

Two Remarkable Healings

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10.5-6).

Introduction

Most people do not know the above verses are in the Bible. Most who do know, don't know what they mean. This study will reveal what the verses mean and why Jesus said them.

Separation of Jew and Gentile

Throughout the Old Testament, Jews were commanded to remain separate from Gentiles. The reason for the prohibition was that Israel was to be a special people (Deuteronomy 14.2, 26.18) before the Lord. The purpose of this separation was largely to prevent Jews from being drawn away into worshiping false gods (cf Exodus 20.2-6).

Despite this, some Gentiles became believers in the God of Israel. Examples of these were Rahab (Joshua 2, Joshua 6; Matthew 1.5; Hebrews 11.31), Ruth (Ruth 1; Matthew 1.5)—both of whom were our Lord's ancestors—and Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5.1-19). God commanded Jonah to go to the Ninevites and the entire city was saved (Jonah 1.1-2; 3.4-10). After the conquest and captivity of the northern kingdom and later the southern kingdom, Jews were forced to have greater contact with Gentiles. The testimony of Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon who conquered the southern kingdom, is recorded in Daniel 4. He came to trust the God of Israel—Daniel's God. Therefore, there were always exceptions in which Gentiles were blessed by Jews under the provisions of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12.1-3).

Universal Blessing of Gentiles

According to prophecy, Gentiles were to be blessed by Jews in a much larger manner than the examples above (Isaiah 42.1-4; Isaiah 60.1-5; Zechariah 8.20-23; Romans 15.8-12). Such blessings would be the result of Israel's kingdom and the presence of their King, the Messiah. All this presupposed Israel's acceptance of their Messiah. Until this occurred, a universal blessing of Gentiles by the nation was not possible.

Presentation of the King

The gospels are the story of Jesus' presentation of Himself as Israel's King and Messiah. Jesus proclaimed that His kingdom, which had been proclaimed by the prophets, was near (Matthew 3.2, 4.17; Mark 1.15; Romans 15.8-9). In it, the Messiah would be established as King over the nation as David's greater Son. This was what the angel told Mary (Luke 1.28-33). In this kingdom, Israel would be preeminent nation among the nations (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13) and Israel's covenants would be fulfilled. As such, the nation would be the source of blessing to Gentiles.

Even a casual reading of the gospels should reveal that Jesus had no ministry to Gentiles. But to most, this statement is shocking. Most people think Jesus came to proclaim salvation to all who would believe in Him. But the Biblical record does not support this claim. In His earthly ministry, Jesus came to proclaim Himself as Israel's Messiah. Not until later, through God's revelation to Paul, did He reveal that Jesus was the Savior of the whole world.

According to Old Testament prophecy, no plan existed for Gentiles to be blessed universally apart from the Jews accepting their Messiah. But the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah. How then could Gentiles possibly be blessed? Was God's plan thwarted? The answer is both yes and no. The Jews had a legitimate choice but God knew how they would choose.

Einstein once said God does not play dice. But in reality, God not only plays dice, His dice are loaded. God had an answer to how Gentiles could be blessed despite Israel's failure. His answer was Paul. But we're getting ahead of the story.

The reason Jesus commanded His disciples not to go to Gentiles was that ever since God called Abraham, Jews had priority. Gentiles were excluded (Ephesians 2.11-13). God gave Israel an opportunity to accept their Messiah. If they had, the kingdom would have come and universal blessing of Gentiles would have come in the kingdom of God (Matthew 6.10). Peter was still hoping for this result even after the nation had crucified her Messiah (Acts 3.17-21).

In the meantime, the Abrahamic covenant was in effect. While Jews had the priority of God's blessings this priority was not exclusive. There could be exceptions, noted above. During Jesus' earthly ministry are two exceptions to the general rule of Jewish priority. They are quite remarkable.

Remarkable Healing 1

Matthew recorded Jesus' healing of a Canaanite woman. Below is the account.

²¹ Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." ²³ But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." ²⁴ But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" ²⁶ And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the

dogs.”²⁷ But she said, “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at once (Matthew 15.21-28).

Jesus had escaped the pressures of the crowd and gone north to the area of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman found Him. She found Him because she had a problem. Aren't we all this woman? This woman's problem was her daughter: she was demon-possessed. We can only imagine what suffering she had endured and how hopeless her situation seemed. We do not know what she had heard about Jesus. But she knew exactly who He was and addressed Him by His proper title. Notice what she said: she asked for mercy, she called Him Lord, and she called Him “Son of David.” The woman had her facts straight. Jesus' lack of response seems almost cruel. He refused even to acknowledge her.

The disciples then got into the picture. How embarrassing! What a nuisance! This Gentile, and a woman to boot, was causing a scene! They implored the Lord to send her away. We don't know how long this went on but it is reasonable to assume several minutes. Finally, because of her persistence, Jesus told her He was sent only to Jews. The woman would not be turned aside. She was desperate. She got into His way. She bowed down before Him and begged Him to help her. Matthew's language is that she was continually prostrating herself before the Lord (ἐλθοῦσα προσεκύνει αὐτῷ). Again Jesus rebuffed her. He told her that it was not “good” (καλός), that is, right or proper to “take the children's (Jews) bread and throw it to dogs ([κυνάριον](#))—little dogs—(Gentiles) such as she. The woman was remarkable. No doubt distraught, she kept her presence of mind: she agreed with Him. She (you have to love her nimble mind) replied that even “little dogs” got crumbs from the master's table. The woman did everything

right. She recognized Jesus for who He was. She agreed with Him about everything He had said. But she used His own words to keep her hope alive. What must have the Lord thought of her? This was a woman to be reckoned with! Her faith was beyond compare. Jesus replied, "Oh woman!" (In today's language we would say, "What a woman!") "Great is your faith! Your wish is granted." And we read her daughter was healed immediately.

