

The Bridge That Was Too Short

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of fully committing to Christ, as almost is not enough to achieve salvation.

Duration: 42:30

Scripture: Isaiah 1:18, Matthew 6:33, Acts 26:22-23, Acts 26:25, Acts 26:27-28

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher uses two illustrations to convey a powerful message. The first illustration is about a man driving his family across a bridge that was not long enough, resulting in their tragic death. This serves as a metaphor for the importance of having a complete and sufficient foundation in our faith. The second illustration is about a little girl who gets lost in a snowstorm but is eventually found just feet away from her home. This highlights the danger of being close to salvation but not fully embracing it. The overall message is that we must ensure our spiritual foundation is strong and complete, not just partially built.

Transcript

In the twenty-sixth chapter of Acts, Festus had brought Paul before King Agrippa, and Paul makes his defense. Agrippa the king said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand and answered for himself.

I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee, testing all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews. Frankly, because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews. Therefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

From that manner of life, from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sects of our religion, I lived a Pharisee. Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made abroad unto our fathers, under which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hoped to soon. For which hope takes King Agrippa? I am accused of the Jews.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible of you that God should raise the dead? I verily thought that with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of magic, which thing I also did in Jerusalem. Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests.

When they were put to death, I gave my voice against them, and I punished them often, every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme.

Being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even on the strange cities. Then he gives his testimony about seeing the light on Damascus Road and being converted, and says in verse 17 that God appeared to him and told him that he would deliver him from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom I now send thee, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among all them that are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O King of Bethlehem, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but showed first unto them that Damascus and that Jerusalem were all the closest to the deity and then to the Gentiles.

They should repent and turn to God to do works meet for repentance. For this cause, the Jews caught me in the temple and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both so small and great, seeing none of these things other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come to pass.

But Christ should suffer, that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles. And as he doth speak for himself, Thestis said with a loud voice, O Lord, beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad. He said, I am not mad, most noble Thestis, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely. For I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him. For this thing was not done in a corner.

King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. And Agrippa said unto Paul, O most selfish, greatest need of thee a Christian. Paul said, I would to God, not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, for both all those and all together such as I am, except for these bones.

Let's have a moment of prayer. Now, Lord, our expectation is quietly looking up. We expect thee to answer, respond, and to fulfill promises made to the fathers and to the apostles, and to the church fathers, to us.

Lord, Lord, blessing others, we believe thou wilt bless us. We're looking, we expect thee. We want to see a revival that will be modest for the city.

That others may come and light their candles at our flames. And other churches may be set to flames. And our own, trusting thee for this, this night, may the blessed spirit testify to Jesus, testify tonight through the Word, in Christ's name, amen.

Now, the text would be, Agrippa said unto Paul, O most, thou persuaded me to be a Christian. Paul replied, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, for both all those and all together, such as I am, except for these bones. Now, I have taken the time to read in your hearing this story, or rather this sermon of Paul, this defense of Paul before Agrippa.

This living human scene here is one of all most ideal beauty and power. It is Paul's testimony before the king. Here was a man in chains, the victim of the spite and the jealousy of certain religious leaders with connections.

He was a victim, I say, and he was charged with such a generalized crime that nobody could pin it down twice. The infestus admitted to Agrippa that he didn't know why he had him here. He said, I brought you a prisoner, but I don't know why.

He said, there's nothing really, because they can't make anything sick. He had done no crime, and no evil could be found in him. There were robbers skulking about the streets, but he was not a robber.

There were murderers whose hands were red with blood, but this man had not murdered. There were traders who had sold out their country for money. This man of God was true to his country.

There were evil men of every sort, arsonists and rapists, but not one thing did they bring against this man. Not one voice cried any of these evils against the man Paul. But nevertheless, he stands in chains and makes his defense.

And there is superiority here and excellence all over the whole scene. The bearing of the man, even in spite of his chains. And his attitude toward God and the scriptures, and the people, and the king, and the man who brought him in chains, that's it.

And the language he used, the elegance of it, and the modesty, and the boldness. And the entire argument is sound, and learned, and frank, and direct. Now, the substance of his testimony is that he'd been always a strict religious Jew, deeply schooled in the Old Testament scriptures.

In following, there were a straightest sect, which was the Pharisee sect of the Jews. And he had followed his Jewish religion straight into the arms of Jesus Christ. This, incidentally, is what we must tell all of our Jewish friends.

