

The King and the Chasm

Once upon a time in a land far away lived a king, the ruler of a vast kingdom. One day, an unusually clear day, the king was looking out across his domain from the top of the castle tower. His eyes were attracted to a distant mountain range he had never seen before. It was so distant, it was barely perceptible and could easily have been mistaken for clouds low on the horizon. The king called for his looking glass to make sure. "Yes, I'm sure these are mountains," was his response. "Why aren't they on our maps? Form a scouting party immediately. I want to go myself to explore this new area."

And so the party set out. They traveled for days through hills, forests, and wilderness until they reached a river. Suspecting the river had its source in the mountains, they continued upstream following the river. After many more days, they reached the base of the mountains, very, very high mountains with tops that seemed to reach the heavens and perpetually covered with snow.

At the base of the mountains, however, they found a small village consisting of huts made of intertwined sticks caulked with mud and roofs of straw thatch. Even though the villagers lived a very simple and primitive life, there was something about them that attracted the king's interest. They were warm and friendly people. But even though backward in their ways from centuries of isolation, the king saw that they had the intelligence and creativity to become much more than they were.

The king was so attracted to them that he decided to stay for awhile and do what he could to teach and help these people to bring the knowledge to them that the rest of his kingdom had available and to enjoy the practical benefits of this knowledge in their lives. First, they needed to learn to read and write. Their clothes were made of skin and although they had sheep, did not know how to spin and weave. So he taught them to shear the sheep and make cloth and to dye it colors. The people had a crude type of earthenware so he taught them how to purify the clay and make the kilns hotter so the pots could be thinner yet stronger. They had no metals, yet the mountains around them were filled with valuable ores. He taught them to mine, smelt, and create items of beauty and usefulness. Their farming consisted of digging in the earth with sticks. He taught them to make plows and hitch them to the horses they used for riding to turn the soil. He showed them how to make log houses and fireplaces of stones to keep them warm.

The people loved the king and begged him to stay, but he said rather sadly, "No, I must go back to my castle now. But I love all of you and this land with so much potential. Someday I will return and build my castle here and establish my court in your village. Remember all I have taught you. There is much more I could show you and when I return, I will bring my advisers and experts to teach you. Farewell my people."

And so the king left expecting to soon return. But before he could finish making ready for his return visit, a terrible thing happened. There was a great earthquake, so great that even the castle of the king was shaken. The king wondered where the earthquake originated and so sent out scouts to find out if any damage had been done in his kingdom.

After many days, the scouts returned. "Sire," they responded, "we have found the origin of the great earthquake but you will not be happy about it. We traveled west to the village of the people that you love. But we could not get there. A great and deep chasm has opened up running from the mountains down one side of the village and angling off to intersect with the great river which now empties into the chasm in a waterfall and has itself now become impassable, being filled with rapids, rocks, and boulders. Your people, sire, are completely cut off from us and there is no way to reach them."

The king's countenance fell as he heard the news and he immediately withdrew to the tower. There he looked out as far as he could see towards the west. His heart was there with those people by the distant mountains. But he could not reach them.

For the sake of his kingdom, he buried the sadness, grief, and great longing inside himself and continued to rule his kingdom well. He told his son about these people and the longing to be with them stirred in his heart also.

"Couldn't we make contact with them somehow?" the young prince asked.

"Well, perhaps we could try tying messages to arrows and shooting them across," the king replied thoughtfully. And so this was done.

Eventually, the king died and his son became king and passed on to his son the story of a very special people. And so the love for these people was passed from father to son, from father to son, from father to son. Each king during his reign would send messages to the people, instructions on how to live, how to make things, and how to repair them.

But in the village, as time went on, those who had seen the king died. They tried to teach their children what they had learned, but their own instruction was very incomplete because the king was only with them a short time. And so they did not really know how to build by themselves and maintain the things the king had given them. They only remembered how to use them. Eventually, the looms broke down and were not repaired. The kilns broke and were not fixed. The smelters deteriorated. The plows broke. And the people gradually went back to the life they had before the king had visited them. The story of the king became a myth that few believed. The things he had brought to them, legends. The log and wood houses disintegrated or burned and finally, the village became indistinguishable from that which had existed before.

One day a man was walking near the edge of the chasm. (The chasm had been there as long as anyone could remember and all assumed it had been there

forever so how could a king come to visit them anyway. The chasm itself proved the king to be a myth.) This man saw something unusual on the ground. Bending over to examine it, he found it to be a stick with feathers on one end and something wrapped around it. He removed it and unwrapped it. It was puzzling. It had something marked on it. Could this be writing? He had heard that it was said people in the old days could make marks on a substance they called paper and then others could tell what they meant by looking at the marks.

He took it to a very old man in the village to see what he would say.

