

“Beyond the Wall”

Ephesians 2:1-20

9 in our series on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians

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Introduction

My life has really been dull and lifeless lately. I’ve felt trapped and constrained. My counselor suggested that I read some good books. So I tried. I read this book, *Snow White*. I read most of it and really liked it until I got to page 78 and read this:

They were too late. Snow White had already taken a bite of the poisoned apple and was lying lifeless on the floor.

I thought, “This book sucks!” She bites the apple and dies. I stopped reading and threw it in the trashcan.

People said *Dumbo* is uplifting, so I started reading. He’s born deformed, everybody mocks him, his mother is locked away, and then I read:

Dumbo, crying for his mother, thought he had no friends in the world as the other elephants turned their back on him.

How depressing! That goes in the trash.

The Lion King sounds good, huh? So I started reading it. It’s about this little lion Simba who screws up big time, and his father—the lion king—dies. On page 53, I read this:

“If it weren’t for you, your father would still be alive!” Scar snarled. “Run away, Simba...run away and never return!” Confused and heartbroken, Simba began to run.

Awful story! In the trash.

I read this one: *Beauty and the Beast*. I only got to page 7, and I read this:

But she wouldn’t let him finish. “I have seen that there is no love in your heart,” she said. “That makes you no better than a beast—and so you shall become a beast!”

“No!” the Prince protested. “Please...”

The enchantress raised her hands high. Slowly the boy changed. Dark hair sprouted on his face and hands. Claws grew from his fingertips. He screamed with pain as his teeth became long and sharp.

“I hereby cast a spell on the entire castle,” the enchantress declared. “You shall remain a prisoner here—and you shall have no human company.”

Now I was more depressed than ever! And someone said, “Try reading a book for grown-ups.” So I read this *Star Wars* book. It was awesome until Obi-Wan Kenobi, Jedi Master, battles Darth Vader.

“Your philosophies no longer confuse me, old man,” Vader growled contemptuously. “I am the master now.”

Once again he lunged forward, feinting, and then slashing in a deadly downward arc with the saber. It struck home, cutting the old man cleanly in half.

The Jedi Master dies, and Darth Vader is totally corrupt. Forget this! It's been like that with story after story after story.

The Lord of the Rings was good. I loved Gandalf until page 430.

With a terrible cry the Balrog fell forward, and its shadow plunged down and vanished. But even as it fell it swung its whip, and the thongs lashed and curled about the wizard's knees, dragging him to the brink. He staggered, and fell, grasped vainly at the stone, and slid into the abyss. "Fly, you fools" he cried, and was gone.

The fires went out, and blank darkness fell. The company stood rooted with horror staring into the pit.

I tore that page out of the book, throwing the rest into the trash, thinking, This is what I'll remember: "They stood rooted with horror staring into the pit."

Someone said, "Read Bible stories." I did. Eve bites the apple. Adam is cursed and turns into a beast. Abraham pimps his bride. Moses fails and dies in the wilderness. David has an affair and murders the woman's husband. Jerusalem gets destroyed several times. It's just too painful to read. Even after Easter in Acts 7, they stone Stephen to death, and a young man named Saul holds everyone's jackets. Acts 9:1:

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

It turns out that Saul—also called Paul—is the worst sinner that ever lived! Bad Story. Trash it.

Let's pray.

Prayer

Father, I think you've asked me to preach the Gospel. So I pray that by the power of your Spirit, in Jesus' name, you would help us preach. Amen.

Sermon

Well, we've been preaching through the book of Ephesians, written by Paul, "foremost of sinners." Let's review.

Ephesians 1:1: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will [choice] of God...." See, Paul is a story that God is telling.

Ephesians 1:3: "God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...." He chose *us*. Who's us? Well, us appears to be whoever is reading this letter, Jews and Gentiles. In chapter 3, he calls it "the mystery of Christ" that Gentiles and Jews are both chosen in Christ Jesus. It's a mystery, and yet it was there all along.

In Genesis 12, God chooses Abraham and his seed, but He tells Abraham that he is blessed to be a blessing to all the families—all the Gentiles—of the earth. Theologian J. S. Whale

writes, “This very particularity is the sacrament of universality.” Theologian N.T. Wright writes, “The covenant between God and Israel was always designed to be God’s means of saving the whole world. It was never supposed to be the means whereby God would have a private little group of people who would be saved while the rest of the world went to hell.”

