The scenes we have considered so far have shown us Pilgrim’s desperation to depart from the City of Destruction. The message of the Book in his hand had been troubling him, and he couldn’t escape the judgment that awaited him because of his sin. Even when he tried to escape to the surrounding fields he found himself calling for someone to give him an answer concerning the question from his soul, “What must I do to be saved?”

And, in all cases where the Lord has convicted the soul of the sinner, He brought into Pilgrim’s life Evangelist. The message of Evangelist was simply to point him in the direction of the gate. As he made his way to the gate his family and some of the townspeople pursued him to try and change his mind. Two in particular, - Obstinate and Pliable, - caught up with him. After a time, though, Obstinate gave up and returned home. Pliable, however, wanted to give Pilgrim ‘the benefit of the doubt’, and he decided to give this journey ‘a try’, and he began travelling with Pilgrim … whose name, by now, had been changed to Christian. … This is where we take up the story …

Careless
The narrative moves from the previous conversation between Pliable and Christian as they began their journey together … Do you notice something though? They both had previously quite a lot to talk about … but notice that through all their much talking they hadn’t thought of praying and asking the Lord’s guidance on the way ahead. … This was a journey that required God to lead them, and therefore, they should have sought His directing and protection.

Also (!), they weren’t particularly paying much attention to where they were going. (I would imagine Pliable would have been distracting Pilgrim with all his questions and statements). Yes, of course, they were both heading towards the wicket gate … but other than that, they weren’t keeping an especially close enough eye on where they were going, and in particular, the terrain … It’s all very well having the good intentions but, as the old proverb says, the road to Hell is paved with good intentions! If Christian and Pliable would have been watching as they ought to have been they should surely have noticed the ground under their feet becoming softer and soggy. They should have noticed the dirt gathering on their shoes, and they should have noticed it was becoming more difficult to walk. … And the next thing to happen was, they were ‘up to their eyes’ in the Slough of Despond. What I’m trying to say is that before they began to sink in the Slough of Despond, the warning signals should have been sounding!
You see, they were to blame for their predicament for they should have ‘caught themselves on’ by the time they were in so deep! … Indeed, there’s an obvious question here. Why didn’t they stop themselves before it became so deep?! Especially when you’re carrying a heavy load, why would you not realise the dilemma, and get out?! But instead, here “they wallowed for a time, being grievously bedaubed with the dirt”. … Unbelievable! Instead of getting out, they waded further in!

Let’s retrace our steps for a moment though. Thus far, - and rightly so, - Evangelist has been the ‘hero’ in the story. He’s the person to be commended. But, Evangelist was merely a man, and like Evangelist we often mean the best … but we are fallible too … and Evangelist was fallible. As believers, we trust we give good advice … but, ‘at the end of the day’ … we’re fallible and we’re prone to making mistakes. … What I’m ‘getting at’ is this … When Evangelist pointed Pilgrim onto this road, why did he neglect to mention the Slough of Despond, and to warn him about the danger of sinking in the mire. Surely he should have pointed out these things out to Christian! You will also notice he didn’t mention the fact either that, “by the direction of the Lawgiver, certain good and substantial steps, [were] placed even through the very midst of this Slough”, and “the ground is good when they are once got in at the gate”.

Why did he not mention it? Why did he not mention those steps?! … Something as important as that!! … Maybe he forgot? Maybe he didn’t want to discourage Pilgrim? Maybe he thought it wasn’t serious enough to mention? … Whatever the reason was, he should have made Christian aware of it … for to be forewarned is to be forearmed! Had Christian known about the steps, - and paid due attention and care, - even though they might have been covered over with some mud, the two travellers would have known to take extra care to look out for them … and both Christian and Pliable could have used the steps to get to the other side with hardly a stain on their garments.

