

THE BRIDGE TO GOD

Pre-Introduction

When Pastor Paul asked if I could preach in his absence, I immediately thought hmmm, this is far outside my comfort zone. I think I replied with something like right, ok, well let me think about that. Pastor Paul said it would be good for me to do this....with a big grin whilst delivering that line.

Over the coming days it was on my mind, and I played out scenarios that included moments of imagined boldness but lots of doubt too. After all I have no Bible college training and have not studied to prepare a sermon from the pulpit. As I talked to the Lord about it, I began to think that maybe it's not a question of should I preach or should I commit to this request but rather Lord, what would you have me preach?

I reflected on the conversation between Moses and God, when God was preparing Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses said to God he was not eloquent but rather slow of speech and slow of tongue. God said to Moses that he would be with his mouth and will teach him what to say. Moses went on to question or doubt God again and God's anger was kindled and so I decided I didn't want to go down that path. Instead, I would commit and then ask God to guide me as I study and help me put an outline together to encourage God's people and share the Word.

I must say that I have a newfound respect for all the men of God that are called to preach and are preparing sermons 3 times a week or maybe more. It is hard work just like II Timothy 2:15 says, Study to show thyself approved unto God – study being to labour.

So, thank you in advance for your patience and understanding. You all look like a friendly crowd, so I am thankful for that!

Introduction

This morning we want to look at a subject I have titled THE BRIDGE TO GOD. During this study we want to focus in on 3 key areas of The Bridge to God.

1. Why is there a Bridge needed?
2. What is the Bridge?
3. What lies either side of the Bridge?

To fully appreciate and explore these three points we will need to take a "Road Trip" in time. In fact, we need to go way back to the very beginning and like with most questions in life or study of anything, it is critical to understand how something began, which provides the context for the here and now.

As we turn our attention to the first point of The Bridge to God which is, 1. Why is there a Bridge needed? Let us turn in our Bibles way, way back to **Genesis Ch1**. We want to take the time to read through this chapter and a little of **Ch2:1-2** to see what God is telling us.

What we have just read is one of the most incredible accounts in all the Bible. God has spelled out very clearly how the Earth, and all creation came to be. Animals, plants, trees, humans and so forth and if one were to spend just a little studying the biology they would quickly see that life all points to intelligent design.

We see 5 times for days 1-5 in Genesis Ch 1 that God said what he made was good and on the 6th day he looked at all he made and it was very good. It is interesting to note that God said the evening, and the morning were the first day or second etc... These are literal 24 hour days because that is exactly what evening and morning equate to.

It would be fair to say that the World God had created was in perfect balance and harmony. Let's compare what God made in the beginning with what mankind has now experienced for millennia.

We see in **Ch2:5** that every plant and herb grew, there was no rain and no man to till the ground. God says in verse **6** that a mist went up from the Earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

What do we see in farming practices today? Firstly, we must wait for Rain and then it comes early, late, too much, too little or years of drought. Man uses pesticides to kill the weeds and the bugs, and they use genetically modified seed that is resistant to a range of diseases but strips nutritional value so they add back in vitamins etc... Then we need to adjust the PH of the soil to give it nutrition so the seed can grow plus some other super boosting additives to increase the yield and maximise the profit. The list goes on and on of what man must do to fight for food production and ultimately, survival.

Now try to imagine the Earth God made? There was no need to plant anything or manage weeds or wait on rain. God provisioned everything.... I am not sure we can really understand that concept in our modern world.

Let's think on it further on what it would have been like in the beginning:

- No sunburn
- The perfect temperature with no high or low extremes
- No windstorms as there was an even temperature around the Earth
- No deserts
- No death, disease, cancer
- Absolutely no sin
- No pollution
- No Hay fever

I'm sure we could come up with a very long list of how perfect the Earth was.

This sounds like what we would call "Utopia" which is often thought of as an ideally perfect place free of moral corruption. In today's language we often use the word utopia to represent an imaginary world in which everyone and everything works in perfect harmony.

