

How Jesus Radically Broke Down Racial Barriers

Jesus went out of His way to break down racial barriers. The racism He confronted was between Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles.

There was even a racial rivalry among the Jews (Judeans derided Galileans, and Galileans disdained Nazarenes). This is evident by how Nathaniel stereotyped Jesus, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46b). He prejudged Jesus before he even met him based on his bias against Nazarenes.

Racism boils down to *pride*—the ugly self-deception that "We are better than *you*." Racism assumes that different means wrong. Remember, we are all made from dirt, plus our bodies consist of about 60% water, which equals mud! Paul wrote, "We have this treasure in jars of clay" (2 Cor. 4:7).

It's not the container that is so valuable to God, but the contents He has placed in it. The ground is level at the cross. We are all equally loved by God and equally in need of His grace. Hatred has no place in the heart of any Christian. God's view on race can be summarized in this simple song: "Jesus loves the little children/ *all* the children of the world/ Red and yellow, black and white/ They are precious in His sight/ Jesus loves the little children of the world!" To be precious means "very valuable, dear, beloved, important, cherished, treasured, prized, priceless."

Jesus dealt with racism among His own disciples and rebuked them for it. James and John, at first, were hate-filled, cold-hearted, hot-headed troublemakers. Jesus even gave them a negative nickname—"Boanerges," which means "sons of thunder" (see Mark 3:17). Thunder makes a lot of noise. These brothers were loud, opinionated, argumentative and full of hot air. On

one occasion, they were angry that some Samaritans turned Christ away from their village and wanted to call fire down from heaven to burn them up. "But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them'" (Luke 9:55-56a). If we harbor hatred in our hearts and want to hurt or kill people, we have the wrong spirit. That is not the Spirit of Christ; it's the spirit of Antichrist.

After seeing true love modeled by Jesus, the disciples radically changed. Later, Peter and John returned to Samaria to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:12-17. Instead of praying the fire of judgment down on them to curse them, they prayed the fire of the Holy Spirit down to bless them. Once consumed with hate, John later became known as "the apostle of love." In fact, in his writings he used some form of the word "love" over 100 times. His words still soothe the souls of millions today—"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). We need a fresh baptism of love in our society. If we harbor bigotry, we must repent of it, renounce it and ask God to remove it from our hearts.

Jesus broke down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-19). The Gospel is inclusive, not exclusive (John 3:16; 12:32, Rev. 22:17). Heaven will be integrated, not segregated (Rev. 5:9). Paul preached that we are all *one* in Christ—there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, black nor white, bond or free (Gal. 3:28). Racial barriers all fall at the foot of the cross and the color line is washed away in the blood of Jesus!

Notice how Jesus broke down racial barriers:

—Jesus went to Samaria to save the woman at the well. Most Jews went the long way around Samaria just to avoid "those

people.” There was total segregation between Jews and Samaritans in Bible times, and they even worshipped in separate temples (John 4:9, 20). But Jesus had a divine appointment with a broken woman who desperately needed His help. The disciples were shocked that Jesus even spoke to her (John 4:27), yet He took the time to reveal His Messiahship to her (John 4:25-26). She was a five-time divorcee with a live-in lover, then she met the seventh man—the one she’d been looking for all along. As a result, a two-day revival broke out in Samaria (John 4:39-42).

—Jesus healed a Roman centurion’s servant (Matt. 8:5-13). We skim over this story without realizing the racial tension between Jews and Romans. The Jews despised them for occupying their land, controlling their lives and overtaxing them. Jesus was willing to go to the centurion’s house. To us, that’s no big deal, but most Jews then wouldn’t even consider going near the house of an “unclean” Gentile. The centurion said Jesus could just speak the word only. He knew how the chain of command worked (his boss gave him orders, and he gave his soldiers orders). Then Jesus commended his faith and healed his servant.

—Jesus delivered the Syrophenician woman’s daughter (Matt. 15:21-28). Jesus ventured beyond the borders of Israel to meet this Greek lady (Mark 7:26). At first, He ignored her (Matt. 15:23). Then, He excluded her—“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 15:24). Next, it seems, He insulted her—“It is not fair to take the children’s bread and to throw it to dogs” (Matt. 15:26b) (Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs). She must have been a bulldog, because she refused to take no for an answer, “Yes, Lord, yet even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (Matt. 15:27). Jesus tested her but was so impressed by her faith that He delivered her daughter from demons.

—Jesus healed a Samaritan leper (Luke 17:11-19). When Jesus cleansed the 10 lepers near Samaria, only one returned to give

thanks. Luke, the only Gentile Bible author, identified him as a Samaritan. Jesus was amazed, “Were there not the ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Were there not any found to return and give glory to God except this foreigner?” (Luke 17:17). Nine Jewish lepers were healed, but the grateful Samaritan was made completely whole.

—Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). Samaritans were the “bad guys” to the Jews, but Jesus deliberately made a Samaritan the hero of his story to show there is good in people we may not like. Notice the priest and the Levite (two “good guys”) did nothing to help the victim. Jesus redefined who our neighbor is—not just someone who lives on the same street, but any person of any race who is in need.

Jesus included the Gentiles and removed racial barriers. It caused a backlash from His own people and eventually led to His crucifixion. After all, He wasn’t just the King of the Jews, as the Samaritans testified, “They said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this Man is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world’” (John 4:42). In God’s eyes, there is only one race—the human race! {eoa}

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