Abraham was chosen that others might know that *they* were chosen; that, like Abraham, they are a story God is telling. It’s right there in the first chapter of Genesis. On the 6th day God says, “Let us make man in our own image.” According to scripture, it’s still the 6th day, and God is still telling our story. Even according to physicists, from the standpoint of the Big Bang (because time is relative), it’s still the 6th day. God is still making us in His image, telling our story.

The first man perfected in His image is Jesus, the “firstborn of all creation”...“firstborn from the dead”...“promised seed.” And we were “chosen in Him.” He is the Word through whom all things are created: the *logos*, the reason, the plot. Jesus is the story, the good story that God is telling, and we are chosen in Him.

In other words, God is telling His story in us, His Body. In other words, everyone in this room is a good story God is telling. Jesus is literally the beginning, the end, and the plot. We were each chosen in Christ to be to the praise of His glory, and God’s glory is grace. So everyone in this room is a good story that God is telling to the praise of His glorious grace. And *you* can only see one page.

If you’re that person’s father, mother, brother, or sister, you may know more pages. But you don’t know all the pages. And so it’s very easy to judge a person by one page in their story and throw them in the trash thinking, “This is not a good story!”

But in Ephesians 1:10, Paul writes: “The plan for the fullness of time: God will *anakephalaio*, unite all things under one Head: Christ.” We know that He’s already united us, His Body, but verse 10 says, “He will unite all things.” In verse 11, “God works all things according to the counsel of His will”—His choice—His Word. Maybe we can will what He doesn’t will, but only because He wills it. We can choose evil, but God’s still writing the story.

So it sounds like everybody who’s anybody is a story that God is telling,
a good story that God is telling,
for Jesus is the plot,
and Jesus is the protagonist.

And every story has an antagonist. The antagonist is chaos, darkness, lost-ness, lies, and death. But Jesus is the reason, the light, the way, the truth, and the life. He is spoken like a Word into the void. He is spoken like a seed into this dark womb of the world. He is spoken into you as the gospel of eternal life. *Life*.

Ephesians 2:1: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.” In the Old Testament, dead is basically synonymous with *Sheol*, which translates as *Hades* in Greek, or *Hell* in English. In the Old Testament, Hell starts on the surface of the earth and continues under the earth after a person’s heart stops beating. In the Old Testament (Eccl. 9:10), everyone goes to Sheol. And Paul writes, “You were dead.”

So of course you had a “Hell of a day.” You really did have a Hell of a day! He writes, “You were dead.” Verse 3: “By nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.” So it’s not like *some* were children of wrath and others were *not* children of wrath; not like some were vessels of wrath and some were not vessels of wrath. We were all born with the same nature. In other words, we are all one race, all by nature children of wrath.

But verse 4: “God made us alive together with Christ.” And verse 8: “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this [faith and salvation] is not your own doing [you’re not writing your own story]; it’s the gift of God...so that no one may boast [it’s His choice]. For we are His workmanship [His masterpiece, His story] created in Christ Jesus for good works.”

And what are the good works? Loving the world as He loved the world. So we, the Church, are chosen, but not because others will never be chosen. Actually, it’s just the opposite. We are blessed to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. We are chosen by love that we might choose to love. We’re chosen to proclaim that God has chosen to unite all things in Christ.

Ephesians 2:11: “Therefore, remember...” Verse 14: “He himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.”

Last week we started talking about that dividing wall. By it Paul must mean:

1. The dividing wall between people and God, like the veil in the temple that ripped from top to bottom when Christ died.
2. That dividing wall in the temple that separated the Jews from the Gentiles, the wall that came crashing down exactly one generation after Christ died, the wall separating people from other types of people.
3. Walls in the temple of our hearts, the walls we create when we judge people.

You know, I think we’re supposed to judge actions, but we can’t judge people. We can’t judge their stories, for we haven’t read all the pages. So when I judge people, it’s like ripping one page out of their story and throwing the book in the trash. I don’t even begin to understand all the factors that lead to the actions on one particular page. I don’t know their history. I don’t know the demons they carry. And I don’t know why the author has included this page in the story, for, you see, this person is not their own author.

