

# 3 Massive Gaps, 1 Magnificent Bridge

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[ 0 : 00 ] So today I'd like us to look both at the chapter that we read in Isaiah 6 but also the passage! We read in 1 Timothy 2 and I'm going to read again from verse 5 as we begin.

There is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. As many of you will know and as I often say my career before I became a minister was engineering and as an engineer I love machines, love heavy plant, love structures, love big engineering projects and one of the things I love is what I showed the kids. I love bridges. It was just a week ago, just over a week ago I went over the Keswick Bridge for the 150th time, whatever it is and still every time I love it. I think it's amazing these huge structures that are built in order to cross a gap. When I was studying for ministry we lived in Kirkcaldy, I was studying in Edinburgh. Every day I would go across the 4th Rail Bridge on the train and again I just think it's absolutely amazing and even in our own village here, our own wee bridge, so nice. It's just such a key part of our landscape here. So as far as I'm concerned bridges are amazing and one of the things

I love about bridges is that I love the thought that if you imagine the 4th Rail Bridge, I love the thought that one day an engineer stood on one side of the 4th and looked across to the other and said, I'm going to bridge that. And I just think that's amazing, amazing courage, amazing vision, amazing determination and he did. It's there and it stood there for 140 years or however old it is, I can't remember what year it was actually completed. But I love that thought. Whatever bridge it is, someone stands there and says, there's a gap here and I'm going to bridge it. And the bigger the gap, the more astonishing the bridge. And as we were saying to the kids, that imagery of the bridge lies at the heart of the gospel. It's pointing us to a key concept in Christian theology that's captured by the word mediator in 1 Timothy 2.5. Jesus has come as the mediator. He's come as the bridge between God and us. But what exactly do we mean when we say that? And how exactly does Jesus fulfill that role? Well, that's what I want us to think about today. And what I hope we'll see is that in the gospel, there are three massive gaps and one magnificent bridge. That's our title. And what I hope we're going to see is that these gaps are massive. And that makes the bridge utterly amazing.

There's one magnificent bridge. So what are the gaps? Well, the gaps are the gap between humanity and divinity, the gap between sin and holiness, the gap between death and life. And the bridge between them all is Jesus. So let's look at them in turn. First of all, thinking about this, the gap between humanity and divinity. Now, when we come to church each week, one of the big things we want to emphasize is the nearness of God. So I hope that's something I always make clear. It's something I always want to make clear that Jesus, that God is near as we worship. He's present as we gather together and sing to him.

And he hears us every time we pray, and he meets our deepest needs. And so in our theology, we want to emphasize the nearness of God. That's a key part of the gospel. But at the same time, at the same time, in our theology, we also have to remember that there is a massive gap between us and God. A massive gap between humanity and divinity. And basically what I mean by that is the fact that in terms of our natures, the nature of a human, the nature of God, there's a monumental difference and distance between us and God. I've often drawn this picture. It's what we call the creator-creation distinction. And that's a picture that's often used, a wee diagram that's often used by theologians. And it's just emphasizing the fact that this one's God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He's the creator. And everything else that exists is in here.

[ 4 : 38 ] So all of time and all of matter and all of energy and all of space, everything physical, temporal, historical, all of it is in that small circle. And compared to God, that circle is tiny.

And me and you in that circle, we are microscopic. The gap, if you like, between us and God, the difference between us and God is massive. And we get glimpses of that. And this is where

astrophysics is our friend, because it's helping us to see this theological truth more clearly. We're at teensy-weensy dot in there. And even that dot is now a million times too big, if we're going to draw this to scale. But sometimes, you know, the amazing discoveries of physics, as people look into space, they see galaxies, stars, all sorts that's just mind-blowing. And you see that and you're thinking, this is massive. And it's just astonishing. It's enormous. All they're doing is taking us to the edge of that circle.

They're just comparing us to the edge of that circle. But the Bible wants us to compare our whole circle with God. And the difference is huge.

God is in a category all of his own. So we are finite and totally dependent. God is infinite and wholly independent. He does not rely on anything else at all. We are limited. We are completely reliant on so many things for our survival. Even in the few hours since you got up this morning, there's so many things that you've depended on in order to stay alive. God is limitless.

