

# BRIDGING THE G.A.P.S. 6

## “The Biggest Gap”

**G**.enerations **A**.ppreciating **P**.erspectives and **S**.imilarities  
“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” Hebrews 13: 8

*“He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, and you will bring me glory. I replied, ‘but my work all seems so useless! I have spent my strength for nothing and to no purpose at all. Yet I leave it all in the Lord’s hand; I will trust God for my reward.’ And now the Lord speaks – he who formed me in my mother’s womb to be his servant, who commissioned me to bring **his people of Israel** back to him. The lord has honored me, and my God has given me strength. He says, **‘You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.’**” Isaiah 49: 3-6*

**We make two dangerous assumptions in the church:**

1. We assume that every person in the world is a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. We assume that every person whose name is listed on some \_\_\_\_\_ is an authentic Christian.

**“EVERY GENERATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR  
\_\_\_\_\_ THE NEXT GENERATION TO \_\_\_\_\_.”**

In the United States, and in particular, in Churches in the United States: we tend to look at our country from **3 different perspectives:**

**1- AMERICA IS FUNDAMENTALLY \_\_\_\_\_ AND DOING OK.**

the central role of the Christian Church becomes \_\_\_\_\_  
live more spiritual and fulfilling faith lives.

**2- AMERICA IS FUNDAMENTALLY CHRISTIAN BUT HAS BECOME \_\_\_\_\_.**

the central role of the church is to call people \_\_\_\_\_

**3- AMERICA IS FUNDAMENTALLY \_\_\_\_\_.**

the central role of the church is to become a \_\_\_\_\_

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We are going to shift gears a bit this morning. We have been discussing the interesting differences between the age-differentiated generations, and have hopefully found some helpful insights into our own, and the other generations that make up our church. But there is a gap that exists in the church and in our culture, and in our country, even in our world, that exceeds all the others we have been discussing. This gap also has potential impact on the life of the church, and that impact may in fact, exceed the impact of any generational study we might conduct.

The biggest gap is not between generations, the biggest gap is between those people who believe in God and have received Jesus Christ as their savior, and those who have not. I cannot state it any more simply than that.

We make two dangerous assumptions in the church:

1. We assume that every person in the world is a **child of God**. Yes, that may be true in a generic sense, but the Biblical truth is that only those human persons who have placed their complete trust in God’s Son, Jesus Christ, are his children. The

implication for this assumption is extremely dangerous. If all people are already God's children, and going to heaven, (as many even in Methodist circles believe,)

then evangelism is a mute and unnecessary endeavor, and (as is the case in many a church,) becomes nothing more than coffee and Kool-Aid after any event.

2. A second and equally dangerous assumption we often make is assuming that every person whose name is listed on some **church membership role** is thereby an authentic Christian. Being a Christian has little to do with church membership. Granted, real Christians ought to become members of a church, but that membership is often assumed to include safe and free passage to heaven, which it does not! The implications for this assumption render many a church impotent, as the business of the church becomes keeping happy, people who have believed and are living a lie. If we have not accepted Jesus Christ as our personal savior, and we are not living in a daily and vital relationship with Him as our Lord, then we are going to hell, no matter if we are members of this or a hundred other churches!

Before we consider this dangerous gap further let me remind you of our foundational principle:

**“EVERY GENERATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR  
WINNING THE NEXT GENERATION TO CHRIST.”**

Many theorists in Generational Studies use an interesting word to describe the state of affairs in America. They call it a Postmodern World. This means that we have left the blessing of the Enlightenment, the Renaissance, the Modern age of industrial and economic advancement and are currently living in a Post-Modern world. Bill Easum is a church consultant who has coined a different term to describe better the world in which we live, and his word is catching on. He describes our current situation as a “Pre-Christian” world. He believes, and I am in agreement with him, that the culture and

society in which we live today more closely reflects the world into which Jesus was born 2000 years ago, than it reflects any other era since.

The implications for accepting his terminology are immense. Let me try to highlight three implications for us today. I am indebted to an article from Worship Leader Magazine by Samuel Perriccioli for much of this information.

In the United States, and in particular, in Churches in the United States: we tend to look at our country from 3 different perspectives:

**1- AMERICA IS FUNDAMENTALLY CHRISTIAN AND DOING OK.**

Some people, Christian people, assume that America is a fundamentally a Christian nation, and for the most part, it is doing okay. If this assumption is true, and accepted by the Church, then the central role of the Christian Church becomes helping the converted live more spiritual and fulfilling faith lives. In this mode, congregations offer a variety of programming aimed at helping 'the saved' to grow in their knowledge, in their fellowship, and in their personal spiritual lives. Or these churches may be content to rest on their laurels, offering little more than worship and SS, with the occasional special program.

Statistically speaking, and I quote Mr. Perriccioli, "these folks are out to lunch." The reality is most of the old-line, main-line denominations, are one generation away from extinction. To espouse the point of view that everything is 'hunky-dory' in our country and in our church is the ecclesial equivalent of planting one's cranium firmly in the sand. Do you notice in anywhere in our text today that the purpose of the church was ever defined as 'resting on our laurels, or coasting into heaven?' I don't either!