The old man accepted the paper from him and said, "Yes, this is writing. It's a message from the king. See this insignia, this design?"

"But it can't be from the king," the younger man stated. "He doesn't exist. He's only a myth."

"Oh, yes he does," the old man replied. "There are only a few of us now who believe in him and fewer yet who can read. I am one of these. We keep it a secret, though, because the villagers would laugh at and mock us if they knew."

The younger man by now was thoroughly intrigued, "What does it say?"

The old man read slowly to himself and then said, "It gives instructions on how to fix the kilns."

After this, the old man and his friends who also believed, would make a point to periodically walk by the chasm in hope of finding more messages. Occasionally, they did find them. Some told of what to do and how to do things. Others told how the king still wanted to come to them as soon as he could find a way.

A few of the people who found messages tried to share with the other villagers, but for the most part they were ridiculed and laughed at.

Some who could read used the instructions to repair or build some of the machines again. They thought this would be proof that they had heard from the king and that he did exist. But most of the people would not believe. "You just figured it out yourself," they would say.

But there were others who seeing that those who followed the supposed king's messages were living obviously better lives, started thinking, "Maybe there is a king."

And so for years this went on. The king at the time sending messages to these people to help them and some of the people receiving the messages and so being helped. But the people who tried to follow the instructions were frustrated because they did not understand fully. The king was also frustrated

because he was not able to help them more and he really wanted to be with them, to help them himself.

After many generations, a king arose whose son, upon hearing of these people, was not content to just send messages. Instead, he vowed, "Father, I will find a way." He began thinking and planning. "There must be a way," he kept thinking to himself, "a bridge, yes a bridge. But how? The chasm is too deep and too wide for any of the bridges we know how to build. We need a new kind of bridge." So he spent much time studying engineering with the king's best advisers but to no avail. Until one day as he was experimenting with pieces of wood and thin rope, the idea came to him. Instead of building the bridge on posts, put the posts on the edge, run rope across, and hang the bridge from the ropes. Yes, it might work. And the more he thought about it, the more he thought it could be the answer.

He built a model and took it to show his father who was enthused, but added, "How will you get to the other side to build the other tower?"

Again the son had to go off and think. "We send arrows across. Perhaps if I used our new long bows which are much more powerful than our old short bows, I could attach a strong cord to the arrow and hopefully lodge it securely enough in a tree that I could cross on the rope. Once across, I could show the people how to build the tower and together we could build it. Yes, it will work."

With great excitement, he ran to tell his father, the king. "Father, father, I've found a way, a way to reach your people. At first, I will cross over on a small cord shot across by an arrow. Then I will build a small footbridge so the people can come to you and to your court to learn. Then we can build a large tower on our side and the people who have been taught can build on their side and we will build a large bridge so that you may come across to build your castle and set up your court."

"Son, it may work," said the king. "But it is very dangerous. You could lose your life in crossing the chasm. The people may not help you. They may have forgotten about the king. Maybe they have not received or have not heeded the messages over all these years."

But after a year of deliberating, there was still no better plan. The king asked, "Couldn't we send one of the servants?"

"No, father, it must be me. It is too dangerous to expect a servant to volunteer. They do not love these people as I do. These are the king's people and the king must reach them. I go as a representative of the king--his flesh and blood."

And so the king's son set off alone with provisions and rope, bow and arrows. After many days, he came to the chasm. "It's deeper and wider than I had supposed," he thought to himself.

He had hoped to shoot an arrow cross with a rope, but he could see that with the weight of the rope, the arrow would never make it. If he could shoot an arrow with a string, that might reach. And if he could get someone on the other side to help, maybe he could attach the rope to the string and that person could pull the rope over.

So he sat and waited. After several days, a figure appeared on the other edge of the chasm. He wasn't sure, but it looked like a woman. He had an arrow already prepared with string attached and a note explaining who he was and what needed to be done. Would she be able to read the note and would she do as he asked?

He set the arrow to the bow, pulled back, aimed, and let fly. Up, up, up it went, then down, down, down into the chasm. He pulled it in disappointed. "It must work," he said to himself and at that moment he looked across and saw that the woman had seen him and was waving at him. This increased his desire to succeed and gave him extra strength. He drew the bow back, farther than it had ever been before, and let the arrow fly. It sailed across the chasm straight and true and with a thud, buried itself in the tree trunk across the chasm. He saw the woman run to see what it was. How he hoped she would see the note and be able to read. He waited, watching eagerly, as she spotted the note and began to unroll it. He couldn't tell if she understood it or not. It seemed to take ages for her to respond. At last, she looked up and across the chasm to where he stood. She waved again and nodded her head and began to pull on the string. It was already tied to the rope and the rope tied securely to a tree on his side. Slowly, the rope snaked out across the chasm. The woman grabbed it when the end reached her and tied it to the tree and again waved back and then sat down to wait.