Sometimes we can be so enthusiastic about the Gospel and seeing souls saved that we can overlook the basics in case it might put people off. We ‘shy away’ from warning them about the reality of Hell, or we don’t want to over-emphasise the commitment the Lord expects … No, what we actually are doing is tampering with the Gospel to make it more amenable and ‘sinner-friendly’. But we have no right to change anything about the Gospel! … But maybe we think we need to adapt it to make it palatable, or more attractive and alluring. You don’t want to put people off coming to Christ … but the Christ Who is the Saviour is already foolishness to the world, and a stumbling-block
… and besides, it’s not our job to change the message … It’s our job and responsibility to tell it as it is! If people don’t like it, it’s not ours to give alter the Gospel, but to give it plainly, simply, honestly and faithfully.

Surely Evangelist would have saved Christian the experience of the Slough of Despond if first of all he had warned him about it, and secondly, if he had told him to look for the stepping stones that were there to bring him safely to the other side. … Christian, there is a way through. Yes, Evangelist had done a good job in pointing Pilgrim towards the gate, but perhaps he was somewhat remiss in giving Christian adequate warning about what lay between.

Something else, as we think about Evangelism … I wonder why he directed Pilgrim to the gate. Why didn’t he direct him to the cross, beyond the gate? In fact, Evangelist hasn’t mentioned the cross yet. You would think he should have. It is not at the gate where Pilgrim will lose his burden … it will be at the cross! When we want to see someone saved, where do we point them? Do we point them to the pastor, or to the church, or to anywhere or anything else? Surely, the only place we must point them is to the cross … and to the Saviour Who died for them.

Yes, there seemed to be a certain amount of carelessmess. … Now, what about Pliable? … Well, we already know he was careless … He was also …

**Clueless**
You can’t expect a fool to come out with much sense! To be fair to Christian, he was genuinely sincere, - he had never ventured outside of the City of Destruction before but he was searching the place where he would lay down the burden on his back. Ahead of him was the wicket gate, and that was why he was on the road. Pliable, on the other hand, was ‘out for a dander to see where it would take him’. He was a fairly ‘clueless’ character, - “let’s see where this road goes!” … A brainless individual! … Pliable, why are you on this road?” “Och, I’m on this road because Christian is on it!”

No, that’s not the right answer … That’s not how it works when you’re hoping to get to Heaven. You don’t venture out ‘at your ease’, and with no urgency in your step. Pilgrim knew why he was there. Before Pilgrim left home he had gone through deep conviction of sin and anguish of soul, and he was searching to find peace. Pliable had no anxiety, no commitment, no burden and no ‘stickability’. At the first signs of hardship and distress, he was ‘ready for the off’!
This isn’t for me … “Is this the happiness you have told me all this while of? If we have such ill speed at our first setting out, what may we expect between this and our journey’s end?” … If this is as good as it gets, I’m off!

In our doctrine of faith we hold to the perseverance and the preservation of the saints. From the moment the Holy Spirit quickens our hearts to believe, He will not fail to maintain that faith which is ours by the gift of God’s eternal grace until we reach glory, Phil. 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

But Pliable had no such confidence or expectation, “May I get out again [i.e. of the Slough] with my life, you shall possess the brave country alone for me!” But no, Pliable, that’s not the way it works. If you want to possess ‘the brave country’, you will never do it going back! You have got to persevere, and God will preserve you. Others can’t make the journey for you, you must keep going on yourself! Lk. 9:62 No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

But, you see, there was no urgency with Pliable because he had no comprehension within his soul of the goal to which Christian aspired. He was just ‘along for the ride’. How easy it is for mere professors of the faith to fall into that category. How easy it is for someone to have a few twinges of guilt about their sin and they make some kind of a decision to follow Christ, but it’s a decision based on how much they are hoping to get out of this ‘salvation’.

