

Introduction:

- *"The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by all her children."* (Luke 7:34-35, NKJV)
- I looked online and discovered that there are over 103 movie titles with the word 'bridge' in it. Why? Bridges have to do with obstacles and overcoming obstacles are why bridges exist, and movies are good.
 - In wars, when an army retreated often they would burn/destroy the bridges so that invading armies could not enter. Then I thought, "When Jesus triumphed over death, hell, and grave; the enemy/Satan began his retreat and started burning every bridge he could." Hell does not want heavenly bridges built into lives, communities and nations because people will cross over the obstacle of hell itself! Ie. When the prodigal son left he thought he burnt a bridge. But the Father never burned it. In his heart the bridge would always be there.
 - Bridges will always be important and during wartime they get even more important. There will probably always be one side trying to blow them up and another side trying to cross them. God's people are building bridges into people lives and hell is destroying them whenever possible.
 - Here is a fact. The majority of Christians, after two years, will no longer have friends that are in the world. Therefore we have to become bridge builders. One very good thing about millennials is that after becoming Christians after two years they still have friends in the world.

I. What is a Bridge and Who Needs A Bridge?

- A. Bridge: is a structure carrying a pathway or roadway over a depression or obstacle (such as a river), a means of connection or transition. bridge, dental bridge, bridge in music, bridge of your nose, in billiards use your hand as a bridge.
 1. Bridges connect one point to another that is separate by an obstacle.
 2. They are designed to bring things/people together
- B. Who needs a bridge? Lost people, disconnected believers, and hurting Christians.
- C. A bridge-builder is one who has made a commitment to understand people with different backgrounds and beliefs in order to make Christianity relevant to these people.

II. A Look At The Gap

- A. Where it all started. *"So the Lord God **banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made. After sending them out, the Lord God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.**"* (Genesis 3:23-24, NLT)
 1. The Hebrew word *salah* means to send away, banish. A gap occurred separating man from God. Ro 3:23 all have sinned, Ro 6:23 wages of sin is death. No access to tree of life.
 2. Mighty cherubim were placed, (Heb. to dwell) This was now their station to guard the gate to the Garden.

3. Flaming sword to watch and to guard with great care, that no man come near the tree of life. To guard against intruders.
- B. God would build a bridge past all those obstacles. He wanted a bridge to connect that which was separated. He had a plan from the beginning to bridge the gap/the sin barrier.
 1. From the foundation of the earth.
 - a) *"God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake."* (1 Peter 1:20, NLT)
 - b) *"He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."* (Hebrews 9:26, NKJV)
 2. The birth of Christ. The incarnation. God became a man. Birth of Jesus.
 - a) Christ closed the cultural gap/barrier. He brought the culture of heaven to the earth. This allowed us to see God. This is a major bridge that God builds to reach us.
 - b) Jesus said, *If you have seen me you have seen the Father.* Jn 14:9
 - c) He broke the humanity barrier. This was God demonstrating how we are to do the mission.
 3. The death and resurrection of Christ.
 - a) He broke the sin barrier at the cross.
 - b) Not only did he become a man but went into our eternal destination of separation from God. His resurrection built a bridge out for all who would believe in Him.
 - c) So he broke humanity barrier, and then the sin barrier.
- C. This action models or is based on the character of God.
 1. The Bible presents to us a God who continually seeks man by entering into man's cultural context. Ie. Dutch Sheet in a bar when backslidden. God visits him there, "What are you doing here?"
 2. In the New Testament we first find God seeking man by taking on a "contextualized" form--that of a man. Contextualization means becoming identified with the opposing party and requires breaking through cultural barriers in order to establish communication. Jesus did this both by becoming a man and by His death on the cross.
 - a) Does this seem extreme? Yes it is.
 - b) It was all motivated by love.
 - c) Jesus was always building bridges in ministry.
 - (1) At one time he was speaking theology with a Jewish Leader Nicodemus, in John 3 and in the next chapter he is talking to a Samaritan woman with racial issues.
 - (2) He could speak to prostitute and tax collector as easy as He could with Pharisees.
 3. God desires us to now do the same thing with people around us.

