

BUILDING THE HIGHWAY!

Isaiah 62: 10-12; Romans 12: 9-21

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Clear the way! During the spring and summer of 1984 and 1985, Jackie and I lived on a dairy farm just outside of Guelph, Ontario. I was a farm helper, doing everything from milking, haying, shoveling manure, etc. One of the tasks during the spring was to 'pick rocks'. This job was not easy. The farmer would pull his wagon down the field, and the two of us would look for rocks which had surfaced, and would remove them from the field. If those rocks were left, they would create a serious obstacle for the machinery during planting and harvesting of the crop. In other words, the crop program for the farm would not be able to go forward. Every year, new rocks would surface and the job of clearing them away needed to be done. Isaiah 62: 10 states: "...build up- build up the highway, clear it of stones."

Do not be conformed to this world! In Romans 12, Paul basically preaches his own version of the Sermon on the Mount. Romans 12: 2 states, "*Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God---what is good and acceptable and perfect.*" Paul had good reason to preach this sermon. The church in Rome was in conflict from within and from the outside. On the inside, the conflict was largely between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. On the outside the conflict was between the Christian and non-Christian Romans. The people in the church believed God was love, and they believed in the power of goodness to one's neighbours, until someone crossed them – until someone crossed the line! This conflict was a large obstacle in the way for their ministry to move forward.

Let love be genuine (Romans 12:9). Is the Lord at the center of your life? In our Bible study this past week, we talked about how we sometimes experience non-genuine love. We discussed how one can see through 'fakeness' quite quickly. We later discussed that one may not 'feel like it' when they love someone but that does not mean it is not genuine. The genuine part is the desire to love another (in obedience to God) without necessarily needing to feel it. This follows the agreed notion that love is more an act of one's will than it is a feeling. Love is the engine that propels us to move forward in our faith journey.

Is the Lord at the center of your life? In his autobiography, "A Life in our Times" the great economist, John Kenneth Galbraith tells the story of his family's housekeeper, Emily Gloria Wilson. One day, Galbraith wanted to take a short nap, and he asked Emily to hold his calls until he woke. Shortly afterwards, the President of the United States, Lyndon Johnson called. "*Get me Ken Galbraith. This is Lyndon Johnson.*" *Sorry Mr. President" she said, "He is sleeping". "Now look here, I am the President*

of the United States". "Sorry Mr. President, but he said not to disturb him." "Well wake him up! I want to talk to him." "No Mr. President, I work for him, not for you." When Galbraith called the President back, Johnson could barely control his delight. "Tell that woman I want her to work here in the White house. It is great to meet someone who knows who they work for." (Houghton Muffin in Reader's Digest, December, 1981.)

As followers of Christ, are you working for him? In other words, is Jesus the center of your life? Are you building the highway of your Christian journey and clearing the obstacles that seem more important than working for Christ and moving forward with Him?

Words are not enough. Words are not enough. Action is necessary! Romans 12: 9-21 is a call to action! *Love what is genuine, hate what is evil! Hold fast to what is good! Love one another with mutual affection!* It goes on and on. Without action – without doing the work, the rocks that keep coming up will not be removed, and we get held up on the road to an abundant life in Christ.

Loving the bully: In this call to action, Paul says not to seek revenge! Rather, *"do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good"* (verse 21). *Theologian and author Barbara Brown Taylor tells the story of her nephew Will at his first birthday. He was the only child of his parents, and was loved very attentively by his parents. He was loved and gave love back just as quickly. At his birthday, the seven year old son (Jason) of the god-parents, charged towards the one year old and knocked him down hard. The one year-old's mother immediately hugged the toddler. Will then tottered towards the seven year old, knowing the boy (Jason) was the perpetrator, and did what Will always did: He put his arm around the seven year old, and put his head against the little bully's chest. The tension in the room was gone.*

Returning evil for evil only multiplies it. Paul has a high view of love, and he is right! Love as demonstrated by Jesus, clears the rocks on our journey to wholeness and Peace. Amen.