**2- AMERICA IS FUNDAMENTALLY CHRISTIAN, BUT HAS BECOME BACKSLIDDEN.**

Some others assume that America is a fundamentally Christian nation that is temporarily backslidden, and in need of reformation and revival, and the role of the church is to call people **back to the faith**. Congregations accepting this assumption find their purpose, and focus their efforts, on getting the lapsed members back into the pews.

I have heard many evangelism committees decide to focus their energy not on the prospective new members, but on reaching repeatedly to reenlist some disgruntled or wayward former member. I have just as often found that strategy ineffective for church growth, resulting soon in no longer attracting prospective members, and sooner, frustrating for those who attempt it.

Accepting this assumption involves using tactics like revivals, and political lobbying (for school prayer, posting the Ten Commandments in court rooms etc.) and for large community events, like the Walk for Jesus, and protesting Abortion clinics, all of which are good, but do more for making the 'already in the church' feel good about themselves, than really reaching the lost members of our communities. Sometimes these folks are prone to bullying and scare tactics. Look for your hellfire and brimstone from these folks. Again if you look at the numbers, and I quote Mr. Perriccioli; "these individuals are missing the boat."

Census figures tell us there is a growing population of people out there with absolutely no Christian background whatsoever. This is true of the Bismarck census as the New York City Census. You can't scare anyone into heaven, and you certainly aren't going to entice a Gen Xer, or Millennial into Heaven by threatening them with a hell they don't believe in! The third perspective is:

### 3- **AMERICA IS FUNDAMENTALLY GODLESS** .

Finally there is a growing group of people, and churches that see America as a fundamentally pagan nation in need of mission work. By 'pagan' I mean those who worship money, youth, power, comfort, and status.

Inside our safe church walls it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the overwhelming percent of teenagers to people in their thirties, in the U.S. are essentially unchurched.

We often don't want to recognize or admit this, because we feel guilty for failing to fulfill our fundamental responsibility of winning the next generation to Christ.

If this assumption is true then the mission of the church has to shift to accommodate this new development. We must ask ourselves how we can face this new era, and take the Gospel message to the unconverted. The church is no longer the pillar of American culture. Our congregations are now foreign outposts placed in hostile territory. To paraphrase William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas' book Resident Aliens, "we don't belong to this world, we are merely outsiders living in an occupied territory."

If this assumption is true then the central role of the church is becoming a **soul saving station**, where authentic Christians are fully engaged in becoming and making mature disciples of all people who are lost, those outside the walls of the church and those inside the church. Isaiah the prophet in our text this morning is lamenting his failed efforts to restore His own nation, when God reminds him that his purpose is not just to restore Israel, but to redeem the entire world.

Many in our church (and I include myself in this group) might feel guilty or be lamenting our own lapses, but God stands ready to remind us today that we are not just called to restore the backslidden, but we are called to redeem the world! We are not called just to make a difference in the world; we are called to make the world different!

We are living in a Pre-Christian world that needs nothing more than it needs Jesus. Not some Jesus dead on a cross, or stuck in the 50's, 70's or 90's, but a Jesus that is alive, relevant, and as inviting for an 80 year old who doesn't know Jesus, as an 8 year old!

I read a story many years ago about a small coastal community on the Eastern Seaboard of the US. This little village was located on a precarious point of land that jutted out into the Atlantic, and often produced wintertime sea going shipwrecks.

After rescuing and reviving and unfortunately burying many victims, the folks in the village got together and decided to build a rescue station next to the shoreline, so help could be more immediate. They volunteered to construct the building and staff the station, and spent many hours giving of themselves, literally saving lives.

As the workload increased, and the ships kept coming, the people grew tired and so decided to hire a director to oversee the station and its important rescuing mission. Soon the people organized themselves into various committees and groups to make sure all the work was being accomplished. Their station needed expansion and updating, so memberships were sold to offset the expenses. The membership increased as the new facilities included a lounge and restaurant atop the rescue mission. It wasn't long until the members were spending more time in their lounge and less time in the mission below.

The setting was beautiful for their club, and at one evening meeting of one of the committees, someone made a motion to discontinue the mission work in the lower level, so it could be converted to a new clubhouse for the golf course being constructed next to their prime property. When someone asked about the shipwrecked sea goers, there was a momentary silence until someone else suggested they offer to buy the city a new ambulance, and have them shipped to the new local hospital. The majority ruled, and the ambulance was purchased.

Not every illustration fits perfectly, but this story, a parable if you will, fits many a church. Many churches have lost sight of their mission, and become a country club for their members. Again let me quote Mr. Perriccioli, "The number one thing that can really send a congregation into spiritual decline is losing sight of its mission.

The church is not a business, a corporation or even a club. Those institutions can happily function without a purpose beyond simply existing, but the church is, at heart a movement; and movements need missions. A congregation following God's mission cannot fail, though it may have to re-imagine what success looks like."

We have considered 3 assumptions, each with its corresponding roles for the church. How will we decide which assumption is true? By looking to God's Word, and following our God inspired mission, and we may have to re-imagine what success looks like.

Let us pray.

God, we honestly admit we easily make assumptions, and those assumptions govern what we believe, how we act, and the way we live. Please inspire our assumptions today with the truth from your word that this church, and every church has a purpose, and that purpose is to win the world for Jesus. Destroy the idols we have made of all our false assumptions, and create obedient followers within your church. In Jesus name, for the sake of the world, AMEN

