

Jesus Breaks Down Barriers

Jesus Breaks Down Barriers with God

Man has a sin problem, a sin problem that began way back in the Garden of Eden. Our sins are what separate us from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 [RSV] says, **1. Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or His ear dull, that it cannot hear; 2. but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you so that He does not hear.** As can be seen clearly, it is our sins that have caused the separation. In Romans 3:23 [RSV] we are told, ***“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** There is not an accountable person living or who has ever lived (except our Lord) who can say that he has never sinned. We are all in need of salvation. 1 John 1:8 [RSV] says, ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*** The easiest person to deceive is oneself. When we rationalize away what God says, this is what we are doing: deceiving ourselves. God says that man has a sin problem, but man says that he does not. Who is right and what are we doing to God when we say that we have no sin? The Apostle John provides the answer. Continuing our reading in 1 John 1:10 [RSV], John writes, ***“If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”*** God is always right when He tells us that we have all sinned!

In Romans 6:23 [RSV] the Apostle Paul writes, ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** Death is a separation. When we die physically, our body is placed into the grave, but our spirit is separated from our dead body and goes back to God, Who gave it. We are told in Ecclesiastes 12:7 [RSV], ***“and the dust returns to the Earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it.”*** In physical death, there is a separation between our body and our spirit.

In Romans 6:23, we saw that, ***“For the wages of sin is death.”*** This is a spiritual death, which is a separation from God in eternity for those who are lost. Since God is in Heaven, and those who experience this spiritual death are separated from God, they cannot go to Heaven. This leaves only one place for them to go, and that is Hell. We see Hell spoken of as the second death in Revelation 21:8 [RSV], ***“the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.”***

Although our sins separate us from God, that is not how God intends for us to remain. Isaiah 55:6-9 [RSV] says, **6. “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near; 7. let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that He may have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 8. ‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. 9. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways**

higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Just as God's existence is far beyond our own, so is His character and behavior. He is *holy* and *righteous*. **Holy** means that God is separate, other; **righteous** means that He is perfectly good. God is thus set apart from man, who is sinful. And because God is infinite goodness, He longs and seeks to have us come back to His fold: ***“The Lord is not slow about His promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance”*** (2 Peter 3:9 [RSV]).

Sin is a word that means "missing the mark." God's holiness is the bull's eye, and because of the existence of sin, our character and behavior miss the mark. You might be asking yourself, "So what's the big deal about that?" The importance of sin is relevant when we consider our relationship with God.

Since God is holy, He demands holy relationships. Another way of stating it is this: God, Who is perfect, must have perfect relationships with others, or not have them at all. So how can we, who are imperfect, have a perfect relationship with Him in His perfection? Enter in Jesus Christ, the solution to our missing the mark by transgressing God's law. ***20. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21. For our sake He made Him to be sin Who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*** (2 Corinthians 5:20b-21 [RSV]) It is only through Christ that we can be reconciled back to God.

This is not the only time the Apostle Paul speaks of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:11-22 sums up succinctly the ministry of Jesus Christ as one of reconciliation between races, and most importantly, reconciliation between God and man whose relationship was sundered due to sin.

In the *Gospel of Luke* a beautiful theme appears which highlights Jesus breaking down barriers of all kinds between people. I hope you will find this study very beneficial.

The scribes and Pharisees and customs of society during the time of the ministry of Jesus Christ had erected barriers between people, but Jesus broke down those barriers. He wanted to reveal the love of God to all people and show all people that God loves them equally. Therefore, we see time and time again how Jesus did not pay heed to social taboos or the restrictions of society and religion of His time, but He broke down the barriers that had been erected standing between God and sinners, the Jews and tax collectors, Samaritans and women.

Jesus Broke Down Barriers with Sinners

In Luke 5:17-26, Jesus forgave the paralytic man his sins, and to show that He had authority to forgive sins Jesus healed him of his paralysis. In response to the Pharisee's complaints against Jesus for eating with tax collectors and

sinners, He pronounced, ***“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”*** (Luke 5:32 [RSV]). In Luke 7:36-50, Luke relates the story of the woman who was a sinner and received forgiveness from Jesus. This is a most beautiful story, especially the verses one reads in Luke 7:47-50 [RSV]: ***47. “Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”***

48. And He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” 49. Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, Who even forgives sins?”