If they say to us, do you want me to change my religion? Our proper reply is, no, by no means. We do not want you to change your religion. We want you to follow your religion to its conclusion.

And if you follow your Jewish religion to its conclusion, you'll follow it straight into the arms of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Now, this is what Paul said. He said he had not forsaken his Jewish faith, but fulfilled it.

And he had fulfilled the very religion his accusers claimed to believe in him. He admitted that at first, in his blindness, he had persecuted Christians. But he said he had met Christ on the roads of Damascus, and become convinced.

And since then, he had gone everywhere, and that he hadn't made up a thing, and he hadn't invented anything, and he hadn't claimed any new revelation or any new religion at all. He claimed only that he had taken a step on further than the rest of these Jews had, straight into the arms of the Messiah, because the Old Testament, which they believed taught that the Redeemer should suffer and die and rise again to be the light of all the nations. And this is the reason for each change he said.

Now, Agrippa was deeply moved, there's no question about that. Paul had indirectly set forth in his hearing a powerful proof of the Christian faith. And whatever is a proof of the Christian faith is also a reason why Agrippa and everyone else should turn to Christ and believe it.

They gossip and believe in Christ. And Agrippa said, now I know the translators have a field day with this, but there's no good reason to change it from what it stands here. Almost outpersuaded me.

Do you think, Paul, he said that in this brief sermon you can change me and come close to it? But almost outpersuaded me to become a Christian. And the reply of Paul was noble and beautiful. He said, King, I wish that you and all these others, Pestis over here, most noble Pestis, and these soldiers that put the chains on me and led me in here, and every one of you retainers and courtiers and everyone, you know, all of you, I wish that you were not almost, but altogether such a one as I am.

And then with a smile he said, except of course, you see, I wouldn't want you to be in chains. So we have here the way one man got out of becoming a Christian. It was by the use of the word almost.

Now, to make you see that almost is not enough, I want to lay before you a little illustration. A contractor puts on him the responsibility of building a bridge. And he builds that bridge over a gray, threshing stream far below.

It's a long bridge. He runs a great girder and a great coast clear down into the rock below. He builds and builds out from one end, one side of the river bank, and he builds it on out to within twenty feet of the other side of the river.

And then he stops. And one night a man comes along driving in the rain and in the darkness. And seeing the bridge ahead of him and seeing the highway without markers or without signs forbidding, he drives with his family, his mother with the baby, sleeping in her lap on the backseat, a little boy and a little girl sitting off to his right.

And he driving in the rain and the darkness and the storm comes onto this bridge. And at a reasonable rate of speed he travels on across his headlight showing the bank of the river beyond the great rock. But what it can't show him because of its direction is that that bridge has never been finished.

It lacks twenty feet. It's connecting with the other shore. So he drives his car with his two sleeping children beside him and his wife and baby in the backseat, straight over that end into the roaring waters below.

He smashes it all up and all die together. A good bridge, a strong bridge, a worthy bridge, but it wasn't long enough. It stopped short of facing the other side of the river.

And the man and his family perished because they trusted to a short bridge. It didn't quite connect. Now that is what exactly happened to the man who drifted.

He said to Paul, this is a powerful argument you have brought to me. And I, he said, am familiar, as Paul had admitted he was, with the teachings of the prophet. And my position makes me head over all the synagogues.

And I know a good deal of the law and the prophet. Much that is written there is familiar to me. And you almost persuade me to be a Christian.

But he was driving on a short bridge. I don't know how far he went. I cannot read the mind of the man and all I know is what he said.

And I dare not read into what he said any more than is legitimately and properly there. But I do know that the bridge was too short. And I do know that there is no place in the scriptures that says King Agrippa was ever saved.

King Agrippa never joined any church. Never was baptized. Never showed himself to be a Christian.

Never witnessed before the company. Never joined the fellowship of the church. He wanted to.

And he said you almost do it, Paul. But he didn't yield. And so a man near Agrippa before the man of God who preached to him underwent an experience all taking place quietly within him.

The only thing emotional or dramatic was that tremendous defense by the manic old man of God. But Agrippa took it calmly. He was a king and so he had to act like a king.

It wouldn't do for royalties to sob or lose control. He had to be poised and control himself. And he did.

But this man underwent an experience comparable to shipwreck or to earthquake or to fire or to flood or volcanic eruption. So this man was wiped out forever. Wiped out at one stroke.

