

# Some trust in chariots and some in horses: can our use of transport show our trust in God?

## Introduction

I think that our use of transport can show our trust in God, but that's the easy part really. What I want us to think about is how to go about demonstrating it, and I think that's going to look very different for each person and each set of circumstances. You see, I believe that God brings about and delights in all technological and societal advances in general but also specifically those we see in transport. God's creation and the way we creatively apply our minds is by nature good. But because we have fallen it is not only possible but indeed quite likely that we will use these things in an ungodly way! Different transport options are good, but they are not the ultimate answer to the problems that this world faces. Only God has that answer, in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and as Christians we need to trust him that he will do as he has promised and renew the world. And if we truly trust in something, we will not just pay it lip service but our actions will reflect that trust in all parts of our lives.

So, can our use of transport show our trust in God? Today I will expand on my suggestion that no mode of transport is bad, just the way we make use of it, look at a common way that people are understood to make transportation choices and suggest some ways that Christians might modify this to show their trust in God.

## Good and Bad in the Bible

Now of course there isn't a great deal of discussion about transport in the Bible – generally modes of transport only get mentioned as part of the wider narrative in a particular passage. So, you might think that the Bible has little it can tell us about this subject. However, I believe that the Bible gives a positive message about both social progression and technological advancements as long as they are used to glorify God rather than to try and replace him. In Genesis 4 Jabal and Tubal-cain are celebrated as the inventors of musical instruments and metal-working respectively. God's covenant with Israel followed by the New Covenant were both incredibly socially progressive for their day and can be understood have set the foundations for many of the societal freedoms we enjoy today. However, just to take a single example of a more nuanced understanding of advancement, Noah's innovation in wine-making leads to much imagery and discussion that is both positive and negative throughout the Bible. But the negative imagery is always as a result of the wine being misused – not that it is inherently bad!

So on to transport itself – can we find evidence for modes of transport being considered good unless it is put to bad use in the Bible. Well, I think there are a few examples:

- First-off we have walking – This was created by God to allow Adam and Eve to move around in the Garden of Eden. It was definitely a good thing! It allowed them to walk with God in the cool of the day and to move around and tend to the garden. But after the fall they used this good gift from God to try and keep away from him – they ran and hid when they heard his voice!

- Some time later we have the innovation of boats – This was definitely a good thing, without the Ark Noah and his family would not have survived the flood and they would not have had the means to rescue all of the other creatures! However, in the book of Jonah, we have another example of transport being used to try and flee God because Jonah did not want to be God’s instrument in saving the Ninevites.
- Finally, we have the intricate road and sea transportation network that was set up and protected by the Roman Empire. Arguably this was produced for evil purposes as it allowed the ruthless exploitation of both human and natural resources for the benefit of a small number of Roman citizens, but God showed that it was nonetheless good by choosing this moment in history to come to earth in human form, at just the time when the good news could travel safely far and wide within a single generation as we read about in Acts.

## Good and Bad today

Now, it’s all very well looking at these examples in the Bible, but the truth is that the world looks very different nowadays both in terms of our society and the modes of transport that are available to us now! So, does the same thing hold today? Should we consider all modern modes of transport to be good but acknowledge they can be put to bad use? Well, let’s think about a few examples:

- First up let’s look at good-old walking again – we’ve been doing it since God created us, but have things changed at all since then? Well at surface level it’s hard to see how walking could be anything but good – it’s sociable, good exercise and produces low emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> and air pollutants! But even this ancient mode of transport can cause damage. Trekking is big business in some countries desperate to make money from tourism and this can be surprisingly damaging to the environment. Fragile montane ecosystems are being damaged by the tonnes of rubbish dropped every year by trekkers on the way to Machu Picchu in Peru.<sup>1</sup> And in Nepal forests around the Mt. Everest national park have been extensively thinned to provide fuel for inns catering to hiking tourists.<sup>2</sup>
- OK, how about an electric car? These can be really good. Similarly to many private transport solutions there is a great deal of flexibility – you can go pretty much wherever there is a road, which is most places you’d want to go, whenever you like. You can take more stuff with you than would be possible walking or cycling or on public transport and in many cases you’ll get to your destination quicker which means more time to spend whilst you are there. You can have private conversations that would not be possible on public transport. Emissions of air pollutants and green house gases are lower than a fossil fuel car (although this depends a bit on the source of electricity) and a greater proportion of them are emitted in the middle of nowhere rather than in the built-up areas you mostly drive through. However, has anyone truly gone through the full environmental implications of electrifying the vehicle fleet? Are we confident in our ability to recycle all of these new components and provide enough clean energy to fuel them, or are we going to get 20 years down the line and regret this big push just like we did with Diesel cars? Also, have you noticed that the rise of car use has coincided with the rise of individualism to the detriment of community, at least in the west. I know that a car can be used to offer lifts to others but the truth is that many people choose to use a car over public transport as a way to insulate themselves from others. As Christians, how can we love our neighbours if we never meet them?

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<sup>1</sup> [https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/04/0415\\_020415\\_machu\\_2.html](https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/04/0415_020415_machu_2.html)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.jstor.org/stable/3451451?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3451451?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

- My final example is a helicopter. Now, you might not expect much love to be thrown in the direction of such a noisy, polluting vehicle at a conference looking at environmental interests! The bad side of this mode of transport is pretty obvious so instead I'd just like to point out the good that it can be used for. Because of its manoeuvrability and speed this vehicle is ideal for travelling to out of the way places that are all but inaccessible otherwise. In emergency situations they are indispensable, and it is only by helicopter that some rainforest tribes can be reached by the outside world at all. The helicopter is currently an indispensable tool for obeying Jesus command that we share the gospel with every nation, tribe and tongue!

