

‘Good news for the Gentiles.’

There was a man who lived in Scotland who had to make an important journey to make a business deal. So he decided to telephone an airline office for some information. After a few minutes of waiting for the phone to be answered, he finally got through to someone and asked, ‘how long does it take to fly to Birmingham?’ The lady on the phone said, ‘Just a minute, sir.’ ‘Thank you,’ the man said and hung up.

You see it’s very easy to misunderstand what someone says to us at times. And when it comes to the subject of Gentiles many people have misunderstood what the word actually means when it used the Bible. Especially in light that the word ‘Gentile’ doesn’t appear anywhere within the original text. Our modern translations uses the word ‘Gentiles’ 130 times and the word ‘Gentile’ appears 2 times. And it’s sometimes translated as the words ‘nation’, or ‘nations’ and it’s also translated as the word ‘heathen’.

The first mention of the word in the Old Testament is found after the flood in **Genesis 10:5** where it talks about “**the maritime peoples.**” This is the Hebrew word ‘gowy’ for Gentiles which simply means a foreign nation. Now for years I’ve heard it say that a Gentile was simply someone who wasn’t a Jew. Well that can’t be the case here in **Genesis 10** because the Jews haven’t been established yet.

The first mention of the word ‘Gentiles’ in New Testament is found in **Matthew 4:15** where Jesus talks about the “**Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.**” And it’s here we see the difference between the Old Testament meaning of the word and New Testament meaning. In the New Testament the word ‘Gentiles’ which is ‘ethnos’ in Greek means a non-Jewish race. And so sometime in Bible history the word ‘Gentile’ begun to lose its original meaning.

You see God has always loved the Gentiles in the truest form of the meaning. He’s always loved mankind, He’s always loved all people from all nations. There were no divisions of people prior to the call of Abraham. The Hebrews weren’t set apart as a distinct people until the giving of the Law of Moses. **Exodus 19:5+6** “**Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**”

Yes, the Israelites became God’s treasured possession. Yes, they became were supposed to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But they messed up because no sooner had Moses come down from the mountain with Joshua they had already built a golden calf. And so instead of all the Israelites becoming priests it was only the tribe of Levi who were chosen to be God’s priests.

The Israelites were supposed to reconcile the world back to God as nation but they messed that up too. Israel as a nation were supposed to be an object lesson of what a relationship with God was could be like. But instead of bringing the world to God, they simply joined the world and did what it was doing. And yes, they belonged to God and had an amazing relationship with Him but that didn’t mean that God didn’t care for the Gentiles.

Have we forgotten that the Lord sent Jonah to the Gentiles of Nineveh? Have we forgotten that four Gentile women, **Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba** all played a major role in bringing the Messiah into the world? What about all the Old Testament prophecies which talk about God’s concern for the Gentiles?

You see loved ones we often portray that the Gentiles were some sort of afterthought for God. We often think when it comes to the good news that the Gentiles weren’t even thought about until after the cross. But let me ask you, **who was first to hear the Gospel?** You might be forgiven for thinking that it was Jesus’s disciples who were first to hear the Gospel. You might be forgiven for thinking that the Jews on the Day of Pentecost were first hear the Gospel.

You might even be forgiven for thinking that the Old Testament prophets were first to hear the Gospel. Loved ones the Gospel was proclaimed way before all of them. **Galatians 3:8** “**Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”** Abraham was first to hear the Gospel and so there’s always been good news for the Gentiles, they’ve always been on God’s mind.

Let’s go ahead and look at background of **Romans 15**. Now remember, we don’t know who established the church in Rome but we do know that on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2** there were Roman citizens present. So, they probably took the Gospel to Rome when they returned home.

We know that Paul had friends and relatives who lived in Rome but he himself had never visited there. The church became a strong church and had a great reputation throughout the whole Roman world. And so, Paul was writing to this church to inform the Roman Christians that he planned to visit Rome. He wanted to establish the fact that the Gospel of Christ is God's saving power to all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile.

In **Romans 1** he tells us that the Gentiles are acting like scum and we can almost hear the Jews applauding and agreeing with Paul in the background. In **Romans 2** he tells us that the Jews are acting like scum and we can almost hear the Gentiles applauding and agreeing with Paul in the background. But then in **Romans 3** he tells us that everyone is acting like scum because everyone has sinned and we can almost imagine a great silence on both sides of the camp. And then throughout the rest of his letter Paul goes on to talk about doctrinal matters.

