

## Jesus Breaks Down Barriers Part 2

In the *Gospel of Mark*, Mark records a couple miracles performed by Jesus in Mark 5:22-23, 25, 28: ***“Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing [Jesus], he fell at His feet and implored Him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.’”***

***“. . . There was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years. . . . For she said, ‘If I touch even His garments, I will be made well.’”***

**Boundaries** and **barriers** are something we all understand very well. We are taught that we may go this far but no further. Trespassing signs we see posted on people’s property limit our access to land that is owned by someone else. Speed limit signs posted on the expressway tell how fast we may legally drive if we do not want to get a speeding ticket. The established laws of society, laws that are good and help keep order in our world, govern so many areas of our lives as human beings. To cross these laws can cause us pain or conflict or ridicule.

There are, however, barriers and boundaries that **we ourselves** put up in our lives and yes, barriers and boundaries we put up before God, barriers and boundaries that say, *“You may come this far but no further.”* We put up barriers sectioning off emotionally painful areas of our lives into which we do not want other people poking their noses. Sometimes we fence off areas of our lives classified as long dead by us, long beyond the hope of a resurrection and any kind of new life. These may be areas of our lives of which we are ashamed and would rather forget.

This evening’s Gospel lesson continues from this morning to tell us of One Who comes to our lives with His power and His grace to break down our self-imposed barriers, One Who crosses the boundaries we have erected. Today we are told of One who **ignores** the limits we place upon Him, One Who **goes beyond** what we allow ourselves to hope for or permit ourselves to believe. Our Gospel lesson tells us of a Savior Who opens doors that we believed were permanently shut.

Yes, Jesus breaks down barriers and crosses boundaries. He came with power and brought **healing** in the life of an unnamed woman and He brought **life** to Jairus’ deceased daughter.

He comes with power and grace to your life and mine to bring **healing** and to bring **life** to those areas of our lives that are dead.

Many people think that a person must know a lot about Jesus in order to come to Him and relate to Him. They feel that Jesus will only have something to do with those who already have a close personal relationship with Him, who already

devoutly believe in Him, who have a good understanding of key doctrines in the Bible, those who belong to the “right” church. Such people are **setting limits** on the **kind** of people Jesus will welcome and the **kind** of people to whom He will respond. Our Gospel lesson this evening presents us with two people who approached the Lord Jesus with very little knowledge of Him, two people who came to Jesus, honestly, as their last resort. Yet Jesus responded to both of them.

Yes, Jesus responded positively to both the synagogue official and to the unnamed woman who suffered from an ongoing hemorrhage. Why? One simple reason is that they **came** to Him. They **sought help** from Him. They were people **in need**. And our Lord never turns away from those who are **in need**, who **come** to Him and **seek help** from Him. Our Lord’s response to their coming reveals His **love** and His **openness to help** those who will come to Him regardless of how complete their understanding is of Who He is, yes, even if they are coming to Him as a “last-ditch” effort. Unbelievable? Yes. This is especially unbelievable to those people who would place **limits** on the **kind** of people Jesus will welcome and the **kind** of people to whom He will respond. Jesus **breaks down** such human barriers and **crosses over** boundaries that limit Him.

In the *Gospel of Luke*, Luke is obviously trying to portray women as equal to men in dignity before God, shown by the paralleling of events involving men and women. This is another example of Jesus breaking down barriers. Look at the following parallels:

The appearance of the Gabriel to Zechariah in Luke 1:8-23 is very similar to that of Gabriel’s appearance to Mary in Luke 1:26-38.

The Song of Mary in Luke 1:46-55 parallels Zechariah’s prophetic utterances in Luke 1:68-79.

Simeon praising God for seeing the baby Jesus in Luke 2:25-35 is very similar to that of Anna praising God in Luke 2:36-38.

During His sermon in Nazareth, Jesus spoke about widows (Luke 4:25-26) and lepers (Luke 4:27).

Jesus healed a man who was possessed (Luke 4:31-37) and Simon’s mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39).

Jesus forgave the paralytic his sins (Luke 5:17-26) and the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7:36-50).

The healing of the centurion’s slave, a Gentile (Luke 7:1-10) is followed by the raising of the widow’s son (Luke 7:11-17).

Jesus chose twelve apostles from His disciples (Luke 6:12-16) and women also accompanied Jesus throughout His ministry (Luke 8:1-3).

The healing of the Gerasene demoniac is matched by the raising of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-42a, Luke 8:49-56) and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8:42b-48).

Jesus offered Jonah as a sign to His generation (Luke 11:30) as well as the Queen of the South (Luke 11:31).

