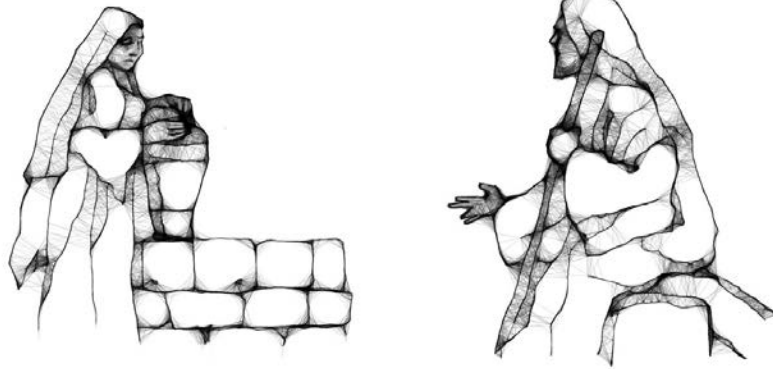


Cross-Cultural¹ Missions



SABBATH—AUGUST 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: John 4:4–30; Matthew 8:5–13; Mark 5:1–20; Matthew 15:21–28; Luke 17:11–19; John 12:20–32.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Here is my servant. I have chosen him. He is the one I love. I am very pleased with him. I will put my Spirit on him. He will announce to the nations that everything will be made right’ ” (Matthew 12:18, NlrV).

HOW INTERESTING THAT JESUS SPENT SO MUCH OF HIS EARLIER YEARS IN GALILEE. It is known as the “Galilee of the Gentiles [non-Jews]” (Matthew 4:15). This is because of the non-Jewish influence in the area. In this area, in Nazareth, Jesus spent many years before starting His public ministry (work done for God). Thanks to its location, Nazareth was near important routes traveled by the Roman army and by merchant caravans. As a result, Jesus must have come into contact with non-Jews His whole early life. (He also was with non-Jews during His early childhood years in Egypt.)

After people refused to accept Him in Nazareth (read Luke 4:16–30), Jesus centered His ministry in the Galilean city of Capernaum. There He met many Gentiles, and their world influenced His ministry and teaching. Jesus paid close attention to Israel, but the wider world was His concern. The New Testament tells us about at least six times when Jesus met with people from different Gentile nations during His ministry. This week we will study the Gospel stories of these meetings.

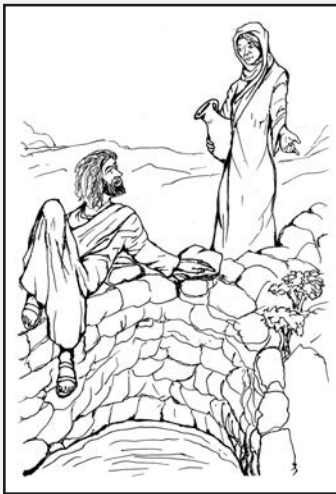
DEFINITIONS

1. cross-cultural—having to do with two or more different cultures or countries.

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN (John 4:4–30)

In the time of Jesus, Israel was divided into three areas: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Samaria lay between Galilee and Judea. The Samaritans worshiped the God of Israel. But they also worshiped pagan gods from foreign lands. As a beginning mission field, Samaria was perfect for the apostles (teachers; leaders) because it was Israel's close neighbor.

Read John 4:4–30. What can we learn from this story about how Jesus witnessed to non-Jews? In what ways did Jesus not follow Jewish rules in order to reach out to this woman?



Jesus broke man-made rules to witness to the Samaritan woman.

The Samaritan woman was alert and well-informed about the history of her people. She also asked smart questions. She led the conversation with her questions. But Jesus responded to her questions and answered with the things that helped the woman spiritually. The only time when Jesus changed the conversation was when He told her to bring her husband. He knew that she was not married but instead had been with several men. Of course, asking her about her husband opened the way for Him to reach out to her, even though she might become uncomfortable. But by doing this, Jesus was able to witness to her in a powerful way.

Also, we should not miss what happened in John 4:27. The disciples were surprised because Jesus was talking with this foreign woman. Jesus broke a few Jewish customs: (1) He asked a Samaritan woman to give Him a drink; (2) He was alone with her. In Israel a man could not be seen alone with a woman if she was not a family member. Jesus followed Jewish rules when in Israel. But in Samaria He was outside Jewish rules. And we have learned elsewhere that Jesus made a big difference between human-made rules and the laws of God.