Now **Romans 15** is a continuation of **Romans 14** where Paul has just talked about how to deal with matters of opinion, especially when it comes to weaker brethren. He starts **Romans 15** by pleading with the Roman church to try and please each other just as Christ pleased them. He says they can do this with the help of God and the Scriptures.

And he asks them to be patient with one another, with one mind and mouth in order to glorify God. He tells them that although Christ was a minster to the Jews, the Jews rejected Him, despite the fact that Jesus came to fulfil the promises which were given to the Jewish fathers. In **Romans 15:9** we get the first mention of the 'Gentiles' in this chapter, a word which he uses **10 times** throughout this chapter.

Now the Roman church was very cosmopolitan, there was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles who all had their own cultures and religious baggage. And remember the Gentiles were seen as unclean, dirty, even using the word 'Gentile' was classed a dirty word. But now here in Rome, we have the Jewish Christians worshipping with the Gentile Christians.

And Paul says in **Romans 15:9** "The Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy". He says, "I will praise you among the Gentiles" which are quotes from **2 Samuel 22:50** and **Psalms 18:49**. Paul quotes David because David was confessing and singing to God among the Gentiles.

Romans 15:10+11 are quotes from **Deuteronomy 32:43** and **Psalms 117:1**. The Gentiles are represented here as being 'glad among the Jews' which means the Gentiles were to rejoice and praise God along with the Jews. The Gentiles were to 'praise the Lord along with all other peoples'.

Romans 15:12 are quotes from **Isaiah 11:1+6-10**. Paul says the Old Testament Scriptures clearly showed that the Gentiles were to have a part in the Gospel. He quotes from the law, the prophets, and the Psalms to remind them that God had promised salvation to the Gentiles along with the Jews.

But can you imagine being a Jew and hearing this? The Gentiles might receive mercy from God! They will praise God along with the Jews! The Gentiles will be equal with the Jews in terms of salvation and blessings! These filthy unclean people can be saved in the same way the Jews could through faith in Christ! I can imagine some Jews thinking, 'hey they're not Abraham's descendants! They haven't a got a rich history with God like we do!'

Now please don't underestimate just how much the Jews despised anyone who wasn't a Jew. If a Jew walked down the road and saw a Gentile coming towards him, he would cross the street to make sure he wouldn't get any contact with him. If he was walking through the market place and his hands brushed the clothes of a Gentile, he would go home and ceremonially wash his whole body. Now loved ones as crazy as that sounds, the reality is, sometimes we can have the same attitude towards the people around us today.

What goes through your mind when you see a homeless person begging for money? What goes through your mind when you see a drunk man sleeping on a bench? Maybe you discovered your neighbour is a convicted child molester, how does that make you feel? What about the woman who murdered her children? Or the man who just come out of prison for raping women? Do we believe that none of these people deserve to hear the Gospel and have a choice to be saved?

You see if we're not careful we too can become like the Jews of old, very proud of ourselves, comparing ourselves to the so called 'filth of the world'. It was the English evangelical preacher **John Bradford** who saw some criminals on their way to the gallows and said, 'there but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford.'

Loved ones, you are who you are today because of the grace of God. The difference between you and anyone else around you who isn't a Christians, no matter how filthy you might think they are, is the grace of God. You've accepted God's grace, they haven't.

We even have these 'I'm more important than you' attitudes in Christianity today. You're not a 'member of the church of Christ' so that means you're not saved. You've not been 'baptised by a minister of the church of Christ', so your baptism is invalid. Even within the body of Christ we have saints telling us they are more influential than others because, 'their dad is an elder in the church, their mother was missionary for fifty years'.

I've even heard Christians say they were 'born in the church'. Listen loved ones nobody is ever born in the church, all Christians have been born again and added to the church. People say all these things because they like to feel important, we've got the truth and you haven't.

And just like the Jews attitude towards the Gentiles we rebuild the walls which Jesus tore down at Calvary. The mind-set of the Jews hasn't been left behind in the first century, it just comes to us in new ways. But this mind-set gives a tiny of glimpse of what lay ahead for Paul.

