



Pastor's Column

Not Just There, But Paved, Too!

We all know the old saying, “The Road to Hell is paved with good intentions.” One might wonder why we all know that saying...because, often it is true. Why is it true sometimes?

Well, let's take a look at it. It starts with the fact that sometimes we fail. To translate the Scottish poet, Robert Burns: “the best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry.” That's just a general statement about how some plans fail. That's always true when two different people are trying to, say, win a bowling match, and only one of them can win.

So, to avoid this, we humans decide that we need an edge over our opponents – be they human, or fate. We'll be the good guys, we say. We'll be the ones who have their hearts in the right place. God will have to bless our plans if they're such good plans, right?

Well, no, sometimes wrong. Sometimes, no matter how pure our motives, no matter how loving our approach, we fall flat on our face. But there's more. The saying says that the road to hell is PAVED with good intentions. There's a sense of trying to control the situation with our good intentions now. And that's when we really can get into trouble.

Take the Pharisees, for example. They knew that their ancestors had been exiled to Babylon because they did not follow God's law. So, upon their return, Ezra, Nehemiah, and what became the Pharisee movement began not only to follow God's law, they “built a hedge” around the law – making sure, for example, that you not only don't touch a leper, but you stay a certain required number of feet away from a leper.

Soon the Pharisees became experts on the law and on their “strengthening” of the law. They went from experts to judges, and from judges to condemners – condemning everyone around them for not following the law as well as THEY did. Jesus accused them of taking new converts to Judaism and making them worse than they were before – causing the great sin of self-righteousness. They not only knew the road to hell, they paved the way for it, too!

This is the kind of mindset that the prophet Jonah holds when we read our first lesson today. Jonah not only spread the message God told him to spread, he seemed to relish telling the people of Nineveh that their evil city (and the people in it) were about to be crushed due to their bad behavior. Of course, this message came with the usual way out – repent in sackcloths and ashes, everyone. Then the people took Jonah up on it. And then God – as God had promised – forgave them!

Oh, Jonah was so upset with God! He knew God would buy this fake repentance hook, line and sinker! God is an old softie! God, of course, sets Jonah straight. He shows Jonah that Jonah, like those future Pharisees, are too self-righteous for their good intentions or best-laid plans to do any good. Our intentions need to be thrown out the window. All the intentions we really need should ONLY originate with God.



Bring it Home

SUNDAY: I Want You to Drop What You are Doing - - Consider the invitation from God to drop what you are doing. This was what Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John had to consider when Jesus confronted them. What was it about Jesus that gave them the confidence to do that? Whom do you trust the most? Why is it easy to trust that person? Can you transfer that kind of trust to Christ? Read Mark 1:14-20. Think about what the Lord might be asking you to drop in order to do His will.

MONDAY: God's Time is the Best Time - - How many times have we lamented the results of "poor timing?" But God is able to take even the most difficult and awkward situations and bring about amazing things. Recall how God has worked miracles of timing in your life. Does this give you a new perspective? Spend time in prayer thanking God for working God's timing in your life. Pray for courage to trust that God knows the best time.

TUESDAY: God's Time is Compelling - - When John the Baptizer proclaimed, he became one of the prophets who foretold the coming of Christ. Many prophets were imprisoned, beaten and killed. God's people had all but given up hope when John appeared bearing the promise of the Messiah. But then John was killed. People might have thought all was lost, but suddenly Jesus appears. Read Deuteronomy 31:6. At times God seems far away but take courage: God is near.

WEDNESDAY: The Power of the Call - - Read Mark 1:16-20. Many have wondered how these men could actually leave what they were doing and follow Jesus. Look at Matthew 19:16-23. What is different? What was it about the man in Matthew that prevented him from following Christ? Pray asking God some questions: To what is God calling you? From what is God calling you away? Pray for God's call – the sensitivity to hear it and the courage to heed it.

THURSDAY: From Mundane to Miraculous - - The gospel truth is that Christ moves us from the mundane to the miraculous. We move from merely catching fish to seizing the hearts of people for the sake of Jesus. Actually, we don't seize hearts, Christ does. God is doing something miraculous in the lives of His followers. Are you ready? Read Luke 5:1-11. In what new place is Christ calling you to throw your nets?

FRIDAY: God Calls From Crisis to Opportunity - - It seems that crisis touches all of our lives at some point. Look at Romans 8:28. This promise reminds us that God is able to work in all situations to bring about opportunity. God was able to work through many crises in biblical times. Each time God was able to bring a miracle out of seeming defeat. God is able to work that miracle in your life as well. Give your crises to God. Ask God to show you the opportunity—in God's time—and trust that God will take care of you.

SATURDAY: The Call to Extend Salvation - - We are called to reach out to others around us with the good news of Jesus. Tell someone about how Christ has impacted your life. Can you think of three things that the presence of Jesus has given to you? Tell those three things to one person in your life who could benefit from hearing your story. Read John 1:35-51. Pray for your unchurched friends. Ask God to give you great wisdom as you seek to share this good news with them.