

INTRODUCTION

A man was walking along a beach in California and stumbled on a buried magic lamp. He picked it up and rubbed it. A genie appeared and said, "Thanks for freeing me. As a reward I will grant you one wish." The man said, "I would like for you to build a bridge from here to Hawaii. I'm afraid to fly, so I'd like to drive there." The genie scratched his beard and said, "Impossible. That would require millions of tons of concrete and thousands of miles of highway. Ask for something else." The man said, "Okay. Okay, I want to understand what goes on in a woman's mind." The genie thought for a minute and said, "Do you want that bridge to be two lanes or four lanes?"

I suppose that for as long as there have been rivers and valleys people have been building bridges. Here's a little bridge trivia for you. The oldest bridge still in use is the Arkadiko Bridge in Greece. It is made of stone and is 4,300 years old. The longest bridge in the world is the Danyan-Kuching Grand Bridge outside Shanghai, China. It is a high-speed rail bridge and it is 102 miles long. The tallest bridge in the world is the Millau (pronounced Mee-you) Viaduct in France, which at one point is 1,225 feet high, or about the height of the Empire State Building. The busiest bridge in the world is the George Washington Bridge connecting New York City with New Jersey. There are 100 million vehicles that cross it each year—and yes, that's the bridge that Governor Chris Christie closed lanes down in when the mayor of Fort Lee, New Jersey didn't endorse him.

A bridge is something built to span a gap: a river, or a valley. We're in a section of Hebrews where Jesus is pictured as a better priest than the Jewish priests in the line of Aaron. That's actually what a priest is—He is a bridge to God. In fact, a few years ago, Pope Benedict was speaking to a group of Catholic priests in the Diocese of Rome. He said, "The priest's mission is to be a mediator, a bridge that connects, and thereby brings human beings to God."

He is right, and he is wrong. He is right in describing the role of priest as a bridge to God. But what he failed to mention is that we no longer have a need for a human priest. We have a perfect priest named Jesus. That's what the writer of Hebrews is communicating in Hebrews 7. The word "priest" appears seventeen times in Hebrews 7. The old bridge, or the old covenant, was based on human priests making animal sacrifices. But the new covenant, with a new priest, Jesus, is a much better idea. Let's read about WHY Jesus is a better bridge:

Hebrews 7:18-28. "The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: 'The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant."

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

The role of a religious priest has always been an important position. Moses designated his brother, Aaron, as the first High Priest. The Jewish leaders kept meticulous records of the names of all the high priests. So we know from Aaron through the last High Priest, when the Temple was destroyed in by the Romans in 70 A.D. there were a total of 85 different men who served as the Jewish High Priest. There hasn't been a Jewish High Priest since the Temple was destroyed 1,947 years ago.

In the Roman Catholic Church there are roughly 350,000 men who serve as priests around the world. As I mentioned earlier, the only priest we need is the perfect priest, Jesus. That's because He is the only priest qualified to serve as a mediator between God and man. The Bible says, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5) In this message, I want to use the simple imagery of a bridge to show you how Jesus is our High Priest. He's a better bridge to God.

I. I NEED A BRIDGE BECAUSE MY SIN HAS SEPARATED ME FROM GOD

God created you to have a personal, loving relationship with Him. We see this in the way God related to the first two people, Adam, and Eve. In Genesis we read how God placed them in a beautiful garden and told them to enjoy His creation. He often visited them and walked and talked with them. What a lovely thought. Can you imagine walking and talking with your Creator in the cool of the evening? And Adam and Eve felt no shame because they had been obedient to God. They had avoided the one thing that could sever that wonderful relationship.

But that perfect fellowship was ruined when they became selfish and disobeyed God. They lost their innocence, and they lost that sweet fellowship with their Creator. Their sin separated them from God.

The same has happened to all of us. We are all children of Adam. We are sinners by nature and by choice. We are born with the capacity to sin; nobody has to teach us to sin. It's part of our DNA. And then there's a time when we reach an age when we know the difference between right and wrong, and yet we choose to sin. Like Adam and Eve, our sin separates us from God.

The Bible says, "But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen. For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers, with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, and your tongues mutter injustice." (Isaiah 59:2-3 CSB)

To illustrate this, you'll find a drawing on your outline that represents two cliffs with a chasm between them. On the right cliff you can write the word "God." On the left cliff, you can write "Me." Then in the middle of the chasm you can write "sin."

