

THE BRIDGE
Matthew 28:1-10

Easter Sunday
April 20, 2014
Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

On this Easter morning I want to focus your attention on this bridge. What is the purpose of a bridge? Well, it is meant to span a chasm of some kind. People on one cliff want to visit people on another cliff and they don't want to go through the chasm, the valley, all the time.

The reason I bring this up is because from the beginning of time, when humans started to imagine the truth and reality of God, it didn't take them long to think of God in lofty, holy and distant terms. They also began to look into their own hearts and realize that they certainly didn't live up the standard of moral perfection that God, or their god(s), would certainly expect.

Increasingly as human beings looked into their own world they saw the presence of darkness. They saw mean thoughts and words, self-serving deeds, greed, injustice, etc. So over the centuries people in their faith systems began to wonder how they could ever come into a relationship with this holy being—especially when there's a chasm that separates us.

You might think of it as you and I being on the human side of this chasm with God being on the other side. What are we going to do to span that chasm? The result is that faith system after faith system came into vogue. Yet if you look at them—all the major world religions—you find that people start saying that they're going to start a bridge that leads to God or to whoever their supreme being is.

Study any major world religion you want to. The construction process to span this chasm of the separation between humans, and between God or god, all starts on the human side. Human beings say, "We're just going to fly a little straighter, live a little more nobly, become more religious (whatever that means), pray a certain amount of prayers, go through certain rituals and rules, do a certain number of charitable deeds."

This whole idea is that through a massive construction effort, maybe through a lifetime, human beings could span that chasm between them and God. The hope is to be able to somehow get over to the other side and enjoy a relationship with God (gods) that would prepare them for the next life.

Again I challenge you. Study every major world religion. It is a construction project that starts on the human side that requires lots of human effort to begin and sustain. And even though there's no actual proof that you're going to do enough to get to God (gods), you better try.

Now contrast that, my friends, with Biblical Christianity. Read the Bible. It says something really remarkable. It says that God, from his side, saw the chasm that separated himself from immoral men and women. He saw a much bigger gap than our minds can comprehend. God knew that no amount of human bridgework starting on that side would be enough.

Therefore God took responsibility on himself. He laid the foundation. He built a bridge that spanned the chasm all the way over to the human side. It was motivated by love. And if some of you are wondering how and when this happened, it happened when God sent Jesus his Son.

A couple days ago, on Good Friday, we focused on Jesus hanging on the cross. You might think of the cross of Calvary as being the bridge that spans the chasm of sin from God's side all the way over to the human side. As a result, God comes to us with his grace and love; he has made it possible for us to walk across this bridge built by his hands, purchased by his Son.

That means, of course, that you and I have a decision. It is the most important decision any human will ever make in their lifetime. That is do I abandon my human and religious efforts to span this chasm; do I instead take God's hand and walk across the one he built for me through Jesus?

I remember times through the years when I have thought that I could somehow bridge my way to God myself. I rationalized that by being a good person, by going to church, by being a pastor, by having a good family, all this gives me extra credits and will earn my way to heaven. Yet I too have needed to let go of my good works, receive Christ's love, and then walk across Jesus' bridge by faith.

The good news this Easter, and why I am so optimistic these days despite all the problems in our world, is that anyone can receive Jesus and walk across that bridge. No matter what your past, how far you've wandered or messed up, you can walk across the bridge to God. You can come home.

You can come home on that bridge deck that Jesus provided when he went to the cross on your behalf and mine. That's the Easter message that's resounding all over the world. A bridge has been constructed, God has come to us, and anyone can walk across it this very day.

The truth, my friends, you also need to know when you open your heart to God is that another construction process is going to begin. God is going to start reconstructing your life from the inside out. It's not simply a behavior modification plan, but rather the Spirit of God works in you to change your values, change your mind, change the way you relate.

Before you receive Christ and cross the bridge, when you're on your own and not living close to God, relational chasms don't bother you very much. Isn't that true? You have an argument with someone that goes unresolved and yet as long as you avoid that person, run away, what's it to you? Some people can live with all kinds of alienation in relationships and it doesn't faze them very much.

Yet when you cross that bridge with Jesus, when you come home to God's family through what Jesus did for you, one thing that's going to happen is that when you have relational problems with another person it's going to bother you. When there are hurt feelings, it's going to make you sad.

God is going to work in your spirit to encourage you to reach out a hand, to be the first one to call. As a bridge was extended to you by God, you extend a bridge to someone you have a chasm with. Now for some of you Easter dinner is going to be a difficult experience because of chasms in your family or extended family. Monday morning is going to be tough because there are chasms at work or with others in your life.

If I were to ask how many of you have had breakdowns in marriages, between parents and children, or how many have had significant strains in a work relationship almost every hand would go up. It happens. It is a sin infested world. And some of these chasms get larger.

Yet the good news of Easter is that the same power that brought Jesus back to life—the supernatural divine power—is available to rank and file people like you and me for purposes of internal change and bridge building. It is our only way to find healing and new life.

Look at this bridge one more time. There is one more major chasm that had to be crossed and that is the chasm from this life to the next. This is a subject matter we don't talk about very much. It is a subject matter that causes quite a bit of uneasiness in people when you talk about death and that final chasm between here and the next life.

You know, my friends, we're always shocked when someone dies yet the death rate has always been around 100%. Yet it's still a shock when someone dies, isn't it? We all have this low grade denial going on about death. It might happen to someone else but not to us.

Part of what drives this denial, for many of us anyway, is that we're not exactly sure about what is going to happen on the other side. As a result we don't want to think about it. Some of us are not exactly sure if we're prepared to meet God, so a little denial helps that problem.

However the Bible comes out and tells us that this is a reality you have to deal with. John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son (the bridge) so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life."*

This is the third piece of news about Easter. When Jesus resurrected from the grave on Easter morning he built a bridge into the next life that through him all of his followers could walk over. It is a bridge into eternity, into heaven. Now instead of fearing and dreading it, we can look forward.

Some of you have physical problems, emotional wounds, psychological scars that you've carried with you your whole life. The promise for you, because of the power of the resurrection of Jesus, is that a bridge has been built into the next life. It is there you'll receive a new body; all your psychological and emotional scars will be healed; you'll be whole.

I wish today that it would have been possible for each one of you to come up here, to symbolically lay down your construction effort of trying to earn your way to God, and if you could take Jesus' hand and walk across the bridge. As you walked across the bridge we could take your picture and celebrate your commitment to rely solely on the one who built that bridge for you.

Then as you promise to rely fully on Jesus, extend a hand to someone you've been having a relational distance with. Can you imagine the differences if people all over the world would reach out a hand across racial, across ethnic, across troubled lines? Just think about it.

Then just look at the hope you have in Jesus Christ for heaven. Heaven is available to you. You can know it--you can live with that certainty in your heart. What a day that will be when all who believe in Jesus are there with him in heaven.

So, my friends, this is why we have Easter hope. This is why Easter is the greatest day on the Christian calendar. I sincerely hope you feel that way, too. Let us pray...