Remarkable Healing 2

One day Jesus went to Capernaum, a village on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. While there He encountered a Roman centurion. Matthew recorded:

⁵ And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, ⁶ and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." ⁷ Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." ⁸ But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." ¹⁰ Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. ¹¹ "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; ¹² but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹³ And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very moment (Matthew 8.5-13).

A centurion (a Roman officer who commanded a hundred soldiers) came to Jesus and implored ([παρακαλέω](#)) Him to attend to his suffering ([βασανίζω](#)), paralyzed servant. We do not know if his suffering was the result of battle or from some other cause. We only know that the centurion deeply cared for the man. Interestingly, particularly in view of the passage we have just examined, Jesus did not hesitate to say that He would go to the centurion's house and heal him.¹ But the centurion protested. He recognized who Jesus was. He understood Jesus had the authority and power to heal his servant without going to his house. Even though he was a good man, he knew he was unworthy for Jesus to enter his house—Jews were not supposed to enter the house of a Gentile (Acts 10.28). As a commander, he understood authority. Therefore, he asked Jesus simply to give the command. He was confident his servant would be healed. When Jesus heard his response he marveled at the man. Turning to His followers he said, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel." Jesus healed the centurion's servant as the man had believed.

In this exchange, Jesus gave a telling indictment to the Jewish crowd following Him. He said, "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Those who come from the east and west are Gentiles. The "sons of the kingdom" were Jews. Though they were the natural heirs of the kingdom, their fate would be hell. The reason: unbelief.

Ministry to Gentiles

As we have noted, Jesus had no ministry to Gentiles. His role was to fulfill what the prophets had written about Him (Romans 15.8). Ever since God had called Abraham, He had set aside the Gentiles and revealed Himself to Jews. They had the priority,

the covenants, and the word of God (Romans 3.2-3; Ephesians 2.11-12). God did make exceptions, however. In Jesus' ministry, the Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion were exceptions. They exhibited extraordinary faith and because of this faith, Jesus granted their requests.

The Twelve continued to proclaim the prophetic plan of Jesus as the Messiah, even after he had been crucified, resurrected, and had ascended. They also had no ministry to Gentiles. They continued to preach the kingdom of God and hoped Israel would repent (Acts 2.22, 29, 36-39, 3.19-20). But the nation refused.

Conclusion

God in His mercy, however, remembered the Gentiles. He changed His greatest enemy, Saul of Tarsus, to become Paul, the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11.13). Paul's ministry was primarily to Gentiles. Gentiles could *not* be blessed according to God's prophetic plan with Israel because of Israel's disobedience. But God in His wisdom and great mercy, created a new salvific plan through His saving and commissioning of Paul to bless Gentiles in spite of Israel's disobedience. This work was completely outside God's revealed plan. The prophets knew *nothing* of it and Jesus had revealed nothing of it in His earthly ministry. But God keeps secrets and reveals them when He wishes. In His own time, He manifested Himself to Paul and commissioned Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11.13; 1 Timothy 2.7). To *this* apostle the ascended Lord revealed secrets ([μυστήριον](#)) He had kept hidden.² One of these was the Church, the body of Christ (Ephesians 3.4-7; 4.15-16; Colossians 1.24) in which there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile but which is composed mainly of Gentiles.

God is sovereign and He works all things for good according to His will. God has mercy upon all. Until Abraham God dealt with mankind. After Abraham, he created the Jewish people and dealt with them. With the call of Paul God put no distinction

between Jew and Gentile. But for the past 2000 years the Church, the body of Christ has been composed of mainly Gentiles. And what of Israel? Has God abandoned them? Absolutely not! (μὴ γένοιτο). When the Church, body of Christ is completed, God will again deal with national Israel. Paul answered this question in his great dissertation upon the nation in Romans 9-11 and concluded his argument thusly:

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? ³⁵ Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? ³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things To Him be the glory forever. Amen (Romans 11.33-36).

¹ Luke's account may shed some light. According to Luke, the centurion was a great friend of the Jews. Apparently, the man was wealthy for he had built the Jews a synagogue. Because of this, influential Jews interceded on his behalf to Jesus. In Luke's account, Jesus did not interact directly with the centurion. The request was most likely mediated by Jews. Therefore, according to the Biblical record, this Canaanite woman was the *only* Gentile that Jesus granted a wish *directly* in His three years of ministry. Luke's wrote:

¹ When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. ² And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. ³ When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; ⁵ for he loves our nation and it

was he who built us our synagogue.”⁶ Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, “Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; ⁷ for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ “For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”⁹ Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.”¹⁰ When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health (Luke 7.1-10).

² See the study [Paul’s Mystery](#) for more on this subject.

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