50. And He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Here, as in the *Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector* (Luke 18:9-14), Jesus contrasts the behavior of a sinner with the behavior of a Pharisee, and again the sinner is justified before God. Luke 15 is a most beautiful chapter that demonstrates Jesus breaking down more barriers. The toll-collectors and sinners drew near to Jesus, and the Pharisees and scribes complained (Luke 15:1-2), so Jesus told three parables about finding the lost: the *Parable of the Lost Sheep* (Luke 15:3-7), the *Parable of the Lost Coin* (Luke 15:8-10) and the *Parable of the Lost Son* (Luke 15:11-32). These parables are a response to the complaints and a vindication of Jesus’ associations with sinners. Luke is the only of the Gospel accounts to record a saying of Jesus that there is more joy in Heaven over one repentant sinner, than over ninety-nine who have no need of repentance (Luke 15:7). The Son of Man came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). It is by no means a stretch to say that Luke 19:10 is a summary of Jesus’ ministry.

Jesus Broke Down Barriers with Tax-Collectors

I should point out that ‘tax collectors’ in our Bibles means ‘toll collectors’ since they did not collect income tax but tolls along trade routes. The toll collectors paid these tolls to Rome yearly in advance just as still occurs in many parts of the world to this very day. Those who are self-employed pay their income taxes in advance quarterly in the United States. This is checked and adjusted after the end of the financial year, but Rome never checked the toll-collectors’ accounts, so people suspected they overcharged the tolls. Since 63 BC, Palestine was under the control of Rome. Naturally, a cause of much resentment against Palestinians who wanted self-rule and independence grew. Although the toll collectors were Jews, they were treated by their fellow Jews as Gentiles, not only because of paying tolls to Rome, but because they were working for non-Jewish employers. Jesus worked to break down that barrier in His ministry. One of the disciples whom Jesus called to follow Him was Levi, a toll collector (Mark 2:13-15; Luke 5:27-29), and he is called Matthew in Matthew 9:9-10. Levi offered Jesus a feast in his house and the guests included a large crowd of toll collectors (Luke 5:29).

The tax collectors and sinners drew near to Jesus to hear Him speak (Luke 15:1). On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus lodged with the toll collector Zacchaeus, who was a sinner in the eyes of the public (Luke 19:7) and Jesus proclaimed that salvation had come to his house (Luke 19:9). This was even more serious than eating with Levi because Zacchaeus was a chief toll collector (therefore a very big sinner in the eyes of his fellow Jews).

Jesus Broke Down Barriers with Samaritans

The Samaritans lived in the land of Samaria, which lay between Jerusalem in the south and Galilee in the north. Samaria was invaded by the king of Assyria and finally captured in 722 BC. The Samaritans intermarried with the foreigners; hence, the Jews considered them “half-breeds,” and they did so with great contempt. If interested, you can read an account of this in 2 Kings 17:5-41. This is the background between the meaning of John 4:9 [RSV]: ***“The Samaritan woman said to Him, ‘How is it that You, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”*** Because of this intermingling the Samaritans were not regarded as being fully Jewish, but half-Jews.

As outcasts to the Jewish world, but still a people with a similar background and culture, the Samaritans built their own Temple in Samaria in opposition to the one in Jerusalem. It was destroyed in 128 BC and since that time there was continuous hatred between Jews and Samaritans. At the time of Jesus, there was a lot of hatred between these two groups of people. Jesus’ dealings with them show Him breaking down barriers between Jews and Samaritans. In Luke 9:52 on His way to Jerusalem, Jesus sent messengers ahead of Him to a Samaritan village to prepare for His visit. Although Jesus was not made welcome in the village (Luke 9:53), it is significant that Jesus intended to visit a Samaritan village. This stands in stark contrast to Jesus in Matthew Who forbade the Twelve to enter into any Samaritan village (Matthew 10:5). (This was because He was presenting His message first ***“to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”*** (Matthew 10:6 [RSV])). We see this same pattern of giving the Gospel to the Jews first in the statement of Jesus given to the apostles just before His Ascension in Acts 1:8 [RSV]: ***“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the Earth.”*** We also see this same pattern followed by the apostles later on even after the church had been brought into existence. Paul, who had initially brought the message of Jesus to the Jews, said in Acts 18:6 [RSV], ***“Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*** And, finally, we see Paul write, ***“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”*** (Romans 1:16 [RSV]).

In response to the lawyer's question as to who is his neighbor, Jesus told the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:30-35). A priest and a Levite passed by on the other side of the road, disregarding the man who had been beaten up by robbers and left for half dead. But a Samaritan man took pity on him, bound up his wounds and paid for his keep in the inn. The price he paid to the innkeeper was two day's wages, or the equivalent at the time of staying as long as two months in the inn. In this parable, Jesus did not give an Israelite as being an example of a loving neighbor. Instead, He gave a Samaritan as an example! Imagine the shock this must have seemed to those Jewish people in that audience. Jesus was teaching that love of neighbor has no limits, even if those barriers have been erected through racial bigotry.

