

Marked: Called to Build Bridges - Matthew 9:9-13

We desire to build bridges of influence and ministry into our neighborhoods, workplaces, and everyday places for the glory of God.

INTRODUCTION

What is the purpose of a bridge? Have you ever crossed a bridge that made you anxious? What about this bridge was concerning?

What are some bridges people built that influenced you and helped connect you to a relationship to Jesus and His Church?

Crossing even a normal bridge can feel a little unsettling. But we cross bridges because they get us where we need to go when otherwise we couldn't get there. Bridges exist to form connections between two locations. We would not need bridges if there was no separation, no gap in between our destinations. As followers of Jesus, we build bridges every day that connect people to relationships with Jesus Christ and with each other. We build those bridges because, without them, people remain separated forever from God. Jesus is our example. Jesus met people where they were and was the bridge for them to connect to God and to others. We are called to follow in His footsteps.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 9:9.

Matthew was a tax collector. What do you know about tax collectors in the first century? How would the Jewish community have viewed Matthew? How do you think their perception of Matthew affected his perception of himself?

Jesus invited Matthew to "Follow Me!" This is the same invitation He extends to all people. What does it mean to follow Jesus, and why is this invitation so life-altering?

We don't have to do anything special before following Jesus. No Bible study participation, seminary degree, or apology to those we've wronged is first required before coming to Jesus. We can never make up for our sin by our self-improvement or good works. When we turn from our self-ruled life and follow Jesus in faith we are saved. This is true not only for us, but also for every other person in the world. We can relate to the feelings of unworthiness or regret that stand between other people and turning to Jesus in faith for salvation. We are all unworthy, and we all struggle to leave everything behind to follow Him. Our own experiences, then, can serve as bridge builders.

How does Jesus' call to Matthew encourage you personally? In light of His call to you to go and make disciples, how does Jesus' call to someone like Matthew challenge you?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 9:10-11.

Besides Matthew and his tax collecting friends, who else was at the gathering? What trouble might there be between these two groups? Why is it significant that Jesus spent time with both of them?

After his encounter with Jesus, Matthew hosted a dinner. He wanted to celebrate and share the experience he had with Jesus with his friends. Most likely Matthew's friends were as unpopular as the tax collectors. The Pharisees considered this behavior improper and shunned Jesus for associating with such people.

What did the Pharisees' question indicate about their view of tax collectors? What did it indicate about their view of themselves?

Why were the Pharisees (and anyone who views themselves as well or healthy before God) wrong about their condition?

The Pharisees were like the Laodiceans of whom Jesus said, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Jesus directly pointed out time and time again that their self-righteousness was heinous in the sight of God, and that their need for spiritual help was just as great as the sinners and tax collectors who flocked to Jesus, keenly aware of their need. The attitude of the Pharisees kept them from building bridges with anyone outside their religious circles.

We cannot effectively follow Christ and build bridges with people if we become self-righteous like the Pharisees. They did not understand that reconciliation to God did not rest in strictly observing the Old Testament law. But Jesus' response to their attacks reveals He extends His hand of acceptance to all who follow Him.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 9:12-13.

What do you think Jesus meant when He said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick"?

First, Jesus communicated to the Pharisees that He (the Physician) would go where He was needed and wanted. The implication is that the Pharisees did not seek His help, but the sinners and tax collectors did, so that is who He spent time with.

Second, Jesus made it clear that He is the answer to the great need of human beings. Remember, this passage comes after multiple accounts of Jesus healing physical ailments. People flocked to Jesus for physical healing. Now, Jesus compared the spiritual healing that He brought to the physical healing He had given.

Why do you think Jesus distinguished between mercy and sacrifice? What does this distinction look like for us today?

This statement is a quotation from Hosea 6:6. Jesus was not diminishing the importance of sacrifice, but reminding the Pharisees that their sacrifice (or religious duty) must be accompanied by a heart that seeks after God and shows mercy as He does. The Pharisees' spiritual sickness was, in large part, due to their wrong view of

themselves and poor view of those in need around them. It is of note that Jesus quoted this statement from the Old Testament. Jesus exposed their misunderstanding of the will of God, which they claimed expert knowledge of.

Jesus summed up His mission in verse 13: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” This, along with the two previous statements, gives us an unclouded synopsis of Jesus’ mission on earth. The merciful Father sent Jesus to build a bridge for all lost people. As followers of Jesus, we are to show mercy to the needy around us, pointing them to Jesus, the source of spiritual healing.

APPLICATION

One of the reasons we don’t build bridges with lost people is because we might not go where they are. Or if we do, building bridges may not be on our minds (like the disciples). Where are some places you can connect with people who haven’t recognized their need for Jesus? If you’re going to go there, what should be your mindset?

We are called not only to build bridges to Jesus, but also to have real relationships with other people. Is our group a place where unchurched or unbelieving people feel welcomed? How can we be more engaging with unbelieving or unchurched people in our group?

Who are the specific people that you can begin to build bridges with in order to invite them into a relationship with Jesus and with His church? Share these names with the group and begin to pray for these individuals.

PRAYER

Thank God for sending Jesus, who built a bridge over sin to connect you to Him. Ask Him to show you how you can be a bridge builder for the people in your life who do not yet know Him.