



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## Missiology

### Lesson 3 – Jesus’ Teachings on Gentile Missions

Jesus’ interest in lost sinners and what He did for them is summed up in His own words:

**“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”** (Luke 19:10). Although Jesus certainly wanted to save all lost sinners, both Jews and Gentiles, He restricted Himself and His followers almost entirely to the children of Israel during the days of His humiliation. He said to a Canaanite woman who came to ask for help for her daughter: **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 15:24). He did then heal her daughter, however, because the woman asked only for the crumbs that fall from the Jewish table. To His twelve apostles Jesus said: **“Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 10:5-6). Even when Jesus had a golden opportunity to work in a Samaritan village that recognized Him as **“the Savior of the world”**, He **“stayed there”** only **“two days”** (John 4:40-43).

Yet there are numerous examples of Jesus’ contact with Gentiles during His ministry to the Jews, and He did not fail to help these Gentiles both physically and spiritually. Even in His infancy the Wise Men from the East **“fell down and worshiped Him”** (Matthew 2:11). Soon after Jesus began His public ministry, He traveled through Samaria, and **“many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him”** through His contact with one woman at a well; some of them even confessed: **“We ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world”** (John 4:39-42).

Jesus made His headquarters in Capernaum in **“Galilee of the Gentiles”** (Matthew 4:15). He then began to teach and heal in that area. We read that **“His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him – from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan”** (Matthew 4:24-25). There is no hint that He turned any of them away because they had Gentile blood. Rather, we read of a Gentile centurion in Capernaum who had such faith in Jesus’ healing power that he believed that Jesus could heal his servant from a distance by merely saying a word. Jesus not only healed his servant by His word, but He **“said to the crowd that followed Him, ‘I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!’”** (Luke 7:9).

We have already mentioned the woman of Canaan; the fact that she was a Canaanite is of special interest because many years earlier, after the great flood, Noah had prophesied:

**“Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren”** (Genesis 9:25). This curse no longer applied to this Canaanite woman.

Jesus healed ten lepers, but the only one who returned to thank Him was a Samaritan. Jesus asked: **“Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?”** (Luke 17:18).

In the week of His death some Greeks wanted to see Jesus. This led Jesus to look ahead to His coming death and the abundant fruit it would produce among the Gentiles such as these Greeks, and He said: **“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain”** (John 12:24). In fact, Jesus often looked ahead to the day when His name would be praised among the Gentiles, when **“many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”** (Matthew 8:11).

When Jesus was brought to the Temple when He was only forty days old, Simeon said that Jesus would be **“a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles”** (Luke 2:32). John the Baptist likewise pointed to Jesus and called Him **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). Jesus Himself told the Samaritan woman at the well who asked about the proper place to worship God: **“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain (Mt. Gerizim), nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ... The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth”** (John 4:21-23).

As opposition to Jesus among the Jews and their leaders increased toward the end of His ministry, Jesus became more direct in talking about the day that would come soon when many Gentiles would receive Him. For example, He told the parable of the vinedressers who refused to accept the landowner’s servants and even his own son; instead, they **“took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him”** (Matthew 21:39). Jesus then asked His listeners what the landowner would do to such vinedressers. They answered Him: **“He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons”** (Matthew 21:41). With this answer the Jews were pronouncing their own sad fate, for Jesus told them: **“The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it”** (Matthew 21:43). The Jewish leaders understood what Jesus was saying, and they hated Him even more because **“they perceived that He was speaking of them”** (Matthew 21:45).

Jesus told two other parables on this same theme. The first was about the marriage feast of the king’s son to which many had been invited. But when the invited people of the kingdom refused to come to his feast, some of them even killing the servants who invited them, the king told his servants: **“Go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding”** (Matthew 22:9). Those who were first invited were the Jewish people. The king became angry with them, so **“he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city”** (Matthew 22:7). Surely this was a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 70 AD. The invitation then was extended to the Gentiles.

The second is similar. Jesus told about a man who made a great supper to which many were invited. Those who were first invited refused to come, and so the man’s servant was then instructed to invite the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind. Since there was still room for more, the servant was told: **“Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper”** (Luke 14: 23-24).