That might not alarm you because you may be the rare person who thinks, "I don't believe in God, and I don't want to have a relationship with Him." But it is important to note that there are dangerous consequences of our sin. God is holy and He cannot leave sin unpunished. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Because of our sin, we have earned a bad payday. The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23). You may be thinking, "Well, I'm sinning, and I'm not dead. In fact, I'm really healthy." This verse isn't talking about physical death; it's talking about spiritual death, separation from God forever in a place the Bible calls hell.

So, that's the problem. Humanity has been trying to fix that problem for many generations. That's why there are so many different religions in the world. Human beings are trying to connect with their creator. The Jewish people were chosen by God to share the message of His blessing to all the nations. He gave them the Law of Moses to teach them how to live here on planet earth. They became so enamored by the Law that they thought it was also the way to go to heaven. The Old Testament Law was like an old bridge.

II. THE OLD BRIDGE (THE LAW) WAS WORTHLESS

The Bible says, "The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless." (Hebrews 7:18) The law wasn't a total waste. It gave the Jewish people a moral standard to guide their behavior. It taught them how to live in community with one another. But as far as a means to forgive sins and grant salvation, it was as helpful as a screen door on a submarine.

So, the Jews saw the problem and they tried to build a bridge. It was called "Obeying the Law." They thought if they obeyed the Law of God and did enough good works it would span the gap and deliver them to God. But it came up short because it couldn't solve the sin issue. Other people around the world have tried building all kinds of bridges. There's the bridge of religion—but it falls short of the glory of God. There's the bridge of goodness—but it falls short of the glory of God. Let me give you three reasons WHY the bridge of obeying the Law was useless.

A. It was congested with hundreds of rules

The problem with the old bridge is that there was always a traffic jam. Have you ever been in a terrible traffic jam? Some of the most congested traffic I've been in is in Manila. It's so bad that drivers can only drive certain days. If your car tag ends in an even number then you can drive on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. If it ends in an odd number you can only drive on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. We often travel from the airport to the Word of Hope Church downtown. Under ordinary traffic conditions, it takes about twenty minutes. But if you catch it during rush hour and especially on a Friday evening, that travel time changes

drastically. The last time we were there it took us a total of three and a half hours to travel the distance that usually takes twenty to thirty minutes.

That's the problem with the old bridge called the Law. First there were over six hundred written commandments crowding the bridge. In addition to these written laws, the Jews had developed a multitude of oral laws that they added on to the written law. All these rules and regulations cluttered up the bridge, and slowed the moral traffic to a crawl and then a standstill. That's one reason the old bridge was useless.

B. The cost of the toll was too high

The cost of tolls continues to rise. I used to dread driving through Austin on my way to San Antonio. But then they built the toll Highway 130 around Austin. It was built in segments, and last year I drove all the way down to catch I-10 to enter San Antonio from the East. I was thinking, "This is great! And I can drive 85 mph legally." I drove it going down and back. Then I got my toll tag statement and I experienced sticker shock. The cost of that round trip toll on 130 was a whopping \$39.50! That was a lot to pay, and I thought that if I lived there and had to commute that way each day, that could add up to a huge cost.

The old bridge of the law had a toll charge, too. And it was too high for any ordinary person to pay. The cost was sinless perfection. The Bible taught "the soul that sins shall surely die." The law is an unforgiving master. If you keep 99 out of 100 laws, and then break just one law, you are as guilty as if you have broken all 100 laws. To put it another way, the law didn't assign a score of your obedience. It was pass/fail. And if you sinned once, you failed.

C. It never reached the destination

The old bridge was worthless, because the law never reached the destination of bringing a man or woman into fellowship with God. So obviously, you are wondering, "If that was the case WHY did God even institute the entire Temple/Priest/Sacrifice thing in the first place?" That's a legitimate question, and the answer may surprise you. God gave them the old system to teach them that it wouldn't work and that they needed a new system. He let them build the old bridge of keeping the law to let them discover for themselves that they needed a new bridge.

The Bible says, "The old system (bridge) under the Law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come... those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:1, 3-4 NLT)

There are two very important truths in that passage. First, it was NEVER possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. Second, the reason they kept making sacrifices was to REMIND them of their sins, which were never forgiven. Each year, there was just another temporary fix. It would be like you being so far in debt that you can't pay, so you take out a loan to pay for your debts, but that just adds to your debt load, so the next year you take out another loan...and on and on until you realize you are unable to pay off the debt you owe.

The law was a bridge to nowhere. Let me show you a picture of a real bridge to nowhere. A few years ago a Japanese bridge building company built a strong bridge over the Choluteca River in Honduras. It was opened in 1998. Just a few months after the opening, Hurricane Mitch swept through the area dropping over 75 inches of rain. The bridge withstood the hurricane, but the powerful storm shifted the river to another location, so the bridge was no longer needed. It has been called a bridge to nowhere. That's a great illustration of the old bridge called keeping the Law. It was a bridge that led to nowhere.

