

Demise of Galloping Gertie



The Olympic Peninsula is situated at the northwest corner of the continental USA. In the late 1930s it was decided that, in order to open up this area of spectacular natural beauty for tourism and economic development, a great suspension bridge would be built over Puget Sound. The site chosen was the only location narrow enough for a bridge to span the Puget Sound, a vast inland sea formed by glaciers long ago. Since the city of Tacoma was the population center nearest to the site, the bridge was appropriately named the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

At the time it was built it was the third longest suspension bridge in the world, just short of the Golden Gate Bridge. The bridge with its high towers that reached skyward and long arching cables were designed with special regard for beauty and sleekness.

Although it was impressive sight, the bridge seemed to have problems from the beginning. While it was being built, workers noticed an unsteadiness about it. However, concerns were allayed because the engineers in charge assured everyone that the bridge was strong enough according to their computations.

Soon after the bridge was opened to traffic, drivers noticed a lot of unnerving movement while crossing over it. Somebody in jest called the bridge Galloping Gertie. This person likened driving over the bridge to the up and down motion experienced while riding a horse very fast. The nickname Galloping Gertie stuck.

Even though travelers complained about Galloping Gertie, authorities still insisted it was safe because it was designed according to proven scientific formulas. According to these formulas the bridge was more than capable of handling the everyday stress of traffic.

The bridge designers got the shock of their lives when, four months after the completion of the bridge, a windstorm howled through the area. The sustained winds of over forty miles an hour acted on the bridge in ways the engineers never anticipated. The bridge, which

always seemed a little unsteady, all of a sudden began pitching and rolling violently from side to side. Apparently the wind passing over the bridge's road surface was creating lift in the same manner as air currents passing over the wing of an airplane.

A driver caught on the bridge when this rolling began became fearful for his life. He stopped his car and opened the door to get out. The bridge tilted so violently beneath him as he stepped out that his face slammed into the pavement. In desperation to escape with his life, he left his dog in the car. Unable to stand on the crazily moving bridge he crawled hundreds yards on his hands and knees to safety. He was no sooner off the rolling part of the bridge when, turning around, he saw his car tumble off the bridge and fall the long distance into the churning waves below. Seconds later he watched aghast as the long mid-section of the bridge broke apart. He had gotten off just in time. The great modern bridge so carefully designed, plunged through the air crashing into the depths of Puget Sound. Fortunately no one was seriously injured when the Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapsed.

Why did Galloping Gertie breakup? It broke up because the effects of the wind were not clearly understood by the engineers. Their formulas were correct as far as they went but they did not take into account the effect of strong side winds.

The demise of Galloping Gertie teaches everyone a lesson. People have always had many different ideas on what will get them into heaven. There seems to be a whole array of formulas on how to bridge the gap between themselves and God.

One such popular formula is hoping that ones good works will outweigh the bad things they have done in life. Another idea is that if one doesnt commit any really bad sins, they will be fine in the end. Some say all will be eventually saved. While others say there are many different ways to God and each one of them is equally valid. A good many think that they can bridge the gap by ceremonies, or perhaps reciting a creed. Maybe you have considered some of these formulas. Maybe you even hold to one of these views. But the problem with all of them is that they dont fully take into account the effects of sin.

We are all going to have to give an account to a God who is absolutely holy. In his holiness he infinitely loves all that is good and just, while he abhors all that is evil with all his being. As the designers of Galloping Gertie didnt understand the effects of wind on their beautiful bridge, so many people today dont understand the effect sin on their lives. The Bible states in the most solemn way, The soul that sinneth it shall die. And in another place, The wages of sin is death. Sin and death are inseparably linked together. Have you sinned? Then death is the wages you will collect. The verses about death just quoted refer not only to physical death but also to spiritual death which occurs when a soul is banished out of Gods presence forever. In that awful place called hell, the spiritually dead will exist forever.

Maybe they never thought about it on earth, but God was always near to them. As their Creator, He provided them with every necessity of life; He gave them many good thing; He preserved them through countless troubles; He brought them every true joy and happiness they experienced. The Bible says, He openeth his hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.

He ordered their lives with sorrows and blessings alike so that they might turn to him in repentance and faith but they never did so. In hell they will never again receive good from Gods hand, never again a blessing, never again a joy. Never again will God take a thought for their happiness. Shut out from Gods presence they will be said to exist but not to live.

To live, a person must have the possibility of joy, they must have some meaning and purpose.

In hell they will have none of these things, therefore they cannot live in the true sense of the word. Rather spiritual death will be their portion and forever and ever.

The Lord Jesus spoke more about hell than any other person in the Bible. He said it was a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, a place where the fire is never quenched and the worms do not die, a place of torment and endless thirst. It is the kind of place that should be avoided at all cost. The horribleness of it should fill us with unrest until we finally get right with God.

Outside a saving faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, every attempt to bridge the gap between sinful man and a holy God will fail. When Jesus Christ came into the world and went to the cross, it wasnt man trying to bridge the gap between himself and God. No, it was God undertaking to make a way for sinful man to come to him and find forgiveness and fullness of life and joy. The difference is immense. Mans efforts will never succeed, while Gods way of salvation is open to all, and will never fail. Mans efforts never fully take into account the effects of sin, but in Gods way of salvation, sins are fully dealt with in the death of Christ. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

There is salvation in Jesus Christ for every one of us if we are only willing to believe. What must I do to be saved? asked one who was in distress over his sins. Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved, came back the peace giving reply.

Oh, be honest with yourself and confess that you are a sinner and unable to save yourself, and turn to the One who is mighty to save. Through him alone can a sinner find forgiveness and cleansing. Only through him can we cross over safely from the shores of this life to the shores of heaven.

No other bridge exists that wont come crashing down. Men may have many ideas for bridges that will carry them to safety at death, but they are all bound to crumble and collapse under the weight of their sin. Salvation is through faith in Christ alone. By grace are ye saved, through faith and that not of yourselves: but it is the gift of God? Believe on him and receive that gift of salvation today.

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