

BRIDGING THE G.A.P.S. 8

“WHO WILL STAND IN THE G.A.P?”

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

“I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn’t have to destroy the land, but I found no one!” Ezekiel 22: 30

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

1. THE _____ (*“I looked for...I searched for...”*)

You didn’t choose me, I chose you.” And again: *“this is real love, it is not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.”*

2. THE _____ (*“for someone, someone among them...”*)

3. THE _____ (*“to stand in the gap...to rebuild the wall...”*)

4. THE _____ (*“so I wouldn’t have to destroy the land...”*)

“The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent.” 3:10

5. THE _____ (*“but I found no one.”*)

“Once again a message came to me from the Lord; ‘Son of man, give your people this message; When I bring an army against a country, the people of that land choose a watchman. When the watchman sees the enemy coming, he blows the alarm to warn the people. Then if those who hear the alarm refuse to take action-well, it is their own fault if they die. They heard the warning but would not listen, so the responsibility is theirs. If they had listened to the warning, they could have saved their lives. But if the watchman sees the enemy coming and doesn’t sound the alarm to warn the people, he is responsible for their deaths. They will die in their sins, but I will hold the watchman accountable. Now, son of man, I am making you a watchman for the people of Israel.” 33: 1-7

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“I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn’t have to destroy the land, but I found no one!”
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This is one of the most haunting passages of scripture in the Bible. Walls, or as they are sometimes mentioned, hedges; in ancient biblical times were used to protect homes and cities from the elements, enemies and intruders. But walls/hedges also have a spiritual significance in the Bible. They serve as a metaphor of salvation. In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet is lamenting the broken down condition of Israel’s people, and pleads for one, anyone who might stand in the breach between a holy God, and a sinful rebellious people.

We have been discussing all summer the gaps between the generations and for the last 2 weeks the gap between those who know God and those who don’t. I wonder if Ezekiel might be asking the same question today? “Who (among us) will stand in the GAP?” Who will champion the cause of Christ to reach succeeding and preceding generations for Jesus? Who will bridge the gap? Who will stand for right and truth? The haunting part in Ezekiel is that none could be found. Would any be found today?

I remind you for the last time of the principle that has guided our thoughts for this entire summer series:

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

This morning I want to analyze this verse so we can answer the question: “YES, LORD, HERE AM I, I WILL STAND IN THE GAP.” The verse from Ezekiel is easily broken in 5 sections:

1. THE **PURSUIT** (*"I looked for...I searched for..."*)

It would serve us well as we consider this passage not to overlook the consistent nature of Almighty God. God is always the one taking the initiative to seek us, to save us, to forgive us, to redeem us. We often place so much emphasis on our personal decision to accept Jesus, or our individual faith, that we overlook or ignore the fact that long before we respond to God, He has been looking, searching for us. John the Apostle says it this way: *"You didn't choose me, I chose you."* And again: *"this is real love, it is not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."*

In this great verse we see God, the consistently seeking God, again looking across the horizon for someone who would stand in the GAP. The wall of Jerusalem was broken down physically by the repeated assaults from foreign and evil armies. But the wall around Jerusalem was also broken down spiritually. The people of Israel had intermingled and intermarried with these foreigners. The people of Israel had mixed their religion with that of the surrounding pagan nations. The people of Israel had traded their unique relationship with God for the immediate gratification of foreign deities, pseudo-gods and idols of many colors. The righteousness that fostered God's favor had been broken down, and the nation was about to experience God's wrath.

Need we look any further than our own country as we consider this passage? We have abandoned God, we have intermingled with other pagan religions, and we are worshipping our own idols of money, power, success, fame, and leisure. We have positioned ourselves precariously close to the precipice of God's judgment, and today God is scanning the horizon for someone who will stand in the gap for our country, our society, our grandparents, our children. God is still and always in the seeking business, looking for even one who will stand up for God, and stand up against evil. Will he find anyone? Will you stand in the Gap?

2. THE **PERSON** (*“for someone, someone among them...”*)

God is looking for a person to stand in the Gap. It has always been that way with God. From the beginning of time whenever there was a problem, God sought for a man or a woman to breach the gap, to remedy the situation. Moses stood in the gap before a Holy but angry God who sought to destroy the golden calf creating, manna complaining, wandering in the wilderness Jews. Abraham stood in the gap for humankind as God and he cut a covenant assuring our salvation. Joshua stood in the gap between God and a frightened human race as they entered the giant infested Promised Land. David stood in the gap, even after his sin with Bathsheba, to bridge the gap between God who wanted a personal relationship with His people, who instead insisted on a king. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah stood in the gap between a frustrated God and His continuously rebellious people. Finally, Jesus came to once and for all bridge the gap between us and a God who loves us, but can't stand our sin. You see God has always sought for a person, an individual, not always, not even very often, the high and mighty, just ordinary people willing to be obedient.

Jeremiah Calvin Lamphier was one such man. He decided on his own to start a prayer meeting in New York City for businessmen. On September 23, 1857, during the noon hour he began. For the first half hour he prayed alone. In the next half hour another five people joined him. The next week there were 20 and the following week 40. Then they decided to have a daily prayer meeting, that soon numbered a hundred. 3 months later there were a thousand gathered for daily prayer. This humble man stood in the gap, and during the next decade a great revival swept America in which 2 million people were saved. The tides of history have been turned by men and women who were prepared to build the wall and stand in the gap and pray. Will you stand in the gap today? All of us can pray, the question is, will we?

