

The Flowers Beneath the Road

I am writing these words in Oklahoma. As most of you know my brother, Pastor David Pope experienced a medical emergency after what was going to be a fairly routine surgical procedure. As often happens in life, we get surprises. Happily, this surprise did not take my brother's life, but it could have easily gone the other way. For several months now, I have been burdened to drop everything and come see David. After this past close call, I knew we had to come. My wife and I will be leaving after one more visit with David and family and head to Liberty Baptist Church Cemetery in Hawkins, TX to place some flowers over my dad and mom's graves. We'll spend the night in Lindale (near Tyler) and then go to The Pope Family Reunion in Canton. Then, God willing, Mrs. Pope and I will arrive home on Saturday evening and we look forward to seeing all of you on the Lord's Day! Thank you for the prayers for our family.

I love this time of the year in Texas! The wildflowers are beautiful this year, especially as we traveled north from Houston. My dad's favorite flower, the Texas Bluebonnet, are ubiquitous upon the meadows, hillsides and roadways. Spring is the time of flowers. We have biblical documentation to verify this: "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle (turtledove) is heard in our land" (Song of Solomon 2:11, 12). I cannot help but think of this passage when I see the early stages of spring foliage. When I think of spring, I also think of the passionate death of Christ and resurrection that took place at this very time of year. In Christian tradition, we appropriately associate spring with life. For as surely as the flowers appear on the earth after their growth was muted and terminated by autumn and winter, so also shall the believers be resurrected to new life. Jesus said, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). When we think of salvation and re-dedication of our lives to Christ, we again see the springtime analogy. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Romans 6:4, 5). "And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (II Corinthians 5:15).

A few years ago, many of the well-worn roads in England had gone beyond repair. Over the centuries some of the roads had been paved over so many times that it was impossible to fully repair them because the under layers of previous roads had become so disintegrated that soon after repair work had been done, sinkholes and potholes from deep beneath the attempted road replacement took its toll. So the government decided they must take the roads down, layer by layer until they got to the original ground and then rebuild the road. The task began and they did not realize how much work and expense was involved, for they had to take road layer after road layer off, all the way back to the first three centuries of Christianity, when they began to build the roads. The

expense was so immense, that by the time they reached the original terra firma, the governmental money allocated for this project had been depleted. So, England had to wait on the final restoration of some of these old roads. The scraped and cleaned roads would now go through a respite until the funding was in place. In the following English spring, something amazing, quite beautiful and very surprising took place; the old scraped roads began to bloom! The flowers now blooming in the road were unknown and unseen to even the best of British horticulturalist's eyes. So without being in too big of a hurry now to build over these virtual flower beds, England decided to do some research to find out what in the world was going on. To their astonishment, these flowers were of a Mediterranean variety that as far as Englanders knew had never grown in their country. In doing further research they came to a most thought-provoking conclusion: when the Romans were conquering Britain and building their roads, they also brought seeds and seedlings with them from Rome to decorate their newly attained territory. These flowers were growing from seeds that had fallen into the ancient roadbeds two thousand years ago and now with the exposed soil, sunlight and rain, were growing copiously in England's fair land.

I love that story. It reminds us that no matter how far something has been buried, you cannot keep the seeds from doing what seeds do, which is grow into flowers if given a chance. When we stray from our Lord as His children, we may go dormant, but Christ's righteous seed remains...and when exposed to The Son of Righteousness with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2), along with the fresh air of His re-discovered will, we, too, will grow and bloom again. I John 3:9b: "...for his seed remaineth in him..." John 12:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

As I write these words I am simultaneously praying for revival and renewal among our people. Every church has her prodigals. Some get far too pessimistic wondering - are certain people living the way they are living because they are lost, not really saved? It is true; some, like Judas Iscariot have never truly received the Lord as personal Savior and are not genuine Christians. I believe, on the other hand, that many of our people who have gone astray are like the Roman roads in England; the seed of righteousness is suppressed and not given a chance to grow. Let us pray that God will revive their hearts and allow them to live again in the springtime of His love. Allow me to use metaphor to elucidate what I am saying.

1. Paving over a problem will never cure the problem.

One of the most often tried remedies for the discomfort that God's backslidden children use is the process of "paving." If they hurt, they often try to pave the conviction they are experiencing with an environment that is non-invasive. Many will choose a church where sin is not addressed and since they are not hearing their activity preached against, they mistakenly assume everything will be okay. This provides no remedy.

Backsliding destroys relationships. How sad to see marriages devastated by sin. Instead of repenting, some people divorce and run to another relationship

that they really believe will cure their broken heart only to find out that they have multiplied their problems.

Another often used stratagem is to busy oneself with an overabundance of activity. Inadvertently thinking that if their world is loud enough and they are pre-occupied to a frenzy they will alleviate the sound of God's voice. This also will not work. Paul was guilty of incalculable crimes against Christianity, which began by his consenting to the death of the martyr Stephen. Our Lord was bringing Paul under conviction to draw him into the frame of mind to embrace Christ and the dialogue is recorded in inspiration: "And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5). Conviction is like the sharp goad that pricks the beast of burden. Paul busied himself, but was only making his life more miserable. The relief can only come by repentance and restoration.

2. The ground must be exposed to the elements.

Removal of the centuries on the roads had to take place before spring could once again visit the ancient ground in England. I am reminded of that great verse of Scripture found in Hosea 10:12, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." Fallow ground is dormant ground. If anything is to grow there it must be prepared and exposed to the sun, the rain and air. Great strides are made when the backslider comes back to the environment where the precious Word of God is taught and preached and to the family of God, the church where we are accountable as brothers and sisters in Christ.

3. Time must transpire before growth occurs.

I want people to be right with God now! On the other hand, God patiently deals with people in the same way a farmer waits on his harvest. "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come" (Mark 4:28, 29). The Bible says, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). What a patient attitude the Lord has with those who have not yet visibly responded to His conviction! I use the word "visibly" because we don't know what is going on beneath the surface.

Don't be discouraged. Remember our Lord loves those we are praying for far more than we do; He is even more willing for them to be right with Him than we are. We are promised, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). Give it time. Give them time! Let's make this our prayer: "And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" (II Samuel 23:4).

-Johnny Pope-