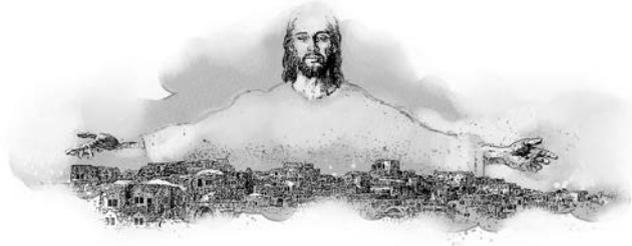


Lord of Jews *and* Gentiles



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 14:1–21, Exod. 3:14, Matt. 14:22–33, Isa. 29:13, Matt. 15:1–20, Matt. 15:21–28.*

Memory Text: “**I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles’**” (*Isaiah 42:6, NIV*).

In Matthew 15:24, Jesus says explicitly, “‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’” (*NKJV*). No question, Christ’s earthly ministry was directed mostly toward the nation of Israel.

But, as the whole Bible shows, Israel wasn’t the only people God cared about. The reason God chose Israel was so that He could bless all people on earth. “This is what God the LORD says—the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ‘I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.’” (*Isa. 42:5–7, NIV*).

It was through Israel, or more specifically through the Messiah who would arise from Israel, that God would reach out to the whole world. This week we’ll see a little more of the Lord’s outreach to all in need of salvation.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 14.

Feeding the Hungry

One of the most well-known acts of Jesus is the feeding of the five thousand, “besides women and children” (*Matt. 14:21, NIV*). Yet, as with everything else in the New Testament, this story doesn’t occur without a context that helps us understand even more deeply the meaning of what Jesus had done.

Read Matthew 14:1–21. What happened right before the miraculous feeding, and what role might that event have played in what followed?

Put yourself in the position of the disciples at that time. John the Baptist, clearly a man of God, just had his head chopped off. His disciples knew that, because they were the ones who told Jesus. Though the texts don’t say, it must have been incredibly discouraging for them. No doubt, it put their faith to the test. However, after what Jesus did next, their faith must have been given quite a boost, especially after such a letdown.

There is, however, a much deeper meaning to this story, regardless of how it might have increased the disciples’ faith. Jesus’ action of feeding the Jewish people reminded everyone of the manna that God had provided to the Israelites in the wilderness. “The tradition arose within Judaism that the Messiah would come on a Passover and that along with His coming, manna would begin to fall again. . . . So when Jesus fed the five thousand just before Passover, it should not surprise anyone that the crowd might begin to speculate whether He was the Messiah and whether He was about to do an even greater miracle—feed everyone all the time by restoring the manna.”—Jon Paulien, *John: The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1995), pp. 139, 140.

This was exactly the kind of Messiah the people wanted: a Messiah that would tend to their external needs. At this moment, the crowds are ready to make Jesus king, but Jesus hadn’t come to be king, and His refusal would greatly disappoint them. They had their expectations, and when those were not met, many would turn away from Jesus, even though He had come to do so much more than what their narrow and worldly expectations were.

In what ways might your expectations of what you expect from God be too narrow?

Lord of All Creation

After the miraculous feeding, Jesus ordered His disciples into their boat (*Matt. 14:22*). He wanted them away from the mayhem and pressure. A good teacher will shelter his or her students from what they're not yet ready to handle. "Calling His disciples," writes Ellen G. White, "Jesus bids them take the boat and return at once to Capernaum, leaving Him to dismiss the people. . . . They protested against the arrangement; but Jesus now spoke with an authority He had never before assumed toward them. They knew that further opposition on their part would be useless, and in silence they turned toward the sea."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 378.

Read Matthew 14:23–33. What do these verses reveal about who Jesus was and the nature of salvation?

A revealing moment occurs when the terrified disciples are wondering who is walking on the water toward them. Jesus says to them, " 'It is I; do not be afraid' " (*Matt. 14:27, NKJV*). The phrase " 'It is I' " is another way of translating the Greek phrase *ego eimi*, which means "I am." This is the name of God Himself. (*See also Exod. 3:14.*)

Scripture time and again has the Lord in control of all nature. Psalm 104, for example, clearly shows that God is not only the Creator but also the Sustainer and that it's through His power that the world continues to exist and that the laws of nature operate. There's nothing here that hints at the god of deism, who creates the world and then leaves it alone. Jew or Gentile, we all owe our continued existence to the sustaining power of the same Lord who stilled the sea. (*See also Heb. 1:3.*)

Peter's cry, " 'Lord, save me!' " (*Matt. 14:30, NKJV*) should echo our own, because if the Lord Jesus doesn't save us, who will? Peter's helplessness in that situation reflects our own in the face of what our fallen world throws at us.

