

## Luke 11:33-54

“Building Barriers; Or Bridges?”

As I've had the opportunity now to sort of process and sift through some of my thoughts regarding what we've been called to endure as a city I can't help but believe that in the midst of it all God has granted us a tremendous opportunity. We all know that God didn't cause this devastation or this destruction; we're not the victims of God's wrath, Christ became the victim of God's wrath on our behalf. God's not judging us; Jesus bore God's judgment for us as He became sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

I say all that to say this: though God doesn't cause these kinds of things to happen (storms of destruction and violent devastation) He has a reputation for taking those things that were meant to destroy, that were meant to damage or demolish and turning them into an opportunity for good and for His glory.

I suppose the premiere *biblical* illustration or example of this kind of principle (outside of the death and resurrection of Christ) is most easily seen in the life and record of Joseph. Thrown into a pit by his brothers, sold off into slavery, falsely accused of attempted rape, thrown in prison for 3 yrs his life kept going from bad to worse. But as you know (Gen 37-45) over the course of time Joseph ascended in power to become the 2<sup>nd</sup> most powerful man on the planet next to Pharaoh himself... A famine strikes the earth; his father, his brothers are getting gravely, dangerously low on supplies (no grain, no nothing with which to sustain themselves) so off they go to Egypt to seek to barter for or buy grain. Long story short, Joseph reveals himself to them; they're in shock, they're stunned, they can't believe their eyes. The one they sold off and treated so horribly now standing before them personally and they think they're done in. He's going to have them killed for sure. But this is what he says, “*Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.*’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.” Gen 50:19-21

It just seems to me that perhaps maybe there's a word in there for you and me, for our community and that is this: “Do not be afraid; I will take this and turn this for good and through this many people will be saved.” God speaks words of comfort to us saying, “Don't be afraid, I will provide for you and your little ones.”

You see, somewhere in the midst of tragedy God is birthing opportunity and it's our responsibility to build bridges for people to cross over from desperation, to salvation; from with out hope to being comforted in Christ. So what do we do? We minister practically, provide for the needs of the body (physically) so that people know that we care genuinely they will allow us to speak into their lives spiritually.

I have nothing to hide, we very much so have an agenda in all of this, and it's to bring people to a place where they're ready to receive the salvation that's found only in the Person of Jesus Christ So we set up tents to distribute clothing (that's a plank in the bridge we're building), we're providing basic necessities (another plank), we're inviting teams to serve the community, to feed them graciously, they're all planks that are creating a bridge so that people can make that journey from in the world to in Christ.

That's what love does; it builds bridges. Law, builds barriers. That's what Jesus is dealing with and being confronted *by* in this particular passage. He's called us to build bridges; legalism, rules, religion builds barriers.

Vs 33-36

If you're a note taker or a margin etcher, Vs 33 is the illustration, Vs 34 is the interpretation, Vs 35-36 is the application.

Now I don't want you to confuse this with other teachings of Jesus. Because when we read this we're tempted to gravitate in our minds to the thought process of things like when Jesus said to you and me, "You are the light of the world", and certainly our light is to so shine so that as people see our good works, (you serving and sharing) that in that they're *sensing*, they're *seeing* Christ and that God is being glorified. But that's not really where Jesus is going with this. So *from* this we're able to deduce that evidently Jesus would use the same, or similar *illustrations* at various and sundry times but He would draw from them different *applications*.

As you follow the flow and keep the context perhaps you recall that Jesus had just cast a demon out from a man yet some of the religious rulers said, "He's in league with the devil! It's through Satan that He casts out these unclean spirits!" Jesus shared with them how ridiculous their reasoning was and showed them how He was in no way connected with Satan but rather He was *stronger* than Satan and was plundering "his goods" those whom he held captive and setting them free. Others wanted to see a sign; Jesus said, "I'm not gonna jump through your hoops". There comes a time when a decision has to be made, He'd cast out demons, healed the sick, opened blind eyes, fed multitudes from a few loaves and a few fish; He'd caused the lame to leap, lepers to be made whole and had brought the dead back to life! At what point do you say, "OK, I get it, You're the Messiah..." Signs, miracles won't create or conjure up with in you saving faith. Faith comes by hearing, and by hearing the word of God.

