

REBUILDING: the Roads in Your Life

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Gates speak of momentary encounters or escapes. But roads—roads speak of destinations (destinies) and routes (pathways or means of approach) and conditions (head winds or tail winds).

When I say, “destinations,” I am thinking of destinies—especially, your eternal destiny.

When I say, “routes,” I mean the pathways that lead you toward your destiny, or away from it.

And when I say, “conditions,” I’m speaking of the conditions you must deal with along the path—head winds or tail winds, conditions that help you make progress, or those that hinder you.

Have you heard about the elderly woman on a busy street corner who was confused and hesitant to cross because of the heavy traffic?

Finally a gentleman came up to her and asked if he could cross the street with her. Gratefully she took his arm, but grew progressively more alarmed as he zigzagged randomly across the street, to the blare of horns and screech of locked brakes.

Finally on the opposite curb, she said angrily, “You almost got us killed! You walk like you’re blind.”

“I am,” he replied. “That’s why I asked if I could cross with you.”

Jesus said of the Pharisees of His day: “They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch” (Matt. 15:14).

We need to be very careful to entrust our souls to the guidance of Someone who can see our destination, who knows the path to take in order to reach it, and who has what it takes to get us there. Our eternal destiny is too important to risk it on blind chance.

Destinations

When I speak of eternal destinies, I am thinking of Heaven or Hell. Heaven is as real as San Rafael; it is a destination. Jesus came from there and returned to there in the sight of His stunned disciples. Again, He will come from there in order to bring us back there with Him.

After rising from the dead, Jesus spent time with His disciples, teaching them about the Kingdom of God. According to Luke’s record in Acts, chapter 1, *Jesus said to them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

After this, He was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see Him. As they strained to see Him rising into the sky, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them.

“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into the sky? Jesus has been taken from you into Heaven, but someday He will return from Heaven in the same way you saw Him go!” (Acts 1:8-11).

Heaven is a real destination. Not that everyone agrees with that. In spite of the plain teaching of Jesus and other parts of the Bible, many people have developed formal denials that Heaven exists.

Christian Science, founded by spiritist Mary Baker Eddy, teaches that “there is no death.” They believe that “heaven and hell are states of thought, not places. People experience their own heaven or hell right here on earth.”

Edgar Cayce, a spiritist and New Age prophet, said that “the destiny of the soul, as of all creation, is to become One with the Creator” and that no soul is ever lost.

New Age cult leader Sun Myung Moon of The Unification Church believes that “God will not desert any person eternally. By some means...they will be restored.”

Mormonism, founded by occultist Joseph Smith, argues, “The false doctrine that the punishment to be visited upon erring souls is endless...is but a dogma of unauthorized and erring sectarians, at once unscriptural, unreasonable, and revolting.”

Jehovah’s Witnesses, founded by Charles Taze Russell maintains that the wicked are forever annihilated because “the teaching about a fiery hell can rightly be designated as a ‘teaching of demons.’”

Unitarian Universalism confesses the following: “It seems safe to say that no Unitarian Universalist believes in a resurrection of the body, a literal heaven or hell, or any kind of eternal punishment.”

Nevertheless, with all of them the Bible disagrees. Heaven is where God lives. It is the seat of His throne, from which He rules the universe. It is the original, of which all things earthly, as we know them, are, at best, but a copy.

Jesus Christ is the King of Heaven, and Heaven is the blessed resting place of all those who have persistently trusted the Lord Jesus to save them. It is the glorious destination that God has prepared for all those He created in His image and likeness.

And Hell is the everlasting fire that God has prepared for the devil and his demons (Matthew 25:41). It was not designed for human beings, yet those who refuse God's gift of salvation and forgiveness, and cling instead to the devil's ruse of self-service will end up where he ends up.

Who chooses Hell? No one! Or, at least, only reluctantly, with resignation, because he or she can no longer perceive the kind of grace that would forgive the ungodly, the unjust. Isn't it the pinnacle of human pride to believe that my wickedness or accumulated failures are too heavy a weight for God to lift? Is the Almighty Creator of the ends of the earth, the King of kings and Lord of lords, so puny that a mere human being (one out of seven billion) can accrue in a single lifetime more sins than the Eternal Father of Mercy can forgive? It's a foolish thought!

Oh, the wondrous grace that brought salvation to humankind! Not a salvation that is the result of our effort and works, but of Christ's effort and love!

As Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, *"God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago"* (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Ancient paganism thought of each god as bound to his worshippers by self-interest because he depended on their service and gifts for his welfare. Modern paganism has at the back of its mind a similar feeling that God is somehow obligated to love and help us, even though we don't deserve it. This was the feeling voiced by Heinrich Heine on his deathbed, "Of course God will forgive me—that's His job." But this feeling is not well founded.

The God of the Bible does not depend on His human creatures for His well-being (see Psalm 50:8–13; Acts 17:25), nor, now that we have sinned, is He bound to show us favor. We can only claim from His justice—and justice, for us, means certain condemnation, for *"everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard"* (Romans 3:23).

God does not owe it to anyone to stop justice from taking its course. He is not obligated to pity and pardon; if He does so it is an act done, as we say, "of His own free will," and nobody forces His hand. *"It does not depend on human desire or exertion, but on God who shows mercy"* (Romans 9:16). Grace is free because it is self-originated and proceeds from the One who was free not to be gracious.

J.I. Packer concluded, "Only when one realizes that what decides each man's destiny is whether or not God resolves to save him from his sins, and that this is a decision

which God need not make in any single case, (only then) can one begin to grasp the biblical view of grace.”

So, then, out of sheer kindness and love Jesus has made Heaven our eternal destiny.

