



Tay Bridge, Dundee

Building Bridges.

Building bridges is a term you have most certainly heard of before, and it relates to different people finding ways of coming together, where once they were separate, in mutual understanding. Like real bridge building, where two pieces of land are separated by a chasm or a body of water and being brought together by a structure, which allows easy access between the two. Bridge building requires effort, and we know the price that has been paid of people losing their lives as they work on bridges. In human lives there are many differences which can separate us and which sometimes need to be bridged, for example, between men and women, between different religions and between different races. It is important to make sure that the bridge is strong enough though, otherwise the result can be catastrophic. On Sunday 28th December 1879, 75 people lost their lives, when on a stormy night, the Tay bridge in Dundee collapsed and the train they were traveling on plunged into the icy waters of the Firth of Tay. It was the longest bridge in the world at that time, and you can still see the remnants of the previous bridge as you travel over the new bridge, as a constant reminder of that fateful night. At that time Britain was in shock that more lives had been lost, so soon after the loss of so many other lives in battle, that Britain had been involved in. Bad design or bad workmanship has been blamed for the disaster since. It is so important to build and maintain strong bridges, because no one knows what forces and at what time these forces will strike. I love traveling over bridges, whether by walking or by train. I have been over so many, for example, Skye, Kessock, Tay, Forth, Border, Severn, Humber, Menai, Tamar, Britannia, Runcorn, Tyne, Clifton suspension, Barmouth and London, to name but a few. You get a strange feeling as you travel across, that feeling that at any moment the bridge could fall. You have to put your faith in the workmanship and design of the bridge-builder.

Building bridges between people is the foundation of friendship and it takes time and care to build those friendships, knowing that at any time an unforeseen force can come along to destroy those friendships. There are people who rather than create bridges, want to destroy those bridges that have been built by others, because it is so easy to destroy than to create.

Bridges are made up of supporting structures that run along the entire network of the bridge. Any weakness to any of the supporting structures will undoubtedly make the bridge unstable and possibly bring the bridge crashing down. One of those supporting structures I believe, is that we should always try to be respectful of other people and their views or beliefs, even though they may disagree with my own or may even insult my beliefs. It is illogical to try and accept everybody's views, especially since many of them contradict each other and my own. We should try to correct any erroneous views in a loving and compassionate way and have the humility to accept when we are wrong. This isn't always easy I know. It concerns me that some opinions are raised that treat my faith in an unfair fashion. Like I say, everyone is entitled to their opinion and I am thankful that we have the freedom to air our views, and we can't force people to accept our views. Certain people make such claims about the Christian faith that give a distorted and even damaging view of what it means to be a Christian, but not only that, those views are themselves evil. These opinions may not affect those that have accepted the faith, but can be a stumbling block to others accepting Jesus into their hearts and destroy the bridge that we wish to build.

I remember once watching on television a programme called "The root of evil" by Richard Dawkins on channel four. In the programme, Dawkins set out to attack religion because of the evil done in its name. The problem is that Dawkins put all religious belief in the same bracket. That is, everyone who believes in God is basically evil. The term "The root of evil" is a distortion of what St. Paul said to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:10), which was "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." Maybe Dawkins deliberately omitted the other words, because he has most probably made a tidy profit on all the literature he has published in attacking God. Dawkins is right to condemn evil that is done in the name of any god. But I tell you that it is not God telling people to do evil. Jesus challenged the religious leaders of His day, just as He challenges the religious leaders of our day. The church has its faults just as we all have, but is Dawkins in a position to judge? We go to church because we are sinners, in need of cleansing by the body and blood of Jesus. We know we have sinned because God's Word tells us so. God's judgment goes far beyond any human standard, He judges the heart, which as Jesus tells us, is the source of evil (Mark 7:21). Where does Dawkins get his standard of right and wrong from anyway? Dawkins believes that he can even judge God. Some people ridicule God when He punished sin in the past, and then ridicule God again for not being so quick to punish today. God gives people time to repent, unless you believe that you are not a sinner, in which case I would say "whose standard are you using to judge, yours or God's?" All believers must constantly examine themselves in light of God's Word. Dawkins should change the word "religion" to "belief" because evil can emerge from any belief, including atheism. My concern is that these statements destroy any bridge you wish to make, because people take these simplistic statements and make sweeping generalizations from them. This demonizing by Dawkins can be dangerous and itself be evil. I have heard people recently use the same statements as Dawkins in denouncing religion, totally disregarding the many good works that are done in its name. It seems strange that Dawkins and people like him never seem to highlight the persecution that is done to those who believe in God, and quite often by people who would class themselves as atheist. I believe in Jesus, and He tells me to love God and other people, even those who hate me. Is Dawkins claiming that love is evil? Atheists like Dawkins are trying to stop the teaching of the faith to children. Calling it "mental child abuse", is using the most extreme terminology to drum up emotions of fear and hate. One of the most important gifts my parents gave me was to know God and Jesus as my Saviour. I wonder if Dawkins would object if we taught children atheism and to hate God, although he probably wouldn't admit it. Denying people the right to freedom of religion has been tried before, but you will not silence the spirit of man that yearns for the truth, for knowledge, for freedom and for salvation.

A prayer:- Heavenly Father, we pray for all bridge-builders, those that build bridges over great expanses of water and land and those who build bridges between people. We pray that you will work with planners, builders and those who maintain the bridges of the world and protect those who use them. We pray also for those who build bridges between people, whether it be ministers, missionaries, aid-workers or just those everyday folk who try to communicate the Gospel with whom they encounter or who want to just make friendships. Finally, we pray for those who would try to destroy bridges between people and pray that their hearts will be turned and they will come to repentance. Amen

By Philip Catherall