He said, "Listen, the only sign I'm going to give you is the sign of the profit Jonah (death burial and resurrection). He said, the men of Nineveh repented at his preaching and a greater than he is here. The Queen of Sheba traveled from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and a greater than Solomon is here; they'll be your judges."

Vs 33-36 is a continuation of that thought process; they're asking for a sign Jesus is saying, "Everything I'm doing, everything I'm saying and sharing is like a light, I'm out in the open for all to see; I'm on display. But you guys are trying to cover Me up, you're trying to push Me aside and snuff Me out." He's saying, "There's light right in front of you, I want to enable you to see appropriately, to keep you from danger spiritually but because you refuse to see Me for who I am it bears witness *against* you, it testifies *of* you that you're blind."

In John's gospel we read it like this, "*I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.*" John 12:46 What's that mean? It means that if you *don't* believe in Jesus you're blind.

Vs 33 is the illustration, Jesus is the light shining bright; Vs 34 is the interpretation; how you perceive Jesus dictates whether you're walking in the light (you see clearly) or you're in the dark (you're blind spiritually). A "good eye" will allow the light of Jesus "in" as to where a "bad eye" won't admit/allow light in, keeping the person in darkness.

Vs 35 Begins the application; make sure that what you believe is the genuine article; it's legitimately the light; that it bears witness *to* and lines up in harmony *with* the word of God. Remember these words, "*The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.*" Ps 119:130 Peter said it this way, "*Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure,*" 2 Peter 1:10 "Take heed that the light that is in you is not darkness." Make sure that you're not placing your hope or your trust as it pertains to the matters of eternity in anything or anyone other than Jesus Christ specifically.

Vs 36

Notice, "Having no part dark" there are to be no "twilight" Christians, no "twilight" living as believers. God wants all of our heart, no part dark, not playing with compromise, one eye on the things of God, the other eye on the things of this world.

That's a dangerous place to be. Remember Samson? His name means "sunny" yet the story of his life (read it on your own, Judges 13-16) teach us that sin will *blind* you, it will *bind* you and it will *grind* you. He catered to the desires of his flesh and it cost him everything, ultimately his very life. Be careful concerning what you let through the "eye-gate" the things you think *through* or meditate *on*, those things are like putting a light under a basket, it snuffs it out.

But when your life is full of light (Jesus says) people will see that, like when a bright shining lamp gives off light. Your life will share, your witness will show Jesus. It's not that you'll have to stop to specifically draw attention to Christ (though there are certainly times God leads us to do that) but a light that's on is simply shining all the time. It's guiding you simply by its presence; it's showing where to navigate, things to avoid, where it's dangerous and how to get from here to there, the function of a light is to enable you to see clearly and your life (being filled with the Son of God and marinating in the word of God) will be like that lamp, showing and sharing the love of Jesus.

Now, Jesus is the key; *He* is the light; receiving *Him* is of paramount importance. I point that out because the scriptures are transitioning here from a life *application* on light to a *demonstration* on darkness. The one's in the dark (in this particular portion) aren't the "ungodly sinners" but the *religious leaders*. So you can know the bible and still be in the dark, these guys were scriptural scholars, spent their whole lives studying/memorizing the bible. But Jesus said,

*"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."* John 5:39-40 So coming to church and knowing your bible, even doing good works aren't the key, believing in and receiving Jesus Christ is the key.

## Vs37-38

Now don't misunderstand this. It's not saying that Jesus just didn't care about the basic rudiments of hygiene. It's a reference to a traditional/ceremonial cleansing that the Pharisees subscribed to (literally) religiously/ritualistically. Now it's true that the law required a certain ceremony for the *priesthood*, but not for the common person.

