

The City Of Destruction

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[0 : 00] Well as you know this evening we're beginning a study of the pilgrim's progress. Last week we were considering the man behind the message.

We met John Bunyan and we considered his life and what influenced him to write such a brilliant book. A book that has in turn influenced countless millions throughout the generations.

And you know one person who was greatly influenced by pilgrim's progress and the writings of John Bunyan. It was the 19th century Baptist preacher Charles Hardin Spurgeon.

In fact Spurgeon he was so influenced and inspired by the pilgrim's progress that he gave a series of lectures to his congregation in the metropolitan Tabernacle in London.

But you know it wasn't until after his death in 1892 that Spurgeon's lectures were later compiled by his son Thomas Spurgeon. And then in 1903 Spurgeon's lectures were published in a book called Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress.

[1 : 07] Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress. And it's you know it's a book that I'd encourage you to read alongside our study of the pilgrim's progress. Because in the book Spurgeon he gives his thoughts on the places Christian travelled in his pilgrimage and the people Christian met in his pilgrimage.

And Spurgeon in his book he introduced pictures from Pilgrim's Progress by saying next to the Bible the book I value most is John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.

I believe I have read it through at least a hundred times. It's a volume of which I never seem to tire.

And the secret of its freshness is that it's so largely compiled from the Scriptures.

It's really biblical teaching put into the form of a simple yet very striking allegory. It has been upon my mind writes Spurgeon to give a series of addresses upon the pilgrim's progress because the characters described by John Bunyan have their living representatives today.

And the words have a message for many who are found in our congregations at the present time.

Now although Spurgeon said those words back in 1862 they are nevertheless as relevant today as when they were first written.

[2 : 32] Because as Spurgeon said the characters presented and portrayed in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress they are mirrored in the lives of many in our own congregations.

In fact many of the characters in the Pilgrim's Progress they were based upon those whom John Bunyan knew in his congregation in his day.

Because as we mentioned last week the Pilgrim's Progress is in many ways autobiographical. John Bunyan was writing through the lens of his own Christian experience and we'll see that as we go through the narrative.

But you know we can see that even from the opening sentence of the story the Pilgrim's Progress. Bunyan begins his story by saying he begins with the words as I walked through the wilderness of this world I lighted on a certain place where there was a den and I laid me down in that place to sleep and as I slept I dreamed.

And the den which Bunyan refers to is of course the Bedford County Jail where he was held a prisoner for 12 years from 1666 to 1672.

[3 : 49] And so this evening as we begin walking with Christian as we walk with Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress we're going to walk this evening with him from destruction to despond. We're going to walk with Christian from the city of destruction all the way to the slough of despond.

And I'd just like us to walk with Christian using three simple headings destruction, decision and despond. Destruction, decision and despond.

So first of all destruction. John Bunyan presents the Pilgrim's Progress to us in the form of a vivid dream which he had in this is in the Bedford County Jail. Now I don't know if you've ever had vivid

dreams which impact and influence your thinking but Bunyan describes what he saw in his dream. He says I dreamed and behold I saw a man clothed with rags standing in a certain place with his face from his own house, a book in his hand and a great burden upon his back. Bunyan portrays the main character of the story as a sinner. A sinner whose righteousness was as filthy rags in God's sight. But what's important to note is that at this point Bunyan doesn't refer to the main character as Christian and it's not until later in the book that we actually find out that his name at this very point as a resident of the city of destruction his name was called Graceless. And so from the outset we're told that Graceless he is standing in the city of destruction and he's clothed in rags, he's got a book in his hand and a burden upon his back. And you know what Bunyan is setting before us is actually a brilliant illustration of my unconverted friend.

That's what Bunyan presents to us. He presents to us my unconverted friend. Now I don't know how I started using this phrase my unconverted friend but Bunyan's description of Graceless it helpfully describes you my unconverted friend. Because like Graceless your location tonight is the city of destruction.

[6 : 13] Your righteousness before God is as filthy rags. You have the book in your hand which is the Bible and you have a burden upon your back it's a burden of sin.

And you have this burden of sin because you know what this book is telling you about your lost condition and your need of salvation. And like Bunyan was trying to portray in the life of Graceless that's what the Holy Spirit does in the life of a sinner.

