

SKYSCRAPERS, BRIDGES AND THE HILL OF CALVARY

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Rom. 12:1-2

There is a common superstition about bridges to the effect that every bridge costs a life in the building. It's really more than a superstition, for many bridges have cost lives before they were finished.

Out in San Francisco where I grew up, we have one of the modern wonders of the world in the great Bay Bridge. This masterpiece of engineering and human ingenuity stretches over eight miles. At one point, its giant towers rise 600 feet above the water.

The designers used two types of construction in building it. The Oakland side is a cantilever bridge and the more spectacular San Francisco side is a suspension bridge. In the middle is Yerba Buena Island—better known to many sailors as T. I. or Treasure Island.

About half-way between the island and the shore of San Francisco is a huge concrete pier which provides anchorage for the mighty cables from which the highway is suspended.

Before the bridge was built, we used to cross the Bay by ferry boat. I can still remember one afternoon, when I was enjoying a boat ride with my grandmother, the older people pointed to the concrete pier (which was only about half done at the time) and talked in quiet tones about the tragedy which had happened just a few days before. A workman had fallen from the scaffolding and was buried beneath literally tons of wet concrete. He was the first of several who were to give their lives before the great bridge was completed.

This same feeling about the giving of a life and the building of a bridge is also true about skyscrapers. Fortunately, modern safety measures have reduced the toll tremendously. But

construction men tell me that in the early days, it was estimated that before a skyscraper was completed, one life would be lost for every story of the building.

I got to thinking about this some time ago as I watched the many new buildings which are beginning to take their place on the Chicago skyline. It struck me that there might be a sermon in this idea of skyscrapers and bridges costing a life, for certainly the throwing of a bridge across the chasm separating men from God was an undertaking into which life was and must be put. First of all --

It Cost the Life of Jesus Christ

I suppose we are all prone to look lightly upon our sin as if it were nothing to be alarmed about. With incredible naivety, we somehow believe God doesn't really care if we "live it up" a bit.

This past week I read an article in the newspaper about a famous police officer who said "the greatest problem facing law enforcement officers is not the hardened criminal, but rather the average man who goes about breaking little laws because he feels they don't apply to him."

What that fellow fails to see is the fact that the only difference between his law breaking and that of the notorious criminal is one of degree and not kind. Both are surface evidence of the fact that underneath lies a disregard for law and a rebellion against authority.

It is the same with us and our sin. We may not be guilty of the gross and fleshy sins, but beneath the surface of our superficial, more sophisticated sins, lies a seething cauldron of rebellion which God can see.

In back of our little sins is sin: the one great fundamental fact that we simply refuse to let God rule in our lives. And building a bridge across sin wasn't easy. The bible says:

"The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

We have become so accustomed to the cross, for the most part it has lost its meaning. To some, it is a decorative ornament to be mounted on church spires. To others, it is a piece of jewelry to be hung about the neck. For most, it is a thing of beauty to be admired.

But let us never forget that in the day of Jesus there was nothing decorative, ornamental nor beautiful about a cross. It was a symbol of humiliation and shame. A torture-rack reserved for the lowest of the low. And it was there that Jesus died!

No, the building of a bridge to Glory was not an easy thing. It cost the life of the only good man who ever lived. The only life which was ever spent solely for the welfare of others was crushed beneath the grinding heel of man's rebellion against God. Like a crimson rag, they nailed Him to a cross, flung Him up against the sky, and left Him hanging there naked and bleeding until He died.

Remember that this morning when you take communion. Remember that when you look upon the cross, for it is a bridge spanning the great gulf between God and man. A bridge which cost the life of Jesus Christ, God's son.

“When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

“See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e're such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were a present far too small:
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Which leads me to this second thought: The building of this bridge between God and man is --

An Undertaking Into Which We Must Put Our Lives, Too.

Perhaps one of the reasons we find it hard to appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus is that we know so little about sacrifice in our own lives. Most of us are never guilty of putting ourselves out for the cause of Christ. We are so abundantly blessed, and yet we give so little in return. Very few give even a 10th of their money, let alone 1/10th of their time.

But there has never been any half-way business about Christian discipleship. It is all or nothing at all. Half a love and half a life will never do the job.

We will never succeed in building bridges to Glory across which the spiritually unenlisted can come to redemption unless we are willing to be living sacrifices ourselves.

For some, it means dying, like the five missionary martyrs in Ecuador. For most of us, it means living. Living with an inner, utter commitment which will have nothing to do with mediocrity and will rise to the challenge of sacrifice.

You don't have to become a foreign missionary to meet that challenge. You can begin tonight by bringing a gift of clothing or other needed item to the SOS party so those who have nothing will have something. And, to really get into the spirit of the thing, make your gift something you'd like to keep instead of something you'd like to get rid of!

Again, you can feel a little of the weight of the cross by making your pledge this year an honest-to-goodness sacrifice. In a few weeks, we will be having our annual Stewardship Program and, if

I know this church like I think I know it, we will accept a goal which will challenge the best that is in us. But we will not make that goal if we continue to let 20% of the people carry 80% of the load.

I thank God for the widow's mite. There are those among us who give \$1.00 a week, for whom it is a real sacrifice. And I suspect there are others who give the same amount for whom it is not even a token.

Jesus said the acid test of a man's love for God is what he does with His money. Matthew 6:21 records Jesus as saying:

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

And if you want to have a part in building a bridge to Glory across the chasm which separates men from God, you can begin by taking a look at your stewardship and by making sure it is characterized by real sacrifice.

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Strange that they should have anything in common, but they do: the loss of life in the completing of a task.

But unlike the others, the cross is never done with its claim on life. As long as there are people apart from God, as long as there are nations who have never heard of Jesus, as long as there are still chasms to be bridged, as long as there are jobs to be done and burdens to be born, Christian men and women will go on dying.

Dying to sin.

Dying to the world about them.

Dying every day—a little bit more—to self
so they may come alive to God and thus allow their lives to be used as

Rivets and cables,

Struts and piers,

in the Great Bridge Of Redemption which God, through Christ, has thrown across the chasm of eternity.

As I have said, such dying is not easy. The old life begrudges every bit of the new. And, in the struggle, you may often cry as saints have always cried:

“Oh God, is there no other way
Except through sorrow, pain and loss
To stamp Christ's likeness on my soul -
No other way except the cross?

“And then a voice will still my soul,
As stilled the waves on Galilee:
'Canst thou not bear the furnace heat
If mid the flames I walk with thee?'

“I bore the cross.
I know its weight.
I drank the cup I hold for thee.
Canst thou not follow where I lead?
I'll give thee strength - lean thou on me.”