How far out of your own “comfort zone” are you willing to go in order to minister to (help) others? How far *should* you go?

THE ROMAN ARMY OFFICER (Matthew 8:5–13)

Read Matthew 8:5–13 and also Luke 7:1–10. What do these stories teach us about how even the largest cultural difference can be broken for the sake of the gospel?

In Capernaum a Roman centurion² searched for Jesus. The Jews hated the Roman army in their country. And many Romans hated the Jews. Even in this great cultural and political divide, we can understand the close relationship here between this Roman and the Jews.

Luke tells us in his Gospel that the centurion went to the “elders of the Jews” (Luke 7:3, NIV) to ask for Jesus. And, surprisingly enough, they did just that. They asked Jesus to come heal the man’s servant. Who were these elders? The verses do not say, but these elders seemed to have related to Jesus differently than did some of the other leaders.

Meanwhile, the centurion was clearly a man of faith. His words to Jesus, “Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Matthew 8:8), were a surprising testimony (witness) to his belief in Jesus. The centurion “did not wait to see if the Jews themselves would receive the One who claimed to be their Messiah [Chosen One]. ‘The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world’ (John 1:9, NIV) had shone upon the centurion. He saw the glory [power and beauty] of the Son of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 317.

The centurion understood and respected Jewish religious beliefs. He knew that according to law, a Jew was not allowed to enter a Gentile’s house. So, he asked for Jesus’ help from a distance. The servant was healed. The faith of the Gentile centurion was rewarded. Jesus pointed out that the centurion was a symbol of the great day when people from all over the world would join the Jewish forefathers and leaders (such as Abraham and Moses) at the Messiah’s banquet.

We may learn different lessons from the stories of this healing. But we can know that big cultural divides could not keep the Jews and this Roman apart. What lessons can we take from this about how we must go beyond cultural differences in good conscience in order to reach out to others?



The faith of the centurion was rewarded: his servant was healed.

DEFINITIONS

2. centurion—a Roman officer who was responsible for 100 soldiers.

DEALING WITH DEMONS (Luke 8:26–39)



When the pigs drowned, the people asked Jesus to leave.



Jesus compared the Syrophenician woman's people to dogs to test her faith.

DEFINITIONS

3. compared—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

Read Luke 8:26–39 and Matthew 15:21–28. How do these stories help us understand how Jesus related to non-Jews? How do we understand Jesus' words to the Canaanite woman? Also, what lessons should the disciples have picked up after they saw Jesus help those who were not part of God's people in Israel?

The area of the Gadarenes was formerly under Greece's control. But it had come under the Roman control of Judea. The man in the tombs was clearly demon-possessed. And the demons in him were causing him terrible trouble. The man truly needed God's help, and he got it.

We can be sure that this miracle happened in Gentile territory because there were people raising pigs. It is interesting to pay attention to how people felt about their economic loss when the pigs drowned. The townspeople asked Jesus to leave their territory. But Jesus in turn asked the healed man to stay. He was to witness to his own people about Jesus. No doubt, too, this would change his life. Even more than his words, his healed life would be a powerful testimony (witness).

In the next event, the child in the region of Tyre and Sidon was "demon-possessed and suffering terribly" (Matthew 15:22, NIV). Her mother, a Canaanite, was a living example of the cultural melting pot of that area. Her Canaanite ancestors were driven from their land when Israel inherited it under the leadership of Joshua. Here again, we find Jesus reaching out to those who were not of Israel.

In talking to her, Jesus used somewhat harsh (rough) language. He compared³ her people to dogs. But it tested her faith and showed her humble willingness to get the help she needed.

"The Savior is satisfied. He has tested her faith in Him. By His dealings with her, He has shown that she who has been treated as an outcast from Israel is no longer a foreigner, but a child in God's household. As a child it is her right to share in the Father's gifts. Christ now gives her what she asked for, and finishes the lesson to the disciples." —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 401.

The lesson was that the work of the gospel is not just for the Jews but is to go to other nations too.

TEN LEPERS (Luke 17:11–19)

Read Luke 17:11–19. What important lessons are in these verses for us, no matter what our nationality is or our place of birth?

Notice first that the unfortunate men all know Jesus. They call Him by both name and title. They ask for His help. What is interesting, too, is that they are not cleansed right then and there. They are told just to go and present themselves to the priests, as is required in Leviticus 14:2. The fact that they just turn around and go reveals that they believed in Him and His power to heal them.

