



## Thoughts from the Bible and Books

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*John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress was published in 1678. It is said that Pilgrim's Progress has been printed into more copies than any other book in history, with the exception of the Bible and possibly The Imitation of Christ (which some say is just ahead of Pilgrim's Progress and others say is just behind). In Bunyan's classic work, the pilgrim Christian must make his way to the Celestial City. Along the journey, he meets unique characters like Mr. Worldly Wisdom, Talkative, and Mr. Moneylove and must traverse dangerous places like the Swamp of Despondence and the Vanity Fair. As the most famous allegory ever written, Pilgrim's Progress is a creative look at the path of Christian discipleship from this life to the next.*

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*In the spirit of Bunyan's Pilgrim Progress, I have written an allegory for (post-) modern American life. In this story, Evangelist tries to lead twelve individuals to The Pearl of Greatest Price. By no means, is my story as creative or powerful as Bunyan's. But perhaps it will be helpful all the same. The story will unfold throughout the summer issues of TBB. So you'll have to keep reading!*

### Many are Called, But Few are Chosen (Part 1)

It was a busy day for Evangelist. All morning, afternoon, and well into the evening Evangelist made his calls on the phone. He dialed and pleaded and urged and laughed and cried and rarely rested the whole day through. This day was not unlike many others. When the sun came up each morning, he knew there would be ups and downs, probably some highs and lows, and always plenty of work to do.

But Evangelist was happy. Especially this day. Evangelist was by nature an optimistic man, but the success of this day surprised even him. You see, the townspeople of Blandanddark didn't particularly like Evangelist. It was his habit of making house calls that annoyed Blandanddark. Actually, it wasn't his calling of people's homes that upset them so much as the fact that he called *their* home.

Don't get me wrong, Evangelist was a cheerful, likeable guy, but many people in town said that, for some reason, he made them feel uncomfortable. Some people got off the phone feeling bad about themselves, which, of course, they didn't think was very good. Others objected to his persistence. Many called him a troublemaker and a nuisance. Over time, more and more people simply hung up on Evangelist once they recognized his voice.

For weeks, the response had been downright dismal. Not a single citizen of Blandanddark showed any interest in traveling with Evangelist to the his hometown, The Pearl of Greatest Price. No takers, just dial tones. This was enough to make even bright-eyed Evangelist a bit gloomy. (In fact, if truth be told, one day Evangelist was so upset he tried to leave town but was

order back by his Sovereign with the assurance that there were still some faithful travelers to be called in Blandanddark.)

You can understand, then, why this day had Evangelist singing, whistling and skipping all over town. In one day, out of fifteen calls, he had received a dozen favorable responses. This was unheard of, not to mention most exciting. In a burst of joy, Evangelist hurriedly made preparations for the group's early morning departure. He worked feverishly, gathering supplies, checking maps, and most importantly, getting a good night's sleep.

Evangelist had instructed the entire group to meet him at 6:30 A.M. sharp on the morrow. And by the time the clock chimed half past, all twelve had arrived promptly and eagerly for their journey. Again, most unusual. But this was already shaping up to be an unusual group, especially with its tremendous size. A group of four or five was normal, six or seven outstanding, but twelve was positively thrilling!

Along with Evangelist these were the twelve: Chosen, Civil Religion, Mrs. Gray, Blame, Skeptic, Tolerant, Intellect, Sincerity, Rebellion, Mountain Top, Mr. Busy, Mr. Comfort and his dog Affluence. (Mr. Comfort's three siblings—Ms. Lazy, Mr. Unreflective, and Miss. Unconcerned—were the only three on that successful day to give Evangelist a negative response). So off they ventured out from the town of Blandanddark to The Pearl of Greatest Price—thirteen men, one dog, and countless miles from here to there.

It wasn't long before Evangelist broke the silence with an announcement. "I am more than thrilled with this wonderful turnout. Our trip will be a good one, though it will not always be pleasant. I ask for your patience and trust. It is my earnest hope that I can safely lead all twelve of you to The Pearl of Greatest Price. I promise you that all cost and loss you may experience will be more than repaid when we reach our destination. You will quickly forget any sacrifice made along the way. In fact, I can hardly call your labor a sacrifice when I consider what will be your great reward should you stay close to me and make it safely to the Great City."

The travelers were not listening though. Or rather, they were not listening very well. It may have eased their minds to hear all that awaited them at The Pearl of Greatest Price, but once they heard Evangelist's

remarks about the possible unpleasantness of the journey, they heard nothing else. So, like every other group that ever set out with Evangelist, the twelve began to murmur. Then they whined. Then they complained. All this without Mr. and Mrs. Grumble-Groan who traveled (briefly) with Evangelist on his previous trek.

With the discontent growing at the sound of even the faintest hardship, Evangelist thought it best to make his second announcement right away. "I should warn you of one other thing." The mention of warning hushed the crowd. "If you make it to The Pearl of Greatest Price—a three days journey I reckon—there will be a final obstacle. Before a traveler may enter the Great City, he must face the Rocks of Offense. I cannot say more about them now except to say that the Rocks of Offense, in my experience, have proved a very great obstacle to many a sojourner, and most stumble on them to their shame. They are absolutely necessary and altogether wonderful, but also exceedingly dangerous. They are to be feared, for they can crush and hinder almost as well as they can help."

This did not sit well with the group. Mr. Comfort was the first to speak up (and the last and the loudest). "I don't like this one bit," he growled. "I was told there would be pleasure and happiness beyond compare." Affluence yelped an affirming bark.

"That is all true Mr. Comfort," assured Evangelist. "You will find that the more you walk along the Path the more your heart will find rest. And the Great City! Good sir, its greatness exceeds words!"

"Hmmp," sighed Mr. Comfort.

"But," Evangelist paused, "the journey will be difficult. And nothing can be brought along the Path except what is absolutely essential. All else shall be counted loss. I never promised this would be easy. All I can promise is that it will be good."

"Well!" Mr. Comfort was beside himself (and full of himself). "Who ever heard of such a crazy idea? Loss for the sake of gain?! Silly nonsense! There is nothing good that isn't easy and nothing difficult that can be good." Affluence snarled, while his master finished his tirade. "This is not what I bargained for. All this talk of grief and trial. Bah! And great joy? I was quite fine back home now that I come to think of it. Quite fine indeed. Come Affy. Let's go home."

And so they did.

*to be continued...*