All his immortal dreams and hopes. For Romans dreamed and hoped as well as Jews and Canadians and Americans and Irish people. For all alike and rivers and seas and borders don't change it.

We dream and we hope and this Roman dreamed and hoped. It ruled. But he didn't dream enough.

And his hopes were defeated. And he brought calamity on himself. Blindly he drove over a bridge that didn't reach the other side.

Now he was only one. There may be those here tonight who are certainly doing what he did. Take that man tried for murder.

He's charged with capital murder. Brought up for trial. The jury has chosen.

And the testimony is taken. The defense and the prosecution. Crown I think they would say here.

Sum up. And then the judge gives his charge. And the jury files out.

And the man who's charged with murder sits and waits. Tries to be flippant about it. But his rolling eyes and the sweat on his forehead and nose and neck give him away.

Twelve persons beyond that door are deciding whether this man is guilty of capital murder. In back of that door the jurors debate. They go over the testimony.

They're corrected by the head juror. Then they change their minds. They take ballot after ballot.

One man holds out. He's not sure beyond a reasonable doubt. Then they say let us hear the evidence again, the testimony.

They go over it again. Then this man nods. He says I guess I was wrong.

It does look as if there was no reasonable doubt. All right says the former. Let's vote again.

Here sits the man on the other side of the door. Wiping his forehead every once in a while and making sick jokes with his lawyers. Trying to hide the terror in his heart.

The vote's taken. They file back in. The judge says, Your Honor, did your heavy reach the verdict? Foreman rises and says, We have, Your Honor.

What is your verdict? We find the defendant guilty as charged and offer no recommendation and mercy. So I screamed at each side and the old mother bows her head and greets us two decent officers here. This man almost got up.

Almost. But they appealed. They carried upwards.

Carried this illustration through. I'd have to go back down across the border because to tell you the truth, I don't know who has the final authority here. But the governor has.

We'll say. We'll say the governor. You know who it is here and I don't.

That's my ignorance. But whoever it is, it's brought before him. Yes, he says, I'll take a look at that case.

I understand there were some doubts about it. So long after his wife has gone to bed and his children are asleep. The radio's turned off and everything's turned off.

Even the dogs are slumbering in the box in the corner. Traffic's quiet outside on the street. The hours pass.

This man that we elect so carelessly. I think we've done him a favor. On his shoulders, his own shoulders, rests the life of a man made in God's image.

A young man. A man who could normally live 50 years. He reads the testimony.

And he says, I'm going to commute this sentence. There's doubts here. I'm going to, there are doubts here.

I'm going to commute this sentence. And if the young man could hear it back where he is, he'd smile and have hope. And then the great man reads another page.

Shakes his head and says, no, this isn't it. So he steps to the phone and sends a telegram. He refuses mercy.

And they lead the young man out. And he goes up those steps and drops a key to the end of the road. He almost lives, but he dies.

I think of the little girl lost in the storm. This happens often out on your west and out in the far northern central states. A little girl coming home from school.

No storm is evident. No warning. She trudges along in her little snowsuit and her little red boots.

So proudly with her books under her arms. And suddenly that thing they call the northwest, the northwest, sinks down. And immediately, nobody can see anywhere.

Nobody. You couldn't find your way with a compass. And the wind hits out of nowhere and begins to blow that snow.

Cars come to a halt. Cattle turn their backs to the wind. And the little girl loses her direction and begins to wander.

Within three minutes, the little road ahead is all gone. She knew well how to get home to mommy, but it's all white now. And she doesn't know which way to go.

But she keeps up her little brave spirit the best she can. And wanders on, stumbling from the deepening snow till she falls. And after this storm is over, the next day, the church and parties have been out.

They see a little mountain empty from her own door. Almost, she slept under warm blankets that night. Almost wasn't enough, the bridge was too short.

Loving hands and with tearful faces, they gather up their darling little things and carry on. Almost slept in her little warm bed. But instead of that, she slept under the cold blankets of Jesus.

I think of Judas Iscariot. Judas Iscariot many times debated with himself about Jesus. For the real opinion of Judas, that Judas had of Jesus, came out at the end when he cried, I have betrayed a just man.

And he committed suicide out of remorse. Though Judas had loved Jesus, he could help her. But he loved money too.

He was a saint and he kept the bag. And there were natural and simple reasons why he should not be a Christian. There must have been moments when Judas almost turned to Christ.