Because you know the work of the Holy Spirit is to use this book the Bible to convict and to convince you of your sin and misery and that your works of righteousness your good works your works of righteousness they are but filthy rags in God's sight. But you know the wonder of the Holy Spirit is that as he works through the book and the burden you'll be brought to the end of yourself like this Graceless prodigal son and my hope and my prayer for you my unconverted friend is that you'll be brought like Graceless was to the point where you're saying what shall I do? What shall I do? That's what that's what Graceless asked.

What shall I do? And of course the question that Graceless was asking was the same question that the Philippian jailer asked the apostle Paul when he came to the end of himself.

What must I do to be saved? And you'll remember that Paul responded with those precious words believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. But you know it's when the Holy Spirit begins to work in the heart and life of a Graceless sinner you know before there is clarity there is this period of confusion where the book and the burden they become in many ways overwhelming to the point that all you're thinking about and sometimes all you're talking about is the state of your soul and that's what we see here with Graceless because through the work of the Holy Spirit the book was convicting and convincing him of his burden of sin and you know he tried to contain it he tried to contain his conviction and even curtail his concern for the state of his soul and the souls in his care but we see that he couldn't and Christian he comes to this point where he had to speak to his wife and his children he had to speak to his family and we read that he says oh my dear wife and you my sweet children

[8 : 59] I your dear friend I'm in in myself undone by reason of a burden that lies hard upon me moreover I am told to a certainty that this our city will be burned with fire from heaven in which fearful overthrow both myself with thee my wife and you my sweet babe shall miserably come to ruin except some way of escape can be found whereby we may be delivered now we're not told at this point that the wife of Graceless is called Christiana and they have four children in fact they're not really mentioned in the pilgrims progress because there are two parts to the pilgrims progress part one is based upon the pilgrims progress of Christian but part two which is the lesser known story of the pilgrims progress it's of Christians wife Christiana and their four children and as they undertake the similar journey towards the celestial city but what's interesting is that you can see that Christians wife Christiana and their four children they're based actually based upon Bunyan's wife and his four children but you know as the narrative continues in the pilgrims progress we see that Graceless he becomes more and more restless about the state of his soul where he would be walking on his own in the fields and he would be reading his book with this ever increasing burden on his back and we're told that as he was walking and reading and meditating we're told that he burst out as he had done before crying what must I do to be saved what must I do to be saved you know Graceless he didn't know what to do he didn't know which way to turn or where to go he needed direction and he needed discipleship which he found when he met a man named evangelist

and you know it was just like we saw last week in the experience of John Bunyan when he was at his wit's end needing he needed direction and discipleship and then he encountered an evangelist he encountered an evangelist in the form of the godly Mr. Gifford who was the pastor and preacher in the Bedford congregation and you know my friend in our day and generation we need evangelists we need to be evangelists we need preachers and people and we need them to poke us and prod us and point us to Jesus we need evangelists and you know that's what evangelist here did he poked and prodded and pointed to Jesus the holy spirit had done the work but all evangelist did was simply speak to to Graceless and say why are you crying why are you crying and Graceless he immediately opens up and explains the concern and the conviction that he felt he says to evangelist sir I read in the book in my hand that I am condemned to die and after that to come to judgment and I find that I am not willing to do the first not able to do the second you know by reading the bible Graceless had come to the realization that it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment but Graceless he didn't want to die because like you my unconverted friend Graceless wasn't ready to stand at the judgment seat of Christ he wasn't ready for the last day and with that evangelist he gives Graceless this parchment scroll and as Graceless opens the parchment scroll he sees written on it the words flee from the wrath to come