However over the years it began to be impressed (not by God but by them) upon the people as well. This is where we got to be careful because it can happen so easily. God might speak to you personally, or maybe about some specific thing He wants from me (perhaps to start doing, or to cease doing). The temptation, even the tendency is for me is to then take what the Lord has shown me personally and make it a rule that I apply to everyone around me; and that is the basis of legalism.

## Vs39-40

There they were eating a meal, so Jesus grabs a cup and begins to illustrate exactly what the problem is with what's going on in these guys lives and it's this. They were all about the outward appearance, making sure all their "I's" were dotted and "T's" were crossed legally, outwardly, religiously; but inwardly they were corrupt.

This Pharisee is saying, "I can't believe you're eating with unclean *hands!*" Jesus responds, "I can't believe *you're* eating with an unclean *heart...*" How easy it is to draw near to God with our mouths, to honor Him with our lips; to look real spiritual by the way we act all the while our *heart* is far from Him. If you've been a believer for any length of time whatsoever you've probably heard it over and over again, God is searching, He's wants the whole of our *heart*.

Jesus shifts the focus from what's going on in our lives by appearance as opposed to what's going on in our hearts in truth. He says in Vs 40, God didn't only make your outer man; He made your inner man as well. We read in Zechariah 12:1, "*Thus says the Lord, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him:*" and *Way* more important to God than what you're doing outwardly is the motive and intent of your heart behind it *inwardly*. "*Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.*" Ps 51:6

The question is are you more concerned for what man sees, what man thinks, or what God sees and what God thinks? God is searching our hearts; that's what Jesus is talking about when He says in Vs 41

## Vs41

If you have a margin maybe it translates this Vs a little more clearly to you. A little more literally Jesus is saying, "But rather give alms of *what is inside*; then all things are clean to you." The idea being again that God wants you to honor Him not only according to outward appearance; you raise your hands in worship, come to church and bring your bible...those things are great, but not if it's not the overflow of your love for God from the heart.

If it's anything less than that it's nothing more than empty religion. Jesus is saying, "It's not about dedicating your tithe to God to be right on, it's about dedicating your heart to God. Then all those other things will be the natural overflow, not the legal regimen." In other words, a vulgar mouth isn't made clean by rinsing with Listerine, it's not about cleansing your teeth or your tongue, but your heart.

Vs42-44

This is a section of scripture that's all about proper perspective and proper priorities. Jesus initiates a series of "woes" (6 of them to be exact) whereby He's seeking to show these Pharisees and these lawyers the hypocrisy of their ways that they might humble themselves and repent. The word "Woe" expresses not anger, but anguish. God's not willing that *any* should perish; it's because God *loves* the world that He sent His only begotten Son *into* the world.

The basic gist here is that they major on minors and neglect the essentials. They would tithe even from their herb gardens (they were into *extreme* tithing □) "9 seeds for me, 1 seed for God". It looked real spiritual, but when it came to exacting mercy, walking humbly and exhibiting God's love they wouldn't do it; they were about *law* not about *love*. Yet the scriptures teach that the law is truly fulfilled *through love*; love God with all that you are, and love those around you as yourself and you'll fulfill the law of God.

Now Jesus wasn't condemning the fact that they tithed, He said, "You *ought* to have done that." That's all good and well, but not at the expense of the love of God; the problem is that they left the other (justice and the love of God) undone.

They love the best seats in the synagogue, the seats that faced the people; where prominent people were sat, they wanted to be seen as the spiritual elite, the who's who. Jesus said, "Don't do that, just take the lowest seat available and walk in humility; because if you humble yourself God will exalt you, but if you exalt yourself God will humble you."

In Vs 44 he says, "you're like unmarked graves that people walk over".

To walk over a grave (even if you didn't know it was there) would make you ceremonially unclean. Jesus is saying; "You guys aren't helping people, you're harming people, your influence in people's lives defiles them, gives them a sense of self righteousness and pride which makes them unclean before God."

