

## i<sup>2</sup> (irresistible influence)

**Intro:** Over the next 6 weeks our Xgroup studies will be based on our new and current sermon series i<sup>2</sup> (**irresistible influence**). This sermon series is based in large part on the book by the same name. "The message of the book is simple: the church must rediscover its role and craft as bridge builders"[1]. God is the ultimate bridge builder in that he spanned the great divide between Him and mankind through His Son, Jesus Christ, with His redeeming work on the cross. This work of bridge building was Christ vision for the church as well. The NT church understood that and therefore became an irresistible influence on its culture around it. This was not just Christ vision for the church then, but so to now. Therefore, this series is designed to inform and encourage the church to be what Christ intended it to be, an **irresistible influence**. When the church becomes this it not only influences the culture it lives in it also changes and strengthens the people within. Why, because you become what God intended to become--"*for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*" (Ephs. 2:9).

**Can u imagine** (sermon based study from 9.13.09)

### A Bridge Story.A Dangerous Dream

As James Roebling peered across the Niagara river Gorge, he believe the chasm could be bridged. Even with an abundance of naysayers, some of his confidence rested in the fact it had already been done. Within a short distance of his proposed railroad bridge, a suspension bridge already hung, although a bit shaky. The work of Charles Ellet, American engineer and showman, the bridge had opened three years before Roebling strung his first cable. Ellet had proved, at the very least that the Great Niagra Gorge was vulnerable.

A master of ingenuity and flamboyance, ellet solved his first problem--how to get the the initial wire across the gorge with characteristic pomp and style. He offered the first American boy to fly a kite across the chasm a five-dollar reward. The competition was intense as skies over thundering waters were filled with frail colors, but on the first day, no one was successful. On the second day, young Homer Walsh won the prize. The string of his kite was fastened to a tree on the far side of the river, a light cord attached to it, and pulled slowly back over the gorge. Next came the heavier cord, then a rope, and finally a cable composed of number 10--strand wire. It was the beginning of Ellet's bridge, the accomplishment of a soaring dream.

As Roebling pondered his much larger bidge, Ellet's efforts must have generated some confidence. Yet it was short-lived reassurance. In May 1854--just one year before the completion of Roebling's bidge over the Ohio River, also built by Ellet, had collapsed. It survived just five years.

Most people were now convinced that James Roebling was a dangerous dreamer. Could it be doubted that the Great Chasm would win in the end?

Jesus Christ was a dangerous bridge builder of another kind. Against his own overwhelming odds, he imagined a bridge of unprecedented spiritual influence--one the could span a chasm roaring with skepticism, indifference, hostility, even persecution. He imagined a bridge able to connect his people--"my church," he called them--to a disbelieving, disinterested world.

That's why Jesus loved to talk about the church, especially the power it could unleash and exercise in the world.

*Follow me*, he would say, and *I will make you fishers of men*.

*You are the light of the world*, he would teach, *shine in the darkness*.

*You are the salt of the earth*, he declared, *make a tasteful difference*.

Nothing, he believed, would prevail against the power of the church:

*I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it*, He said.

By exhibiting, through everyday humanity, his life and love to the world, Jesus expected the church to supernaturally attract men to God: *If I am lifted up*, he said just before his death, *I will draw all men to myself*.

This is the bridge Jesus imagined: a connecting church--a bridge of influence.[2]

## Bridge Builder Questions:

- What kind of impact do you believe today's church is having on our culture?
- What kind of impact is your church having on its community?
- What kind of influence can your Xgroup have on your community?
- What can you do to personally?

## Conclusion: *Keeping Faith*

James Roebling, in a sense, was a man of faith. He believed in the fixed laws of the universe. If great chasms refused to be bridged, it was the fault of the engineers, not the structures. Despite accumulating evidence to the contrary, Roebling insisted, "There are no safer bridges than those built on the suspension principle, if built understandingly, and none more dangerous if constructed with an imperfect knowledge of the principles of their equilibrium."

Roebling's bridge was completed in March 1855. It was profound both in its simplicity and economy: "four plain towers sixty feet high, four cables ten inches in diameter, their suspenders and stays, and a straightforward timber truss joining the two levels to one span. The bottom level was for carriage and pedestrian traffic, the top reserve red for the Great Western Canada Railroad

On Friday, March 16, the first train crossed over. Put together especially for this purpose, it was far heavier than most trains--the engine weighed twenty-eight tons, and it pushed twenty double-loaded cars.

Roebling harbored a quiet but deep satisfaction. He reveled in the opening of such great commerce, but even better, the separation that had long existed between two countries had been spanned. He was pleased with the harmony, economy, grace, and soundness of its structure. But most of all, he revisited its elemental purpose. "No one is afraid to cross."

The impossible became possible. A keeper of his faith, Roebling was now believed. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the father" (John 14:12).

As we turn to face the Great Chasm, can we believe him?[\[3\]](#)

## Bible Application Questions:

Read John 14:1-14

- ◆ Jesus is the only bridge to life, this is a hard truth for some to accept today. They say it is narrow-minded thinking, but once Roebling's bridge was complete nobody argued that it was the only way to get a railroad across the Niagara gorge. Once they saw and heard the evidence for themselves they believed. Philip's skepticism was extinguished by the evidence Christ gave him.
- What evidence are we to offer others to trust in and cross the bridge of Christ?
- What are the greater things that those who put their faith in Christ can do?

Can you imagine God using you in that way?

[\[1\]](#) i2, Lewis & Wilkins, p.28

[\[2\]](#) i<sup>2</sup>, Lewis & Wilkins, p.26-28

[\[3\]](#) i2, Lewis & Wilkins, p.31-32