

HUMAN LADDERS

Ezekiel 22:29-30 The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. 30 And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.

I. The sinking of the *Titanic*

A. This is an event that is well known to us today

1. We are familiar with the great tragedy that occurred and the many lives that were lost

a) But what we may not know is the incredible sacrifices that were made as well.

The headline of the Hudson Dispatch read – “Harrowing Tale of the Scenes on *Titanic* by Miss Dowdell.

Elizabeth Dowdell was one of the passengers on board the *Titanic*. She was the governess (or nanny) to Virginia the six-year-old daughter of Mrs. Estelle Emanuel, a famous opera singer of the day. When the ship began to sink, Elizabeth carried Virginia to the last lifeboat to leave the *Titanic* – Lifeboat # 13. But they were lost in a throng of people trying to get aboard the boat. Early on during the sinking of the colossal ship there was a curious apathy about getting on board a lifeboat and many boats were launched only partially full. Now a full-blown panic resulted in a mad dash for what little space remained. The screaming was so loud that a single voice could hardly be heard.

In the article Elizabeth described how the muster deck of the *Titanic* stood at least seventy feet from the level of the sea. When the final lifeboat started to lower, Elizabeth forced her way to the front desperate to get her charge on the last boat.

She knew that once the boat was lowered there was no way that she could bridge the seventy-foot gap to reach the last lifeboat.

One man on board the deck of the *Titanic* saw Elizabeth trying to save little Virginia's life. He took hold of another man's hands and together they formed a human ladder to span the gap to the lifeboat as it hung out away from the ship. The man then told her to hurry across to the lifeboat. Stepping across this human ladder Elizabeth was able to reach the salvation of the last lifeboat with Virginia in her arms.

Elizabeth went on to tell the Hudson Dispatch that this event was not unusual at the sinking of the *Titanic*. She is quoted as saying, "Much should be said for the noble and heroic acts of the men, and should ever remain in the reminiscences of the history of the world. Many a social leader or man of wealth grasped hold of the limbs of a laborer as they sacrificed their lives to form the human ladders where woman and child escaped from perishing."

Then speaking of the particular man who helped her, Elizabeth said, "I will never forget him... for he died nobly." *Hudson Dispatch April 20, 1912*

II. Stand in the Gap

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A. Our text

1. In our text the prophet writes from the standpoint of God.
 - a) *It is God who is speaking directly in this passage of scripture.*
 2. God describes the wickedness of the world
 - a) *They have used oppression*
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- (1) They have brought trouble on people
- (2) Perhaps through violence or threat of violence

b) And exercised robbery

- (1) They have stolen from others
- (2) Whether through greed or another motivation is irrelevant

c) They have vexed (or tormented) the poor and the needy

- (1) They have belittled those that are struggling

d) They have oppressed the stranger wrongfully

- (1) They have been racist and prejudice
 - (a) Does this sound like our day?
 - (b) Does this sound like our society?

B. God was looking

- 1. Not for an army
- 2. Not for a great warrior
- 3. Not for a politician or leader

a) But for a man – to stand in the gap

C. The desire of God

- 1. Is for people who will mend the hedge not tear it down
 - a) I believe that today the gap in the hedge is so large that it will take many people working together to bridge the gap*
 - b) It will take all of us joining hands together to form the ladder that will save the world.*

III. Passions

A. I have been to the circus

1. I have seen the acrobats join hands and create human pyramids

a) They have tumbled and jumped with excitement and enthusiasm

(1) They have passion, they even have the form, but they are not saving anybody.

B. People today get passionate about a lot of things

1. For some it's sports teams

2. For some it's shopping

3. For some it's Music & Entertainment

4. For some it's exercise

a) People get passionate about things that they want to do or be involved in

b) People also get passionate when they recognize an injustice or feel that they have been wronged

C. What is God passionate about?

1. God is passionate about one thing and one thing only – SOULS

a) His desire is that all men would be saved

b) He wants all men to repent

2. And God's way of reaching the world is through His body – the church

a) He has granted to us the ministry of reconciliation

b) We become the human ladders across which people can come to salvation

(1) We are His hands

c) *Paul writing to Timothy told him that before anything else he should pray and intercede for lost souls to come to God*

(1) We are the hedge restorers

(2) We are the gap bridgers

(3) We are this world's human ladder to salvation

D. God wants us to be just as passionate about Souls

1. Just as God seeks people to worship Him, He is also seeking people who will work for Him

a) *Abraham*

(1) When Abraham was told by God that Sodom was going to be destroyed – Abraham took it on himself to stand in the gap for the wicked city

(2) And Abraham was known as the “friend of God”

b) *Moses*

(1) When God told Moses that He was going to destroy Israel because of their unbelief, Moses pled for their souls before God.

