

The Bumpy Road of Life

As a young man, I was driving down a country lane late one night. The dim headlights of my old car caught a rabbit, too late for it to move. A moment later it lay dead in the road. I stopped the car and ran back to the spot. There was not a mark on it – no apparent cuts or bruises – so a few days later we feasted on rabbit stew!

As a young father, I was once again driving along a country road, this time with a two-year-old daughter riding in the back. A pigeon sat in the middle of the road. It seemed oblivious to the impending danger and too late it decided to try and fly away. There was the tell-tale thump and feathers everywhere. I pulled the car over and ran back to the spot, but there was nothing to be done, just a dreadful mess. My stomach turned over. As I climbed back into the car and drove on, a little voice in the back kept asking, over and over, “What happened to the pigeon, Daddy? What happened to the pigeon?”

These incidents seemed to highlight the way in which we react to the events in our lives. Sometimes we relish the challenge. On other occasions, we are appalled by what has happened, feeling either helpless or guilty about what has occurred.

At times, we seem oblivious to the suffering going on around us. At others, it becomes very personal indeed, and we may search for some specific reason, ultimately something or someone to hold responsible. Often it is God who is blamed. People say things like, “Why does God allow it to happen? I thought He was supposed to be a loving God?”



Whilst things are going well, very few of us stop to acknowledge God. So why should He be blamed when things go badly?

First Things First

Let's start from the beginning. We are told clearly that the starting point is with God and our belief in Him:

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

This verse tells us that there is a rich reward for those who are willing to trust God and deliberately and carefully seek to please Him in their lives. The clear implication is that He, and He alone, can give meaning and purpose to the lives we live every day.

We have to acknowledge that He is the infinite God and that we are limited, finite human beings. He understands and knows everything. We on the other hand are going to have times when we simply don't know, and certainly when we don't understand what is going on in our lives.

However, we can be certain that God cares for those who are His. Jesus said to his followers:

Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

This is both comforting and challenging. Don't behave like a frightened rabbit; place your confidence in God.

The Future Kingdom

There is also a reward, the Kingdom of God. Just let your mind dwell on these word pictures of that future time.

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:3-4).

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing (Isaiah 35:5-6).

There are many passages like this giving a description of a world very different from the one we know today.

What a vision for us! God has given us a hope which far outweighs anything today's world has to offer.

A Clear Choice

It has always been like that, since the Garden of Eden. We read in Genesis chapter 3 that God offered Adam and



Evil a clear choice: obey Me – and enjoy life; or go your own way which will lead only to suffering and death. The man and woman chose to go their own way, and found only work, sweat, pain and death.

Even the earth itself was no longer in harmony with mankind, so providing food became a real chore. Life would be made more difficult with pests and weeds competing with humans.

Their choices had taken them beyond God's immediate care and protection – they were living on their own terms. Human intelligence would not be sufficient to sort out the problems in human life, especially the problem of death. Sin (ignoring and disobeying God) caused death, and mankind cannot fix this.

But God provided a remedy. If they tried to live a life close to God there was a way back to Him, to be reconciled to Him and to hope for a place in His Kingdom. That way is open to all of us, through the work of Jesus, but it is a choice we have to actually make.

For the most part, men and women have continued to go their own way and ignore God's offer. The earth was made imperfect because of sin, and symbolically groans with its effects:

For the creation was subjected to futi-

lity... For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now (Romans 8:20, 22).

How Do We React?

The natural disasters we see arise because of the imperfections in the earth's make-up. In some cases, men and women also make these worse by mismanaging resources, damaging the climate and choosing to live where they know there are risks. Whatever the cause, terrible sufferings result, and we rightly feel upset and sorry for those affected.

What would Jesus' reaction be? Fortunately, we are not left in any doubt. When faced with two disasters in his own time, in which people died he said that those people were no worse than others, but:

Unless you repent you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:5).

The message is clear: we cannot control these incidents, but our priority must be to be right with God.

Another Bumpy Road...

One dusky, dusty African evening, I was driving quickly along a dirt road. Suddenly, in the headlights I caught sight of a huge ditch stretching out right across the road. I tried to brake, but on the dusty track the car went into a prolonged skid which seemed as if the car, with us in it, would nose-dive into the hole. At the last second, the car slewed round and came to rest with its nearside wheels on the very brim of the ditch. We cautiously got out of the car to assess the situation, a 'real near miss'.

All we could do was give thanks to God, feeling that He must have had us in His hands. We cautiously moved the car away from the edge of the ditch and drove on our way – thoughtfully and with a little more caution.

That is the lesson for all of us. Put God in control, trust Him, and give thanks to Him for His care and His promises.

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