But only the Samaritan comes back to thank Jesus for what He has done. The Samaritan turns around even before he gets to the priests. The Bible does not say that the other nine were Jews. But the location of the story makes it very likely. Also, the fact that Luke says that the one who is thankful is a Samaritan, and that Jesus calls him “this stranger” (Luke 17:18), makes it clear that the other nine were Jews. Jews normally had no dealings with the Samaritans. But their disease broke down those barriers. Accidents, disease, or terrible events were what Albert Schweitzer⁴ called “the fellowship of suffering.” Suffering often breaks down geographic divides. The lepers’ common need for cleansing, healing, and saving brought them as a group to Jesus.

Yet, Samaritans and other foreigners were not the immediate goal for Jesus’ ministry: “ ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel’ ” (Matthew 15:24, NIV). He planned first to establish a strong mission base among the Jews. Throughout His ministry, however, Jesus gave His followers proof that the gospel should go to the whole world. This point became clear only after Jesus’ resurrection (return to life from the dead). But even before His resurrection, Jesus did things that were to open the minds of the disciples to the idea that world mission would become their main work.

All these men (lepers) showed faith. But only one turned around and thanked the Lord for what he had received. What does this tell us about why praise and thanksgiving are so important for faith? What are the things you have to be thankful for? Think about how much happier you would be if you always kept them before you. And how much better it would be to always remember to thank God for all that you have been given.

DEFINITIONS

4. Albert Schweitzer—a famous Austrian missionary to Africa.

THE GREEKS AND JESUS (John 12:20–23)

Read John 12:20–23. How does this event help us to understand the heartfelt cry of people everywhere for salvation, for hope, and for answers that can be found only in Jesus?

These Greeks were probably converts (new believers) to Judaism, because they came to Jerusalem to worship at the feast. Bible thinkers have noted that these Greeks went to Philip, who, though Jewish, had a Greek name. His name might have attracted the Greeks to him. So, pioneering Christian work can be done by foreign missionaries who have sympathetic understanding of the people they want to win for Christ. But the best groundbreaking work is done by people with the same background as the target people.

The Greeks came only days before Jesus' crucifixion. They no doubt were impressed with Jesus' words about His suffering, death, and final victory. (The voice from heaven gave them something to think about too.) Jesus would have been encouraged by their desire to "see" Him. The Greeks' action signaled the beginning of world evangelization.⁵ It was understood even by the Pharisees, who had said, " 'The world has gone after Him' " (John 12:19, NKJV).

What we find here are men outside of Judaism wanting to come to Jesus. What a sign that the world was ready for His atoning (cleansing) death! These Greeks represent the nations, tribes, and peoples of the world. They were being drawn to Jesus. Soon the Savior's cross would draw the people of all lands and in all later historical periods to Him (John 12:32). The disciples would find the world ready to receive the gospel.

DEFINITIONS

5. evangelization—the act of spreading the gospel to the whole world.

Read John 12:20–32. What is Jesus saying about losing your life in order to keep it? Why would He say that in this setting? How have you experienced just what He is talking about?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “ ‘I say to you that many will come from the east and the west. They will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of heaven. They will sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But those who think they belong to the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness. There they will sob and grind their teeth’ ” (Matthew 8:11, 12, NlrV). These words were spoken in a certain setting about certain people. But we should not miss the principle (important rule). Those who have been given great rights to know spiritual truths need to be careful. It is easy to become “lazy” about truths that we have been given, truths that maybe no one else is preaching and teaching. First, we need to make sure that we keep ourselves grounded⁶ in these truths. Then, second, we need to be willing to teach these to those who do not know them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① The cross has taught us that salvation is for all the people in the world. Before God we are all sinners. And we all need grace (mercy; forgiveness) for salvation. But many groups often think of themselves as better than others. This is a common feeling and has been found all through history. What about you and your own social, financial, or cultural group? In what ways do you think (and do not fool yourself—*you do* think) you are better off than others who are different from you? What is wrong with that attitude (feeling)? And how can you learn at the foot of the cross to change it?
- ② The woman at the well went back and witnessed to her own people about Jesus. What does this teach us about missions and the importance of using those of a certain culture to reach their own people?
- ③ The Greeks wanted to see Jesus. No doubt they had heard about Him or had themselves seen some of the things He had done. But Jesus is now in heaven. And the church, His people, represents Him here on earth. What does this mean for us in the kind of life we live and the kind of witness we present?

DEFINITIONS

6. grounded—describes the state of being sensible and having a good understanding of what is important.