When His death drew ever nearer, Jesus expressed more frequently the coming days of mission to the Gentiles. When He foretold the coming destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said: **“This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come”** (Matthew 24:14). He spoke of the gathering His elect **“from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”** (Matthew 24:31). On the final

Judgment Day **“all the nations will be gathered before Him”** (Matthew 25:32). Even when Jesus defended Mary, Martha’s sister, from those who accused her of waste because she poured out her precious perfume on Jesus, He had the Gentiles in mind, for He said on that occasion: **“I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her”** (Matthew 26:13).

Zebedee’s sons James and John were certainly loyal followers of Jesus, but they did not completely share the spirit of their Master. When a certain Samaritan village did not want Jesus to come to them, James and John thought that a destructive fire from heaven would be appropriate, but Jesus responded: **“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 9:55-56). It was not the time for judgment. In fact, when judgment did come, it came first for the Jews, not for the Gentiles. At the conclusion of one of His parables, Jesus addressed His fellow-Jews with these words: **“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last”** (Luke 13:28-30). Judgment came to Jerusalem and the Jewish nation in 70 AD. Jesus warned them in advance: **“There will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”** (Luke 21:23-24). We are now living in the times of the Gentiles, a time when the Gospel of Christ is being proclaimed throughout the world.

John’s Gospel in particular stresses the **world** as the object of God’s love. **“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”** (John 3:16). Jesus called Himself **“the living bread which came down from heaven”** and then He said: **“The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world”** (John 6:51). **“I am the light of the world”** (John 8:12), Jesus said.

Jesus talked about the Gentiles as His **“other sheep”**: **“Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice”** (John 10:16). Jesus will gather these other sheep through His Word. John took careful note of the words of the ruling high priest Caiaphas when he called for Jesus’ death. In a cunning and cruel way Caiaphas said: **“It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.”** But John saw in these words of high priest a prophecy of world evangelism: **“Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad”** (John 11:50-52).

The cross would be the symbol of our Savior’s death, but Jesus Himself saw it also as a magnet attracting many Gentiles to Himself. He said: **“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself”** (John 12:32). Therefore, the evening before His arrest Jesus

prayed not only for His disciples, but for all the many who would be brought to faith through the faithful teaching of His followers: **“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word”** (John 17:20). This includes all of us Christians who are living today.

Immediately after Jesus’ suffering and death for the sin of the world and His triumphant resurrection, the message of Jesus with regard to the Gentiles changed from anticipation to reality. Now was the time for the worldwide mission to begin. The time of the Gentiles was at hand. Already on the day of His resurrection Jesus said to His disciples: **“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”** (John 20:21-23). Not long after that, Jesus spoke to His followers (probably over 500 of them at one time) and gave them their commission: **“Go ... and make disciples of all the nations”** (Matthew 28:19). **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15).

Shortly before He ascended to heaven, Jesus said **“that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”** (Luke 24:47). In a very short time Jesus and His Father would send the Holy Spirit to His disciples in Jerusalem for this purpose, and then they would be empowered to be His witnesses **“to the end of the earth”** (Acts 1:8). Jesus’ last words to His disciples while He was with them in the flesh directed them to do mission work, to be missionaries, to spread the Good News of His salvation throughout the world.

As we examine Jesus’ so-called “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18-20) we find that it is based on Christ’s authority over heaven and earth, its key command is to make disciples of all nations; it involves movement and expansion; its method is baptizing and teaching; it is carried out in the name of the one Triune God (Father, Son, Spirit); and its goal is not to create shallow and superficial followers, but rather followers who are to be taught **“to observe all things”** that Jesus has commanded. This work of missions will continue as long as the world endures, for Jesus promised: **“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

## Questions

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1. Where did Jesus and His disciples do their preaching before Jesus' death?
2. Name some Gentiles who came to faith in Jesus during those days.
3. What was Jesus' response to the desire of some Greeks to see Him?
4. Which parables of Jesus point ahead to the Gospel being preached among Gentiles?
5. What did Jesus mean when He talked about His **"other sheep"**?
6. In what way did Jesus pray for us on the night before His death?
7. What did Jesus mean by **"the times of the Gentiles"**?
8. List the various directions about Gentile mission work that Jesus spoke after He rose from the dead.
9. What promises did Jesus make to His disciples about their mission?