Or, is there something in between? Purgatory? Only if the sacrificial death of Jesus was insufficient. Was it not enough? On the contrary, the Scriptures testify, *“With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves (as under the First Covenant)—[Jesus] entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever”* (Hebrews 9:12). *“Once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice”* (Hebrews 9:26).

Or, maybe our destiny is just death, then nothing. The end of existence. It cannot be!

The letter to the Hebrew Christians says, *“Just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27). There IS an “after that.” But let’s read the whole passage: *“Just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him”* (Hebrews 9:27-28).

What is Heaven like? Where is Heaven?

Most importantly, how do we get there? If Heaven is your preferred destination, how can you make sure it is your destiny?

Conversion is required. Converting from self-dependence to God-dependence. From disbelief to trust. Conversion is the decisive act in which a sinner turns away from his sin in genuine repentance and accepts the salvation that Christ offers.

The imagery in conversion is that of turning. A person is going along a road and realizes that he or she is on the wrong track. He will never reach his desired destination if he continues in that direction. So the person “turns,” or “is converted.” He or she ceases to go in the wrong direction and begins going in the right one. Conversion changes the direction of one’s course of life from the wrong way to the right way, the way that God wants, the way that God leads.

Now we’re talking about ROADS. And you need a map.

Routes

Charles Swindoll advises, “Think of the Scriptures as an absolutely accurate map. A map tells you how to get to a certain destination. But just looking at a map won’t automatically transport you to Arizona or England or Peru. Getting to those places

means you have to make the effort...pay the cost...take the time for travel...stay at it until you arrive. In a word, persevere.

“So it is in the Christian life. God’s map is reliable and available. It is also clear and direct. But there is no hocus-pocus in its pages that automatically sends its reader by way of a magic carpet.”

So, let’s study the map of the Kingdom for a bit and get acquainted with its major routes.

First, we will come to *Repentance Circle*. Not a small cul de sac, but a ring road, that circles the vast city of life. You will cross it many times, for repentance is not only the way into the Kingdom of Heaven, it is also the way *of* the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

This will bring us to *Faith Avenue*. Not a broad, meandering avenue, but a long and winding narrow road, turning east and west and north and south. It is the main boulevard of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, for the Bible says, “*whatever does not proceed from faith is sin*” (Romans 14:23). Far more than the threshold of a new and spiritual life, faith is the breath and lifeblood of this wonderful relationship with God through Jesus Christ. “*Without faith it is impossible to please God*” (Hebrews 11:6), for “*we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. No one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law*” (Galatians 2:16).

Many side streets share a common name: *Love Lane. Love Street. Love Court. Love Drive*. This is where all the action is. There is no parking on Faith Avenue; it is strictly for travel from one place to the next. But all the people live and work and play on these side streets. That’s why the Bible says, “*what matters is trusting faithfulness expressing itself through love*” (Galatians 5:6). The most important thing is love—God’s love, as Jesus demonstrated and taught it. It’s the source of true obedience, and the expression of real faith. Love is the glue that holds us all together, revealed in generous forgiveness and fervent kindness.

Here’s the thing about these roads: No one of them will get you there. No two of them will get you to your eternal destination.

If you want to go to Heaven, you must walk all three: repentance toward God, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love to all of God’s people. Sometimes that’s easier than other times.

Conditions

You may have traveled these roads for a long time. You may think you know them like the back of your hand. But the time your journey takes on any particular day depends on the conditions.

Road conditions. Weather conditions. Traffic conditions. Other drivers. Vehicle maintenance. The list goes on...

Road conditions may call for more faith than yesterday. Roads may be uphill or downhill. They may be level or steep. Smooth or rocky. Short or long.

The weather may be sunny or stormy, calm or windy, dry or icy, clear or foggy.

Traffic may be slow and congested, or light and free-flowing.

Other drivers may be attentive and courteous or confused and dangerous. Some act like they are the only car on the road (or at least the only important one). Others are hotheaded and sharp-tongued. Some are in such pain or sorrow that it's a wonder they're making any progress at all.

The car in front of you may break down, or your own car may break down. You may get stuck and have to wait a long time for help to appear.

These are just a few of the challenging life-conditions you may find yourself dealing with on any given day in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Storms, setbacks, reversals, delays, bitter people, hurting people, angry people, losses, sickness, grief—and all you want is to make it to Heaven!

Travel Tips

Here are some things to remember when the conditions are adverse:

God is still on His throne and He cares for you!

He has the power you need to see those rough spots smoothed out.

He'll never cease loving you, even if you're the one causing all the grief on the road today.

Repentance is your friend, and a direct line to the Savior.

He's available to help you whenever you call on His name.

If He said He would show up to give you a tow or a lift, wait for Him; He may take longer than you expected, but He'll never leave you stranded or abandoned.

Every step of faith on your part will lead you back to His love.

Every act of love on your part will reveal His faithfulness.

Every act of love in His name will make you a deeper, richer person.

As you travel these roads—repentance, faith, and love—you will see more and more of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. In your life, and in the lives of those around you.

That is why you're here. That is what the Holy Spirit has come to guide you through, whether it's here or there or at the ends of the earth.

Destiny is not determined by chances, but by choices.

What routes will you choose to travel this week?

Many conditions are beyond your control, but you can always choose to be under Christ's control. Meet the conditions—whatever they may be—with faith, hope, and love.

Let His Kingdom come, and His will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven!

Here's a contemporary version of the prayer Jesus taught us to pray. Try it on for size!

Our Father, who lives in Heaven,
May your name be revered as holy.
Your Kingdom come here!
Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us our portion for the day
And forgive us for crossing You
As we forgive those who have crossed us.
Don't lead us into temptation
But deliver us from the evil one.
The Kingdom belongs to You!
The power belongs to You!
The glory belongs to You!
Forever.
Yes!