flee from the wrath to come but Graceless he asks evangelist who there must I flee and evangelist he he points in the distance and he he says to Graceless do you see yonder wicked gate but Graceless he says no then evangelist says do you see yonder shining light and Graceless says well I think I do and evangelist he responds by saying keep that light in your eye and go directly there and you'll see a gate and when you knock you will be told what to do of course evangelists direction and discipleship it was based upon the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said enter by the narrow gate enter by the wicked gate for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and there are many who go in by it but narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads all the way to life and few there be that find it so evangelist he points Graceless in the direction of the narrow gate but you know it's at this point that in his pictures from pilgrims progress that Spurgeon says he says I am a great lover of John Bunyan but I do not believe him to be infallible and with that Spurgeon questioned the gospel which evangelist preached he asked why did evangelist direct Graceless to the wicked gate and not to the cross surely evangelist should have said do you see the cross run there at once and Spurgeon says if Bunyan meant to show what usually happens he was right but if he meant to show what ought to have happened he was wrong for we must not say to the sinner now sinner if thou wilt be saved go to the baptismal pool go to the wicked gate go to church do this or do that no say Spurgeon the cross should be right in front of the wicked gate and we should say to the sinner throw thyself down there and thou art safe but thou art not safe until thou canst cast off thy burden and lie at the foot of the cross and find peace in Jesus and you know I have to agree with Spurgeon on this one because as a Graceless unconverted friend you will never be saved because of your baptism you'll never be saved because of your Bible reading or your church attendance or even your good living or your good works none of these things will save you because there is salvation in no other and in no other thing apart from the cross of Jesus Christ my friend this world's one and only remedy for the curse of sin and death is the cross of Jesus Christ the difference between eternal life and eternal death is the cross of Jesus Christ the difference between being saved and being lost is the cross of Jesus Christ the difference between an eternity in heaven or an eternity in hell is the cross of Jesus Christ and it's for that reason that Graceless begins his pilgrimage towards the celestial city because Bunyan writes so I saw in my dream that the man began to run now he had not run far from his own door when his wife and children perceiving it began to cry after him to return but the man put his fingers in his ears and he ran on crying life life eternal life which brings us secondly from destruction to decision destruction to decision decision you know there's a version Joel the book of the prophet Joel chapter 3 which reads multitudes multitudes in the valley of decision the day of the lord is near in the valley of decision and you know in a sense Graceless had just passed through the valley of decision when his two neighbors met him because Graceless he had decided to cast his lot in with Jesus and follow him Graceless had taken that first step of faith by believing in Jesus Christ and confessing that in him and in him alone is life life eternal life and it's with that that Bunyan now refers to his pilgrim as Christian Christian didn't know that he was a Christian yet but he was a Christian and as we said while he was still resident of the city of destruction he was called Graceless but now that he had taken that first step that important step of faith and commitment to

Jesus Christ he was called a Christian he didn't realize he was a Christian by that point but he was a Christian and you know for you my unconverted friend someone who is called Graceless I want to ask you this evening when are you going to when are you going to take that step of faith and commitment to Jesus Christ when are you going to to step out in confession of your faith and commitment to Jesus when am I going to stop calling you my unconverted friend and start calling you my Christian friend when is that going to happen but you know when Christian took that step of faith and commitment to Jesus Christ he did so trusting in the Lord's promise the promise was be ye separate from the world and come out from among them and I will receive you be ye separate from the world and come out from among them and I will receive you Christian needed to separate himself from the worthiness of the city of destruction and you know that's what we need to do too isn't it because you know far too often this promise is not preached and what happens is the Christian is in the world

and the world is in the Christian the Christian is in the world and the world is in the Christian and yet the promise for everyone who takes that step of faith and commitment to Jesus Christ is be ye separate from the world and come out from among them and I will receive you now as we've said on many occasions before separation is not isolation it's contact without contamination separation is not isolation it's contact without contamination but you know my friend as Christians we need to be separate from the world because like it was for Christian who had his family and his neighbors running after him trying to persuade him to go back you know there will be many in our own experience who are trying to do the same they may mock they may threaten like they did to Christian but you know my friend far better for you to flee the city of destruction and to follow Jesus than to be fascinated by the world and feel the wrath of God and your oboeon tells us that his his wife and his children they try to persuade him to stay and now there was these two neighbors who who ran after Christian in the hope of persuading him to turn back and Bunyan tells us that the names of these two neighbors he says the name of one was obstinate and the name of the other pliable and when they caught up with Christian who couldn't run very fast because he had this burden upon his back

Christians neighbors obstinate and pliable they tried to persuade him to turn back but Christian he responded by saying that can by no means be you dwell in the city of destruction the place also where i was born see i see it to be so and dying there sooner or later you will sink lower than the grave into a place that burns with fire and brimstone and you know as a new convert as someone who had just taken that first step of faith and commitment Christian knew where he had escaped from and he certainly wasn't for going back but you know the conversation which Christian had with obstinate and pliable it reminds me of the passage which we read earlier from Luke chapter 8 and the parable of the sower because it's in the parable of the sower that Jesus is asking the question how's your heart how's your heart you know the parable of the sower it's it not only teaches us about the purpose of the sower and the power of the seed but it also teaches us about the people of the soil because the parable of the sower it describes four types of soil and their response to the seed which obviously it represents to us the four types of heart and how they respond to the word of god and as we read in the parable of the sower there's a hardened heart a hollow heart a hungry heart and a healthy heart there's a hard hardened heart the seed that fell by the wayside there's a hollow heart the seed that fell onto the rock there's a hungry heart the seed that fell among the thorns and there's a healthy heart the seed that fell into the good ground and you're needless to say Christian had a healthy heart but obstinate he could be described as having a hardened heart he had a hardened heart because when the seed of god's word was sown it just fell by the wayside obstinate and many like him he heard the word but the devil came and took away the word from his heart so that he refused to believe and be saved and that was obstinate because he wasn't willing to give up his companions or his comforts in this life he wasn't willing to give them up for the sake of the cross or the crown he wasn't willing to give up the companions and comforts of this life for the sake of the cross and the crown and even when Christian explained to obstinate where he was going obstinate still refused