I can’t judge their story, yet if I’m a Christian, I do know the plot. I know the beginning and the end. I know Jesus. So although I can’t explain the story or judge the story, I know it’s a good story, written by an author who is good. And if I know it’s a good story, I won’t throw it in the trash...on the other side of some wall. I won’t separate. I’ll get more interested, for everything in a story has meaning or the author wouldn’t include it in the story. And it all reveals the plot.

So I won’t abandon Snow White in disgust, fear, or despair. I’ll get all the more interested, because I trust it’s a good story. I’ll have compassion on Dumbo and hope for Simba in exile and hope for the selfish prince stranded in the flesh of a beast. I’ll whisper to myself, “Surely we haven’t seen the last of Obi-Wan Kenobi.” And I’ll wonder who is hiding under Darth Vader’s mask. Even though Gandolph descended into Hell, even if he loses hope, I won’t lose hope.

I’ll keep reading. I won’t give up on this story, this person, even if they’re infected with demons, bite me like a beast, or even have big, ugly ears. I know the story isn’t over and the author is good, so I won’t cast them on the other side of some wall.

Last week we talked about the wall between races of people, particularly the wall between Jews and Gentiles, because that’s the wall Paul is talking about in Ephesians 2. And it’s the wall that you can still see in the Middle East to this day.



This dividing wall of hostility still stands because many Jews and many American Christians believe that ethnic Jews are chosen for a particular blessing, and ethnic Arabs are not. In other words, they believe one story is blessed and another is not. It's ironic, because Isaac (father of Israel) and Ishmael (father of the Arabs) are brothers and both sons of Abraham. So if one is blessed, he's blessed to be a blessing to his brother. And Jesus said, "Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers, you do to me." Jews and Gentiles.

It's fascinating that in the Old Testament especially, Scripture usually talks about saving groups. It's inconceivable in Scripture that you could rest in paradise while your wife or children were tormented in Hell.

- And so God reveals Himself to families and teaches individuals grace for others in the family.
- And then God reveals Himself to tribes and teaches families grace for other families in the tribe.
- And then God reveals Himself to nations and teaches tribes grace for other tribes in the nation.
- And then Paul writes in Ephesians 3:6: "The nations are fellow heirs"...with Israel.

Last time we talked about the dividing wall between races. I said I think this may be a far greater dividing wall than that in Israel or South Africa or Germany seventy years ago, and a far greater Holocaust because of it. I spoke about a dividing wall erected by the Western Church in the 6th century when the Church was conscripted by the empire of Rome. That's when this dividing wall started to become doctrine—that some men were created and predestined for a story of endless grace called the Kingdom of Heaven, and some men were created and predestined for a story of endless wrath called Hell. As if in the beginning God said, "Let us make a few men in our own image and bless them. Let us make most men a gross distortion of our own image and curse them and torment them forever without end—without Jesus, for Jesus is the end."

It's the doctrine of eternal conscious torment.
I believe it's very unbiblical, theologically absurd, and dishonoring to Christ.
Yet I've discovered it's incredibly attractive.
And why is that?

[Video clip from *Hellbound*, with Bob Larson, Exorcist:]

Bob: *It is a slippery slope of wishful thinking that some theologians have gotten on, because, quite frankly, they don't have the guts to deal with the reality of evil. There are different aspects, maybe different compartments, maybe different degrees like Dante suggested. But it's all pretty bad. I wouldn't want to go there, and I certainly don't want to see anybody else go there, and it's what compels me to do what I do.*

[Bob is shown exorcising, placing his Bible on a man's head and a large cross on the man's chest while shouting.]

Bob: *Can anyone really believe—I mean really even want to believe—that Hitler's had a second chance, that Pol Pot and Stalin are going to be walking through the Pearly Gates with the rest of us good guys? I don't think so. Jesus was pretty plain. He spoke clearly to the fact that there are two ways: the broad and the narrow.*

Pastor Bob says, "Hell is a real place," and I think he's right. He says, "I wouldn't hope it for anyone," and then he says, "Can anyone even want to believe Hitler goes to Heaven?" That is, "I wouldn't hope Hell for anyone, but, of course, I hope it for Hitler. How could anyone even want to hope Hitler goes to Heaven?" But if I can't hope Heaven for Hitler, how can I hope Heaven for Paul, the foremost of sinners? It's in the Bible. Not Hitler, but *Paul* is the foremost of sinners!