The *Parable of the Mustard Seed* and the *Parable of Leaven* are paired; the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which a man took . . . (Luke 13:18-19) and like leaven which a woman took . . . (Luke 13:20-21).

The healing of the woman on a Sabbath, bent double with a spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:10-17), is paired with the healing of the man with dropsy (the swelling of soft tissue due to the accumulation of excess water) on a Sabbath (Luke 14:1-6).

The *Parable of the Man with the Lost Sheep* (Luke 15:3-7) is paralleled with the *Parable of the Woman with the Lost Coin* (Luke 15:8-10).

Of two men in bed, one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:34) and of two women grinding together, one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:35).

The high standing of women in Luke's Gospel is evident from the beginning with two women playing enormously important roles in the history of salvation: Mary and Elizabeth. Additionally, we learn the story of Anna as well. The roles of these women are described in such details, and only Luke in chapters 1 and 2 of his Gospel account supplies these great details. It is also evident that there is much concern for widows by Jesus in the *Gospel of Luke*. They are mentioned occasionally (Luke 2:37; Luke 4:25-26; Luke 7:12; Luke 18:3; Luke 20:47; Luke 21:2). Mark 15:41 and Matthew 27:55 relate that women accompanied Jesus during His ministry, but only Luke mentions that they provided for Him out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3). Martha and Mary received Jesus into their house and Mary sat at Jesus' feet, the position of a disciple (10:38-42). Although Jesus mentions leaving wives for the sake of discipleship (Luke 14:26) or for the Kingdom of God (Luke 18:29), He was not trying to limit those following Jesus to men. Rather, this demonstrates that a more radical detachment from family is required by the Jesus brought forth in Luke than is brought forth in either Matthew or Mark. The angel said to the women in the tomb, "**Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee . . .**" (Luke 24:6 [RSV]), yet the three passion predictions made in Luke 9:22, Luke 9:44 and Luke 17:25 were spoken to the disciples, thus confirming from Luke 8:1-3 that women accompanied Jesus since the time He was in Galilee.

## Jesus Disregards Taboos about Women

The curing of Peter's mother-in-law is recounted in Matthew 8:14-15, Mark 1:29-31 and Luke 4:38-39. After she was healed, she rose and served. If it is true that in Palestine as elsewhere in the world that a woman should not serve men at table, then Jesus was freeing a woman from customs that hindered her.

Jesus did the same by allowing Martha to serve Him in Luke 10:38-42. Another interesting fact about that incident is that Mary sat at Jesus' feet (Luke 10:39). This was the position of a disciple/student. It must surely have been remarkable for Jesus to allow this, considering the fact that women were not supposed to be taught.

Allowing women to accompany Him (Luke 8:1-3) was breaking down barriers on Jesus' part because it would have been scandalous for women to leave home and travel with a rabbi. Also, some scholars believe that women were present at the Last Supper.

I want to deal with another three passages in which Jesus overturns taboos about women. But to understand them, we need to know what being ritually unclean means. The *Book of Leviticus* contains various rules about clean and unclean. The concepts of clean and unclean for the Jews may be seen under 4 categories which you can read in the *Book of Leviticus* in the Old Testament.

- 1) Food: Clean animals are those with a cloven hoof which chew the cud. Otherwise, they are unclean. Further details are found in Leviticus 11. If you ate unclean food, you, in turn, became unclean.
- 2) Leprosy and skin diseases made one unclean. The purity laws are found in Leviticus 13-14.
- 3) Contact with a corpse made one unclean. Details are found in Numbers 19:11-19.
- 4) Sexual functions also made a person unclean, both a man and a woman (Leviticus 15). For the purity laws concerning childbirth see Leviticus 12.

The length of the impurity varied according to the cause. The details are given in Leviticus. One remains unclean until one undergoes purification. As seen in Leviticus, most purification can be achieved by bathing. The point was that if you were unclean, you were forbidden from taking part in worship. Therefore, you were called ritually unclean. The concept of clean is somehow connected with the holy, and uncleanness is somehow connected with the profane.

Now let us read some passages in Luke with new meaning as a result of our knowledge of clean and unclean. Jesus healed the woman who had a spirit of

infirmity for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17). Not only did He do it on the Sabbath when work was forbidden, but He also called her a “**daughter of Abraham**” (Luke 13:16). Elsewhere in the New Testament, people are called son of Abraham or children of Abraham, but nowhere else is a woman called a daughter of Abraham. Jesus was making it clear that she was as good a participant in God’s covenant as a male. It should be noted that being said to be bound by Satan would have made her ritually unclean. The crippled woman can stand for all whose faith never wavers despite misfortune which befell them; although deformed she spent her Sabbaths in the synagogue.

