Each of the writers in Scripture writes from their own personal perspective. Whilst all of Scripture is directed and inspired by the Holy Spirit, He nevertheless does not divorce the writer’s personality from their message. This adds a deeper understanding to how we read God’s Word. For example, Peter, - the disciple who forsook the Lord and denied he knew Him, later wrote, I Pet. 3:15 be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

When I go to preach somewhere for the first time I would often tend to include some word of testimony to how God saved me. Similarly, when a church is considering calling a new pastor they would require him to submit his testimony. You need to be sure of the ground you are standing on … and others to be sure of you too. This is also the reason we require a testimony of grace from any who seek membership of our church.

And so it was with Christian on his journey. As he came to the door of the Palace Beautiful, he was greeted by the Porter, - a man called Watchful. Watchful was the first point of contact between the outside and the inside of this church, the Palace Beautiful. Now … are all welcome? Yes, of course they are … but how we also need to take great care concerning those who would desire admittance among the ranks of God’s people! Jude wrote about the certain men who had crept in unawares, who were ungodly men … the devil’s spawn … and whose minds were intent upon wreaking havoc among God’s people. … There was the young man who was ‘carrying on’ with his father’s wife (…his mother!), and Paul told the church to deliver him unto Satan trusting and praying he would ultimately be restored to the Lord (I Cor. 5:1-6).

There are also other examples of those who had crept in among God’s people, - Demas, Hymenaeus, and Alexander (I Tim. 1:20). … And in the Old Testament, Nehemiah had to contend with Eliashib the priest who was a friend of the enemy Tobiah, who along with Sanballat and Geshem sought to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Babylonians had destroyed it (Neh. 13:4ff.). … It is only right and proper to guard the entrance to God’s house, and to keep out that which is contrary to God’s people and their witness.

You see, returning to that young man who was having the incestuous affair with his mother in Corinth … It seems some, - if not many, - in the church were actually proud of it! They ‘gloried’ in it. They weren’t ashamed. It was flagrant disobedience to God’s Word but they, nonetheless, saw it as ‘keeping up with the times’. …
Paul told them in no uncertain terms, Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (I Cor. 5:6). Paul wasn’t telling the Corinthians it was a small matter, - a little leaven, - the young man was embroiled in … What he meant was if you do not take action at the beginning, - if you ‘let it go’ and ignore it, - others will take advantage and there will be more of the same! … It has a word to say to our churches today. Many of them want to keep up with the world, - and we can see how this relates to this massive storm that is about to blow upon the church concerning the issue of homosexuality. The true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot and must not succumb in any form to any practice that God’s Word condemns!

We need to have men like Watchful at the door to keep out that which is contrary to the Scriptures, and we need to heed Paul’s words to young Timothy, I Tim. 6:20 O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.

And so Watchful rightly makes his enquiries concerning Christian. Christian was hiding nothing … He was honest because the grace of God was working in his heart since he had left the City of Destruction behind him … What was his name and his character like in those former days? His name when he was living in that godless place described his spiritual condition, and he was not ashamed to tell Watchful the change that had happened in his life. His name used to be …

**GRACELESS**

He had nothing going for him spiritually. He had his family, his house, his job, his friends, and his citizenship in the City of Destruction … but he had nothing of God. He had nothing really, - he was empty inside. He was graceless! He didn’t know God. None of his friends knew God … and they were all out for themselves! God was irrelevant. They had their philosophies and religion … as men like Obstinate and Pliable displayed … but there was no true religion pertaining to God’s sovereign and redeeming grace. It wasn’t preached, it wasn’t taught, and it wasn’t owned.

Well then, how did this man whose name was Graceless come to discover his need of the Saviour? Somehow, - known only to God, - a precious Book came into his possession … and Graceless could not lay this Book down. He read it and read it … and the more he read it, it troubled him. He could not escape its message. He would go to his work, and it would follow him. He would lie down to sleep at night, and he couldn’t because its message of how he was heading towards a lost eternity would not allow him to sleep. … He went out into the fields, and it continued to follow him there. He could go nowhere to escape the burden of his sin God was setting before him.
Graceless by name, and graceless by nature! Nothing he could have done would have merited his salvation for the City of Destruction was his home, and it had permeated every aspect of his being.

Graceless … and yet in Sovereign Grace, the Lord began dealing with that man. He could not understand what it was, and neither did he know how to escape it … until one day, - while out in the fields, - God sent another man called Evangelist to direct him towards salvation. And we know how Graceless became the Pilgrim, and he journeyed over the hurdles and through the pitfalls to eventually arrive at the wicket gate, where he entered in … and the Lord saved him. The Lord led him to the cross where his burden fell from off his back. He rejoiced in God’s saving grace, “He hath given me rest by His sorrows and life by His death”.