Rev. Bob goes on to say, "Can anyone even want to believe that Hitler will walk through the Pearly Gates with the rest of us good guys?" Well, who are "the rest of us good guys"? According to Paul, by nature we're all children of wrath, and once saved, we have no reason to boast, for we didn't choose God.

God chose us.

That's the point of election: humility, not pride.

According to Jesus, there are two paths, and everyone takes the wrong path. Only one takes the narrow path, and He becomes our path. He is the path, He is the gate, He is the way; He is the way, the truth, and the life. And He gave His life for all, not some.

I've encountered demons on numerous occasions, and they all try to convince people of the same thing: The grace of God in Christ Jesus is not sufficient. They say, "Jesus didn't give His life for you or for them. So throw them over the wall, throw yourself over the wall. In fact, you're already over the wall. Welcome to Hell. Nothing can prevail against the gates of Hell."

Do you ever listen to a voice like that? Have you ever spoken a word like that? You see, I think there is a Holocaust greater than any other Holocaust, and we self-righteous, religious folks commit it, and it's committed upon ourselves.

How's that?

Well, if I take Paul seriously, as soon as I judge someone with "the knowledge of good and evil," I'm dead. I'm on this side of the wall. So this is a more accurate representation of the start of my sermon. [Peter picks up the story books and gets into the trash can. He looks again at each book and then tosses it onto the stage outside of the trashcan.] I judge people:

- "She's pretty but has nothing to say."
- "He has big ears."

- “He killed his father and should be ashamed.”
- “He’s a beast, he bit me, and I won’t forgive him.”
- “There’s no hope for Obi-Wan Kenobi. Darth Vader is forever an ass.”
- “Gandalf goes to Hell. Well, he was kind of a New-Ager.”
- “Eve bit the apple, Abraham was a creep, Moses was a loser, David should be impeached. No one ever sinned worse than Paul. And check this out: Jesus numbered Himself with the transgressors. He cried out, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ and descended into Hell. Story over. Throw it out.”

Now, at last, I’m safe. I’m in control behind these walls. I’m at peace in my city of peace—Jerusalem. You know, 2,000 years ago they judged Jesus out of the city and onto a cross. And their fortress literally became a prison under siege. Heaven on earth became Hell on earth.

Maybe any time I judge people out, I judge their creator out.
 Maybe any time I judge the story bad, I judge the storyteller bad.
 Maybe whenever I judge others out, I judge myself in...to Hell.

It’s almost like the judgment you pronounce is the judgment you receive. So give Hell, and you’ll get Hell. [Peter turns the garbage can around, and it says HELL.] Oh, Hell. Hell...an isolated, little, dark, lonely kingdom of self, devoid of life, because you’ve literally judged the life right out of your kingdom. Utterly alone, yet surrounded by evil spirits: spirits of the accuser, dark spirits, lying spirits, evil spirits. And you think it’s the end. But it’s not the end. Jesus is the end. Ephesians 4:9 says Jesus descends even into Hell. Jesus is the plot to your story.

Why don’t I trust the power of God’s grace for other stories? Because I don’t trust the power of God’s grace for my own story. But crucified, Jesus gave up His spirit—His Spirit of trust in His Father; His Spirit of faith, hope, and love. It descends into our dead hearts like a word or a seed, giving us courage to look beyond our walls.

You see, you don’t have to descend into Hell. He can set you free *now*. Free from your sin, the prison of self, and free to love as He loved, free to live beyond the walls. And what’s beyond the walls? [Peter gets out of the trashcan and begins to pick up the books.] Well, for starters, a bunch of really great stories.