And he is just eternal, self-sufficient fullness. Just never running out, never diminishing. We're fragile. We're fluctuating. We're fleeting. God is unchangeable, immutable, everlasting, unshakable stability. That's what you find in God. We flourish for a moment with God that is just undiminishable, eternal delight. And all these words I'm using, all these categories I'm trying to bring before you, none of them are big enough. None of the words I'm using to describe God are big enough. Our biggest and our boldest conceptions of God are always far, far too small. And you get a glimpse of that in Isaiah 6, the passage that I read for us. It speaks of the Lord sitting on his throne high and lifted up. And just the edge of his robe, the train of his robe, the tiniest little bit at the end of his robe, fills the temple.

[ 7 : 32 ] The structure shakes. It's filled with smoke, as you see at the end of verse 4. And the whole vision here is just a vision of magnitude and enormity. And that's just a glimpse. It's just a glimpse of what God is like. And that's why this category is so important. This distinction in our minds is so important. You know, it's so easy to make a couple of big mistakes in terms of how we think of God. Sometimes we can just think, we can think of God as though he's just a kind of bigger version of us. You know, so we think, well, you know, we know people who are quite strong. God's even stronger. We know people who are wise. God's even wiser. And we kind of start with ourselves and we make God a bigger version of ourselves. And it's understandable why we do that. But it can be a huge mistake because it can mean that we're actually sort of looking at God through the lens of ourselves.

And, you know, if we just make God a bigger version of ourselves, that's not big enough. And the other danger is that when something happens in our lives which doesn't go the way we want it to go, and if we feel like God is doing something that we don't want him to do, then we think that he's just like us. So sometimes we might, you know, we might be resentful or we might take revenge on people. And if we feel like something goes wrong in our lives, we think, oh, well, God's just, he's a bigger version of us, so he's just behaving how we behave. And we can actually, we can impose all sorts of negative views onto God because we're looking at him through that lens.

We mustn't think like that. God's not just a bigger version of us. He's in a totally different category. And at the same time, I need to rub out my picture a little bit here just to explain it a little bit more. We also must not make the mistake of thinking that God is like part of a bigger reality.

I need to get rid of this as well. So sometimes, you know, people might think that there's like reality here and the universe is in it. So I'll just do you for universe there. And God is in it, but reality kind of goes beyond that. And so people will sometimes ask the question, well, you know, if God is there, well, where did God come from? What was there before God? Who made God? People might ask. And that's kind of having this idea that beyond God, there is kind of this reality that he's set in. And it's so important that we recognize that that is a completely inaccurate way to think. All of this does not exist. Because nothing exists outside of God. Nothing exists beyond him. Nothing before him. Nothing after him. He is above everything. And so it's not that there's a reality that holds the universe that holds God in it. The truth is the opposite. It's God that holds all reality. And there's nothing, absolutely nothing above him or beyond him. So God is immense, infinite, eternal. We are just tiny. The gap is massive. And God says,

I'm going to bridge it. And that bridge comes in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Because when Jesus became human, that bridge, that gap was bridged. God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, the one in whom all the fullness of deity dwells, he became one of us. And so when we read verses about Jesus being conceived in Mary's womb, whether it's Matthew 1.18, Luke 1.34, John

1.14, speaking of Jesus coming to be born, all of these, all of these verses, whenever we read them, we've got to remember that the gap is massive. When it says there that the Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. It is monumental what is happening right there. And this is where we have to recognize that pretty much every other religion says the same thing in different forms. And all of it's based on a logically impossible idea. It's so much of it is based on the logically impossible idea that we can build our own bridge to God. And many, many, many different religious positions, and even some versions of what people would call Christianity are building this on the same idea, the idea that actually, you know, God is there, we can find him, we build the bridge. Now, you only need to look at that diagram for one minute to realize that that is logically impossible. A minute, minuscule speck in that bottom circle has got no chance of building the bridge. The gap's far too big. And any religion that says that you can work your way up to God is demanding the logically impossible. Only God can bridge it. Only God can bridge it. And when Jesus became human, God is showing us that that's exactly what he is going to do. Jesus is the mediator. He's the one who's come to build that bridge.

