

Sonic Boom

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell

 *John 18:28-40*

On October 12, 1947, a young Air Force captain was out riding his horse and got thrown – the result two broken ribs. He couldn't let anybody know that he broke his ribs so he went to a doctor off base who taped him up. He couldn't let anyone know that his two broken ribs were taped because two days later he was scheduled to slip into the cockpit of an experimental rocket powered plane, the Bell X-1. Nothing was going to keep Chuck Yeager from that cockpit and attempting to break the invisible sound barrier. Which he did. And the world heard its first human sonic boom.

Roger Bannister died last week. If you were alive back in 1954 then chances are you read his name on the front page of whatever newspaper you were reading. Roger Bannister had gone where no man or woman had ever gone before – at least in the recorded history of human beings. On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister, a London medical student worked his usual shift at St. Mary's Hospital, took an early afternoon train to Oxford, had lunch with some old friends, met a couple of his teammates and made their way to the inauspicious Iffley Road track and prepared to run against Oxford. And on that day Roger Bannister did what no other human being had ever done before – he broke the 4 minute barrier. He ran the mile under 4 minutes. He had gone where billions of other human beings before him had never dreamed they could go. He imagined that maybe somebody would enter the under 4 minute world – and he imagined that maybe it could be him. The next day his name was in every newspaper headline. A sonic boom.

A year after Roger Bannister broke the 4 minute barrier a 42 year old African American citizen of Montgomery, Alabama broke the invisible barrier

on a Montgomery City Bus – the one that said no “coloreds” here. Rosa Parks sat in the forward section of the rear of a Montgomery City Bus and refused to give up her seat to a white man and the country heard one of the first sonic booms of the civil rights movement.

Sometimes the most difficult barriers to break are the invisible ones.

So when Jesus is nearing the end of his life – and his ministry of compassion and grace and truth telling gets the big push back from the powers that be – and he finds himself dragged before the local magistrate – Pontius Pilate – the two get talking of kingdoms. Pilate is sitting in his Praetorium, surrounded by all the kingdom trappings of Imperial Rome. The imposing Roman Eagle hovers above him just so there is no confusion over who is in control – who has the power – who is really the king. But Jesus speaks to him of a different kingdom. One that Pilate can't quite see. One that has this invisible barrier that Pilate can't quite see beyond. “My kingdom,” Jesus says, “is not of this world.” My kingdom doesn't have praetoriums or hovering eagles or thrones or palaces. From the very beginning Jesus has been talking about this kingdom. The first words out of his mouth as he begins his ministry are – the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The kingdom of heaven is right in front of you. The kingdom of heaven is this close. But there is this barrier – this invisible barrier – that makes it difficult for us to enter.

I suppose it's what C.S. Lewis was trying to portray when he tells the story of the little girl Lucy who trying to find a good hiding spot in a hide and seek game with her siblings – so she crawls into an old wardrobe of coats and she makes her way back to the back – and all of a sudden she is in another world. A once invisible world. A world of fauns and talking animals and witches and kind lions called Narnia. And she comes back and tries to convince the others of where she's been – but they'll have nothing of it. There is

this barrier. They can't see or believe or imagine this other world.

It's Ray Kinsella building a baseball field in the middle of his cornfield – his Field of Dreams -- because he knows somehow that when he builds it another world is going to open up – and all the baseball greats of generations past will be able to come and play again. And only a few will be able to see. Those who believe, those who imagine, those who dream. And people will come, Ray, people will most definitely come – because they will have heard your sonic boom. You will have broken the barrier.

So it just takes one, right? It just takes one to show us that the barrier can be broken. It just takes one Chuck Yeager, one Roger Bannister, one Rosa Parks, one Lucy Pevensie, one Ray Kinsella to imagine that there is this other world out there that we can access – that we can enter – if we are willing to believe, to imagine, to dream.

And so Jesus walks from town to town in Palestine and to anyone who is willing to listen he says – follow me and I will show you the kingdom. Follow me into the wardrobe and I will show you there is another world – and in this other world you will experience what real life is all about. You will experience what it means to break through the barrier and to release the sonic boom of the kingdom. And so that's the first step, right? That's the first step – to consciously follow the one who dares to break the barrier. To jump in the cockpit with Chuck Yeager – broken ribs and all – and take this ride into the unknown regions beyond sight and sound. Jesus says, Follow me and I will show you

the kingdom. The kingdom that is this close and yet for you -- is this far away. On your own you can't see it – but when you follow me you will discover more than you can imagine.