3. THE **PLAN** (*“to stand in the gap...to rebuild the wall...”*)

There are two parts to this plan, and you have to read it carefully to not miss it. God is seeking for 2 separate things. First he says, “I am looking for someone to rebuild the walls, and Second, he says I am looking for someone to stand in the Gap.” It’s almost like: “We all know the wall needs to be rebuilt, and that rebuilding process will take some time, energy and resources, but our need is more immediate. I need someone NOW to stand NOW, in the hole in the wall!” That is exactly true of our condition today.

We need much rebuilding in our country, in our community, in our church and even in our lives. We have many remodeling projects pending that will require much effort, energy, and time, but right now we are facing an immediate crisis and someone must stand up to breach the gap.

We need someone who will work through adoption and legal avenues to rescue the unborn children in our nation. We need someone who will bring some common sense to our school boards and county and city commissions, and state and federal governments. We need someone who will stand up and say gambling is wrong, abusing children is wrong, abusing alcohol is wrong, wasting money is wrong, wasting time is wrong, wasting God’s gifts is wrong.

When sin creates a hole in the wall two things happen, the good things run out, and the evil things run in. We have both conditions to contend with. Husbands and wives, will you stand in the gap for your marriage, against all the detractors and defectors living around you, will you stand? Children and young people will you stand up for the Lord at school? Will you show that being faithful to God is more important than being popular? Will you stand in the gap at your work? Will you be honest, and will integrity mark your work, even when no one is watching? Yes, we need to rebuild some walls, but right now we need men and women, boys and girls, who will stand in the Gap, NOW!!!

4. THE **PURPOSE** (“so I wouldn’t have to destroy the land...”)

God has a purpose in every situation, this is no different. He is looking for someone to intercede, and intervene on behalf of the people of Israel who are about to experience God’s wrath. Much like the situation in Sodom and Gomorrah, God is ready and waiting to exercise the judgment they deserve. Abraham comes to God and asks him to reconsider, testing God to see if he would still destroy the city if 50 faithful people could there be found. Then 45, then 40, then 30, then 20 then finally 10. And God relents, yes; if there are even 10 faithful people there I will not destroy the city.

My friends, if we in America don’t repent soon, if we in America don’t get on our knees soon, God will owe Sodom and Gomorrah an apology!

God’s judgment causes some people to fidget and squirm, they don’t like the God of Judgment, preferring to focus on the God of Love. But what is love if you don’t have the other? God’s judgment is God’s ultimate and last-ditch effort to save his wayward creation. I wonder if God ever has second thoughts about giving us free will? I wonder if God wonders sometimes, why he made us? Do You?

Before we leave this point lets make something perfectly clear. God’s intended purpose was what, NOT to have to destroy the people. It is not God’s intention to destroy us. God’s judgment is nothing more than the consequence of our rebellion. God’s intention is clearly seen in this passage from 2 Peter:

“The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent.” 3:10

God’s purpose in Israel and in America, even here in Bismarck, is that all men, all women, all young people, all boys and girls will be saved. Someone stood in the gap on a hill called Golgotha 2000 years to make salvation possible. It will take someone willing to stand in the gap today, to make sure that salvation wasn’t for nothing.

5. THE **PROBLEM** (“*but I found no one.*”)

Is there anything more frightening than being stranded all alone? Is there anything more disappointing than standing all alone? Is there anything more discouraging than feeling like you are fighting a battle all alone? I don't think so. 11 years ago I was visiting the country of Pakistan. My first day there my host dropped me off in downtown Karachi, a city of 12 million people, in the center of the city market, and told me he'd meet me in 4 hours. I can vividly remember how alone I felt in the middle of these thousands of people.

This must be how Ezekiel felt. The rest of the story comes 11 chapters later.

“Once again a message came to me from the Lord; ‘Son of man, give your people this message; When I bring an army against a country, the people of that land choose a watchman. When the watchman sees the enemy coming, he blows the alarm to warn the people. Then if those who hear the alarm refuse to take action-well, it is their own fault if they die. They heard the warning but would not listen, so the responsibility is theirs. If they had listened to the warning, they could have saved their lives. But if the watchman sees the enemy coming and doesn't sound the alarm to warn the people, he is responsible for their deaths. They will die in their sins, but I will hold the watchman accountable. Now, son of man, I am making you a watchman for the people of Israel.’”
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Ezekiel is mixing metaphors from standing in the Gap, to standing as a Watchman, but the message is very consistent. God found only one faithful, and his name was Ezekiel. That one man spared his nation from God's wrath, preserving the unbroken lineage from Adam to Jesus, and keeping our salvation intact.

I have no presumption that any of you, or even myself, will ever be called upon to be the only ‘gap standers’ for America, but I am equally filled with certainty that God is calling everyone of us to Stand in the Gap for our families, for our church, for our schools, for our community, for our state and for our nation! We are the watchmen and women, will you Stand in the Gap? I don't want God to find here, what he found when He came to Ezekiel and Israel. I pledge to stand. Let us pray!