[13:23] He's the mediator because God the Son has become the man Christ Jesus. So in Jesus, the gap between humanity and divinity is bridged. But that's not the only gap. The gap's actually far bigger. The problem is far deeper. There's the gap between sin and holiness. Because our nature as creatures makes us minuscule compared to God. But sin means that we're not just minuscule, we're minuscule and deeply marred. And again, here's, it's, this is where it's so easy to underestimate words. We see words in the Bible many, many times. We're quite familiar with them often. And we can underestimate what they mean. And a word that's so, so easy to underestimate is that word there, the word holy.

Sometimes we just think of that word, you know, as something kind of maybe a bit pious, a bit religious, and a bit important. You know, somebody who's maybe, you know, maybe some people have said that about you because you come to church, oh, they're quite holy. You know, maybe that's what they, what they might think. But the word holy means so much more than that. And we've got to, got to sort of just think of it a bit more deeply to get it into our minds. When, when these creatures, the seraphim cry, cry out, holy, holy, holy is the Lord. When they use those words, they're speaking of the impeccable perfection of God. They're speaking about the fact that he's utterly pure, without any stain, without any inconsistency, without any corruption whatsoever. ever. And, and they're covering their faces because, because they're confronted with overwhelming holiness and perfection. And again, when we say that God's perfect, we mustn't just kind of think of our own ideas of perfection. That's doing the same mistake I mentioned before. We project our ideas towards God. We have to, we have to just realize the categorical difference. God is perfect with a divine perfection. What we can come up with is not nearly enough. His perfection is one that we can't grasp, but one that we can't describe. It's a perfection. It's that perfection of holiness that makes God unapproachable. And this is the language that you see again and again in the Old Testament, that the minute God reveals what he's really like, people are confronted with the fact that he is unapproachable. And this is where it's so important, that when we say God is holy, that he's pure, that he's without stain or corruption, that's because it's impossible to corrupt him. It's impossible to corrupt God. So, so you can't, you know, it's not that, you know, he's managed just to dodge any corruption over the years and nothing, no stains ever landed on him. It's that, it's that it's, it's impossible for it to happen. Nothing can get close to him.

It's a bit like, you know, if an impurity tries to approach God, the impurity is not going to make it. It's extinguished before it reaches him. If you think to yourself, right, I'm going to go and cool down the sun with this bucket of ice cubes. And you walk up to the sun with your ice cube and you think, I'm going to cool it down. The ice cube's not going to make it. It's just, it just vaporizes before it gets there. That's, that's, that's a kind of glimpse of what we're talking about when we're talking about the holiness of God, how perfect and undefiled and undefiled he is. And that's why the moment Isaiah, the prophet who saw this vision, the moment he starts to see this, he responds in near despair.

[17:07] He says, woe is me, but I'm lost. I'm a man of unclean lips that dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. And so Isaiah's response to seeing God isn't, isn't actually one of like, oh wow, I think I'll go and have a closer look. It's actually a response of, oh my goodness, I, I'm, I'm done. Because I can't, I cannot approach God.

And so he's devastated by the reality of his own uncleanness and of all those who are around him. So for Isaiah, there's just no escaping this overwhelming holiness of God. And there's no denying his own unworthiness. He's realizing the gap, the gap is, it's too big.

And, and for us, that gap, that sin of course has caused, it's a gap of woe. Because it's a gap that we've made. It's our sin that's caused it. We're the ones who's, who are guilty. It's our fault. And it's a gap that we can't bridge. We're helpless.

And it's a gap that we cannot hide. We can't escape from it. It confronts it all. The gap is monumentally big. And God says, I'm going to bridge it.

And when we talk about the incarnation of Jesus, Jesus coming into the world, that was the end of a journey and the start of a journey. So it's the end of the journey in the sense that God the Son has come to, to be one of us, to come alongside us. But it's the start of another journey because Jesus didn't come just to stand alongside us. He came to die in place of us. Our sin has left us guilty.