If we look at **Ch2:8**, God says he planted a garden within Eden which is where he put man. The word Eden literally means delight. This was no utopian imagination but in fact a place of delight. A place of delight God created.

Checkout verse **10** where there is a river that comes out of Eden to water the garden God made for man (again complete provision). Verse 11 and 12 goes onto to say that there is a land where there is gold and it's good, plus bdellium and the onyx stone i.e. precious stones.

If we look to **Ch2:15** we see that God places man in the garden of Eden and he has a job to do. He was to dress it and keep it. God has given Adam a specific duty to care for his garden home.

Although there were no weeds and everything was perfect, you must understand that the ground was so incredibly fertile. The ground cover would been so luxuriant that it's growth would need to be directed and controlled.

There is a wonderful principle here in that God very clearly made man to work and that it was good for him. This is despite the fact it was a perfect world. It says Adam was to keep (which means guard) it and not because of enemies but rather to care for it, to love it, to keep it beautiful and in order. This is representative of harmony through action. A wonderful principal God has shown us here to work and care for his creation.

So, what else can we find out that's going on in the garden of Eden? If turn our attention back to **Ch1:29, Ch2:9 and Ch2:16** we see here that God made incredible provision for Adam. Moreover, he was encouraged to eat whatever he wanted and as much as he needed. We also see in verse 9 and 16 that this included the Tree of Life.

Hopefully, what we have explored so far has allowed your mind to start to imagine a most perfect world, where everything works in divine harmony. From the creation of Adam and Eve to all the creatures God made, whether massive like the dinosaur or a cute little ladybug. They were all living peaceably together with no one eating each other. Instead, God provided an incredible buffet of herbs and plants which was to be their meat.

HOWEVER, there is one small request that God gave Adam and considering the abundance of provision and incredible beauty of the world around him, it should be a walk in the park. Let's look at **Ch2:17**.

Here we see a simple test for Adam.

- Can you trust and obey me?
- Do you love me to do as I ask?

You can see here in this verse that man still had a clear free-will choice. Verse 17 does not say you will be unable to eat of it but rather it is a command to not eat of it. The second half of the verse shows the free will choice by saying, if you eat of the tree then the consequence will be death.

As we said a moment ago, considering how much God had provided Adam and furnished the Earth, then surely this would be a simple request that one would oblige willingly with gratitude and love. It would demonstrate Adam's attitude to God i.e. there is no reason to disobey.

Let's remember that Adam has only ever known good and this is very clear choice to obey God's command. Why should he not?

God is saying, if you choose to eat then this will be consequence. It will be two-fold in that you will die a physical death and there will be a spiritual separation from God.

We have already established that Adam had knowledge of all things good. By accepting to eat the forbidden fruit, which was the rejection of God's word, the knowledge of evil would be conveyed to him and he would become fully aware of the stark difference between both good and evil.

After this command to Adam the remainder of Chapter 2 deals with Adam naming all the animals. This does go to show that Adam was clearly a highly intelligent man and would have had incredibly quick discernment to get through the animals. So, clearly Adam would have had no problem understanding precisely God's earlier command.

Chapter 2 also goes on to describe in more detail the creation of Eve. Eve was to be an help meet to Adam. They became as it were one flesh and were Husband and Wife. They were both naked and not ashamed. This is important to note because they were still innocent and not sin stained. They only knew good.

Hopefully so far, I have been able to help you gain perhaps, a small insight or snap shot as to how it was at the beginning of time.

- Perfect world – for us today unimaginably perfect.
- Harmony between man, animal and creation – something we can't fully grasp today.
- There was the first marriage between Adam and Eve
- They only knew good!! We can hardly say that today. Evil wants to take over us.
- They had direct fellowship with God Almighty. – Wow!

Turn with me to **Ch3:8a**. Now we are shown that Adam and Eve hear the voice of the Lord God. God is literally walking along in the Garden.

