

The Parable of the Belligerent Bridge Builders

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"I just don't get it! Why don't they use the bridge?" the baffled and offended bridge builder asks himself out loud. "I mean, after all those months of hard work, the couple of millions of dollars we spent . they still refuse. I don't get it!"

"Hey moron" he yells out with anger, "why don't ya use the bridge we built ya? Why don't you and your freaky friends use it? Its for you to use too, ya know."

Exasperated, he pauses, sighs heavily, then draws in another breath to finish his tirade and release his pent up anger. "How could we make it any clearer to you idiots? Don'tcha know how stupid you look wading through the river and putting up planks to cross over? For God's sake, use the stinking bridge. That's why we built it. What's wrong with you?"

"Ya wanna know why we don't use your bridge?" the 'moron' replies. "Ya really want to know?"

A pause born of surprise is lengthened by a time of decision. The bridge builder had not expected an answer. As angry as he was, he was not sure he wanted one. Besides, he fumed, what possible sensible reasons could they offer? Smugly confident in his safe position, he sarcastically replied, "Go for it."

"I'll tell ya why we don't use your bridge" the hurt-filled voice answered. "It's not because it's not a fine enough bridge for us. No, it's a great looking bridge and I am sure it will serve certain people very well. To tell ya the truth, am happy for them. But we don't use your bridge because we know we are not welcome on it!"

"What?" cried the incredulous builder. "Not welcome? What part of 'open to everyone' do you not understand?"

"Saying it's built for us is one thing. Treating us like ya really want us to use it is another. We heard you while you were building it. We heard how you talked about us, about how you seemed even resentful in having to build it. Being disdained hardly makes a soul feel welcomed. Where I'm from, hatred never puts out the welcome mat very convincingly."

"You built a right fine bridge alright and it cost you aplenty. No disputing that. But it seems it was paved with ill will - raw begrudging duty."

"What are you talking about?" plied the stunned contractor, a little less bold and with a hint of red flushed out on his cheeks.

"Its real simple. You spit in the soup and then blamed the hungry for not eating it. You cook up a feast - begrudgingly - invite us over but leave out the attack dogs. You say they are on chains and won't hurt us, but we've been bit too many times already. It's hard to feel welcomed when your host seems ready to hit you."

Those pictures hit the contractor hard. Speechless, he listened on as the "moron" offered more wisdom.

"I would rather wade through the slough than use your bridge. You only built it because you had to not because you give a 'spit in the wind' for us. If you do care for us, you have a very funny way of showing it. Crossing your bridge would mean ignoring how you bridge-builders treated us people who need your bridge. I'd rather wade."

Before he knew what he was doing, the bridge-builder found himself waste-deep in the water. He had an apology to make. If it were not accepted, he would understand. Yet, he needed to cross over to this unlikely teacher and offer both thanks for his candor as well as regrets over his behavior and attitude.

Even as water soaked his shirt, he realized that he needed to build another bridge - possibly several more. This one needed to be built differently. The plans for this span-closer called for grace, compassion, mercy, humility, sincerity, and tenderness.

Though tempted to tear down the old bridge, it was decided to leave it as a reminder, a sad memorial to sacrifice wasted.

Colossians 4:5-6 "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

1 Peter 3:15 "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason

for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

(All verses are from the New International Version - NIV. Used with permission.)