There were times when as he lay, he heard the quiet soft breathing of those men around him. Under the trees there as Jesus traveled with his little crowd from city to city to other cities also that he might win some. Judas woke and looked up and saw the stars.

And some a little bit of the streak of good that's in every man along with all the evil of them. Very likely awaked and Judas reached down and felt that lump there that was the bag that kept the money that he had stolen. Out of which he had stolen.

And there must have been tender times when Judas said to himself as soon as morning and Judas woke, I'm going to crawl over beside him and whisper in his ear the awful story. I know you'll forgive me and I know you'll give me another start. I've been a dirty sheep.

A dirty sheep. He lay there in the darkness and listened to the breathing sound of the night birds. He almost became Saint Judas that night.

Over there around beside him lay the man who was to be called Saint Andrew. Saint Peter was there and Saint John was there. The saints were all about him there.

They didn't know it but later they became Saint this and Saint that. And he almost became Saint Judas. For as he had gone crawling on his knees across and touched Jesus on the shoulder and Christ had wakened and shook his head and smiled at Judas and Judas had poured into his tender ear the story of betrayal and deception and dishonesty and thievery.

Christ would have said go and sin no more. And Judas would have been on the way to be called Saint Judas. He almost did it.

We can read that out of what he did. But he died with a curse on his head. Almost wasn't enough.

The bridge was too short. And I think of the living dead. Toronto is a beautiful city.

I've always said that. Always thought that before I ever came here. I thought this city was one of the most attractive cities on this continent.

I don't think so. But you know there are many of the living dead around us. They're not all down in Skid Row.

They're not all down in the Victor whatever it is nation. Not all down at Harbor Lightning. No, no.

They're not all down in those houses we don't talk about and mix something. Not all there. No, no.

Out here. Fine big homes. Big cars sitting out in front.

There are men and women. Dead inside. Disillusioned.

Embittered. Defeated. Lost.

They'll go down one at a time like the great trees on the mountains. That have been eaten by termites and killer. Hollow shells.

On the outside they look all right. But inside they're rotten. And when there's nothing left but the thin shell.

Just the wind. Comes and down they go. And dust flies.

As the tree breaks apart and breaks the teeth as I've seen it. Breaks all the teeth because of dry dust inside. There are many of them out here.

Some of them have shells here. Tomorrow morning. They'll get in a. Car as long as.

One of these two. Uniformed man up in front. He'll drive him down to the precinct.

And he'll vote. Or she'll vote. And when people see them sweeping.

They stand respectfully and say. Did you know that so and so voted here today? Yes. But disillusioned.

Embittered. Staying together only because. They don't want the disgrace.

Of having divorce. And going apart. Or they're younger staying together.

Because there are children. And they love the children. And they don't want to leave them.

Keeping up up front. But I say. If needed.

No sane people. Maybe long ago once stood. Near the door of the kingdom.

Maybe back in Alberta. Maybe back in British Columbia. Or out in Nova Scotia.

Or down in one of the states. Those same people. Before the big cars could be afforded.

They had gone to old fashioned meetings. And heard them sing old fashioned songs. And the preacher.

Whose grammar might not have been the best. Who might have been a little bit emotional. But he was preaching the word of God.

And the word nevertheless. Gave the invitation. And the young wife.

Held her feet hard. She wanted to go. And her husband slapped a great hand over hers.

And said now don't be afraid. And she shook herself and got control. And pretty soon the meeting was over.

And they were on their way back home. Nothing was said. They were both embarrassed.

But she'd almost been saved that night. Almost wasn't enough. The bridge was too short.

And all about us kids. Businessmen. Politicians.

Little big men tomorrow night with their ears glued to the radio or the TV. Or down at some political center. Eagerly watching charts and graphs.

And wondering. Don't take this political now. Because I don't know one party from another.

But a lot of those men. Whose pictures appear around here at home. The facts about them.

They died a long time ago. They're still interested in politics. And they're still interested in their country.

And we give them honor for that. But I think most of them are more interested in themselves. But they haven't got a finger.

Not a finger. But an outward shell. There may be some that are otherwise.

I hope they're the ones that are elected into them. But a lot of them. A lot of men.

A lot of men down here at the stock exchange. A lot of men who was selling by real estate. Teachers.

Who have a little commitment. And they smile that waxen smile. They've been smiling for 30 years.

You say now children. Same old thing. Class after class for 30 years.

Long ago they've gone through it. Years ago they stood at a little church. Heard the singing.

Didn't go in. Or they went in. And lastly.