The way it's described makes it seem as though this is a fairly normal event. Something perhaps that Adam and Eve were accustomed to. **Verse 9** tells us that the Lord God called unto Adam. God is looking for them, maybe they weren't at the usual cool of the day meeting place.

Something here has definitely changed. Let's now read **Verses 8-13**. Suddenly they have hid themselves from God's presence (this action of hiding itself points to guilt) and they now know their nakedness, which they did not know during their innocence.

Adam and Eve do not take accountability for their sin in disobeying God by eating of the forbidden fruit. Instead, they blamed the woman, the serpent but ultimately Adam blamed God when he said, "The woman whom thou gavest me to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat". This is a familiar tune we hear today; it's not my fault because of....

The earlier part of Chapter 3 tells us that Satan in the form of a snake questions Eve why she can't eat of every tree. She tells him exactly what God had said, don't eat it lest ye die.

Satan says oh no you won't die, you'll be like gods and will know good and evil. Satan certainly wasn't wrong about coming to know evil. This is the trap with Satan, he will always use a little truth and a lot of lies to deceive his prey.

What does Eve do, she changes her perception sees the fruit as something to be desired and make one wise. So, she takes and eats and gives to Adam who was with her and he did eat. Adam appears to not have offered any opposition.

If we look at **Verse 7**. Their eyes were opened and they knew they were naked. This is the actual, very moment that sin has entered this perfect world because they disobeyed God's command.

What did God say in Ch2:17 – THOU SHALT SURELY DIE. Although Adam would go on to live another 900 years, he was now a walking dead man. He was now physically and spiritually separated from God. The sweet fellowship they once enjoyed i.e. God walking in the Garden was ended.

After all the good God had created and given to man, the one small request to obey, to show love and demonstrate the right attitude just could not be followed.

Let's see what God does in **Ch3:22-24**. Adam and Eve are removed from the Garden and away from the Tree of Life. Verses 14-19 detail the consequence of their sin. Such as Eve would bear children in sorrow (pain) and Adam would have to work by the sweat of his face and the ground would be corrupted/cursed – thorns/thistles etc..

We started by asking why is a Bridge to God needed? God has shown us through Genesis very succinctly that the gap, for which a bridge is needed, is our **SIN**.

God is holy and perfect and this Chasm began; the separation commenced the moment Adam and Eve disobeyed.

2. What is the Bridge?

Now that we understand there is a gap between God and man, we can now turn our attention to understanding if there is a Bridge to God and if so what is it?

Let's make our way to the New Testament to the book of **Romans Ch3:10**. It is quite plain that there is none righteous. The word righteous has the meaning of innocent, holy, just or right. Have you noticed that you don't need to train a child to do wrong. They do it of themselves. There is none righteous before God.

We saw with Adam/Eve that although they were made perfect and had freewill, they also found themselves not righteous by their sinful disobedience.

If scroll down to **verse 23** it is also quite plain that all have sinned, just like Adam/Eve and because of that sin we come short of the glory of God. We cannot attain it ourselves; we cannot bridge the gap.

What we have a tendency to do is compare ourselves, our standard of perceived right living to our neighbours or friends or family and say piously, well I don't do what they do. I mean I've never murdered anyone or robbed a bank.

The standard is God himself, we should compare ourselves to his holiness and we will quickly realise that we come short, that we are a sinner. We are disobedient to God just like Adam/Eve were.

Turn over to **Ch6:23a** do you remember what God told Adam/Eve what their disobedience would lead to? It was a physical and spiritual separation from God. Now here in the New Testament we again see that nothing has changed and that the payment for our sin is death.

BUT it's not all bad news, we see the second half of this verse **23b** that there is a gift from God which is eternal life through his Son Jesus. There is a hope which means we don't have to come short of the Glory of God.

But there's more, turn to **Ch5:8**. So despite our awful sin and pride and selfish ungodly ways, God commended, strengthened his love to us. In the Garden he demonstrated his love to Adam/Eve in all that he made and provisioned for them. So, God strengthened even more his love for us despite our rejection/disobedience to him and in our sinful state, he approved Christ dying for us.

