

We all know the story of how the rich man served only himself and ignored the crying need of someone else, Lazarus, at his very door¹. These two both died and the story continues from their respective places of repose. The rich man is in torment. Seeing Lazarus in the arms of Abraham, the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to comfort him with a bit of water. But there was a critical problem, as Abraham said²,

'... between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

Such a chasm is a great wonder! How was it put into place? Perhaps the rich man created his own personal chasm because of the distance that he kept between himself and God³? Was it because of his own selfish attitude, and his complete ignorance of the will of God? Was it an absolute, or was its existence due to the current situation and relationship between the rich man and God? The rich man did not want to be with God; he just wanted to avoid the pain for himself, and then for his brothers.

What if instead he had asked to be with God; to be forgiven, to admit his guilt (like the thief on the cross)? Was there a “chasm” between Christ and the thief? If so, then it was definitely not “uncrossable”, as Jesus reached across without difficulty. But the thief’s attitude was one of humility and admission of his guilt – especially compared to his perceived innocence of Christ. The other thief was ignored; his only interaction with Christ was condemnation as though he was on the same level as Christ. He seems to have had an uncrossable chasm as well. I have to wonder at what point or under what conditions is the chasm unpassable?

Christ, as a priest, was by definition a bridge-builder⁴. He lived in a time that many of those designated priests for His people were making a mockery of what was in truth His job! He had nothing good to say about them⁵, though he sent people that He had healed for ritual cleansing. He is actually our great high priest⁶, which suggests to me that He can bridge any gap that He wants to⁷. I believe that He is looking for our response to His love and grace. We still must be saved through the blood of Christ⁸ if we ultimately bow before Him⁹.

1. Luke 16:19ff
2. Luke 16:26
3. thanks to Linda Elrod for this thought
4. “pontifex”, the Latin word used to describe a priest means bridge-builder; www.britannica.com
5. consider His account of the priest’s actions in the story of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25ff
6. Hebrews 4:14
7. We are never able to bridge the infinite distance between the infinite and the finite from the side of the finite. Dynamics of Faith (Perennial Classics); Tillich, Paul; p.122
8. Ephesians 2:13
9. Philippians 2:5-11; “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth”

Notes:

Hsl: Through the distance that he put between himself and God
SSM3?

The critical “impasse”:

Hsl: proverb about digging a pit and falling in it
Uncrossable: might this be limited to the current situation (or terms) or attitude?
no mention of the other thief and the chasm he had

Nothing good about the existing earthly priesthood (story of the Good Samaritan; also spoke of how He would be treated by them as they condemned Him) – but He became the ultimate high priest (see Hebrews); they were making a mockery of what was in truth his job
He did send some people that he had healed to them for the ritual cleansing

Listeners who asked questions in response to Jesus story
What would His response have been?

Could it close the gap or create a bridge [priest] across it?

Someone asks this question of Christ – He just smiles; perhaps then discusses the new kingdom or priesthood
What does Christ say about the priesthood?

Consider the apparent continual torment in Hades; consider also that this is with Abraham as the “monitor”, and thus does not represent the New Kingdom; is there a later chance to kneel?
Phil 2:5-11; “every knee shall bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”