

Jesus and the Gentiles

(Open your Bibles to Ephesians 3.)

Introduction

Show of hands: Do we have any Jews in the audience? For you Jews, know that Jesus said, “Salvation is of the Jews.” For the others, you are “non-Jews” or “Greeks” or “Gentiles,” from the other “nations.” So, how is it that we Gentiles have access to salvation? In order to answer that question, we will first answer the question, “**When Was The Gospel First Preached To The Gentiles?**” Then we will consider “**Jesus’ attitude toward the Gentiles.**” Finally, we will consider “**3 Lessons for Us Gentiles.**”

When Was The Gospel First Preached To The Gentiles?

Much of the New Testament, and especially the book of Acts, is the unfolding of the story of the spread of the gospel, starting among the Jews (Acts 2-9) and spreading to all the Gentiles, starting with Peter’s preaching to Cornelius (Acts 10), Peter defending his preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 11) with the conclusion, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.” (Acts 11:18) and continuing with Paul’s missionary journeys (starting in Acts 13) where he would preach to the Jews in the synagogues, they would generally reject the message while the Gentiles would beg to hear the message, and Paul would say things like,

“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.”⁴⁷

“For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”

⁴⁸ Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. – Acts 13:46-48

[The book of Acts ends with this:] Let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it! – Acts 28:28

And we may recall that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26) ... in the first church comprised of Jews AND Gentiles!

(See slide show on Ephesians 3:1-6. The “mystery” was the inclusion of the Gentiles as fellow heirs with the Jews in the body of Christ.)

But the preaching to the Gentiles started before the book of Acts.

One purpose in Jesus preaching around the Sea of Galilee was so that He could be a light to the Gentiles.

He departed to Galilee.¹³ And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali,¹⁴ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,

By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:

¹⁶ The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,

And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.”

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” – Matthew 4:12-17

¹⁸ He will declare justice to the Gentiles. ...

²¹ And in His name Gentiles will trust.” – Matthew 12:18-21

Salvation is of the Jews. ²³ “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. – John 4:22b-23

But the preaching to the Gentiles was predicted even before the ministry of Jesus.

In fact, when Jesus was about 6 weeks old (cp. Lev.12), the godly man, Simeon, said

My eyes have seen Your salvation

³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

³² A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,

And the glory of Your people Israel.” – Luke 2:30-32

And this was mentioned even long before the birth of Jesus. Simeon probably had in mind...

Isaiah 49:6 – ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’

But Isaiah was not the first to preach about the salvation of the Gentiles.

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. – Galatians 3:8-9

(Genesis 12:3) – All the nations; All the families of the earth. Us.

But the thought of preaching to the Gentiles did not start when God saw faithful Abraham.

... the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Ephesians 3:9-11

Jesus’ Attitude Toward The Gentiles

What Reputation Did The Gentiles Have?

Carnal –

Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’³² “For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.³³ “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. – Matthew 6:31-33

Idolatrous –

You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. – 1 Corinthians 12:1

Worldly/Ungodly –

There is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles. – 1 Corinthians 5:1

...Not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God... – 1 Thessalonians 4:5

But what did Jesus have to say about certain Gentiles, in spite of the stereotype?

1. The centurion (Matthew 8)

⁵ Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, ⁶ saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.” ⁷ And Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.” ⁸ The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ “For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” ¹⁰ When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! ¹¹ “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² “But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.” And his servant was healed that same hour. – Matthew 8:5-13

Sense of urgency / Sense of need / Sense of unworthiness / Respect for authority

2. The Canaanite woman (Matthew 15)

(Mark 7:26 tells us she was a Gentile, a Syro-Phoenician by birth.) Jesus went ... to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.” ²³ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, “Send her away, for she cries out after us.” ²⁴ But He answered and said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵ Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” ²⁶ But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” ²⁷ And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸ Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour. – Matthew 15:21-28

Love for family / Humility

3. The Samaritan woman (John 4)

The woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. [*And, jumping to verse 27, we see that His disciples “marveled that He talked with a woman.”*] ¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.”

The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

The woman then left her water pot, went her way into the city, and said to the men,²⁹ “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ? ...