2. We understand the fate of those that do not obey this great Gospel

a) *That knowledge alone should be a motivation to us*

3. The passion for souls

a) *It is a John Knox saying “Give me Scotland or I die”*

b) *It's Evan Roberts praying for Wales saying “Bend us, Oh Lord...”*

c) *It's Jim Elliot who was murdered by a band of Indians in South America, that said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” After Jim was murdered his wife returned to South America to preach to*

those same Indians

(1) Human ladders

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

4. John 3:16 is probably the most famous verse in the Bible

a) But it expresses to us the very heartbeat of our God

(1) God so loved the world...

(a) Not the Rocks, Plants, Animals, Oceans, or Mountains

(b) But the souls of humanity

(2) That He gave...

(3) Jesus would not have been crucified 2000 years ago except that He loved us

IV. Passion for the lost

A. The greatest thing that we can do

1. Is not to understand all points of Theology

2. Is not to stir up controversy

3. Is not to make lots of money

a) It's not even to save ourselves

b) It is to save others

B. Radical Islam

1. People today fear radical Islam?

a) It's just another religion

(1) We don't fear Buddhists the same way

- (2) We don't fear Confucians the same way
- (3) We don't fear Atheists the same way
 - (a) It's not the teaching – it's the zeal
 - (b) They will do ANYTHING for their religion

2. Take away the radical side of Islam

- a) *Why is it growing by leaps and bounds?*
- b) *Why is it the fastest growing religion in the world today?*
 - (1) It's not because it's easy
 - (a) It's one of the most restrictive religions around
 - (2) It's because it's people are passionate about it
- c) *If we were to put Modern Christianity up next to Islam*
 - (1) One would seem to be on fire
 - (2) The other would seem very cold

3. Radical Christianity

- a) *To win this world will take a fervent prayer life*
- b) *To win this world will take a zealous witnessing*
- c) *To win this world will take an on fire church*
 - (1) It will take someone that is consumed with winning the lost
 - (2) A soul winner that can never get used to the sound of feet marching to a lost eternity

C. Reaching for Souls

- 1. One of the last things that Jesus did on Calvary was to reach for a lost thief
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a) To forgive those that had crucified Him so that their souls could be saved

2. His prayer was for laborers for the Harvest
3. His last commandment to us was to win the lost

a) Do you hear that same call today?

- (1) A call from within – you want to win a soul
- (2) A call from without – others looking to you
- (3) A call from beneath – those in Hell pleading for you to reach their loved ones
- (4) A call from above – Heaven cheering you on and rejoicing with your successes

b) Do you feel the urgency?

- (1) If they will not seek – then they must be sought
- (2) If they will not come – then they must be brought
- (3) If they will not study – then they must be taught

V. Closing

Samuel and Susanna Wesley had 19 children in their lifetime. 11 of which died in their infancy. Samuel was an Anglican Pastor in the small town of Epworth. One night an angry church member set fire to the parsonage. Fortunately, the Wesley's were awakened by the blaze and were able to rush their children out of the house and to safety.

But once outside they realized that they had somehow miscounted. Young John Wesley, age five, was still in the house standing at an upstairs window. As the fire raged throughout the house the boy looked helplessly down at his panicked parents. It was too far for the boy to jump, but the house was now so engulfed in flames that no one could go in and hope to come out alive again.

One of the Wesley's neighbors awoken by the commotion, saw young John

standing at the window. He immediately rushed over to the house directly beneath the window where the boy stood. He then placed his hands against the smoldering side of the house. Another neighbor saw what he was doing and quickly raced over to him, climbing atop his shoulders and also placing his hands against the house. Another neighbor did the same. This repeated until a human ladder had been formed and the last man – smashed the window to bring young John out of the raging inferno.

When Susanna Wesley held her son she said, “Surely you are a brand plucked from the fire!”

How could those men know that they held in their hands, the father of the Methodist movement? Did they comprehend that from this fiery preacher countless nations would be influenced toward salvation? Could they have understood that from his preaching and teaching another future group would emerge determined to recapture Pentecost?

1. Church we are built on a human ladder
 - a) *Jesus came and passed it to the apostles*
 - b) *The apostles passed it to their followers*
 - c) *Down through the ages, countless men and women have sacrificed and died bridging the gap in a human ladder of salvation*
 - d) *The human ladder has extended through the reformation, the Early Pentecostal movement, the Azusa street revival, and finally to us at C3 today.*
 2. Who can you win to Jesus?
 - a) *Who can you reach?*
 - b) *Who can you teach?*
 - (1) Who will stand in the gap?
 - (2) Who will be part of this “human ladder” today?
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