The king's son began to ready himself for the trip across. First, he had to shed his royal robes and don the shirt and trousers an ordinary person would wear. He redid his pack leaving most of his supplies behind, taking only a few essentials. When he had eaten and readied himself, he began the long treacherous journey across. He had attached another thicker, stronger rope to the tree and to his belt planning to take this rope across to be the basis of the bridge. The wind blew up from the chasm and as he crossed slowly, hand over hand, his body swayed with the rope. Slowly, slowly and carefully, he proceeded. A few times he almost lost his grip, but finally the crossing was made. His heart was pounding and his mouth was dry like sandpaper, but he had made it. The hard part was over. Now he had to get people to believe him and to help him.

The woman approached shyly. She had seen him in his royal clothes and she believed he was who he said he was. Together, they walked to the village.

As they approached the village, the prince stopped to talk to people. "I'm the king's son. I come to bring word from the king. I come to make a way for you to go to see him. Eventually, the king will return and set up his

throne here. But I need your help."

Most of the people said, "Yeah, sure," and laughed in his face as they turned away from them.

But after they entered the village, the woman spoke up, "Come with me, Sire. I will take you to those who still believe in the king."

The young woman brought him to her father. "Father, I saw this man in royal robes. I saw him cross the chasm. Could it be that he is the king's son and at long last the king is going to fulfill his word to us and return?"

"Perhaps, my daughter. Go now and help your mother prepare supper and I will talk to this stranger."

So the prince spent the day and evening with the family who was waiting for the king's return. The prince explained many things to them, things that were not clearly understood about the messages they had received from the king.

As the sun set behind the mountains that night, the man said to the prince, "Yes, I believe you are the king's son. You may count on me to help you and I will bring to you others who also believe in the king."

That night, both the prince and this family were happy and excited. The prince to be finally among his people and the family to have their prince with them. Both knew that now the king would return to these people.

Soon all those who were waiting for the king had met his son. Most of them, after hearing him speak and repair some of their equipment, said, "Yes, we believe," but a few were not sure at first.

Most of the rest of the people in the village only mocked. "How ridiculous," was their response.

But in the midst of their ridicule, the king's son began building a small foot bridge. He showed the people how to build the foundation and anchor it securely on their side. He then attached the heavy rope he had brought across to one of the posts. "Now I must cross over and take another heavy rope across." He fastened another heavy cord to the other post and started out to cross back to the other side.

"Please don't go," his friends begged. "Stay here with us. Teach us all you know and we will make you our king."

"No," he said, "I must go and make a way to my father. You must be able to cross over to him and get instructions from the engineers in our court so you can build the tower on this side to support the main bridge so the king may return. Besides, the people will not now believe I am the king's son and will not receive me as I am. But when I return with my nobles and retinue from the

whole court, they will see with their own eyes and they will welcome me. I must cross over now. I will build a small footbridge back to you and then I must return to my father's court to prepare for his return and to build the tower on the other side."

And so again, hand over hand, the king's son made the perilous journey across the chasm as his friends looked on in anguish and concern. They wanted the bridge built, but they did not want to lose their beloved prince. Finally, the journey was completed. The prince swung himself up on the edge at the other side. He stood up, smiled, and waved to his friends who waved back cheering.

He then began the job of cutting, laying, and tying boards to the ropes. He had two main ropes for the bridge floor and one thinner rope, the first one he had crossed over on, for a hand rail. He tied that to the floor at intervals to steady it and took another one with him for another hand rail on the other side. Slowly he made his way back across the bridge laying down boards in front of him, his friends waiting and watching eagerly.

Finally, after several days, the bridge was complete and he stepped off to be greeted by his friends. They were amazed at his clothes, for he had now changed back into his royal court finery, silk shirt, cape of purple velvet, and soft flannel trousers. All they had ever known was leather and coarsely woven wool. They had never dreamed such colors and fabrics existed. The prince told them there were many more things they had never seen in his father's castle. He would build a road and have way stations supplied with provisions so his friends could come to visit him and his father and then return, bringing what they had learned and a very small sampling of goods back with them. For the footbridge was very narrow and only a very small pack could be taken across safely without the danger of being thrown off balance by the wind and falling to death below.

And so after spending some time with his friends and final instructions, the prince returned to his father to begin preparations for the king's return.

The prince's friends began the work on the huge high tower that would support the large bridge needed for the king and his retinue. Often they would take journeys to the king's court to receive further instruction and would bring back small samples of the wealth and beauty found there.

They tried to tell the other villagers about the king, the richness of the court, and his plan to return. A few seeing the beautiful vases, clothing or jewels, came to believe in the king and undertook the perilous journey across the footbridge to see the king themselves. They returned with glowing accounts of the wonders they had seen.