Many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman...
– John 4:9-10, 25-26, 28-29, 39

More spiritual than we would expect / Useful in the kingdom

Jesus taught several points using Gentiles to illustrate. For example,

“No prophet is accepted in his own country.²⁵ “But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land;²⁶ “but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of **Sidon**, to a woman who was a widow.²⁷ “And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the **Syrian**.”

[The Jews then proved Jesus’ point:]²⁸ So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,²⁹ and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. – Luke 4:24-29

Acceptance comes from unexpected quarters

[From the parable of the **Good Samaritan**:] “Which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? ... “Go and do likewise.” – Luke 10:37

Love

The **one thankful leper of the 10** whom Jesus healed... was a “foreigner,” a Samaritan!
(Luke 17:11-19)

Thankfulness

Even the story of the **prodigal son** can be understood as a contrast between the Gentiles (the prodigals who repented) and the Jews who had “always” been with the Father. (Luke 15:11-32)

Repentance

3 Lessons for Us

1. The gospel lowers us all to the same level.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” – Romans 3:23

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. – Romans 1:16

[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. Jesus **died** for all the children, all the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight. Jesus **died** for all the children of the world.

[Song] Of one the Lord has made the race; Through one has come the fall; Where sin has gone must go His grace; The gospel is for all. (*Chorus*) The blessed gospel is for all; The gospel is for all. Where sin has gone must go His grace; The gospel is for all. Received ye freely; freely give....

You can sing it... Do you believe it?

When we see others who are different, it's tempting to try to start focusing on our differences. Orientals. Africans. Europeans. Native Americans. Our blood pressure rises and we start becoming hyper-aware, hyper-sensitive to what's about to be said. To suggest that there are any physical or genetic differences gets Nobel Prize winners fired, and foments all kinds of fighting. *How pitiful*. God created us all, and we are NOT the same. If you think we're all the same, you're just not paying attention. Or, you're living the same sorry dream that the feminists have from the '70's that there are no differences between the genders! Whatever differences that exist are created by God, and so are not a cause for pride OR for pity.

The parable of the talents tells us to use what we have and get busy. Stop comparing yourself to others, and do what you can in the Lord's kingdom.

Stop judging your brethren and get ready for the Lord to judge YOU.

Look past the stereotypes and SEE PEOPLE, see SOULS, like Jesus did.

Lose the bigotry and remember: We are ALL "just a bunch of Gentiles."

Thank God that Jesus came to save us Gentiles!

God is no respecter of persons... Are we?!?

2. The gospel demands a change.

We have been called out. We may always be PHYSICAL Gentiles, but we are no longer SPIRITUAL Gentiles! We no longer live as the Gentiles!

You should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,¹⁸ having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;¹⁹ who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.²⁰ But you have not so learned Christ. – Ephesians 4:17-20

¹¹ Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, ¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. – 1 Peter 2:11-12 (and Peter goes on to talk about obedience and submission of Christians to all facets of the government and to "masters," of wives to husbands, and of brethren to one another in the church.)

Application to Hispanics (and other sinful Gentiles): I'm often asked, "Would you baptize an illegal?" I'd like to ask, in return, "Would you baptize someone in an adulterous marriage?" *More importantly*, would we even preach to them in the first place?!? (To answer the first question, I'd baptize anyone who will repent!)

We must trust the power of God's word and trust the faith and commitment of the hearers. Beware focusing on results and numbers of conversions, else we start watering down and perverting the gospel!

[We] no longer should live the rest of [our] time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. ³ For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. ⁵ They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. – 1 Peter 4:1-6

If you have escaped spiritual corruption that leads to death, *will you – like the Samaritan woman – preach the gospel to those who are dead so they can enjoy the same blessing?!?*

3. The gospel raises us all to the same level.

In Christ, we're ALL "just a bunch of *Christians*." (Not perfect, just forgiven.)

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. – Galatians 3:26-29

Preaching to all families/all nations and bringing them into the church is the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation/scheme of redemption.

The mystery has been revealed, and now ALL people of faith, from every race, ethnicity, and nationality can enjoy the promise of salvation "through faith."

Will you show your faith in Jesus, that He's the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of your sins? Will you be one with us in Christ Jesus?!?