

## ***Discipleship***

### ***Ethnicity and Discipleship***

Lesson #6 for February 9, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 15:21-28; Luke 7:1-11; John 1:3; Acts 10:28,34,35; 11:25-30.

1. This lesson is about how Jesus and some in the early church reached out to people of different nations and different cultures. During the first one and one-half years of Jesus' ministry, the only story we have in which He reached out to non-Jews is the story of the woman at the well at Sychar and then His interaction with the Samaritans of the city over the next two days. (See John 4:1-42) The Samaritans were very much like the Jews in religion and culture even though they were bitter enemies. It was not until almost the final year of His ministry that He reached out to people of a completely different culture.
2. Sometime in the middle of His year of ministry in Galilee, the story of the Roman centurion and his ill servant took place. (Luke 7:1-10; Matthew 8:5-13) This centurion was well acquainted with Jews and their religion. He probably had been stationed at Capernaum for some time. He had come to believe that their religion was far superior to his own polytheistic, pagan religion. He had built a synagogue for the Jews. It may have been the very synagogue in which Jesus preached and performed several miracles.
3. But then the centurion's servant, a Jew, was apparently about to die of "palsy." The centurion, unlike many of his fellow countrymen, really cared about his servant. But, understanding the prejudice of the Jews and not being personally acquainted with "this new Rabbi," he was afraid to approach Jesus. He had heard wonderful things about Jesus, and his faith grasped the possibility that Jesus could heal his servant. So he asked the Jewish leaders to approach Jesus, thinking that they would know the most culturally appropriate way to get Jesus to help.
4. When the leaders approached Jesus, He immediately began proceeding toward the centurion's home. Hearing about the approaching crowd, the centurion sent another message which showed his remarkable faith. Read it in Luke 7:6-8. But Jesus continued on His way toward the man's house. Finally, the centurion himself came to Jesus and expressed his faith. (Matthew 8:8,9) Jesus had not initiated that contact. But Jesus could not miss the opportunity to point out such incredible faith, especially in a foreigner!
5. The first record in Matthew that we have of Jesus reaching out to Gentiles was the time when He crossed the Sea of Galilee to the area of the 10 towns and healed the demon-possessed man. Jesus apparently made that trip across the lake during the night specifically to reach out to that man or men—there may have been two men. (Matthew 8:28)
6. Why did Jesus make that trip? It was apparently at the risk of His own life and the lives of His disciples! The only thing He accomplished on the other side of the lake was the healing of the demon-possessed man/men. What did He tell them to do? What kind of witness could those men give? They had just recovered from being demon-possessed! Their community knew them. What do you think they could say? They had only known about Jesus for about one or two hours. But they could tell what He had done for them! And they could witness in a way and to people that even Jesus' disciples were not willing or able to do. And when Jesus came back, probably about six months later, (Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10) thousands of people went out to see Him and listen to Him! Those men had proved to be very effective evangelists!
7. Jesus' final year of ministry—aimed primary at His disciples—occurred largely in Gentile territory

because whenever He traveled in Jewish territory, the Jews were trying to kill Him.

8. It is a basic tenet of Christianity that although Jesus ministered exclusively in Palestine, His life and His death took place for the benefit of all humanity. What is implied by that? The Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus created all things (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16) and that He is the Savior of all. (John 3:16)
9. For those who share our views about the expanded version of the plan of salvation, it is important to recognize that the life and death of Christ were not just for the inhabitants of this tiny planet but rather were for the benefit of the entire universe.

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: ‘Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.’ John 12:31,32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.” *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68,69 (1890); *Reflecting Christ* 60 (1985)

10. The challenge for Jesus was how to break down prejudice. He lived and worked among one of the most prejudiced groups of people known in history. Did He start with the Jews because if He had started with any other group, the Jews would have been so prejudiced against those other groups that He would never have been able to reach the Jews?
11. Do we need to recognize how small we are in relation to the entire universe in order to reduce our prejudice?
12. In every case that we know about, Jesus reached out to Gentiles by performing miracles. He told the woman at the well about her past history. He healed the demoniacs on the “other side of Galilee” and the daughter of the woman of Tyre. Does that imply that we need to learn to think “outside the box” to reach people not of our own culture?
13. Read Luke 17:11-16. What did Jesus tell those 10 lepers to do? If the Samaritan leper had appeared before a Jewish priest to be declared clean, what do you think would have happened? Did Jesus want the Samaritan leper to go to his Samaritan priest in order to have a fair chance of being declared clean? After they had been healed by Jesus, did they need a priest to declare them clean?
14. Some time later He made a journey out of Galilee into the territory of Tyre and Sidon and healed the young daughter of a Syrophenician woman. (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30) That woman belonged to the ancient Canaanite race. They were despised by the Jews. Thus, we see that Jesus made intentional trips outside of Jewish territory to reach at least two—and probably three—demon-possessed Gentiles and He healed them.
15. Apparently, Jesus walked many, many miles to reach the area where the Canaanite woman

was located. Did Jesus take that journey entirely by chance? Was He running away from opposition in Galilee? Why did He travel so far outside of Jewish territory? Ellen White says that the healing of that young girl was the only miracle He performed while on that journey. It is true that He took the opportunity to instruct His disciples. But it seems clear that Jesus made this journey to meet this woman and demonstrate her great faith.

16. Philip was one of the seven deacons. His Greek name suggests that he had some experience in the diaspora (Jews living outside Palestine), and thus, he was more amenable to working in Samaria and even reaching out to Gentiles. He was having good success in Samaria when he received an angelic message to go to the road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza. Why didn't God ask one of the church leaders in Jerusalem to make that trip? Were they not yet ready to reach out?
17. Philip found an Ethiopian eunuch—a national leader—traveling home in his chariot after visiting Jerusalem. Philip found a way to speak to him and explain to him the gospel story beginning in Isaiah 53 where the Ethiopian had been reading. Once again, we see the readiness of some Gentiles to accept the gospel.
18. Some time later in the church in Antioch in Syria, Barnabas called Saul from Tarsus because the work was going so well and so quickly that he needed more help. Notice who the church leaders were there in Antioch. (Acts 11:25-30) Some Jews and several non-Jews—even one from Africa—became the leaders. Was the church growing so well because the members had accepted diversity as being an essential part of the gospel?
19. As we noted last week, Christianity's basic core message is love. If we cannot learn to overcome our selfish, egocentric prejudices, what possibility is there that we can really love people? So, where do prejudices come from, and how do we overcome them? Do we inherit them from our parents? From our culture? Or are prejudices "acquired" from our parents and our culture?
20. The only successful way to overcome prejudice is to spend time with those we have prejudices about and learn to understand them for what they are. That requires a "reaching out" of ourselves and being willing to make a real effort to understand others. That is the first step in communication and love. It should be clear that it is an essential step in Christianity.
21. If we hope to live in a universe full of different individuals, shouldn't we start learning to live with cultural diversity now?
22. It is very easy for Seventh-day Adventist Christians to move around among our small groups of Adventist friends and feel safe. When are we going to learn to reach out? Would it be safe to attend a "Sunday-keeping" church at times? Could we find ways to reach out to those with whom we work or our neighbors?

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Last modified: January 6, 2008

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