Only the Samaritan leper out of the ten who were healed came back to thank Jesus (Luke 17:16). In this incident, as well as in the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*, in the contrast between the behavior of the Samaritan and that of the Jews, the Jews come out in a bad light, while the Samaritan comes out in a good light. It is significant that a Samaritan is portrayed as an example of someone open to salvation in contrast to the Jews. Jesus was breaking down barriers.

Jesus Broke Down Barriers with Women

To understand Jesus' ministry to and treatment of women in Luke properly, we need first of all to examine how women were treated at the time of Jesus. Women were segregated from men both in synagogues and in the Jerusalem Temple. Women had to remain behind a screen in the synagogue. They were not counted in the number ten, which was the minimum required to hold a synagogue service. The Temple forecourt was divided in two by a wall, the western half and the eastern half. The eastern half was called the Women's Forecourt or Court of Gentiles, because women were also allowed access there and only male Israelites had access to the western half of the Temple, which was the Temple proper. Women were of course allowed take part in the Passover meal, but they were forbidden from taking part in the Passover liturgy. As Judaism developed, women became more segregated and among the morning prayers of orthodox Jews was this prayer, "I thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou has not made me a woman," which I have seen in a Jewish prayer book printed earlier from the past century.

When Mary presented Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:22-38), she would have had to let Joseph take Jesus into the Court of Jews for the sacrifice. She could have entered as far as the Court of Gentiles, but they would have had to part at the Beautiful Gate, sometimes also called the Gate of Nicanor.

Segregation of men and women in society was just as thorough. A self-respecting Jew would not talk to a woman in public, a point evident from John 4:27 when Jesus' disciples marvelled that He was talking to a woman. A woman as a witness had no validity in law courts. By the time of Jesus, segregation of

women had become harsher. They were forbidden to take part in a meal when someone was invited to the house. It is debated how far segregation of women had spread in Palestine. Only the upper class women could stay shut up in their houses. The rest would have to fetch water from the well, work in the fields and help their husbands with their business. Men were not to walk behind women and one of the six things rabbis considered unsuitable for one of their disciples was talking to a woman in a square. One occasion when women played a large part outdoors was at funerals. Only boys could go to school from the age of 5 or 6. Girls were not to be taught. It was generally considered bad to teach the Torah (Jewish law) to women. Male children were preferred to female children. In Leviticus 12:2-5 the Law of Moses stated that a woman was ceremonially impure for twice as long after the birth of a daughter than that of a son. There were a few exceptions. There is evidence that some women held the office of synagogue ruler in ancient Judaism and of priestesses in Roman religion, and had some role in business in the Roman world.

In my life I have encountered people who say that we should not expect too much of Jesus. They boldly assert that there are many problems that are *beyond* Jesus' ability to help. They question and doubt that He really can help with their troubled marriage, their wayward child, their alcoholic spouse, or their chronic illness. They conclude that perhaps they should just grin and bear it. Human nature, being what it is, often tends to think that if a problem is out of **our** hands and beyond **our** ability to do anything, then it must also be out of **God's** hands and beyond **His** ability, too. Our Gospel lesson this morning shows that this is not true at all. Our Gospel lesson reveals how our Lord deals with questions pertaining to His ability. The bleeding woman suffering from her hemorrhage came to Jesus to touch His garment and she was healed! While she might have been wrong about her ideas of a magical quality to Jesus' garment (thinking to herself, *"if I just touch His clothes, I will be healed"*), **she was right about her faith and about coming to Jesus**. So, too, Jairus, who came to Jesus because there was no one left to whom He could turn, the situation was so serious and so beyond hope. He rightly came to Jesus for help. **Who else is there who can really help us?** He **alone** has the words of life (John 6:68). He is **able** to do **far more** than we ask or even imagine! (Ephesians 3:20)

Perhaps you, too, have not wanted to bother Jesus with your problems and concerns. With all the problems in the world today, why would He want to hear our little complaints or deal with our insignificant hurts? **But that is not the way Jesus is**. In fact, Jesus invites us to Himself saying, ***"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*** (Matthew 11:28) He **wants** us to come to Him at any time. **Jesus does not view us as interferences**. It may seem preposterous to us that God could care what happens in the life of one individual when there are billions of people on Earth, but that is precisely the concern He has for each of us. He wants us to know that His forgiveness and spiritual healing can cure all of our uncleanness caused by sin!