But some others said the whole thing was made up and the vases and things were just recently found. They were from a golden age years ago when men were smarter than now and they just had to rediscover that wisdom. Those articles

had nothing to do with a king.

Others believed in the king but didn't want to take the footbridge. They wanted to be able to take more with them--food, supplies, and presents--to impress the king. They planned to take some of their best pottery and woolen clothes to trade for items at the king's court. So a few planned pack trains to go up and cross the mountains to go around the chasm. Several set out, but were never heard from again.

Others planned to raft down the river and this way to reach the castle. Those who had been to the chasm and had seen the falls tried to warn them but they would not listen and put their rafts in the river filled with self-confidence and their goods. Those that did not break up or perish in the rapids, perished in the falls.

A few others put their goods in large packs and carrying them on their backs attempted to cross the bridge. But the bridge was not built for heavy, bulky weights and as it swayed in the wind, they would lose their balance and fall.

Some thought they would build their own bridge like the king's son had so tried shooting arrows across. But the bows they had were not nearly as powerful as the prince's and the best they could ever do would not reach the other side.

While these were trying their own ways to reach the king, there continued to be a steady flow of those that did cross the footbridge safely, either going to or coming from the king. Their homes and businesses prospered as they used the knowledge they had gained from the king's court. Their pottery, while not quite as fine as in the palace, became considerably more beautiful and functional than the normal pottery, their metals more pure, and their wool softer and finer, the colors deeper and richer. In all areas what they produced was better. People were beginning to see there was a difference. Maybe what they claim is true. But others were jealous and began to envy and hate the followers of the king and planned ways to destroy them.

But even as their hatred was growing, the bridge was nearing completion. The villagers could not see clearly what was happening across the chasm--but they could see the many workmen on the bridge and the increased number of people on the other side. The villagers working at the edge of the chasm from time to time would say, "I think I saw him. I just got a glimpse of the king. He must be almost ready to return." This would encourage the others who would go throughout the village announcing, "Get ready. The king is coming very soon." Many got ready and there was eagerness and excitement on many faces, especially among the children.

Those filled with hatred felt they must act quickly because soon the whole village would be looking for the king. But before they could carry out their plan, they heard wild shouting and cheering coming from the east, the direction

of the chasm.

The day had arrived. The bridge was finished and the king, his army and his nobles had started across. The king rode straight and tall on a prancing white horse, next to him the prince, also on a white horse. In front of them were the trumpeters and the heralds carrying the banners with the king's insignia and colors- crimson and white. Next came the nobles after the king, dressed in rich clothing the colors of the rainbow. Then there were horse-drawn carts filled with coffers of treasure-gold, silver, and jewels. There were carts carrying trunks filled with books, treasuries of knowledge and wisdom, and carts filled with tools and equipment needed to build the king's castle. There were animals--sheep with fine textured wool, cows bred for milk and those bred for meat, chickens, large and plump, horses, sleek and spirited and larger ones to pull plows and heavy loads. Lastly, the army all in fine steel armor marching orderly in rank to protect the village from any dangers.

Slowly across the bridge they marched. It swayed under the weight but not enough to create a problem. Finally they reached the other side and the people went wild, hats in the air, children on shoulders, and people in trees to see, cheering and shouting, and musical instruments playing. People laughed until they cried. Their faces were radiant with joy as were the faces of the king and his son. The king and prince dismounted from their horses and those who had come to the king's court and knew him personally ran to embrace the king and the prince.

The king announced, "Today will be a feast day, so prepare, but first, where are those people who do not welcome my return?"

While the king had been greeting his people, his soldiers had been out rounding up all those who were not welcoming his return. They were brought to the king and stood before him with surly looks on their faces.

"I will not execute you," the king stated. "But this is my village. I will set my court here and build my castle and make this my capitol city of my whole kingdom. I do not want anyone here who does not love me or does not want to learn what I have to teach or does not want me to rule over them. So I will banish you to a land where you can continue to live as you have in your ignorance in thatched houses, digging in the ground with sticks, without metals, and making crude pottery. I send you to a land that has not enough trees to build houses, that has no ore to be made into metal, that has no rich soil to accept a plow, that has no clay that can be made into china. Go now from my presence forever. I shall not trouble you again."

And so they left escorted by the soldiers to a land where they would live out their days in poverty, hardship, and ignorance, for that is what they had chosen.

But those who loved the king grew in knowledge and their skills and talents were perfected. Their lives became easier and much more enjoyable.

The whole village became very wealthy and productive and became the capitol and most important, city of the realm. The king and his beloved people were together at last.

Scriptures for discussion:

John 14:6

John 3:16

Ephesians 2:8,9

Romans 3:23

Luke 16:26

Isaiah 64:6