[24 : 21] Christian said to him I seek a place that can never be destroyed one that is pure and fadeth not away and is laid up in heaven and safe there to be given at the time appointed to them that seek it with all their heart read so if you will in my book but obstinate with his hardened heart he responded by calling Christian a fool and he said away with your book away with your book and you know with his hardened heart obstinate he turned back he turned back to the city of destruction and were told that he walked with Christian no longer but it was obstinate you know he was the fool

because as Jesus said whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple obstinate wasn't willing to give up his companions and comforts in this life for the sake of the cross and the crown but pliable he was a different story because pliable he was interested in what Christian had to say and he was interested in where Christian was going and to him it sounded a lot better than the city of destruction and yet the truth was pliable's heart was a hollow heart pliable's heart was a hollow heart pliable was like the seed which fell on the rock he was like the person who heard the word and received it with joy and believed for a while but in time of testing fell away pliable was as his name suggests he was soft easygoing and could be twisted any which way because when he heard about the city to which Christian was going he wanted to hear more and pliable says to Christian come neighbor Christian since there are none but us two here tell me now further what the things are and how to be enjoyed whether we are going and Christian he reads his book to him he reads there is an endless kingdom to be enjoyed an everlasting life to be given to us that we may live in that kingdom forever and with eagerness pliable says and what else and Christian says well there are crowns of glory to be given us and garments that will make us shine like the sun in the sky and with this increasing joy pliable says again and what else Christian says well there shall be no more crying or sorrow for he that is the the owner of the place he will wipe away all the tears from our eyes and as Christian explains all that he has read in about in the celestial city pliable responds by saying the hearing of this is enough to delight one's heart pliable was he was very different to obstinate because pliable he he responded positively to the gospel in fact you could say pliable enjoyed the gospel he was enthusiastic about the gospel he was excited about the gospel on the outside pliable looked so promising just like the seed on the surface of the soil but you know inside he had a hollow heart inside under the surface of the soil there was no depth no root and no earth what was on the inside was that he had a hollow heart and you know sadly there are many like pliable who enjoy the gospel and they're enthusiastic about sermons and they're excited about testimonies and reading Christian books and yet their enjoyment and their enthusiasm and their excitement it's all hollow because there's never a real concern about sin there's never a confession of sin there's never a commitment to the savior they just enjoy the moment my friend

how's your heart tonight how's your heart is it a hardened heart a hollow heart a hungry heart or a healthy heart how's your heart because it's with his hollow heart that pliable turned to Christian and said well my good companion come on let us mend our pace let's keep going but Christian said I cannot go so fast as I would by reason of this burden that's on my back and then Bunyan he writes now I saw in my dream that just as they had ended this talk they threw nigh to a very myery slaw or swamp that was in the midst of the plane and they'd been heedless both fell suddenly into the bog and the name of the slaw was despond which brings us from destruction to decision to despond despond when Christian and pliable fell into the slaw of despond pliable was confused and offended that such a thing would happen to him and in a moment we see that he became angry and he turned on his fellow

