

Lessons From A Landfill

One of my fondest memories of youth goes back to Barlow Road in Hyattsville, Maryland. We lived in one of the newest homes in our area that was part city and part rural. Should you visit there today you will discover it is just another portion of the sprawling urban area of Washington D.C.

As the construction workers were carving the remainder of our subdivision out of the forest, a mountain of dirt was formed at the end of our street, just around the bend in the creek. What a glorious sight this was to eight to twelve year old boys! I remember climbing up the "mountain" and seeing so many things from the top. At first, when we looked down, it was nearly dizzying in effect. We knew the dirt below us was fresh, soft, and, oh, so inviting. I can, with imagination, even smell the sight. It was a combination of fresh soil, the surrounding foliage, and diesel fumes coming from the nearby bus that would run in the proximity of our neighborhood. At first, we were cautious as we gingerly stepped off the side of the mound and fell about fifteen or twenty feet to the bottom. Because of the fresh softness of the dirt, upon entry we would bury ourselves to just above our ankles without any injury. As the day wore on, we became more adventurous. There was a long ridge along the top of our mountain. So with a little speed and agility, we could sail out through the open expanse to the dirt below. We were getting to the point that we would be buried up to our knees and almost waist in the soft dirt. We remained relatively safe, because we could never get further out than the dirt below us, no matter how high we jumped or how far we sailed out. We slept well that night, after a much needed bath.

Well, the years have come and gone since those happy days. Not long ago, I was driving through an unfamiliar area and I spotted a nostalgic sight. I saw a big beautiful mound of dirt that looked so inviting! My mind immediately went back to my youth and I found myself fighting a longing to park the car, take off my shoes, run up the hill and jump! I was then captured with the sight of a garbage truck driving up the side of this great mound and then I realized it's a landfill. Should I take off my shoes, I may be cut by some thrown away tin can. What a contrast! A great mound silhouetted against a breath-taking sunset that could have rivaled any picture on a postcard, but nonetheless.

Eventually, the mountain in our youth was leveled and upon that ground were built some lovely houses. Now the truth is, the landfill that I beheld will someday be leveled and eventually built over. After all, there are equally beautiful things built, some over virgin soil, others over landfills.

There are some whose lives are virtually untouched by this world's naughty influence. And those years of childhood innocence and fun, have matured them into great citizens who bring that fun-loving virtue into the future setting of the home they one day will be part of, the vocation they perform, and the church they attend.

There are others who will know the degradation of shame that accompanies being involved with deep sin. As they look back into their youth they will see some darkness that overshadowed them as the fresh soil of youth was marred by the trash of this world. They will be told by Satan there is no use to try to build here; too much trash has built up, too many obstacles. If he can, with his fiery darts (Ephesians 6:16), get you to forget about going on, he has you where he wants you. I say to you, don't give up!

Did you know that God is in the reclamation business? He can make jewels out of the junk that has accumulated in our life! What can He do?

I. God can sterilize the ground.

He will meticulously take the surrendered heart and wash it clean. David made reference to using the same instrument (the hyssop) that was used to apply the blood to the lintels and doorposts of the homes that experienced the original Passover. When God saw the blood, He passed over that residence. *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"* (Psalm 51:7).

In the same way, when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us (I John 1:7, 9)! God made this message clear to Peter when He said, "...*What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common*" (Acts 10:15). The word "common" in Greek is "koinoo," which means: *to make (Leviticallly) unclean, render unhallowed, defile, profane, to declare or count unclean.* The Lord used a great contrasting comparison; He was saying if I have the ability to take an animal which is formerly declared "unclean" and to declare it "clean," I also have the ability to take the heathen Gentiles and clean them up for service.

II. God can prepare the ground.

When a landfill has been maximized with the quota of trash and garbage, then the preparation begins. More fresh topsoil may be added, then the mighty earthmoving bulldozers do their work of compacting, crushing and smoothing the land out.

Please observe two verses of Scripture that seem to contradict one another, but on second look, you'll find them a pleasant singular paradoxical truth.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

"Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins" (Proverbs 10:12).

If we have sin in our life, be transparent, confess it to God and to any or all we have offended with it. When we do, we receive from our Lord immediate forgiveness. When we deal with people who have forsaken sin, we in turn do with it what the Lord has done! God places it beneath the blood on His mercy seat; so let us forgive the forgiven.

Propitiation means "to appease, to cover as on the mercy seat." God makes the ground of our life usable by His abundant mercy and grace! *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another"* (I John 4:10, 11).

III. God will find the rock.

Whether the builder is building on untouched soil or a landfill, he is dedicated to finding the correct foundation. In the same fashion, the Lord will go down through the refuse of our mistakes and carefully find the Rock on which to build. *"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (I Corinthians 3:10, 11). *"...and that Rock was Christ"* (I Corinthians 10:4).

When you think about it, the best we have to offer God would equate to "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). If any work brings glory to God, it must be built upon Christ, the Solid Rock!

My word to you today is, thank God for the good memories of a past that was not defiled, but do not mourn unnecessarily of the past that looks more like a garbage heap. God must work through all we have to offer Him in this life and get to the Rock, Christ our Savior before a lasting work is done.

- Pastor Pope -

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