- Did you know that Snow White is kissed by a prince, rises from the dead, and lives happily after? Awesome! The most troubling pages reveal the greatest stories and blessings.
- Did you know that Dumbo’s ears weren’t a curse but a blessing?
- Did you know Simba becomes Lion King and rules his father’s kingdom?
- The beast turns back into a prince...but a prince with a new heart.
- Darth Vader repents and is reunited with Obi-Wan Kenobi.
- Gandalf rises from Hell, and he’s no longer grey but white.
- Abraham becomes father of nations—not one, but many.
- Moses enters the Promised Land on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus.
- David and Bathsheba give birth to the Messiah.
- Jerusalem comes down new from Heaven.
- Paul becomes the apostle of grace and writes the Bible.

And all glory goes to the Author of the stories.
 His glory is grace.

Why would anyone want to hope for Hitler? Well, haven't you noticed? It's just like Paul wrote: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." And that's what makes a great story! Elie Wiesel wrote, "God created man because he loves stories." So I hope Hitler has more than a second chance. I hope he has a new heart flooded with grace. I hope to see Hitler washing the feet of six million Jews. And not because he has to, but because he wants to. It's his delight, and the delight of six million Jews: a communion of delight.

Heaven, for Paul, was communion with people he once sought to exterminate. What a story!

What's beyond the wall? Stories. And I will not only hear the stories one day in Heaven; I can take part in the stories on earth right now. Then I'll participate in a communion of stories in Heaven.

"Remember how Jesus saved you? You were a beast!"
"Remember how He used you to save me? I was an ass!"
"Remember how He saved us, my friend?"

Communion.

But if I even suspect that someone is simply a vessel of wrath, created only for endless torment, I'll erect a dividing wall before you can blink an eye. Yet if I believe God is writing a good story, and that God is all good and all powerful, even if they bite me, even if they curse, me, even if they crucify me...I'll have hope. I'm sharing in the sufferings of Jesus as we all write an amazing story.

So what's beyond the wall? Amazing people. And God in all His glory—"a slaughtered lamb, standing on the throne." Michael Meade wrote, "A story is a store or storehouse. Things are actually stored in the story." And what's stored there is the meaning; in Greek, the *logos*. And Jesus is the meaning to every story—the *logos*, the plot.

J. R. R. Tolkien wrote, "You can't keep the gospel out of stories." Even bad stories are a longing for the good story.

chaos turned to order
the lost find the way (or better, the way finds the lost)
lies are conquered by truth
death gives way to life
darkness gives way to light
doubt gives way to faith
despair gives way to hope
condemnation gives way to grace

In other words, chaos is defeated by the Word of God—Jesus Christ our Lord.

If I believe that God is writing a person's story with Jesus, then I can bear testimony to Jesus and become part of His story. Jesus means, "God is salvation." His name is glorious. Jesus saves us from our sin, our self. But if I believe that God may not be writing their story, I bear witness to myself as savior, or their self as savior—"the self" that saves them from God. In other words, I build a dividing wall of hostility between that person and God. They'll honor Him with their lips, and their heart will be far from Him...in Hell.

So on the other side of the wall is people and God and me. Ephesians 2:6: "We are already seated in the heavenly places with Christ." That's crazy. My life, my true self, the eternal me is found beyond the wall...because I'm connected to every other story and to God. We are reconciled in one body—one life, and life is this great diversity in unity where walls of

hostility have become the gates of mercy, where one member sacrifices for all and all sacrifice for one.

So beyond the walls of hostility are amazing people, the glory of God in Christ Jesus, my true self, me...and Jubilee. I mentioned jubilee last time. Jubilee literally means “ram’s horn,” but it’s not the usual word for ram’s horn. It’s hardly ever used in the Bible except in two places. In Joshua 6, the children of Israel blow the *jubilee*, and the walls of Jericho come tumbling down. And then in Leviticus 25-27, the Israelites are instructed to declare a *jubilee* on the Day of Atonement—the 50th year after 49 years (7x7), the sabbath of sabbaths. On jubilee, all dividing walls were to come crashing down. All debts were to be forgiven, prisoners were to be released from prison, all land was to be returned to the families to whom it was first allotted, and all were to remember Leviticus 25:23. The Lord says, “The land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me.”

It appears that jubilee was never observed by Israel as commanded. However, it became part of the Messianic hope, that Messiah would proclaim the Year of Jubilee. When Jesus stood in the synagogue and quoted Isaiah 61 (in Luke 4), that’s exactly what He did. “Good news to the poor, liberty to the captives...the year of the Lord’s favor.” And everything went well until He began to point out that the Jubilee would include the Gentiles—like the widow of Zerephath, and Naaman the Syrian. Then His hometown tried to kill Him.