Christian and he said to him is this the happiness that you have told me all this while off if we have such ill speed at our first setting out what may we expect between this and our journey's end may I get out again with my life you shall possess the brave country on your own and with that were told that pliable he gave a desperate struggle or two and then he got out of the slaw of despond and were told that away he went and Christian saw him no more pliable my friend he was just how Jesus described him he was a hollow heart because pliable was like the seed which had been which had fell upon the rock the seed was the one who heard the word received it with joy believed for a while but in time of testing fell away in time of testing fell away my friend pliable's problem was that he didn't count the cost he didn't deny himself he didn't take up his cross and he didn't follow Jesus instead were told away he went and Christian saw him no more just like what was said of obstinate away he went and Christian saw him no more pliable got out of the slaw of despond and he got out quite easily because he had never read the book and there was no burden of sin upon his back like there was for Christian pliable you see he wasn't convicted or convinced of his sin which is why he never confessed or committed his life to the savior but for Christian we see that he struggled he was left to struggle and sink in the slaw of despond and yet he couldn't get out because of this great burden that was upon his back weighing him down and as we said the burden upon his back was an illustration of his conviction of sin but you know now having taken that first step of commitment by leaving the city of destruction and setting out on his pilgrimage towards the

celestial city we see here that that Christian he slips and he struggles and he sinks in the slaw of despond because he lacks assurance of salvation he slips and sinks and struggles in the slaw of despond because he lacks assurance of salvation and you know my friend many people are like Christian in this regard where they take that step of faith they come out on the side of the Lord they come out committing and confessing the name of Christ and yet in their heart they struggle and they sink in the slaw of despond but as we read Christian he struggles and sinks in the slaw of despond until a man called help puts out his hand and pulls Christian onto solid ground and you know is that not just the beautiful picture of what happens in Psalm 40 where the confession of the Christian in the slaw of despond the confession of the Christian says about Jesus he took me from a fearful pit and from the mighty clay and on a rock he set my feet establishing my way but you know it's when Christian meets help that he asks him he asks him why the slaw of despond isn't repaired so that other pilgrims can travel more safely and help replies he says this mighty slaw is such a place as cannot be mended it is the hollow wither the scum and filth that go with the feeling of sin to continually run and therefore it is called the slaw of despond for still as the sinner is awakened by his lost condition there arise in his soul many fears and doubts and discouraging alarms which all of them get together and settle in this place and this is the reason of the badness of the ground and you know what help was saying was that the slaw of despond it existed as a result of Christians inward looking where he was looking inward at his own faults and failings instead of looking upward to the faithfulness and fidelity of Jesus Christ and you know my Christian friend how often do you slip and slide and sink and struggle in the slaw of despond because you're looking inward at your own faults and failings and failures instead of looking upward at the faithfulness and fidelity of Jesus Christ how often are you slipping and sinking in the slaw of despond because you're looking inward rather than looking upward but that's what we need to look isn't it we need to look upward there's no use looking inward because all you'll find is faults and failings all you'll find is a slaw of despond but you need to look upward set your affections says Paul on things above where Christ is seated that's where we need to look we need to look up to the one who is faithful and you know that's why David could go on and say in Psalm 40 which we'll sing in a moment he put a new song in my mouth our God to magnify many shall see it and shall fear and on the Lord rely and so this evening we've walked with Christian in the pilgrims progress we've walked from destruction to despond we've walked from the city of destruction to the slaw of despond and God willing next week we'll walk with Christian a little further we'll walk from worldly wise man all the way to the wicked gate well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray together oh Lord our gracious God may give thanks to thee this evening for that wonderful reminder that we have been brought from the city of destruction and on to this narrow path that leads to life we thank thee O Lord that even though we were once called graceless when we were strangers to grace and to God and yet we thank thee that through commitment and confession of the Savior and through the work of the Holy Spirit in our heart that we came to be called a Christian to be one of Christ's people to be a follower of Jesus and help us even this evening and in the week that lies ahead to keep looking to Jesus that there may be many sloughs of despond there may be many times where we faint and fail but Lord help us we pray not to slip or to slide or to struggle not to look inward but ever to look upward to look to Jesus who is the author and the finisher of our faith bless us then we pray and go before us taking away our iniquity and receiving us graciously for Jesus' sake amen well we'll bring our service to a conclusion by singing in that Psalm we mentioned at Psalm 40 a Psalm which I'm sure is well known to you it's a Psalm which is the confession of the Christian and I suppose the question I want to ask you as we conclude this evening is is this your confession is this your confession in Psalm 40 are you confessing as a Christian saying with David I waited for the Lord my God and patiently did bear at length to me he didn't climb my voice and cry to hear he took me from a fearful pit and from the mirey clay and on a rock he set my feet establishing my way we'll sing down to the verse marked four of Psalm 40 to God's praise didn't climb my voice and cry to hear he took me from a fearful pit and from the mirey clay and on a rock he set my feet establishing my way he took me from a fearful pit and from the mirey clay many shall see it and shall hear and on the glory line above the glory line respecting all the bright nor such as to the sight to lie