Do you see that God does not leave us to live in our sinful state. There is a way, a bridge to Him that we don't deserve, and we can never truly understand his love to us but here it is in black and white – Whilst we are still in our rotten sinful state Christ died for us.

Remember God said back in Ch6:23 that there was a gift from him. Now like any good gift it is only yours if you take it. You can reject a gift someone gives you and therefore it is not your gift.

So, the question beggars how can I obtain this gift? In this world of constant telemarketers, scams, ads, amazing bargains etc.... there always seems to be a catch.

Turn to **Ch10:9-13** it is so simple, God tells us we just need to confess/acknowledge the Lord Jesus and believe that God raised him from the dead and thou shalt be saved.

When we truly believe in the Lord Jesus and who he is, that means we are acknowledging that we are sinners who are worthy of death/separation from God and are sorry/repentant/turn away from our sin and be saved.

Now why don't we look at what Jesus himself had to say on this matter. **Matt7:21-23**

This passage exemplifies precisely the opposite of what we saw in Romans. Christ here is describing people who speak of him but have never truly come to know him. Key passage **verse21**– but he that doeth the will of my Father in heaven. We just saw in Romans exactly what the will of God is, confess and believe!

In verse 21 you can imagine what people will be saying to Christ.

- Yeah, but I've been good Lord, I'm a good person
- I was born into a Christian family, Lord

Christ here in this verse gives us the contrast of who will enter – but he that doeth the will of my Father. What is the will of the Father? Well, we saw that already in the early passages in Romans putting your faith in Chris but let's also look at **Matt17:5-6**.

Hear ye him and the men (Peter, James and John) were sore afraid. Yet people today are apathetic to the Gospel of Jesus Christ; repulsed even by the notion of Christianity.

Christ spoke extensively through the New Testament that he was the Son of God, that he would die for sins of all mankind and would rise again the third day. He called sinners to repentance and God says Hear ye Him. When God Almighty says to Hear ye Him then we should pay attention.

Back in Matt7:22 it goes onto to tell us more things the lost will say to try and save their skin.

- Prophetised in thy name i.e. foretold what the bible says
- Cast out devils in thy name

- Done many wonderful works in thy name – good deeds, toiled away

Notice how these lost souls are stating/listing what **they did** but in God's name! They are contesting their entry to heaven due to what they perceive is worthy or righteous but they completely miss the point of what **CHRIST DID** on calvary. It has no bearing what they did or their efforts.

How does Christ respond? I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity (sin). This should be a very sobering wake up call to everyone who has yet to make a decision for Christ or not. When your last breath leaves you, it is done.

If these people who are saying Lord, Lord trying to justify their entry were good enough to enter Heaven. Then what was the point in Christ dying?

Remember what we learnt in Romans

- 3:10 – None righteous (holy or innocent), no not one
- 3:23 – All have sinned, shorty of the glory of God. We fall short.
- 6:23 – Penalty of our sin is death but (notice that word but again) the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ
- 5:8 – Whilst we were still in our sin state, Christ died for us.
- 10:9-13 – Call on the name of the Lord Jesus to save you, confessing your sin though shalt be saved.

Where in these passages is there an exception for anything that mankind can conjure up as acceptable? It doesn't exist because Christ paid it all and it is simple Faith/belief in him that opens the door. Not anything we can do.

This is why Christ said, I never knew you depart from me ye that work iniquity. You see whatever "goodness" we think we have can never pay the debt of our sin.

There had to be a holy, perfect payment worthy for our sin. You see only God could do that for us through his holy, perfect son.

Again, it could not be simpler for us. Take the gift – believe and receive Christ.

Remember all Adam had to do was obey – how did his wrong choice work out for him and all the generations since? Not so good....yeah?

3. What lies either side of the Bridge to God?

Now let's turn our attention to understand what God tells us lies either side of the Bridge to God, which as we just covered is Jesus Christ.