III. We Are God's Bridges

- A. To lost people, disconnected people, and hurting people. (From last Sunday)
- B. New Testament examples:
 1. The NT church repeatedly followed Christ's pattern of building human bridges in order to communicate the Gospel within the context of where people were and lived.

2. The Apostle Paul
 - a) Acts 16:9 Paul has a vision:
 - (1) The man from Macedonia says, "Come over here." I.e. Like my vision of Chipepo in 2014, Black man come out of a hut and says, "Welcome we have been waiting for you." Paul goes immediately by sea.
 - (2) Paul gets to Philippi (a Roman Colony) and on the Sabbath preaches by a river and Lydia is saved.
 - (3) Lydia takes the Gospel back to Rome and is credited for taking the Gospel to Europe.
 - (4) What were his obstacles? Water, does not know anyone, does not know where to go. But motivate by love, empowered by the mission, he goes after the 'low hanging fruit' spiritual people who are coming to pray by the river.
 - b) Acts 17:17-27, Athens. City of many gods. Yet in this chapter Paul speaks differently to the Jews (monotheistic) vs the Athenians (many gods.) He was able to do this because he understood their cultures. He became all things to all men that he might reach some!
 - c) Timothy was able to minister to Greeks because he was of greek heritage. Yet on another occasion, Paul has him circumcised because they were going to be in contact with Jews that thought circumcision as important.
3. The Apostle Peter
 - a) Acts 10. Peter goes to Cornelius' house. Peter has a dream and in the dream God is building a bridge to the Gentiles for Peter. *"Rise, kill and eat!"*
 - b) His tradition kept him outside of Cornelius' life. Like I said last Sunday... *"If we are not building bridges we are erecting barriers."* The Gospel brings down barriers in order for the bridges to be built. Peter built a bridge across religious barriers.
4. Philip goes to Samaria. He builds a bridge across racial barriers.
- C. So here is the question for us: "When non-Christians encounter us, what impressions do they walk away with? Do they simply see another "religion," or do they encounter a Christianity that is relevant outside the church and makes good rational sense in every area of human life?"

IV. How Can I Be A Better Bridge Builder

- A. Let love be a motivating factor. Non-Christians are lost. Separated from God. Spend some time looking at the word and what it has to say about the fate/ the eternity of those who die without Christ.
 1. I don't think that fate really bothers us much anymore. It is evident when we pray.
 2. Love stirs compassion which leads to action. Compassion see the pain of people and breaks for them. Love and compassion makes our heart tender towards the condition of people not knowing Christ.
- B. Be intentional. Look for opportunities.
 1. Be like Is. 6. "Who will go?" Response of Isaiah, "I Will!"
- C. Speak the language of the non-Christian. Get away from you "Christianese."
- D. Practice hospitality.

1. Barna report: "Faith is stimulated by hospitality and formed in community." Happens best in the home with out children.
 2. xenos - Ro 12:13 *"Always be eager to practice hospitality."* The Greek word has to do with strangers and foreigners. We are aliens/foreigners passing through this life. We are different than the world.
 3. In Mt 25 Christ is the foreigner and it is about our relationship with Him.
 4. Parable of the good Samaritan. Practiced hospitality.
 5. Be kind, be helpful, be loving.
 6. This is really the easiest one can do. A meal with someone.
- E. We must develop a servant spirit. What are bridges we can build into our community.
1. Ie. Suntree elementary. Testing week.
 2. Dove Bible club.
 3. Mentor at a school
 4. A number of you volunteer at Love INC.
 5. What about prison ministry at Sharps?
- F. Put aside our judgement that builds barriers and seek to build bridges. Ie. People will look different than us. Sound different. Act different. But we have to ask just like a missionary to a new land: "How can I connect with these people." Connect!!! That is the job a bridge... connect two things/people.
- G. Practice 'reaching out'. That is the start of building a bridge to someones life. IE. The question we have been using: *"If you could change one personal problem or challenge this year what would it be?"* Maybe you have a better question....share it with us.
1. Out reach team. Cliff Weeks or Eric Ross

Conclusion:

- *"The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by all her children."* Luke 7:34
- Ie. Let me tell you the story about Paul, the maintenance man. Birthday cake with snowballs.
- God is calling this morning for us to be bridge builders.
 - Who will you build a bridge to?
 - Look at the card in your bulletin.