

# WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY ABOUT RACE AND RACISM?

## WHAT WOULD JESUS SAY, PART 2: RACE & RACISM?

Charleston. Ferguson. Baton Rouge. Minneapolis. Dallas.

As our country reels from one tragic confrontation to the next, what does Jesus have to say about the racism issue that plagues our country? How would Jesus speak into this volatile situation where both police officers and civilians are being gunned down, and where every week, another video about shootings goes viral?

The first-century church was deeply divided over race and social status. Too often, the modern church is too. But God commands us to love one another as we share with the world the good news that God loves everybody.

**BIG IDEA:** Saying 'Yes' to Jesus means saying 'No' to Racism.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

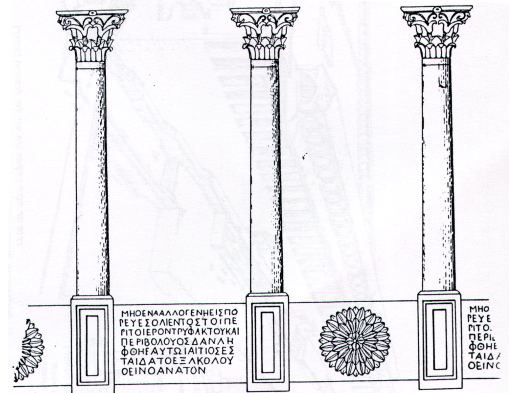
1. What is your own experience with racism and/or prejudice?
2. What are your thoughts on the ongoing tensions that have been revealed through the deadly incidents in places like Charleston, Ferguson, Baton Rouge, Minneapolis, and Dallas?
3. *With your Bible or The Bible App, read Ephesians 2:11-15.*

*Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews. In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. For Jesus himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups.*

*Ephesians 2:11-15 (NLT)*

4. Before Jesus, what problems did the Gentiles (non-Jews) face? What results from being 'in Christ'?
5. What is the bomb that Jesus dropped on the religious 'class system' of His day? What impact would verses 14-18 have on the decisions between Jews and Gentiles?
6. How is the reconciling work of Jesus (verses 19-22) like a new citizenship? Like a new family? Like a new temple?

*In that day, Jews on the Temple mount would literally build a barrier—a wall—so that Gentiles would not pass. They would hang signs on this wall "Let no foreigner go beyond this point. You will be responsible for your own death." Barriers keep people out and keep people at a distance. Barriers create isolation.*

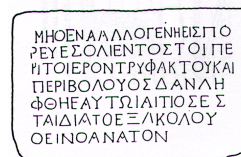


above: A reconstruction of the so-called balustrade, which Jews were not allowed to pass

7. What relationships in your life still have walls to be knocked down? How will that happen?

8. *With your Bible or The Bible App, read Acts 10:27-28.*

*So they talked together and went inside, where many others were assembled. Peter told them, "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean." Acts 10:27-28 (NLT)*



left: A stone-carved Greek inscription forbidding non-Jews enter the area of the Temple

9. Given Peter's experience in Acts 10:9-23 and what you see of Cornelius here, how do you think each man was feeling as they greeted one another?
10. Jews regarded people like Cornelius as pagans, unless they fully submitted to Jewish practices (See Acts 11:3). In that light, what would verse 28 have meant to Peter? To Cornelius? Why is the story of Cornelius so important in Acts (verses 28, 34-35, 43)?

11. *With your Bible or The Bible App, read Galatians 3:25-28.*

*For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26-28*

12. How does being clothed in Christ (verse 27) eliminate major cultural barriers (verse 28)? What are some contemporary cultural barriers between people? What does 2:28 mean to you in that context?

## DIGGING DEEPER

Pause to pray for the families that today are torn and broken.

13. *With your Bible or The Bible App, read Psalm 34:18.* God is close to the brokenhearted; he draws near to those who are grieving. If God is near to the brokenhearted, how can we remain far away? How can we draw near to those in our communities who are hurting?

14. Take some time and pray as a group for the families affected by the shooting.

Pause to give thanks for those who protect the freedom we so often take for granted.

15. *With your Bible or The Bible App, read 1 Thessalonians 5:18.* We are to give thanks when things are good and when things are bad. “We don’t give thanks for all things; we give thanks in all things.” How can we give thanks during tragedy? One thing that we can do is to give thanks for the leaders who have guided our city through this tragedy.

16. Take some time and pray as a group, giving thanks and praying for the leaders of our city, state, and country.

Pause to renew our faith in a father God who is good.

17. When something evil happens, it is natural to wonder why God would ever allow it to happen. Spend a moment in your group; what sorts of questions did you wrestle with this week? What would you ask God, if you could?

18. *With your Bible or The Bible App, read Romans 8:28.* Do we really believe that God will work everything for good? What keeps us from believing that?

19. Take some time and pray as a group, thanking God for being good, even in the midst of tragedy.

## THINK ABOUT IT

If you need some ideas of what it looks like to follow Jesus through loving others, consider the excerpt below from a commitment card that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave to people who wanted to be a part of a movement of justice and love:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.</i>                   | 6. <i>Sacrifice personal wishes in order that all people might be free.</i> |
| 2. <i>Remember always seek justice and reconciliation—not victory.</i>         | 7. <i>Observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.</i>  |
| 3. <i>Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love.</i>                | 8. <i>Seek to perform regular service for others and for the world.</i>     |
| 4. <i>Pray daily to be used by God in order that all people might be free.</i> | 9. <i>Refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.</i>              |
| 5. <i>Sacrifice personal wishes in order that all people might be free.</i>    | 10. <i>Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily health.</i>                |

*I sign this pledge, having seriously considered what I do and with the determination and will to persevere.*

## MOVING FORWARD

If the church (the people of God) do not choose to listen, to care, or to act, someone else will. If love does not lead the way, violence will. What is your next step as part of the church this week?

## CHANGING YOUR MIND

*For Jesus himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Ephesians 2:11-15 (NLT)*