In **Luke Ch23** it details for us the trial of Jesus before both Pilate and Herrod who were the rulers of the Roman Empire in Jerusalem and Galilee. Both these rulers found no fault with Jesus as they interrogated him. Despite finding no fault they still allowed Jesus to be beaten, mocked mercilessly, ferociously whipped, called king of the Jews and

given a crown of massive thorns pushed into Jesus' head and other cruel acts. This was all done to appease the Chief Priests who wanted Jesus crucified. Remember Pilate and Herod found not fault but alas it was to no avail.

Pilate offered to release Jesus, as was custom at the feast which was being celebrated, but they would rather have Barabbas released who was guilty of sedition (insurrection and dissention) and he was a murderer.

This was the sum total of their blood thirsty, hatred of Jesus. They would rather a man guilty of serious crimes including murder be released than the innocent Jesus who had only ever done good e.g. healed the sick, raised the dead and so much more.

So, Pilate relented to the mob and the Chief Priests' blood thirsty lust (like a rabid dog) and ordered Jesus' execution.

Please pickup with me in **verses 32-43 of Luke Ch23** to see how the innocent Jesus responds to this most unjust judgement.

In verse 34 Christ ask his Father to forgive them in response to his execution. We also note there are two malefactors (criminals who are hung next to Jesus).

In this passage Jesus demonstrates his love and compassion for mankind as he is about to pay the price for man's sin – death. Remember in Romans the wages of sin is death...

He is derided when they say he can save others but not himself haha. Can you imagine if it were you or I on that cross with our pride and sin? We would want to show them what for and ask the Father to send 12 legions of Angels and wipe them out – now who's laughing. In Matt Ch26:53 Christ says he could ask the Father to give him more than 12 legions of Angels but his love for us is greater than that.

What did Jesus pray instead in the face of this tempting mockery? Verse 34 Father forgive them for they know not what they do. It is Jesus' incredible love and obedience to his Father which allowed Jesus to become the Bridge to God. Only he could pay the price for us.

What about these two Malefactors alongside Jesus. **Verses 39-43**

It's very important to understand that Jesus was the talk of all the land, everyone knew of him and all his miracles; witnessed by tens of thousands. You can see this is quite obvious by the first Malefactors response. He too mocks Jesus saying if though be the Christ, save thyself and us – again more temptation.

In complete contrast we see the other malefactor who is in the same dire predicament. Notice that he acknowledges his sin in verse 41 by saying "and we indeed justly" talking about their condemnation, we are getting what we deserve. He is repentant and acknowledges Jesus' innocence and asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes

into his kingdom verse 42. Here this malefactor in this moment has put his Faith in Jesus Christ. WOW.

Jesus responds with the most beautifully, compassionate words you ever want to hear in verse 43. To day thou shalt be with me in paradise. The sweetest words you ever did hear.

This man's simple acknowledgement/repentant attitude of his sin and faith in Jesus saved his soul mere moments before he breathed his last breath.

What is paradise that Jesus spoke of? This is what lies on the other side of the Bridge to God. Heaven where there is no sin only joy, happiness and eternity with God and Jesus and all the heavenly host. This Malefactor just went over to the other side of the Bridge.

A curious mind might say well, what's on this side of the Bridge? I've heard many people say, I don't want Jesus, mate she'll be right or me and my mates we'll be have a party in hell! I remember a fella who died only a few years ago from a tick bite. He said this to me many times. I remember sharing with him that hell was no party, it's a horror.

So, let's go and see what Jesus has to say on the matter of what's on this side of the bridge. Turn with me to **Luke 16:19-31**

We see hear a sharp contrast between two individuals that made alternative choices in life. As both men died, we read that Angels are sent to carry Lazarus. How incredibly comforting and beautiful that God sends Angels to collect and escort his children to heaven.

The rich man though, he is simply buried and opens his eyes in hell, in torments (torture). This was no party with thi mates.

At this time we have Paradise, a heavenly waiting room, if you will, for the believers (malefactor went there). When Christ arose, Paradise was taken with Christ to heaven. Jesus tells us that the other side of this great gulf was hell.