Jubilee finally did happen on Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection. It didn’t happen by the power of human flesh and the law. It happened by the power of the Spirit with tongues of fire. In Jerusalem a multitude from every nation under Heaven, including Arabs (Acts 2:11), all heard the good news in their own language, and all shared everything in common. None had any lack.

It was the New Jerusalem coming down, and her gates are always open.

It was the prophecy in Zechariah 2:5: “I will be to Jerusalem a wall of fire all around and the glory in her midst.”

It was the Church, not protected with walls of stone but walls of fire. God is fire, and God is love.

Our relationships are not to be mediated by ordinances, laws, and walls of stone. Our relationships are to be mediated by the grace of God, which is the life of Christ, which is blood, which is fire.

It was Jubilee and Pentecost, the New Jerusalem. It was a party. Heaven is a great party. And the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. But don’t expect Benjamin Netanyahu or Barak Obama or Hamas to tear down the walls. Don’t expect the principalities and powers of this present darkness to tear down the walls. They can only build walls. God wants to use *you* to tear down the walls. And this is how we do it:

1. We find dividing walls of hostility.
2. In the power of His Spirit, we climb over those walls and simply love people on the other side. And not to save them so much as to experience our own salvation.

“We love because He first loved us”—because He climbed over the dividing wall that we had erected.

Communion

And on the night He was betrayed, He took bread and broke it saying, “This is my body broken for you. Take and eat. Do this in remembrance of me.” And in the same way after

supper, after He had given thanks, He took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you. Do it in remembrance of me."

So He calls you to His table to tear off a piece of the bread and dip it in the cup, and then take that seed—that little piece of fire—and put it in the tomb, put it in that Old Jerusalem and turn it into the New Jerusalem.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, your name is glorious. God is salvation. You've consigned all men to disobedience, so we build walls, and you even command us to build walls. You've consigned all men to disobedience that you might have grace upon all. Your glory is tearing down the walls and showering your lost children with grace.

God, we thank you for who you are. We pray that we would live who you are and be your Body in this world. This is Thanksgiving week, Lord. That means we're going to have dinner with some people we probably don't like. Father, we pray right now for those people...

Think about the people you're going to have Thanksgiving dinner with. Does anyone have big ears? Do you see anyone pretty but you've thought, "There's nothing going on upstairs; she's asleep"? Maybe there's someone in exile; they're the black sheep of your family, and they're imprisoned in shame. Maybe someone's a beast, and he has bit you. This is what I'm asking you to do: Would you thank God for that person? Maybe they're not just a beast. Maybe one day you'll see those ears soaring through the heavens. Or he'll come back and rule his father's kingdom after he understands the glory of his father's grace. Or maybe she'll wake up and be your bride. When we pray, things change. We realize they're God's stories. And He writes good stories.

If you climb over that wall, you might get yourself crucified. But that's not the end. The end is hanging there with Jesus on that cross. The end is the life. Have courage.

There may be other places where you have dividing walls of hostility. How about poor people? How about rich people? How about people on welfare? How about people who voted against increases in welfare? How about people in Sun Valley? Would you pray that next week you might taste it just for a moment, that you would taste jubilee? Pray for people on the other side of that wall.

Our world is full of dividing walls. It looks like we could be on the edge of a big war in the Middle East because of a dividing wall. Think of some group of people that is on the other side of some dividing wall. And now pray for them.

Father, we do pray for the sons of Ishmael that have been told they're cursed. Lord God, would you help them see your glory, that even your curse is like a prelude to your blessing, because your blessing is grace? We pray for the sons of Isaac that have built walls around themselves and told themselves that you love them in a way you don't love others. Then they miss your love, because your love is poured out from your cross as grace.

Lord, we thank you that you came to tear down the dividing walls. We pray that you would use us as your Body to do just that, and that, Lord God, when we do just that, we wouldn't do it in an exalted way but as people who hope in who you are, people who want to experience your blessing, humble people who want to experience the joy of jubilee. And people who realize it's all gift—your kingdom is gift.

And that is a pretty good story. In Jesus' name, amen.

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