So we surrender ourselves to Jesus and we put our life into his life ... and we say take me to the kingdom. And so we learn about Jesus and we discover that Jesus boldly breaks down barriers into other people's lives. Jesus boldly breaks down barriers into other people's lives. The barriers that keep people from people. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, Jesus says, and he has anointed me to lead you to where it is – So, follow me as I bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free and to proclaim that all debts are forgiven. And when you hear Jesus say that – you can begin to see the barriers. All these chasms we have created between ourselves and those the world wants to make invisible – the poor, the captives, the oppressed, the guilty. And we begin to dream with Jesus of a world where there are no poor, no oppressed, no captives, no blind, no want, no need. And Jesus sets us to imagining what might need to happen in order that the kingdom of heaven might become more visible? What barrier am I called to break down?

Young William Wilberforce set out to pursue a career in law and politics in the late 18th century. But then at age 26 he encountered the living Christ and knew that to follow him was to find a barrier to break through. And that's when he realized the chasm between him and the slaves who were being traded and imported from other lands. And so he knew that

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the kingdom was in them. The kingdom was in setting free the captives. And so he surrendered his life to the abolition of slavery and the ending of the slave trade in England. Sacrificing his life and health to bring to passage the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. He died three days later – but not without having entered first the kingdom.

For a large part of his life Dietrich Bonhoeffer saw from a distance the struggle of his Jewish brothers and sisters and didn't do much about it. The anti-Semitism of his culture was inbred within him he later confessed. But when he set himself to radically follow the Savior he knew what barrier needed breaking – the one between him and the people of Israel. And so he followed the Master into the thick of the Nazi machine – and got himself arrested, thrown into prison and executed. And along with all the anxiety and loneliness of a prison cell came the peace of the kingdom. The peace of having done what was right.

Bobby Kennedy was fond of quoting George Bernard Shaw who wrote, "Some men see things as they are and say, 'Why?' Others dream things that never were and say, 'Why not?'"

Don't you wonder if that isn't a big part of what Jesus calls us to do – what he calls Pilate to do ... what he calls the disciples to do ... what he calls you and me to do? To ask the simple question, Why not? That's the sonic boom question, right? Why not?

Well, we've never done it that way. Well, why not? Well, that's just the way the world is and the world is never going to change. Well, why not? Hunger, disease, poverty, violence – forces too big for any one person. No sense in standing up against it. Well, why not?

They say that dreamers went to the moon long before Neil Armstrong.

Don't you think it's what those Parkland students were trying to do? They're trying to dream of a world where first graders or high school students don't get mowed down by crazy people with semi-automatic

weapons? It doesn't matter where you come out on that issue – the point is dare we follow them in their dreaming? Dare we say, why not? Dare we do something that at least says we refuse to accept a world where innocent children are snuffed out in a classroom? Our Children at Risk concert last Sunday – we raised \$5600 dollars to support the work of UNICEF and we raised awareness for 600 people to the plight of children across our globe. And so there's this chipping of the wall – this breaking of the barrier between ourselves and children whose worlds are far away from the worlds we live in. And when we follow Jesus and we break down the divide and enter into the soul of another human being we enter the kingdom of heaven. Maybe that's what happens when a person says I'm going to volunteer one day of my life to bring a day of hope to some young student that doesn't have the resources to get ready for school. I'll contribute a few hours, I'll give some of my money – because I know Jesus is trying to break down the divide between those kids and me ... and I know that Jesus tells me to let the little children come for to such belong the kingdom of heaven.

So I know this young woman named Shannon. I've known her since she was knee high to a grasshopper. She grew up in suburban America. Attended my church in New Jersey. Did the typical American high school thing – went to class, played sports, hung out with her friends. But then she and her family go to Tanzania for a little vacation – and she sees the divide. She sees kids like her that have so little. And she sees in particular that they have no books. No books to read. So she comes home and she says this is unacceptable. And probably there were folks who said, well it's Tanzania and there's not much you can do about it. And Shannon said, Why not? And so she started Shannon's After-school Reading Exchange (SHARE). And she collected books and money and long story short through her high school years and a few trips back and forth to Tanzania she established four libraries with a collection of 33,000 books,

created reading programs, outfitted classrooms with computers, built a dining hall and brought electricity to several schools. All because she asked the Jesus question, why not?

Tom Monaghan, founder of Dominos Pizza was asked what the secret of his success was – and he said, "The secret of my success is that I didn't know that it couldn't be done."

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Don't you wonder if there isn't some sonic boom we can set off here? Some barrier we can't bust apart? Oh the kingdom, Jesus says – oh the kingdom – is this close. It's right here. You just have to believe. You just have to imagine. You just have to move to the front of the bus. You just have to get in the cockpit.

And boom!



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