

Good Friday 2015
“Separation Removed – Access Gained”
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“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split...” (Matthew 27:50-51)

And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:37-38)

Now, at home I have some curtains that you could rip pretty easily. But this was no ordinary curtain! The Jewish historian Josephus said the veil was four inches thick, and that horses tied to each side could not pull the veil apart. What was this veil? Let me give you a short explanation:

- The veil was placed at the entrance to the “Most Holy Place” – the place where God’s presence was in the ancient temple. This curtain was no mere sheet hung before the holy of holies; it was said to have been one hand in thickness. This curtain was sixty feet long and thirty feet wide, and separated the Holy and Most Holy Places. Nothing less than a miracle could have torn it in this way and at the precise time of our Lord’s death.
- Only one man, the high priest, could enter there, and then only once a year, only for a few moments. He would take the blood from a lamb, and sprinkle it out in the presence of God, symbolizing the forgiveness of people’s sin.
- If anyone else tried to walk through that veil, they were immediately struck dead by God.
- For almost 1,500 years, this veil in the temple had stood for the separation of man and God – it was a big sign saying “no access.”

Now, imagine that you were in the temple in that Friday as Jesus died. . . and you knew the rules. If I go through that curtain – that veil – I’m a dead man! Suddenly, that curtain that had stood for 1,500 years ripped right down the middle from the top to the bottom! No one was near it, you didn’t see anyone, but it just ripped right in two! You would know – something POWERFUL just happened!!!!

What was happening? God was giving us a powerful picture that shows us this: Jesus death and resurrection gives us access to God.

Imagine that you had a ticket to a concert of your FAVORITE artist. You decided that, since you’re here, you’d like to go talk to him or her. So you headed toward the backstage area.

Guess what would happen? Two big guys in sunglasses would step up in your way about the time you got to the entrance. They would ask to see your backstage pass – and if you don't have one, you might as well forget going backstage, because YOU don't have ACCESS!!

1. Through Jesus, we have access into God's presence.

Heb. 10:19-22 – “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

One of the most famous pictures of president's children is the one of JFK Jr. playing under the desk in the Oval Office while JFK was working. That's the picture of a Christian. . . we've got that kind of access! Anytime, anywhere! It's not about income level. . . It's not about race. . . It's not about background. . . It's not about religious training. . . Eph 2:13, 18 “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. . . For through Him we have access... to the Father.”

The veil, which symbolized man's separation from God, has been ripped in two – we have ACCESS!

2. Through Jesus, we have access to God's forgiveness. Romans 5:2 - “Through Jesus we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Grace = undeserved kindness. Grace means that God doesn't look at you and say, “Get your life in order, and then we'll talk about forgiveness.” He says, “Bring me your messed-up past, let me forgive, then let me work on putting your life in order!”

In 1830, a man named George Wilson was convicted of killing a government employee while robbing the U.S. Mail. He was tried and sentenced to be hanged. Andrew Jackson, then the President, issued a pardon for Wilson, but Wilson did a strange thing: he refused to accept the pardon and no one seemed to know what to do. The matter went to Chief Justice Marshall, perhaps one of the greatest Chief Justices we ever had, and he concluded that Wilson must be executed. “A pardon is a slip of paper,” wrote Marshall, “the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged.” And he was. You've got ACCESS into God's forgiveness. Don't let this day go by without accepting that pardon!

3. Through Jesus, we have access into God's power. NLT Jude 1:24 "And now, all glory to God, who is able to keep you from stumbling, and who will bring you into his glorious presence innocent of sin and with great joy."

Grace = enabling power. Several years ago the Peanuts comic strip had Lucy and Charlie Brown practicing football. Lucy would hold the ball for Charlie's placekicking and then Charlie would kick the ball. But every time Lucy had ever held the ball for Charlie, he would approach the ball and kick with all his might. At the precise moment of the point of no return, Lucy would pick up the ball and Charlie would kick and his momentum unchecked by the ball, which was not there to kick, would cause him to fall flat on his back. This strip opened with Lucy holding the ball, but Charlie Brown would not kick the ball. Lucy begged him to kick the ball. But Charlie Brown said, "Every time I try to kick the ball you remove it and I fall on my back." They went back and forth for the longest time and finally Lucy broke down in tears and admitted, "Charlie Brown I have been so terrible to you over the years, picking up the football like I have. I have played so many cruel tricks on you, but I've seen the error of my ways! I've seen the hurt look in your eyes when I've deceived you. I've been wrong, so wrong. Won't you give a poor penitent girl another chance?" Charlie Brown was moved by her display of grief and responded to her, "Of course, I'll give you another chance." He stepped back as she held the ball, and he ran. At the last moment, Lucy picked up the ball and Charlie Brown fell flat on his back. Lucy's last words were, "Recognizing your faults and actually changing your ways are two different things, Charlie Brown!" God can do something more for you than help you see that you were wrong – he can give you the power to change!

4. Through Jesus, we have access into God's place/home for us.

And if I am going away to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will welcome you into my presence, so that you may be where I am. (ISV) (John 14:3)