So how were people saved in the Old Testament? Not by keeping the law. They were saved the same way we are, by faith. They had faith in God's plan for redemption. We know God's plan for redemption is named Jesus. They couldn't see Jesus clearly yet, but they had faith that God would deliver His people and forgive their sins. They had faith that God had a better priest, a better bridge, and His name was Jesus.

III. THE NEW BRIDGE (JESUS) IS WONDERFUL!

The Bible says, "A better hope [bridge] is introduced, by which we draw near to God." (Hebrews 7:19) The old bridge offered no hope. No person ever crossed it could draw near to God. But Jesus offers us a better hope. Remember HOPE stands for Having Only Positive Expectations. And through Jesus, we can draw near to God.

Look at our diagram again. There is only one bridge that can cross the gap sin created. That bridge is the Lord Jesus Christ and the sacrifice He made on the cross. And Jesus isn't one of the bridges to God; He is the ONLY Bridge to God. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

He took care of the sin issue by bearing our sins in His body on the tree. And our response to His offer of salvation has two steps. First, we HEAR the offer of salvation. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ." Then we believe and receive a loving relationship with God. The Bible says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." (John 1:12 KJV) So let's note three things that are better about this Jesus Bridge.

A. There is only one rule on this bridge: Love

Imagine the traffic jam I described on the bridge of the law. There are thousands of cars and trucks all bunched together and all at a standstill. This bridge only has one rule: Love. But as with most bridges, it has two lanes. First, Jesus said the most important commandment is to love God with all your being. And the second commandment that grows out of that is to love your neighbor as yourself. Have you ever been driving along and got stopped by a traffic jam because of some accident on the highway ahead? You are inching along you are getting more and more frustrated by the minute. Then you clear the accident and there are four lanes of open road ahead. Then you utter of sigh of relief, "Aah, finally!"

That's what the grace of God does. When you finally get through all the rules and regulations of legalism, and discover grace, you utter a sigh of relief. Relax. Everything is okay now. Thank God there aren't a thousand rules and regulations we have to obey. There's only ONE: Love God and love your neighbor.

B. Our toll has already been paid—in full

We could never pay the toll required for a bridge to God because that price was a perfect, sinless, life. But Jesus came and faced every temptation we face; yet He never sinned. Then He went to the cross and paid the full price for our salvation.

If you work for the Port Authority in New York City and retire as a Lieutenant or higher, you get a pretty nice retirement perk. You get free tolls for life. Imagine not ever having to pay a toll again!

But we have a better deal than that. "The wages of sin is death, but the GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The gift of God means that our toll on the bridge to heaven has been paid in full. Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. Sin left a crimson stain; He washed it white as snow." The next time you drive under one of those toll stations on Loop 49, say a prayer of thanks that Jesus has paid your toll on the road to heaven.

C. This bridge is completely safe because it leads to God

The Bible says, "Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." (Hebrews 7:25)

There are some bridges that are so scary that you probably wouldn't want to cross them. But the Jesus Bridge is totally safe. We are assured that Jesus is able to save us completely because He is there in heaven making intercession for us. Jesus is praying for me and He is praying for you.

By the way, that's just another reason why I know I can never lose my salvation. Jesus is praying for me. For me to lose my salvation, you would have to get Jesus to stop praying for me. The only way you could get Jesus to stop praying for me would be to get into heaven. And once you get into heaven you wouldn't ask Him to stop praying. This bridge is rock solid and it will carry us to our Creator.

CONCLUSION

So Jesus is a better priest; He is a better bridge. By the way, this simple bridge illustration is an easy way for you to explain what it means to be a Christian to your friends who don't know the Lord. It's so simple anyone can understand it.

Our sin has created a gap between our Creator and us. The only way to span the gap is through the cross of Jesus Christ. Back in college, I would often play my guitar and sing at different

events. One of the songs I often sang was Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Waters." But when I sang it, I always introduced it by saying; "This is what Jesus is saying to you tonight."

"When you're weary, feeling small; When tears are in your eyes, I'll dry them all. I'm on our side, oh, when times get rough. And friends just can't be found, like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down. Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down."

And that's what Jesus did to bridge the gap. He laid down His life on the cross. Jesus said, "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." (John 10:17-18)

Rejoice that God has provided a solid bridge that connects sinful humanity with a holy God! Now, will you take advantage of this bridge and hear and believe for salvation?

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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