[ 18 : 58 ] It's left us helpless before God. It's left us totally exposed. But in the cross, in the crucifixion of Jesus, God himself is bridging the gap. And you get a beautiful glimpse of it in Isaiah 6. Because when Isaiah says, woe is me, then we read that one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he's taken with tongues from the altar, he touched my mouth and said, behold, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away. Your sin is atoned for. Now, it's a bit of a sort of strange imagery, but it's actually giving us lots of beautiful images. It's beautifully foreshadowing several aspects of the gospel. It's showing us, first of all, that the initiative comes from God.

So it's the heavenly creature that takes steps and that moves towards Isaiah, not the other way around. So God is moving towards God. And it's reminding us he's always the bridge builder. He's always the cost absorber. Always. And we're seeing also that the atonement comes from the altar. So whenever you see altar, it's the language of sacrifice. And the language of sacrifice is getting us to think about death. And the whole reason it's getting us to do that is because sin brings death. That's the definition of sin, of what sin does. Sin brings death. You never get sin without it causing death.

The only choice is either the death of the guilty one or the death of a substitute. And the altar, the language of sacrifice, and all of that stuff you see in the Old Testament is pointing us towards what Jesus has come to do, that he's come to die in place of us. He's come to take the penalty for our sins. And all of that is foreshadowing what Jesus does on the cross. So the initiative comes from God.

The atonement comes from the altar. And the atonement meets every need. You see there's a beautiful balance here. When Isaiah says, woe is me, he says, I'm a man of unclean lips. That's the area of guilt that's pressing his conscience so powerfully. I'm a man of unclean lips. And the coal from the altar goes where? It touches his lips. In other words, it's just, it's showing us that Christ's sacrifice, that God's atoning work touches everywhere where sin has left its mark.

Where sin has left its mark of woe in our lives. That's where God reaches. That's where the bridge reaches so that we can be healed. And all of it is so that our guilt can be taken away. Now that word taken away is a very interesting word. It means, it basically means to depart or to turn aside.

[ 21 : 45 ] And it's actually used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe the sin of Israel in departing from God, turning away from him. So here's an example. They've turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. And they've made for themselves a golden calf and worshipped it and sacrificed it and said, these are your gods who brought you away to the land of Egypt. That's the same, same language there, same word there. That turning aside, that departing. And this is, I think, the use of that word in the Old Testament is so powerful towards us because it's telling us that we fall into the trap of turning aside from God. We are departing from him into sin, madly rushing down a road that leads to destruction. So our sin makes us guilty of a horrible departure. Our sin makes us guilty of a horrible departure. In the gospel, God is saying, all the guilt of your departure from me has now departed from you. The guilt of our departure from him has forever departed from us.

And all that is because Jesus has come as the bridge to carry away every speck of our sin and guilt. And the result is actually a fourth holy. You see, we've got three holies here. Holy, holy, holy. And many think that that's likely referring to the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Father, the Holy Son, the Holy Spirit. I would definitely go along with that. But what I want to highlight is that there's actually a fourth holy now. And remember how we're defining that word, that

word of utter, astounding purity and cleanliness. What's the fourth holy? The fourth holy is you. If you're a Christian or if you become one, you become his holy people. That's what we read at the start. You're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. The temple that you see in Isaiah and anywhere you see the temple in the Old Testament is foreshadowing the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ. And as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3, 17, he's saying, you're that temple.

God's temple is holy and it's you. That's what Jesus makes us. That's the level he restores us to. And this is where it's so important that for Jesus, his target was never his own holiness. And it never needed to be his own holiness because the holiness of Jesus is eternally secure. He's God, the Son. Jesus' target was never his own holiness. His target was your holiness. And he will not stop until he's rescued you from the deepest depths of sin, from its grip and its power. And he has restored you to the highest privilege of holiness. Every ounce of guilt, every speck of sin, every stain of iniquity, all of it taken away. And in its place we're clothed with the perfect impeccable righteousness of Christ. And that's all what Paul is speaking about in 2 Timothy 2. Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all. He comes, Christ comes, Christ gives, Christ ransoms, Christ redeems. It's all so that we can be saved. Did you notice what Isaiah does in chapter 6, verses 5 to 7? He does nothing. All of it is done by God. God deals with everything.