It’s so obvious that Pliable hadn’t the same constraint as Christian to progress and persevere along the road of repentance, with the fence of Salvation on either side. So, there as he struggled in the Slough along with Christian he calculated the cost, and he decided it wasn’t worth it. “It’s not for me, Christian. You battle on … I’ll be thinking of you, and I hope you make it, but no, it’s not for me”. John Bunyan described the effort Pliable put into getting out of the mud, “he gave a desperate struggle or two”. It’s a pity he didn’t put that same ‘desperate’ effort into going forwards, instead of going back! … He had the ability, but he didn’t have the calling of grace. Yes, he was clueless, and he was also …

**CALLOUS** When the Lord does a work in your heart, He gives you a oneness with the people on the journey with you. You look out for them as they look out for you. Pliable didn’t though. He couldn’t have cared whether Christian ended his days in the Slough or not. …
He made sure to get *himself* out of the mire, and he didn’t ‘throw too many thoughts’ Christian’s way! He was a ‘fair-weather friend’ … only prepared to be there when things were going right for *him*. The first sign of trouble and he’s off! He only thought about Number One, so when he got out of the Slough “away he went and Christian saw him no more”.

Pliable represents those whose only desire to reach Heaven is for their own comforts and aspirations. They have no longing to be there to worship God, or to join with His people. They want to be there because they reckon it to be the ultimate utopia, and they think it’s a place where they can enjoy themselves pursuing those things they didn’t get the opportunity to fully pursue on earth. To them, the worship of Christ is only an ‘afterthought’! … If He is not the priority on your way to Heaven, it’s doubtful whether you will reach there!

Pliable was a stranger to God’s grace, even though he travelled for a while in the company of Christian, along the same road, and listened to him quoting the Bible. If you like, Pliable ‘converted himself’ … and it proved absolutely futile for neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12).

And when Pliable *did* return home they said all kind of things about him. Some were glad to see him back. Some of them told him he was stupid for getting caught up with Pilgrim in the first place. And then there were those who used the opportunity to poke fun and mock him, and his attempt to be a Christian. He brought shame upon the Name of Christ, for he had given the Lord’s enemies ammunition to claim salvation was a myth and a delusion. Consequently, Pliable started “sneaking among them” … gutless and spineless. Yes, he had tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come (Heb. 6:5), but he eventually returned to his house and his friends in the City of Destruction and he became again like those who derided “poor Christian behind his back”. We also need to note that he had come to a certain knowledge of the truth and that, ultimately before God, - this would compound his guilt even further.

**Clueless** and **callous** … John Bunyan summed him up, “And thus much concerning Pliable”…
CONCLUSION
From the perspective of Christian, … we need to choose carefully our travelling companions on the road to Glory. Yes, it’s easy to be ‘taken in’ … and we’ve all fallen foul of expecting from people more than they can deliver. But that is why it is so important to make sure we’re travelling with people Who have the Book in their hands, and they are trying to live by its directions. Paul directs the church in Corinth, II Cor. 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. … Travel with those of a like-mind who know they are on the narrow road to Heaven, and who have entered by the way of the cross.

Yes, Pliable, on the other hand, is the epitome of careless, clueless and callous. He didn’t know what it was to have to leave his home and family and follow Christ. It was all simply an ‘adventure’ for him. He saw no need to escape the wrath of God. He didn’t see a Hell he needed to escape from. He had no conviction of sin, and no comprehension of his need. Just as simply as he ‘breezed’ onto the scene, so his type ‘breeze’ off again.

Pray for the ‘Pliables’ who follow Christ according to their own convenience … who ‘breeze in and out as the fancy takes them’. When Pilgrim left his home, I could imagine he threw the key to his front door away … Pliable, on the other hand, would have kept his key in his pocket ‘just in case’. Seek to win the Pliables, that they may see their real need of Christ

I trust that our study this evening would cause us to examine ourselves once again. May none be able to write the derogatory comment on our epitaph, “And thus much concerning …” But may it be our testimony, to God’s glory, “He drew me and I followed on, No turning back, No turning back”. Amen.