Think about just how helpless you really are, in the sense of being at the mercy of forces so much greater than you and that you can't control. How should this reality help strengthen your dependence upon Jesus?

The Hypocrite's Heart

“Therefore the LORD said: ‘Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men’ ” (*Isa. 29:13, NKJV*). Though this was the Lord speaking to ancient Israel, what message is here for the church today? What are the two main issues that the Lord is warning them about, and how can we be sure that we aren't doing the same thing?

Many centuries after Isaiah wrote those words, Jesus quotes them while in a controversy with the religious leaders.

Read Matthew 15:1–20. What is the specific issue here, and how does Jesus address it?

At some point after He returns to Capernaum, Jesus gets into a debate with the Jewish teachers about what makes a person unclean. The teachers had added to the law all kinds of regulations about external uncleanness. For example, you had to wash your hands in a certain way. But Jesus' disciples weren't bothering with this regulation, and when the scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem pointed it out, Jesus responded as He did.

In short, Jesus strongly condemns what's so easily a trap for anyone: hypocrisy. Who hasn't at some point been guilty of this, condemning someone for an action (either verbally or in your own heart) even though you have done or were doing the same thing or worse? We all, if not careful, have a tendency to see the faults of others while being blind to our own. Hence, being a hypocrite tends to come naturally to us all.

We all hate hypocrisy in others. It is always so easy to see hypocrisy in others too. How can we make sure that our ability to see hypocrisy in others isn't just a manifestation of it in ourselves?

Crumbs From the Table

After feeding, healing, and preaching to His own Jewish people, Jesus makes a dramatic decision. He leaves the area of the Jews and enters the region of the outsiders, the Gentiles.

Read Matthew 15:21–28. How are we to understand this story?

In many ways, this isn't an easy story to read, because we're without the benefit of voice tone and facial expressions. At first Jesus seems to ignore this woman; then, when He does talk to her, His words seem very harsh: " 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs' " (*Matt. 15:26, NIV*).

What if you tried this approach? Someone asks if they can have some of your chips, and you respond, "It is not right to toss my chips to the dogs." Not exactly a way to win friends, is it?

However, here are a few things to consider.

First, it is true that at this time the Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs, bringing the image of mangy dogs running the streets. But Jesus uses the more affectionate Greek term, "small dog" (or "puppy dog") here, conjuring up domestic dogs kept in the home and fed from the table.

Second, this Canaanite woman calls Jesus the "Son of David." This shows her familiarity with Jesus' Jewishness. Like a good teacher, Jesus dialogs with her and perhaps tests her. Craig Keener writes: "Perhaps he is requiring her to understand his true mission and identity, lest she treat him as one of the many wandering magicians to whom Gentiles sometimes appealed for exorcisms. Yet he is surely summoning her to recognize Israel's priority in the divine plan, a recognition that for her will include an admission of her dependent status. . . . One may compare Elisha's requirement that Naaman dip in the Jordan despite Naaman's preference for the Aramean rivers Abana and Pharpar . . . , ultimately leading to Naaman's acknowledgment of Israel's God and land (2 Kings 5:17–18)."—*The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p. 417.

Finally, it's likely this woman was an upper-class Greek woman who was part of a class that had "routinely taken the bread belonging to the impoverished Jews residing in the vicinity of Tyre. . . . Now . . . Jesus reverses the power relations, for the 'bread' Jesus offers belongs to Israel first . . . ; this 'Greek' must beg help from an itinerant Jew."—*The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p. 417.

This is not an easy passage, but we have to trust Jesus. By dialoging with this woman, Jesus dignifies her—just as He did the woman at the well. She leaves with her daughter healed and her faith in the Son of David ignited.

Lord of the Gentiles

Read Matthew 15:29–39 and compare it with Matthew 14:13–21. What are the similarities and the differences between the two stories?

Many people don't realize that there are two feedings of the multitudes in the Gospels: the first for the Jews, the second for the Gentiles. In both instances, Jesus has "compassion" for the people.

It's amazing, this image of thousands of Gentiles coming out to be taught, loved, and fed by this young Rabbi. Today, looking back and understanding the universality of the gospel (after all, most people reading this right now are not Jews), we can easily miss just how incredible and unexpected something like this must have appeared to the people, both to the Jews and to the Gentiles. No question, Jesus was surely taking everyone out of their comfort zones.

