

Series: Building the Bridge

April 15, 2018

## **Title: The Good News**

### **[Slide 1]**

**Text: Acts 2:22-24**

## **Building the Bridge**

### **The Narrows:**

#### **[Slide 2]**

In 1523 an Italian explorer named Giovanni da Verrazzano sailed from France to the New World in search of a new route to China. In so doing, he became the first European to discover the east coast of the North American continent. And while he never did find a passage to the Pacific Ocean, he did stumble upon one of the world's great natural harbors. For several weeks in 1524 he anchored in a place known as "the Narrows."

#### **[Slide 3]**

The Narrows divide what is now New York City's inner and outer harbor. Staten Island lies to the south; Brooklyn to the north. The passage between them is about a mile wide -- wide enough to effectively cut Staten Island off from the rest of New York City, but narrow enough to make engineers and politicians dream of a way to cross it without getting wet! The dream came true on November 21, 1964, 440 years after Verrazzano first anchored in the Narrows. The bridge was named in his honor.

#### **[Slide 4]**

Building the bridge was one of the great engineering feats of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, two 693' towers had to be built: one on each side of the Narrows. Then 142,000 miles of steel cable had to be strung over the two towers and anchored to both shores. Finally, the bridge deck was suspended from the main cables and the bridge was open for business.

### **Peter on Pentecost:**

#### **[Slide 5]**

When he stood in the Temple during the Pentecost festival, Peter had a similar task before him: building a bridge. The bridge he needed to build would span the gap not between two boroughs of a city, but between two radically different understandings of who God was and what God was doing. It would be nothing less than a bridge from the Present Age right into the heart of the Age to Come.

To build this bridge, he needed two towers. One would be close to the familiar shore; the other would stand next to the far shore. Only then could he create a path for his listeners to leave the old behind and cross over to the new thing God was doing.

### **The First Tower:**

The first tower Peter built was based upon the Old Testament *promise* that God would one day come in victory and make the world right. This is what the prophets had written about, including the prophet Joel, who had promised that God would pour out his Spirit on "all flesh" in the "last days." Peter builds this tower by connecting the outpouring of the Spirit upon 120 followers of Jesus with this prophecy.

"A strange and wonderful thing has just happened. You've heard ordinary people praising God in your own mother tongue. You're wondering what it all means. Well, this is what God said He would do. We actually have a grid for what is happening. This is a signal pointing to the arrival of God's Time!"

Like a mighty tower rising just offshore, here is God's Day – the "Last Days" – unfolding right before their eyes.

Now came the task of building the far tower which would at last connect them to the other side.

### **The Second Tower**

#### **A New Moses:**

If you look at the two massive towers that hold up the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, you will note that they are the same. The only difference is that one stands by the Brooklyn shore and the other stands next to Staten Island.

In a way the same was true of the two towers in the bridge that Peter built on Pentecost Sunday. The first tower summed up Israel's story with the

promise that God would make all things right. The second tower was part of the same big story as the first. The difference was that it stood on the far shore. The second tower told the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Peter recounts Jesus' story in three parts, from a foundation sunk deep in their actual experience to its lofty climax on Easter Sunday.

He builds the foundation of the tower with these words:

**[Slide 6]**

*Acts 2:22 NIV*

*"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did through him, as you yourselves know."*

Peter is presenting Jesus as **the New Moses of a New Exodus**. The key clue is in the phrase "miracles, wonders and signs." In the Exodus story God equips Moses to perform wonders:

**[Slide 7]**

*Exodus 4:21 NIV*

*The LORD said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the **wonders** I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go."*

The term "wonder" is essentially a technical term that means much more than "miracle." It refers to God revealing Himself as Creator and Lord in an unexpected way. It is an action of God establishing His authority and rule in the world. The fact that He entrusted to Moses the performing of "wonders" meant that Moses was uniquely accredited by God to act on His behalf.

Now Peter is saying that God has acted definitely through a New Moses to bring His rule – His Kingdom – into the world. And there could also be a little dig at the rulers who, like Pharaoh, hardened their hearts in the face of Jesus' saving activity!

## **A New Passover:**

Of course, a ***New Moses means a New Passover***. Peter continues:

### **[Slide 8]**

*Acts 2:23 NIV*

*"This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."*

On Passover night God had instructed the Israelites to kill a lamb and sprinkle its blood on their doorways as protection against the final plague that God would bring against Egypt – the death of the firstborn.

Now, in this New Passover, it is *God's Firstborn* who is the sacrifice for the people of the entire world. This was no accident. The forces of evil didn't get the upper hand on God or His Son. This had been the plan all along. God took the most evil intentions and turned them into something unimaginably wonderful.

## **A New Exodus:**

***A New Moses and a New Passover meant a New Exodus was underway.*** Just as God rescued His people by making a dry path through the water, now He had made a path through the Valley of the Shadow of Death:

### **[Slide 9]**

*Acts 2:24 NIV*

*"But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."*

Again, a little phrase – "The agony of death" -- holds the key to understanding God's New Exodus from death to life. "The agony of death" means literally "the birth pangs of death." In other words, Death "is regarded as being in labor, and unable to hold back its child, the Messiah." (Bauer, 351)

This is the crowning “wonder.” The Creator God has turned Death inside out. Death becomes pregnant with the very Life of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

## **Good News!**

### **Rooted in history:**

The Verrazano Narrows Bridge may soar 220 feet above the water, but its towers are sitting firmly on solid ground. Before the bridge could go *up*, the builders had to go *down*. The same could be said of the bridge that Peter built on Pentecost. Before he could span the gap between the Present Age and the Age to Come, he had to anchor his bridge on the solid ground of the lived history of God’s people.

The first tower – the tower that promised God would in fact one day come to the rescue – rested on the lived story of Israel, from Abraham to Exodus, from King David to the writings of the prophets like Joel. This history was indisputable. The tower was not an elaborately constructed myth, like the stories of the pagan world. It was a lived history, warts and all. But it was a story in which God revealed Himself as King.

The second tower – the tower that offered proof positive of God’s Kingdom come in the person of Jesus – was likewise anchored in the lived story of Israel. Peter reminds his listeners that God did miracles, wonders and signs among them through Jesus – “as you yourselves know.” That Jesus did in fact perform these wonders is beyond debate. Even His mortal enemies agreed that He performed miracles.

The Bridge of Faith that would span the gap between the Present Age and the Age to Come would be suspended from towers resting on things that happened in space and time.

### **Our towers:**

Each one of us faces the same task that Peter faced on Pentecost. We, too, need to build that Bridge of Faith from our present reality to God’s Kingdom. The Good News is that the two towers for the bridge are already constructed. God acted in human history to rescue His people in the Exodus. He acted in human history to make a covenant with them so that they would

be His people and would bring His rule to reality in the world. He acted in human history once again when He sent Jesus as our New Moses to lead us on a New Exodus into God's Age to Come.

Our faith isn't based merely upon fleeting experiences or fading traditions. It is based on God acting and making Himself known in the here and now. It is certified by God's "wonders."

### **Good News!**

So when it comes time to string the cables over the towers and anchor them to the shore, you can rest assured that the towers won't come crashing down. What God has done cannot be undone. When you step out over the rushing waters to hang your faith bridge from the cables, you can know that God won't let you down. Best of all, as you build the bridge you will discover that the Architect and Chief Engineer is right there beside you, making sure your bridge will take you all the way to the other side.

And that's Good News!