORTUNITIES for doing those things by which God can obtain most glory, his own soul most good, and his neighbour most edification.

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Adam Clarke

Verse 3 - "... and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper ..." And with regard to this prospering, take heed that thou understandest not a carnal prosperity. This prosperity is a hidden prosperity, and lies entirely secret in spirit; and, therefore, if thou hast not this prosperity that is by faith, thou shouldest rather judge what prosperity thou hast to be the greatest adversity.

Martin Luther

Verse 6 - "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous..." They that endeavour righteous living in themselves and have Christ's righteousness imputed to them.

Thos Wilcox

There are two distinct groups of people on this earth - "the ungodly" and "the righteous". We all by nature belong to that group called the ungodly, because in our natural outlook and behaviour we have no time for the things of God.

We may attend worship occasionally, or even regularly, but our outlook can be as ungodly as ever. There is only one way that we can truly serve God with a righteous heart and mind, and that is when we have been accepted as righteous by Him.

How can this come to pass? Only by the acceptance of God's way of salvation, by accepting Christ's merits as a robe of righteousness to cover our sins.

Read the first Psalm for yourself, and, as you read, ask yourself - "To which of these two groups do I belong?" If you are honest, you will find the answer, and realise that you can only find acceptance with God under His conditions.

REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

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