Christian, then, began to realise this was no ‘chance’ meeting or ‘good fortune’. He realised that God found him before he found God. John Bunyan wrote Christian shared with the Watchman, “I come of the race of Japheth, whom God will persuade to dwell in the tents of Shem” … What did he mean?

Shem, of course, relates to the Hebrew race, - the Jewish nation. The Jews take their ancestry from Shem (the tents of Shem, the ‘Semitic’). Ham was Shem’s brother and Noah’s son who fell under a curse for his lewd sin against his father (Gen. 9:18ff.). Japheth was the other brother who covered Ham’s nakedness … and Japheth is the ancestor of the Gentile nations that moved westwards, - these were the people Christian was identifying himself with. … Not just by way of ancestry though, but also by way of God’s grace. You see, Ham was cursed, - his future was dark, v.26 Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren … but the descendants of Japheth had a future blessed of God that would be shared with the descendants of Shem, the Jews. Paul explained, Eph. 2:11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

… Made one in Christ … “ingrafted” (Rom. 11:17) … And also God’s irresistible grace, “Whom God will persuade to dwell in the tents of Shem”. Yes, we, - of our own selves, - called upon Christ to enter in and to save us from sin and from Hell, - but it was God’s irresistible, overwhelming, and persuasive grace that opened our eyes to see and our hearts to believe. …
Consequently, all the glory for our salvation belongs to God alone … completely, absolutely and totally! … And so Graceless who became Pilgrim who became Christian began along the road that would take him one day to the Celestial City. Christian was honest, though, to the Porter at the door of the Palace Beautiful. He also humbly confessed he had recently been …

**CARELESS**

He had not taken the care he ought to have. True, the Hill Difficulty had been rightly named! And the higher he climbed the wearier he became. He stopped for a break halfways up, - at the Pleasant Arbour, - and he sat down for what was to be only a few moments. However, he was so tired and he went to sleep as he was reading his scroll … and the scroll slipped out of his grasp … and he forgot about it!

When he wakened, it was dark, but he continued to carefully climb on regardless. He reached the top of the hill, met Timorous and Mistrust, - two sad excuses for pilgrims(!), - realised he had mislaid his scroll, went back halfways down to the Pleasant Arbour, and then had return to the summit of the mountain. He had wasted time and energy! … And then when he saw the lions Timorous and Mistrust had warned him about he feared they might be ‘the final straw’ in his journey and that he might need to give up and turn back.

However, because of the work of grace God had done in his heart, he resolved he must keep going on … so he did, until he arrived at the Palace Beautiful. … Just go back to the second time he was at the Pleasant Arbour, - it is good to see he had learned from his previous experience, - he didn’t get caught out a second time and sit down and go to sleep. Yes, the Lord was teaching him!

What this episode reminds us of is that God does not abandon His people. When we are tired, He picks us up. When we are afraid, He gives us the confidence and the desire to continue moving on. He keeps ‘the lions at bay’. He keeps the next stage of our journey in view.

Yes, Christian had been careless but he could testify how God had given His power to the faint, and to those who had no might, God increased his strength … and he began to walk, and not faint (Is. 40:31) … and God took Christian to where he was going. …

As Christian told his testimony he honestly spoke of how he had been graceless and careless … but then he added another aspect, for now he was …
"Because the sun is now set, I desire if I may to lodge here tonight". He had the freedom and confidence to ask. Here, - in this Palace Beautiful, the church, - is the lodging of God’s Redeemed. We’re pilgrims heading towards Glory, and the Lord has provided such places of meeting for His people. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. … We have the responsibility to God and to each other to meet for worship and for fellowship. We encourage each other and build each other up in the presence of our Father. That is the purpose of a place such as this.

Yes, Christian was homeless, but he was no vagrant! He knew he had his home in glory … and that was the reason he was travelling to Mount Zion. We are not to set down roots that curtail that journey … Heb. 4:9 there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. 11Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.

Graceless, careless, homeless … but most definitely, not hopeless! All who belong to the Family of God are (Titus 2:13) looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ … Titus 3:7 That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This was Christian’s testimony. It is our testimony too. And some of our journeying has been similar to Christian’s. Yes, we all began graceless, but God found us and saved us and He has written grace upon our hearts for He promised, I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer. 31:33). … And we also must confess to being careless, - we have shut our eyes when they should have been wide open; we have lain down when we should have been up and running. … And homeless but not hopeless because we’re on that journey that is heading towards the city which has foundations, and whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10).

May God, then, bless our endeavours to His glory as we continue to persevere in the faith He has favoured us with! Amen.