Now the point of these examples isn't to try and persuade anyone that particular modes of transport are better than others or, even worse, that we should stop moving around at all! I just want you to see that perhaps we should prayerfully think about what modes of transport we use, taking into account the specific circumstances, rather than always making the same old choices.

## Common framework for making choices

So, what is it that commonly drives those choices that we make? In my job I've worked quite a bit with economists and social researchers who make assumptions, where possible based on evidence of past behaviour, about how people will react when Government policy changes in order to work out what the impact will be. The model they use is that you can put a monetary value on all of the factors that contribute to a decision and that when you compare the costs of the different options you will reach a point where people move from one option to another when the cost of the original moves above that of the next option. It does get more complicated than that but it's not really worth going into the details now. What is of interest to us is the kind of factors that they often look at when estimating the costs.

- The most obvious of these is the upfront cost – how much do you pay to take this option? It might be the fare if you are taking a bus or a combination of fuel cost, insurance etc. if you are driving a car. It could even be effectively nothing if you are walking!
- Another common one is convenience, although this is harder to attribute a monetary value to. A car journey would likely be more convenient and therefore have a lower convenience cost than a bus journey although that might change if you had to worry about parking or having a drink with your meal!
- Time is another common cost on the assumption that people will be doing something useful with all of the time available to them. Therefore, any time spent on a journey is reducing the time you can spend on other things which you value, like doing your job or spending time with friends etc. Apart from very short journeys, walking would normally have a high cost in terms of time. If you're travelling from London to Birmingham it would probably take longer by plane than by train, but if you're going to Edinburgh that is likely to change!
- There might be one or two other common factors that impact on cost for the population in general, but normally if you go much deeper than this the costs start to be much more individual, based on preferences. You might really enjoy driving, in which case it would take quite a lot for you to choose an alternative transport option.

Now there is nothing wrong with any of these factors in and of themselves, but I wonder if you have noticed a common theme to them? They are all focussed on the individual. What can they afford? What do they find convenient? How much time do they have to spend? What are their preferences? Or to bring it back to the original question: What can I afford? What do I find convenient? How much time do I have? What are my preferences? Now, I know that many of us would also consider things like the impact on the environment and, if you are travelling with others, what their preferences are. However, I don't know about you but I rarely think beyond those concerns which impact on me. Does that look like I'm trusting in my God or more like trusting in myself?

## Modified framework

So what kind of things should we consider when making a transport decision in order to show our trust in God? Of course, if God outright tells you "I want you to go by car today" then you should definitely do that. But in my experience, those instances are the exception rather than the rule! Instead he prefers us to apply our understanding of who he is, what his plans are and who we are in him to each decision. So what kind of things am I talking about here and how might they impact on a transport decision? Here are some suggestions:

- God is in community with himself, the trinity, and with us. He calls his people to be in community just like him - not only with him, through the Holy Spirit, and with our brothers and sisters in Christ, through the church, but also with the rest of the world as witnesses to his glory. When making a transport decision we could think about how each option might be used to strengthen our community relationships. Do you need to have an important private conversation with a fellow traveller? Perhaps a car journey would best provide the environment to allow this to happen. Do you feel led by the Spirit to open yourself up to possible opportunities to interact with strangers and talk about and demonstrate your faith? Maybe taking the train would be better. Do you need to spend as much quality time as possible with someone you rarely see but have an important relationship with? Perhaps flying would get you there quicker and give more time for those important conversations. Do you feel the need to spend some time with God on the way to a meeting? Perhaps walking will give you the space and time to pray. These questions and their answers are moving beyond what works best for the individual and looking at our relationships and interactions with others which God tells us are so important.
- God delights in and cares for all of his creation, and he calls us to do the same. He charged humanity with caring for the environment and all of the creatures in it and also called on us to love our fellow humans as ourselves. Jesus gave us the ultimate example of sacrificial love and called us to follow his example. I'm sure many of you know far more than I do the impacts of different forms of transport on the environment and the creatures that live within it but perhaps we less often consider the social impacts of our transport choices? A recent study has estimated that if you take a journey on foot which costs you \$1, this will have a direct cost to society of \$0.01. In contrast a car journey which costs you \$1 will cost society \$9!<sup>3</sup> If we love others as ourselves we will likely put much greater weight on the societal and environmental costs in our decisions than we currently do!

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<sup>3</sup> <http://discoursemedia.org/urban-development/full-cost-commute>

- God created us to love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and when the way we act shows that we in fact love other things more than him we are definitely not putting our trust in him! For example, I love cycling, which is a good thing as long as I don't put it before God. But in the past I've looked for every excuse to cycle somewhere rather than taking another form of transport, even if that inconveniences me and others! If we rely on a particular form of transport for our happiness to the extent that we put more of our time, effort and attention into it than anything else, then this is not showing our trust for God. Sometimes God asks us to show our trust in him by giving up our idols and for some people that might even mean giving up a mode of transport, either temporarily or permanently!

## Conclusion

So, can our use of transport show our trust for God? I have suggested above that it's not what mode of transport we use, but the reasons for choosing it which demonstrate our trust. We can choose a mode of transport for purely selfish reasons and this will show that we don't have much trust that God will provide or protect. Or we can use Godly principles such as seeking his plans for our day, thinking of community, society and environment and giving up our idols in our decision making which show that we are looking to God rather than ourselves, even if we end up with the same outcome at the end! All modes of transport are good – it is only our motivations and reasons for using them which can lead to misuse if we are not looking to God.