

## 2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

### Does Jesus drive a school bus?

Presented by Harry Goodhew

#### INTRODUCTION

“Does Jesus Drive a School Bus?” What a question, but it is a chapter heading in Dr. Diane Komp’s little book, “A Window to Heaven”. If you want to get a lump in your throat but have your faith inspired, read her book. It’s subtitled, “When Children See Life in Death”.

In 1992, when the book was published, Komp was Professor of Paediatrics at the Yale University School of Medicine, and Attending Physician at the Yale-New Haven Hospital. Her chosen speciality was paediatric oncology – children suffering from cancer. Dr. Paul Brand writing the Foreword to her book said: “Dr. Komp has chosen to specialize in paediatric oncology, which means that, however well she does her job, a high proportion of her patients are going to be little children who will die of cancer”

She confesses that her experiences brought her from being “agnostic and atheist” to belief in God and a recognition of the reality of his love. But more about Jesus the bus driver in a moment.

#### SEGMENT 1

Let me read you section of Dr. Komp’s chapter headed “Does Jesus Drive a School Bus?”

A colleague told me of an eight-year-old boy with cancer whose parents avoided discussing death or matters of faith despite obvious signs that their son would die within a few days. The boy took them by surprise one morning with the report of a dream. A big yellow school bus pulled up to his house in the dream and the door opened. On the bus he saw Jesus, who told him of his impending death and invited him to go with him on the bus. In his dream he accepted Jesus’ invitation. It was with great peace that he recounted his dream to his parents.

Of all the images children have come up with, the school bus has become my favourite. So I was puzzled when I told this story to child psychiatrist Kyle Pruett and watched his brow furrow solemnly. Was there a psychoanalytical interpretation at variance with the Christian message I read into the dream? He narrated the significance of the school bus from a loving father’s point of view.

Several weeks before our conversation, the entire Pruett family drove their eldest daughter to begin her college career in a distant state. As they neared their destination, Kyle was confronted by a memory from his daughter’s childhood that returned to him unbidden. “We were at the curb on her first day of kindergarten and I could see that big, old yellow school bus pull up. I could even see, hear, and feel that huge door slam in my face, taking my daughter away from me. I had completely forgotten how wrenching an experience that was for me – not at all nice!

She continues, “At a school nursery where Dr. Pruett consults, the model of a yellow school bus is worn out and requires replacement faster than any other toy. In playing with the bus, these youngsters master separation from their parents.

She goes on later to say, “I recently met a couple who lost identical twins to the same disease. Nathan and Jordon loved school buses and would ask every visitor to their home to draw a school bus with Jesus, their parents and grandparents, and them aboard.” One of the twins Nathan who had never been able to walk died. Shortly before he died the entire family went on a trip on a school bus that was quite disastrous. The bus, travelling too quickly over a pothole threw people about in the bus. This upset the twins who wanted to know who was driving the bus. It apparently mattered very much to the children who was in control of the school bus.

Well, a little more about this after some music.

## **SEGMENT 2**

Just one more thing about that school bus.

After Nathan’s death his twin brother often asked his parents to go and pick his brother up and bring him home. Whenever he asked to go to see his brother in heaven, he accepted their answer of “Soon, Jordan, you will see Jesus and Nathan in heaven”.

One day he became very thoughtful for a moment, thinking of his brother and how he would get to heaven to join him. He asked, “Dad, does Jesus drive a school bus?”

God can use any means – even a school bus but his usual method of communicating with us is through the Bible. We are directed to go everywhere and make the good news of Jesus known so that people can believe and be saved. As we pray, read, discuss, and listen to God in Scripture we are guided and directed by him. That is the purpose of the letters of the New Testament. They were written to guide the recipients in living in fellowship with God and in obedience to him. But, as in the case of the children who appear in Dr. Komp’s book, God is God and he chooses how he will draw and guide people. There are multiple reports of people in today’s world being addressed by God in dreams and vision, especially in situations where the usual means of learning about him are seriously restricted.

I have a friend who worked as a missionary in Nepal some years ago. He spoke of a lady missionary who visited a remote village where she found ready response to her message about Jesus. She later asked some of the villagers why it was that they responded so readily to what she had to say. They explained that for some time before she arrived, two women of the village working out in the fields were often visited by an old man. The old man told them that someone would come to their village one day who would tell them about the true God and how they could know him. “That was why”, they said, “we received what you told us”. The missionary asked if the old man still met with the women as they worked in the field. “Oh, no”, they replied, “after you came and told us about Jesus he stopped coming to us”.

I find these stories encouraging because they remind me that God is God and that he is working in his world. As I pray and seek to influence others to follow Jesus I am sustained by the realisation that God is at work calling people to himself in ways that he knows are best suited to them.

God is the Lord of his harvest and he is reaping that harvest in every part of the world. I have friends who talk about ‘divine appointments’, occasions when they find themselves in company with someone who is open to hearing about Jesus. They go expecting such ‘divine appointments’ and seek to make the best of them when they occur. You might like to pray that God will make use of you in fulfilling such ‘divine appointments’.

### SEGMENT 3

In the concluding chapter of her book Dr. Komp includes a quote from a book by Charles Hummel entitled “Fire in the Fireplace” the quote runs: “The book of Job ... gives clues to the meaning of suffering. But we do not really understand this message – in fact, we hardly take it seriously – until we suffer. Our initial knowledge may come from the Bible, but deeper understanding comes only as we put teaching into practice”.

As you and I go about our daily lives we are in contact with people who may look very composed on the outside but who often carry within them great sadnesses and hurts, deep and profound questions, and pain that no tablet or drug will relieve. The capacity to be with such people, to offer a listening ear to their stories and questions, to be able to empathise with their pains and doubts and, when appropriate, say something about what we have learned of the grace and mercy of God is both a great privilege and a solemn responsibility.

To share something meaningful with some other person does not demand that we be a trained theologian equipped with every possible answer for the great questions of life. If one is genuinely caring and can share something about what faith in God means personally then one is equipped to speak into the life of another. You may have yourself needed to deal with pain and suffering. Though no two stories are the same, experience of the grace of God as we have known it can speak to others

Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl wrote: “Has all this suffering, this dying around us a meaning? For, if not, then ultimately there is no meaning to survival: for a life whose meaning depends upon such a happenstance – as whether one escapes nor not – ultimately would not be worth living at all”

When we have looked into God’s face as it appeared in Jesus, especially on the cross, we have a word to offer to those who suffer.

I have friends who use their hands to remind them of the good news they have to share. They use their thumb that points upward to remind them that God is gracious and his gift of eternal life is a free gift, never earned or deserved. Their pointing finger is a reminder that we are all sinners, all in need of pardon and renewal. The centre finger, the largest, speaks of God and his holiness and love. The ring finger speaks of Jesus the Bridegroom who died and rose to make a relationship with God possible, and the little and weakest finger represents faith which though weak can reach out to a mighty God and be embraced by Divine Love.

### CONCLUSION

So where does thinking about children facing death and yellow school buses, people experiencing unusual encounters with God, and suffers reflecting on the place of their suffering and whether or not it holds meaning, leave us this morning?

Not depressed I hope. I hope that you might rather be prompted to hope, powerfully uplifting hope, to greater confidence in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to a fresh resolve to open yourself to God and to those who are around about you.

I leave with you some words that challenge me and I hope may give you a fresh way of looking at those around you: “There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.” Life truly is something marvellous.

God bless you.