Think about that, how does your influence effect people's lives? Does it help them, or harm them, draw them nearer *to* God, or does it somehow defile them in the sight of God? Through misguided conversations, gossip, coarse jesting or bad attitudes, religious rules or whatever. We want to be instruments whom God uses to encourage people, build them up and draw them nearer to Him; we don't want to be like unmarked graves (things look fine on the surface but as people come into contact with us they're defiled before God because we're corrupt underneath...

## Vs45-46

This guy should've just kept his mouth shut. The lawyers were the ones who interpreted the Law of Moses, and they interpreted it in such a way as to make a complex legal puzzle through which they would justify themselves and oppress the people of God. To give you an idea God gave them the Torah; the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 books of Moses; they then created the Mishnah which were the oral traditions that explained the Torah, then came the Talmud which were the writings that explained the Mishnah, which explained the Torah. An English edition of the Talmud comprises around 34 volumes and over 30,000 pages...you get the idea. They were "loaded down" with burdens that were hard to bear, minute details that were impossible to remember and made feel as though you were in constant violation and never right with God. That's why Jesus said,

*"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* Matt 11:28-30 God's not about being a burden to you, but rather He's about being a blessing to you, setting you free from the bondage of sin and death. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there liberty...

## Vs 47-51

Wow! Here's the short of it. These guys would build these glorious tombs to the prophets as though they honored them yet they were persecuting Jesus who was the one they all spoke of. They would crucify Jesus, martyr Stephen and others yet they acted as though they were all about the prophets of the past. Jesus says, "You're hypocrites, actors; you carry the façade of one thing but in reality you're something altogether different."

and Since all the previous prophets were pointing *to* Christ, and they would *reject* Christ therefore they would be held accountable accordingly, their accountability culminated in Christ. To reject Him was to reject all that was written of Him.

## Vs 52

Translation; they've built barriers. Law, legalism will build barriers, love builds bridges. Jesus says it's bad enough that you won't enter yourselves, but then to take those who are seeking to be right with God and lead them astray takes it to a whole new level.

When we give people a list of rules and various rituals which will make them right with God you aren't helping them at all, you're hurting them in a grave way.

Listen to me: Jesus is the key; they're rejecting Him, taking Him away from the people. A right understanding of the word of God comes from a right relationship with Jesus Christ In the volume of the book it's written *of* Him, it points *to* Him, revolves *around* Him, it's all *about* Him. Maybe you've heard of "Hermeneutics" (explaining, interpreting the scriptures) it would be better if it were called, "Himeneutics" because Christ is the key, it's all about Him.

## Vs 53-54

Interesting how people respond to conviction and correction isn't it? The bible teaches that he who disdains correction despises his own soul (Prov 15:32). Yet it's so typical that rather than repent when confronted with sin in our lives (having it together outwardly but being a mess inwardly, majoring on minors, exacting law instead of love, worried more about the way people see us than the way God sees us) we get all defensive and angry; change the subject and point the finger at someone else to get the attention off of ourselves. God help us to just humble ourselves and repent. If you're not right with Christ today, get right with Christ today; if you need to turn from your sin and find forgiveness at the feet of Jesus than do that.

Don't resist Jesus in pride, receive Him in humility; and let's be a people who build *not* barriers that *keep* people from Jesus, but bridges that *lead* people to Jesus.

## Prayer Points:

Father we thank You for Your word, the clarity, the simplicity and how practically it applies to our lives. May we not resist Your correction, Your conviction; but may we receive it, humble ourselves and be a people of repentance. We thank You that You are able to take things that would otherwise be seen destruction, devastation and ruins and turn them for an opportunity for Your glory. Use us Lord, glorify Yourself through us...

If God is dealing with you and speaking to you about your need for Jesus. Maybe you've been a religious person, figured you go to church, or do right by people so that's good enough. But in reality you're realizing that rather than simply crossing a bridge you've built a barrier and you've trusted in your own works as opposed to the work of Christ upon the cross. Jesus shed His blood, laid down His life and rose again the 3<sup>rd</sup> day for the sake of your sin and mine. It's not about what we do, it's about trusting what He's done. Are you ready to do that?