The story of the raising of the little girl to life forms a sandwich around the story of the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage for twelve years (Luke 8:40-56; Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43). According to Jewish law, anyone who touched a corpse would be ritually unclean. Nevertheless, Jesus took the little girl by the hand. Concerning the hemorrhaging woman, Jesus would have been ritually unclean after being touched by her. But Jesus does not observe the law and does not undergo purification. Why? Because He **was** holy. By His touch He totally cleansed those individuals, and no impurities were left in them, thereby leaving both them and Him clean.

Jesus raised the son of the widow from Nain in Luke 7:11-17. Widows were especially vulnerable. A widow did not inherit her husband’s estate, it passed to a son, or if there were no children it went to the nearest male relative. Thus, a widow with no children would be penniless. Jesus violated custom by speaking to the woman on the street and then broke ritual purity by touching the bier which carried the corpse.

### **Mary Magdalene**

Before finishing this section on Jesus’ treatment of women, I want to deal with Mary Magdalene. I will broaden the study now to the other Gospels, also. *Magdalene* refers to the name of the town *Magdala* where Mary was from, on the western shore of Sea of Galilee. Traditionally, Mary has been regarded as a reformed prostitute due to a proclamation stated by Pope Gregory the Great in 591 AD. However, there is no evidence for this in the Gospels. It is said this tradition arose by confusing her with the sinner woman mentioned in Luke 7:36-50 since this immediately precedes the scene in which Mary and other women are mentioned as following Jesus, and seven demons are said to have been driven out of Mary (Luke 8:2). The number seven was a Semitic (eastern) way of signifying totality, thus implying how badly possessed she was. And it could simply have meant she was possessed by seven demons. This erroneous view of Mary Madgalene as a prostitute was not corrected until 1969 when the Vatican issued a very quiet retraction.

When Jesus went up the mountain for His Transfiguration, He took Peter, James and John (Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28). For the raising of the girl from

the dead, Jesus allowed no one except Peter, James and John with Him (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51) and He kept Peter, James and John near Him during His agony in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37; Mark 14:33). Peter is placed first in the lists. In the lists of women, Mary Magdalene is first, also (Luke 8:1-3 women followers of Jesus; Matt 27:56 and Mark 15:40 women by Jesus' cross; Luke 24:10 telling the apostles of Jesus' resurrection). That she is placed first in lists like Peter shows her importance. John 19:25 does not place her first but near Jesus' close relations, again showing her importance.

In all four Gospels, Mary Magdalene went looking for Jesus after the Sabbath and became a witness of His resurrection, either indirectly through the words of an angel, or directly by receiving a vision of the risen Jesus. In Matthew 28:1-10, she had a vision of an angel telling her of Jesus' resurrection and then a vision of Jesus. In Mark 16:1-8, she had a vision of an angel telling of Jesus' resurrection and in Mark 16:9 Jesus appears to her. In Luke 24:1-11, she sees two angels who tell of Jesus' resurrection. In John 20:1-18, Mary goes to the tomb on her own and in her meeting with Jesus we see the special relationship between them. Thus, she holds a privileged position in relation to Jesus, seen above all in being sent to announce His resurrection to the apostles (Matthew 28:10; John 20:17), for which she has sometimes been called "Apostle to the Apostles" since the word apostle simply means one who is sent. This is significant since in Jewish tradition no attention was given to the testimony of a woman.

### **Other Actions and Sayings of Jesus Breaking Down Barriers**

Jesus preached in the synagogue in Nazareth. He mentioned a time when there was a famine over all the land and Elijah was sent to no one except a Sidonian widow (Luke 4:25-26), meaning she was Gentile widow (1 Kings 17:15). In the time of the prophet Elisha, none of the lepers in Israel was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5 (Luke 4:27). Once again, Naaman was a Gentile. The point Jesus is making is that God declared these two Gentiles acceptable.

In the account of Jesus healing the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1-10), the important point is Jesus' declaration that not even in Israel had He found faith such as had the centurion, a foreigner, a Roman (Luke 7:9).

The mission of the Seventy (-two) (Luke 10:1-20) has often been said to symbolize the salvation of all peoples, not just the Jews, because the number Seventy or Seventy-two is said to symbolize all the nations of the world in Genesis 10. Some manuscripts of Luke 10 have seventy and others have seventy-two. The idea of inserting this passage may have come to Luke from Genesis 10. Hebrew manuscripts of Genesis 10 have 70, while the Septuagint Greek Old Testament has 72. Hence, there is confusion about the number.