I believe in hell. I don't preach very much about hell. I don't like to preach about hell.

D.L. Moody said no man ought to preach about hell. Except he preaches with tears in his eyes. And I never feel good when a man rises, clenches his fists, grinds his teeth, and screams at his audience that they're going to hell.

I don't like that. It would be to me like going to death row and sitting in prison and screaming at all of those men that they were going to be executed. They are.

But I'd hate to say that to them. So I don't say much about hell. But I believe in hell.

I believe in it as surely as I believe in heaven above or earth beneath. I believe there's a place where God put people that won't go where God is. Those who would not by life go on earth or at the time of death even they would not turn to Christ.

So there are men in hell. A lot of them. And women.

God forgive me but there are women there too. Beautiful young women. Strong young men there were while they lived.

But they're there. That man there he heard a thousand terms. He wasn't raised in the slums.

He was not habituated to saloons and the dens of vice. He was brought up in the better parts. Toronto or Montreal or Toledo or London or Berlin.

He knows the way. He knew the way. And if you could get to him now he could recite it for you.

For I think there are as many people who know the way who know about scripture in hell as there are who know scripture on earth. He knows stories of Bible verses. He learned them when he was a little boy in Sunday school back in Ontario.

He knew them planned and promised. He said to himself after the lights were out and things were quiet many nights he said that tomorrow morning I'm going down and tell mom that I want to be Christian. Tomorrow I'm going down and tell her.

But he didn't. When the light came he wasn't scared anymore. And some boy yelled and he dressed in a hurry and grabbed his breakfast and disappeared.

Then some bad day worse and now he's in hell. He almost became a missionary. He almost became a song director a song leader a pastor.

But he's in hell now. All I'm trying to say to you tonight is it almost isn't enough. The bridge is too short.

It looks all right it'll take you a while but it doesn't reach the other shore. You're going to have to make it all together. He said Paul said I wish that you were not almost but all together.

What about you? Here some of you almost yielded yourself to God and got filled with the Holy Ghost and helped start a revival in Toronto. But your carnal flesh got the better of you. Almost wasn't enough.

It didn't reach the land of brightness and glory. Some of you drifted away from him and backslid him. Your business got in your way.

You used to have family prayer but you haven't had family prayer for years. You haven't got the courage. One day you read a book or you heard a testimony or you heard a sermon and you said to yourself I'm going home and tell my wife tomorrow morning we begin family prayer.

Almost did it. But when you got up the next morning your wife was a little bit grouchy you were hurried breakfast was late you sultanly left the place and there was no family prayer. You just had family prayer but you didn't have it.

You work with somebody and you say I'm going to witness to that person I'm going to tell them that Jesus died for them. You mean well but you didn't do it. You almost did it but you didn't do it.

Almost is a short break isn't it enough. Some of you said now I've had a bad year but I remember Bob Letourneau and many others that I've heard about and I go to the poor I'm going to start this year you almost did it too but you didn't do it. You give and give raggedly and you don't know where you are.

You almost did it but you didn't do it. Almost isn't enough. Somebody says I'm going to start my prayer every day I'm going to pray I'm going to wait on God I'm going to take some time before God no matter what.

You mean well but you didn't do it. Almost but not all together. It's washed in the blood.

You said how many times I'm going to, I'm going to I want to, I intend to but you haven't. The bridge is short almost insufficient. I tell you dear friends tonight here's a great story about a great man and the greater God almighty has put it here for your instruction.

The voice of the Lord Jesus is calling I would that thou shouldst be almost but all together what about it? Are you going to get old and weary and tired and hollow and let life defeat you and beat you down and wear you out almost just and you should be all together one. We're going to sing a song I happen to think it's one of the sweetest songs that we have. It isn't listed among the great songs but it is a sweet song and a good song.

Though your sins be as charlotte they shall be as white as dew and while we're singing it we're going to stand so the McNally will lead us in the first couple of stanzas and I want you to stand and just as soon as we begin to sing I want those of you who are going to say not almost tonight but it's got to help me it'll be all together I want you to come down here to the front and stand a little later we'll go together into the chapel now in that chapel last week we had 32 persons there some of them came to pray but most of them are there for themselves and there were tears and confessions and wonderful blessings from what I can understand it showed up Wednesday night in the friendly and it'll continue to show up God did it last week he can do it this week and I invite you to come first come just come down here quietly and sing and then we're going together into the chapel all right

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