Yet, this was always God's plan, to draw all peoples of the earth to Him. A startling verse in the Hebrew Scriptures testifies to this truth: " 'Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites? . . . Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?' " (*Amos 9:7, NIV*).

What is God saying here? That He's interested in the affairs of not only Israel but of all people? He's interested in Philistines? A careful reading of the Old Testament reveals this truth again and again, even though it had become so obscure through the centuries that, by the time the New Testament church was formed, many of the early believers had to learn this basic biblical truth.

Read Romans 4:1–12. In what ways is the gospel, and the universality of the gospel, captured in these verses?

Further Thought: A Christian was speaking to students on a secular campus about the existence of God. After using all the common arguments, he took a different tack, saying: “You know, when I was about the age of most of you, and not believing in God, every now and then, when something would convict me that maybe God did exist, I always pushed the notion out of my mind. Why? Because something told me that if, indeed, God did exist, then—considering how I was living—I was in deep trouble.” The mood shifted, instantly. Dozens of consciences, in sync, started grinding against themselves. It was almost as if the temperature in the room rose from the friction behind all these suddenly uncomfortable faces. He clearly struck a nerve. These students, not Christians, and thus probably not too concerned about the Ten Commandments, nevertheless still sensed that all was not right with their lives morally and that if there were a God they would have a lot to answer for. As Christians, however, people who should be very attuned to God’s moral standards, we don’t have to feel uncomfortable when confronted with the reality of a moral God, and that’s because of the promise of the gospel. Whether Jew or Gentile, when confronted by our sinfulness, we can take refuge in the righteousness of Christ offered to us by faith “apart from the deeds of the law” (*Rom. 3:28, NKJV*). When we become acutely aware of our sin, we can claim the promise that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (*Rom. 8:1, NKJV*). Jew, Gentile—it doesn’t matter. “Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 403.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Read Matthew 16:1–12. What do you think Jesus means when He says, “‘Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees’” (*Matt. 16:6, NIV*)? At first the disciples thought Jesus meant literal yeast. During Passover, the Jews were careful to get rid of leaven; so, they thought Jesus was instructing them not to buy bread with leaven. But Jesus had in mind something much deeper. What was it?
- ② The love of Christ for all people should be the message that emanates first and foremost from Christianity. After all, we are struggling sinners too. None of us has any hope outside of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, the message we send can, at times, seem to be one of judgment, arrogance, and superiority. Following the lead of Jesus, how can we as a church better show our compassion for all people?

The Bridge That God Built: Part 1

Frank Kalom was a pastor in the Maramuni River area of Papua New Guinea. In this isolated and untamable region, he ministered to 21 village churches scattered among the steep mountains and valleys of his territory. One Friday he set out to visit a village on the other side of the river.

This was no easy journey, as there are no roads. Pastor Frank had only a narrow foot track to follow. First he climbed up the hill behind his house and crossed the airstrip where the mission planes land to deliver supplies and visitors, and occasionally evacuate medical emergency patients to the hospital, which was only an hour away by plane, but several days by foot. After crossing the airstrip, he began the steep descent down to the Maramuni River. This river, like so many rivers in Papua New Guinea, is swift-flowing, especially during the rainy season. Over the years, the river has cut great gorges through the soft soil and rock, and now the river flowed deep and wide.

Pastor Frank followed the narrow winding trail that led to a bridge that crossed the torrent. The bridge was a simple structure woven from bush vines. It didn't look safe, but the pastor was used to such bridges, and he crossed the river without any trouble.

Word reached the village that the pastor was coming, and happy church members ran out to greet him. They didn't often have their pastor come to minister to them. Nobody complained about the rain that fell almost nonstop.

Pastor Frank ministered to the people, baptizing new believers, marrying excited couples, and dedicating new babies born since his last visit. When it came time for him to return, villagers walked partway with him to express their love, and some gave him gifts of food for his journey home. One of the believers decided to go with Pastor Frank back to the mission station. As they walked along the trail that led to the river, they met some people who announced, "You might as well turn back. The river has washed away the bridge. It's impossible to cross."

But Pastor Frank told his companion, "I really need to get back home. We're doing God's work, and He will provide a way for us to cross the river."

The two men came to the river and saw for themselves that the bridge had been washed away. The river flowed so fast, deep, and wide that there was no way to get across. The men stopped and prayed that God would provide a way for them to cross the river.

To be continued in next week's Inside Story.