[ 25 : 45 ] Now, I'm going to give you what is possibly the cheesiest theological statement that I'll ever give you. Forgive me for it, but I hope it's still teaching you something important. I want to say that in the gospel, woe becomes woe. I know that's very cheesy, but it's true though. It is absolutely true. Because sin leaves you with, sin guarantees woe. Guarantees it.

But Jesus takes it all away. We do nothing. We just stand before him and say, wow. If you understand sin properly, then you will cry woe. And if you're not crying woe at the sight of sin, you don't understand it. And if you understand grace, then you will say, wow. And if you're not saying, wow, then you don't understand it. In Jesus, the gap between holiness and sin is bridged. Last of all, there's the gap between death and life. Now, sometimes that doesn't feel like much of a gap at all. In fact, sometimes death feels far too close. In our own fragility, sometimes there might be a diagnosis or an accident, and it can make feel like the gap between life and death is like a knife edge.

And sometimes that gap is crossed far sooner than we ever wanted it to be. And so for very often in our experience, death and life feel far, far too close. So how is there a massive gap? Well, without Jesus, our experience of life is actually only ever the experience of dying life.

So all of us have life, but it's fading. And we can see that before our very eyes. And that's what sin has caused. It's left our life as dying life. The gap I'm talking about is not the gap between death and dying life, because that's a very close gap. The gap I'm talking about is the gap between death and eternal life. The gap between dying life and eternal life. Dying life is always under the power of death.

And we see it in our aging. We see it in our illnesses, our vulnerability, our fragility. We all face it. We can't escape it. It's happening before our very eyes every day. And for some of us, it's happening.

[ 28 : 14 ] We're seeing it really powerfully with illness and aging and pain and struggling. And so the gap between dying life and death is tiny. But I want you to imagine undying life. I want you to imagine eternal life. And even if you are skeptical about everything that I'm saying and about every claim that the Bible makes, even if you're skeptical, I just want you to imagine for a moment that this is a reality. Imagine life with no disease, no cancer, no motor neuron disease, no heart disease, no malaria, none of that. Imagine life with no pain. Imagine looking at your hands and they're never sore again.

Or your back or your hips or whatever it is that is sore every day. Get older before your eyes. But you're not watching your body slowly get older before your eyes. Imagine life with no deterioration. You don't get weaker. You don't get slower. You don't get more brain foggy. It doesn't happen. Imagine life with no separation. You'll never ever have to miss someone ever again. Imagine life with no tears. Imagine life with no tears. Imagine life with no end. That kind of life feels so far away from what we have.

And because it's so far away from what we have, so many people think it's a fantasy. It's an impossible dream. It's the life that we wish we had, but we've got to accept that we'll never get it

because the gap's too big. The gap's too big to be possible. The gap's too big to be real.  
[ 30 : 06 ] And maybe this is the one that feels like the biggest gap of all. And God says, I'm bridging it. I am bridging it. And once again, that bridge is Jesus. And he proves that he's bridged it in the power of his resurrection.

The whole of Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus' resurrection is at the heart of every other part of our theology. And if the resurrection tells you anything, it tells you that the gap between death and life has been bridged.

The gap between dying life and eternal life has been bridged. Jesus has broken the power of sin. He's conquered the power of death. He's risen in total and utter victory.

The man Christ Jesus is risen. He's the savior. He's the mediator. The massive gap has been bridged. And this is where the imagery of a bridge is so important because what's the point of a bridge?

The whole point of a bridge is so that you can cross to the other side. And in Jesus, we can cross from death to life. We can cross from dying life to eternal life.

[ 31 : 26 ] We can cross from the wide path that leads to destruction to the narrow path that leads to eternal life. That bridge is open for you. That bridge is strong enough for you. That bridge is ready for you.

In the gospel, there's three massive gaps. The gap between humanity and divinity, between sin and holiness, between death and life. And these gaps are utterly huge, but there is one magnificent bridge.

Jesus Christ, the only mediator. The savior who's everything that we need. Two crucial things to say as we finish.

No one can build that bridge for you. Except Jesus. Only he can do it. No one can step onto that bridge for you.

Only you can do it. So, I hope all of us are just saying, Lord Jesus, you're the bridge. I'm stepping onto you. Let's go.

[ 32 : 39 ] Amen. Let's pray.