We first notice that the rich man was in torments. He must have known who Lazarus was for he specifically named him and asked Abraham to send him to cool his tongue. As he burns in hell, he burns but without burning up.

Jesus here in this passage reminds us that the decisions we make now whilst on earth decides our eternal fate. We see this in verses 25-26.

When the reality of the Rich man's future is clear to him, his thoughts turn to his family. Of course, this is normal and notice how he did not want his family to come to this place of **TORMENT**. The rich man thinks if Lazarus were to rise from the dead and tell his 5 brethren what he has seen, that they can avoid this place of torment. Clearly hell is no party. At a party you would want your family and friends to be with you.

Abraham tells him that the people on earth have Moses and the prophets. If they aren't persuaded by them then they won't believe even if one rose from the dead.

God is looking for simple faith and obedience. Again, just like we saw with Adam and Eve who had it all but just don't touch this one tree, don't eat.

Now Jesus himself performed miracles which was witnessed by tens of thousands.

- He turned water to wine
- The five loaves and two fish that fed the 5000
- Raised a different Lazarus from the dead
- Made the blind to see
- Healed lepers of leprosy
- Appeared to 500 people after his resurrection

Even still with all these miracles that people witnessed all this evidence that proved who Jesus was; still man rejects Jesus Christ.

Jesus is warning us of the reality to come and what awaits us – Heaven or Hell. There is no other option.

Christ spoke more of hell than he did of heaven. This should be a warning sign for us; our lights should be going off.

I have a friend in Singapore, Vincent, who I have shared the good news of Jesus with. He thinks it is good and is persuaded but he wants to wait for EOL. I said, Vincent what is EOL and he tells me end of life. He has this idea that I want the other side of the Bridge to God but not yet... I will wait until right at the end.

Proverbs 27:1 says, Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

Luke 12:20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? This passage describes another rich man who all he was concerned with was getting more, relaxing, enjoy life with an attitude of me, me, me. You don't have to be rich to have this attitude, because we all die.

As we take some moments to recap, let us not be hasty and miss the magnitude and momentous decision that awaits us all.

We have seen this morning the perfection of what God made. God created everything man would need. God said please have it all, enjoy but just one small but important request. Don't eat of the Tree of Knowledge. The rest have at it – if you will.

God's love abounded in all he did for Adam and Eve and he gave them the free will to chose to love God and obey or not.

This same free will still applies today.....more on that shortly.

We saw the malefactors on the cross alongside Jesus. They also had a choice to make. Once chose well in acknowledge/repenting of his sin and put his faith in Jesus.

We lastly saw the Rich man and Lazarus. A wealthy man consumed in his own lusts, wealthy and only looking out for himself and no trust in God.

Lazarus who was dirt poor beyond what you and I have experienced; I am not sure we can really appreciate his dire situation. He begged just for the crumbs from the Rich man's table. He had dogs for friends that licked his sores.

Both men had freewill choices in life. One chose well and the other poorly.

This freewill choice we also have today. The Bridge to God is clear, it is his son Jesu Christ.

Just like in the Garden God now says to us, believe in my Son Jesus who I sent to pay the debt of your sin. Simply receive my free gift, acknowledge your sin, repent i.e. turn away and ask Jesus to save you.

Having a genuine heart, being sorry for your sin and asking Jesus to save you is so simple. Yet people find it so hard to make that choice. It's **pride** that stops people from saying yes. When you know the reality of what's to come, that free gift, you will want to take it now.

God said to Adam/Eve- just don't eat from that one tree. Now God says just believe in my son, receive him and be saved.

What choice will you make?

Remember the three examples we've looked at this morning and consider how their choices turned out for them. There is no going back to change your mind once you depart this earth.

If your heart is beating a little faster, is it because you know which outcome awaits you? Then you need to settle it today. Come see me and we settle the account today.

Did you know that Luke 15:7 says, I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,

Let all heaven rejoice over your decision to receive Jesus today.