

Potholes!

- When I lived in Edinburgh I cycled more regularly than I manage now, and regularly experienced the potholes...
 - big, deep, gaping holes...
 - particular occasion coming down Leith Street (outside John Lewis'), hit a pothole straight on and flat out - bent rim on bike...!
 - couldn't use it again; almost went over handlebars.
- Potholes - big time obstructions to progress.

Potholes for Standing on Authority of God's Word

- *Rework this section of the intro, perhaps connecting to issues facing Church of Scotland just now...*
- General Assembly decision as fundamentally a failure to stand on the authority of God's word

But, what happens when we ignore God's word?

- Or, put it another way, what are the obstacles hindering us from studying, proclaiming? From living on the authority of God's Word?
- What are the **potholes** that face us, and how can we go about avoiding them?
- When I was cycling regularly, I had a number of strategies for dealing with potholes - **knowing the road**, **looking ahead**, **not cycling in the gutter...**
- What are our strategies for avoiding these potholes standing in the way of our successfully standing in the authority of God's Word?
- Exodus 32/Golden Calf example of some potholes, things that can get in the way of us standing firmly on authority of God's word.
- Not exhaustive - but hopefully pertinent. Really just two, very broad, very large potholes!

1. Impatience

- People heard Commandments - core of God's revelation - from Moses at foot of Sinai.
- He's gone back up for more detail and the God inscribed tablets - and they are waiting down below.
- Wouldn't it have been great to have been there with them, so easy to stand on God's word, when you'd heard its echoes in the thunder & lightning on Sinai? - still waiting. Waiting some more. This waiting business is getting boring!
- So they turn to Aaron, and twist his arm. In the process, they forget that it was God and not Moses who brought them out of Egypt!
- They were here to hear from God - and the thunder and lightning, the terrible fear and awe of just over a month before (40 days - Ex.24:18) faded.
- They didn't hear God saying much - and where was Moses anyway?
- They were impatient.

Impatience as a Pothole for us

- We live in an impatient world.
- Communication (article on BlackBerries and personal life); transport; sex before marriage; loans and credit cards; National Lottery and institutionalised greed - "**Now generation**"
- They, and we, want to see results - we find it hard to trust God.
- We've forgotten that God wants to shape and mould our characters, to transform us true reflections of his image - and that such character changes take time.

- "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness," Gal 5:22

- And fruit takes a while to grow!
- Who'd expect a child to behave with the maturity of an adult? It takes time and experience for a child to grow into an adult.
- So, what in particular are we in danger of doing?
 - remember 2 Timothy 4:3: "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear."
 - that gay sex & relationships are OK? That all religions lead to God? That everyone will be saved by God in the end?
- Or, doubting God: why doesn't God do something NOW - convert my kids/parents/...
- Impatient, both waiting for God to reveal himself, and impatient with God's word as it stands.
- This is why it is also important that we live in God's ways:
 - not impatient and trying to worship any other Gods (success, greed, education, ...)
 - not impatient that things need done when God has given a day of rest
 - not impatient with the failings and short-comings of your parents
 - not impatient with workmates, friends, family, so that inwardly you wish them dead.
 - not impatient waiting for marriage to sleep with someone
 - not impatient with God's care for you so that you supplement that by taking from others
 - not impatient in any dispute with your neighbour so you shade the truth
 - not impatient with what God has given you so you covet what you do not have
- In other words, the 10 commandments!
- Trust does away with impatience - and if we trust God, we will learn to trust his ways. Impatience as a pothole: stark contrast with for instance Psalm 40:1
 - *I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. (Psalm 40:1)*
- We'll not become patient overnight - but we can start down the road of obedience, and see God crafting patience into our characters, patience to hear & obey his Word.

2. Image vs Reality (Word vs Image)

- Second pothole the Israelites fell down was to seek to worship an idol, a visible image, something tangible. (Just like everyone around them!)
- God had revealed himself in words - in words that pointed to his character and nature. The Israelites sought to replace that with the image of a young, strong bull - symbol of strength, uni-dimensional
- They had replaced the reality of God revealed in what he'd said for the image of a bull.
- Bulls today? Not likely!
- But image over against reality is very much to the fore!
- So what's our pothole? Perhaps in our worship...
 - possible to focus so much on the form - slick presentation, traditional or contemporary styles of music, approachability - that the reality, a disturbing encounter with the living God gets lost somewhere.
 - not just a danger for Willow Creek. Also for CofS, where the minister can sometimes be doing a little performance, "his thing" up the front. The image is there, but not the reality.
- That reality has been grounded by God in the words of Scripture
- Again we come to the warning sounded by Paul to his young associate Timothy:
 - *"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers*

of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God - having a form of godliness, but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them!" (2 Tim 3:1-5)

- Sound familiar?
- A form of godliness, but denying its power. We are in great danger here - our middle class morality, our "niceness", our Christian activities - a form of godliness, but...?
- Desperate need for us to know God, to love Jesus, to have that living relationship and engagement with Jesus Christ.
- Reality rather than image.

Consequences of Falling Down a Pothole

- Levites sweeping through the camp were a tangible warning - a direct and shocking shot across the bows of the whole people - a probably random examples of the death ALL deserved.
- Death - dying dangerously!
- God's (& Moses) burning anger.
- Neglecting God's word can be a dangerous business!
- There's the stunting in service, the lack of growth in knowledge and love of God, but also, if we ultimately choose defiance against God's self-revelation, then we are in danger of standing in defiance against God - that attitude that separated us from him in the first place...
 - if we linger at the bottom of a pothole, ultimately we are in danger of death - ultimate separation from God.

Strategies for Dealing with Potholes

- Repentant intercession - "if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)
- See depths of Moses concern - prepared to give up his own right of entry into God's Kingdom for the sake of the people (a true shepherd), and also prepared to confess their guilt as his own - so for us for our land?!?
- Rooted out evil
- Potholes can be dangerous - discussed two big ones tonight.
- But God listened to Moses prayer. He's not vindictive - "didn't get that bit quite right, did you? ZAP!"
- He gives the strength to enable us to stand on the authority of his Word as we seek to do so. Strength to be patient. Strength to prefer reality to mere image.