

“God’s Bridge to Us”

1 Kings 3:5-12, Matthew 13:31-33 & 44-46, Romans 3:23 & 8:26-39

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July 20, 2014

On the way to workcamp we went under and across the New River Gorge Bridge one of the highest bridges in the world, 876 feet above the river and one of the longest arches in the world at 1,700 feet. It is an impressive accomplishment of humanity with spectacular views.

Our rafting guide explained how the bridge improves people’s lives. Before the bridge, coal was mined through the gorge. There were train tracks on both sides of the river. To get across to the other side now takes less than a minute, but back then it was at least a day’s journey on two to three different trains. Sometimes family lived mere feet from each other across the river, but due to the constant smoke from the coke fires they never saw each other or even knew they had family on the other side. Some children grew up in the mining camps having never seen the sky, unaware there was an entire world beyond the gorge. Now the gorge is a pristine paradise for water sports. The bridge connects people to each other and to both sides of the river opening up a better life for everyone.

The Apostle Paul has spent several chapters explaining the mess we make, the destruction of sin, the pain, sorrow and suffering of life apart from God. We are in desperate need of a bridge to the spectacular glory of God and God’s kingdom.

Often embedded in our consciousness is a sense that our wrong doing has separated us from God. Some have thought that by working hard at good deeds, passionately worshiping God, by generous giving, faithful service and so on — that these efforts may build a bridge from us to God. Paul says that **Romans 3:23** “**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” All our attempts to make a bridge to God collapse, fail, and come up woefully short.

Our gracious, triune God provides the bridge. We didn’t design this bridge. We didn’t finance it. We didn’t build it. We don’t deserve it. God the Creator is constantly at work creating more and more beauty, goodness, and love. God the Redeemer, Jesus, forgives us, cleans up the mess, heals us and gives us the love and joy of God. God the Sustainer, the Holy Spirit, communicates with us, comforts us, and empowers us to love extravagantly and rejoice abundantly. God is our bridge that brings the glory of God into our lives.

The Apostle Paul describes the prayer aspect of the bridge. **Romans 8:26-27** “**Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**”

When all seems hopeless. When we are depressed. When we don’t know what to do. When we don’t know how to pray. When we feel alone and unloved, God still maintains a never failing bridge to each one of us. God keeps connecting with us, sustaining us, carrying us, loving us.

When all we can do is cry or hurt. God is crying and hurting with us. The Holy Spirit carries these burdens across the bridge to God who recreates them. God sends back comfort, a longing for a better life, healing, love, and joy. Sometimes this takes time, sometimes years, sometimes a life time. God is molding us into a glorious person.

When you are impatient, frustrated by the way and timing of your transformation, God is with you. When all you can muster is a sigh, or a tear, a groan, or an angry clinched fist, God is with you. God takes that and turns it into a prayer. God uses it as a point to connect the bridge and continue the process of filling you with God's glory.

God uses every prayer to lovingly transform us. The Old Testament tells of Solomon's prayer. **1 Kings 3:5-12** "At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you."

If you want to pray like Solomon then begin with thanksgiving, confess your inadequacy, explain your trust in God to supply your needs, and then ask for guidance in making the right choices.

Wherever you are at on your faith journey, praying like Solomon or praying with a sigh, God is the bridge giving you ways to journey into abundant life. The Apostle Paul continues to describe what we receive through the bridge God maintains to us. **Romans 8:28-39** **We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose. What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? God who did not withhold God's own Son, but gave Jesus up for all of us, will God not with Jesus also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Jesus who loves us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor**

rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Life in the present is shaped by the pain and suffering of the cross. We are unable to see who we will become. Sort of like the children who could not see the sky through the coke fires or the horizon beyond the lip of the gorge. Our mess, our weakness, keeps us from understanding what is happening around us and in us. Often we are unable to tell what is a good thing or a bad thing. Paul insists that in all things God is working, even the bad things. God will somehow, some way, bring good out of everything or will recreate it into something beautiful. God is working in all people. We are unable to tell how much bad or good is in another. God has built a bridge to even the badest, most evil person. God's grace will cleanse them. God's love will make them glorious. This gives us hope, a confident expectancy in the promises of God. It enables us to trust that everything will be made right, that everyone will become gloriously perfect.

The Apostle Paul lived a hard life with plenty of hardship and suffering. He saw vicious evil people using, torturing, and killing people. Through it all the Apostle Paul remained convinced that nothing can separate you or anyone from the love of God. God's bridge never fails. God's bridge is never temporarily obstructed to let boats pass or closed due to flooding or needs to be replaced by a higher, longer, more efficient bridge. God's bridge to each of us is steadfast and eternal.

Jesus used parables to give us a glimpse of what is on the other side of the bridge, to give us an idea of who we are becoming, to give us a vision of our future life. **Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46** "Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

These parables reveal glorious growth, amazing results from seemingly insignificant beginnings. God's spark of love begins so small it is hardly perceptible. God takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. Life will be an invigorating adventure full of joyful surprises, glorious beyond our grandest vision. God's bridge supplies us with our dreams and gives us glimpses of us loving perfectly. God's bridge supplies us with strength to journey through every darkness. God's bridge assures us that we belong to God, that we are cherished, that nothing can separate us from God's love. God's bridge is the way to joyful, abundant eternal life.

Any love you receive or share and all your love will be magnified and celebrated for eternity. Years ago a sociology professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore assigned his class to a city slum to interview 200 boys. "On the basis of your findings, predict their future."

Shocked at what they saw in the slums, the students estimated that 90 percent of the boys interviewed would someday serve time in prison. Twenty years later the same professor asked another class to locate the survivors of the 200 boys and compare what happened. Of the 180 boys they could find, only four had ever been to jail. Why had the predictions by the earlier class proven false? A common denominator — over 100 of them remembered having the same high-school teacher, Miss O'Rourke, who had been a tremendous influence on them at the time. After a long search, Sheila O'Rourke was found in a nursing home in Memphis. When asked for her explanation she was puzzled and replied, "All I did was love every one of them." Amen