To take the Gospel to the Gentiles meant overcoming deep-seated prejudices of many years. Paul who persecuted the church became one of her greatest servants. It took a vision in Acts 10 for Peter to finally realise that God wanted Gentiles into His kingdom. And after reporting back about what happened at Cornelius' household, the Bible says in Acts 11:18 "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

We know that Paul has a special commission from Jesus Himself to take the Gospel to the Gentiles according to Acts 9. And because of the grace of God, he describes himself in Romans 15:16 as "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

Now notice that God gave him the priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel. A priest's duty was speak to God on behalf of the people, a priest's job was to make sacrifices on behalf of the people to God. That's what that word 'minister' means, it means 'one who does priestly service.' Paul's offering to God was the Gentiles, in other words because he preached to them and converted many of them, they became acceptable to God as an offering and set apart by the Holy Spirit.

Remember what happened back in Exodus 19:5+6 "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Paul is now doing what God wanted all the Israelites to do in the first place and that is reconciling the world back to God. And that still stands and applies to us as Christian priests today because Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." And so Paul understands his calling, he understands who he is and Who he belongs to as a Christian.

Imagine what the Lord's church could achieve if only His people understood who they were, Who they belonged to and what their mission was? Paul understood why God chose him to take the good news to the Gentiles. That's why he says in Romans 15:17-19 "Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God."

Paul says he taught, preached and performed the miraculous, all in an effort to make the Gentiles obedient to God. Why? Because Paul understood his mission, he quotes from Isaiah 52:15 and says my mission is to provide an opportunity to hear and understand the Gospel to anyone who had never been taught.

Now we spoke about the deep animosity between the Jews and the Gentiles earlier. And one way to put that animosity to rest is simply by helping others. There was a severe famine that broke out in Jerusalem and many people we're really struggling to feed themselves. And Paul basically ends this chapter by speaking about how much contribution the Gentile churches have actually made to help the poor saints in Jerusalem.

He says in **Romans 15:26+27** “For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord’s people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it.”

You see loved ones, when people become one in Christ, it’s not only about sharing our spiritual blessings but also sharing our material blessings. Imagine the impact this relief would have had on the Jews in Jerusalem. Not only would they be grateful for their relief but perplexed because it actually came from the Gentile churches.

I wonder if these Christians finally saw themselves simply as Christians, brothers and sister in Christ, instead of splitting themselves into Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. I wonder if we could ever see ourselves simply as Christians, instead of splitting ourselves into ‘one cuppers’ or ‘many cuppers’. Instead of we are the ‘**King James Version only church**’ or we are the ‘**no kitchen church**’. I wonder if one day we can simply see ourselves as brother and sister in Christ.

Now I’ve spoken a lot about the Gospel, the good news which Paul took the Gentiles. **But what exactly is the good news?** Fortunately for us the Bible tells us very clearly what the good news is. **1 Corinthians 15:1-4** “Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

The good news is simply that Jesus died for our sins, He was buried but rose again three days later. When we try to talk to people about Jesus we often make the mistake of getting all technical and doctrinal and they end up losing interest. And I believe that we’ve made the Gospel too technical and difficult for people to grasp. But when we keep it simple by telling them that Jesus died, was buried and rose again and they need to do the same in the waters of baptism, **how easy is that to share with people?**

Now if you’re not a Christian this morning let me share with you the Gospel in its simplest form. Look again at **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**, **see how Paul uses the word Gospel?** That’s the same Gospel God asked Paul to preach to the Gentiles. **See how he says that the actual Gospel, the good news, includes Jesus’ death, Jesus’ burial and Jesus’ resurrection?**

That’s the same Gospel that every Christian in the New Testament and every Christian here believes and responded too. And I say responded too because if you really believe with all your heart that Jesus really did die for you, was buried for you and rose again for you, then you simply will feel moved to respond. **But what does that response look like? Is it simply saying, ‘oh yes I believe in Jesus’? Is it simply quoting some, ‘sinner’s prayer’ where you ask Jesus to come into your life? Or, is it simply doing what Jesus did?**

Just before we finish turn your Bibles to **Romans 5:3-5** “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

Now let me ask you, **can you see the connection between baptism and the good news? Who died? Jesus died. Where? On the cross. What did they do with His body? They buried His body. What happened three days later? He rose from the dead. What happens when a person is baptised? They are buried with Him in baptism. Why? So that they will die spiritually but also be raised to have a new life with Him.**

In other words, Jesus asks us to do what He was willing and done for us. Loved ones, the Gospel is such a simple message and our response is also very simple. The question is, **are you willing to respond in the same simple way that every other Christian in the New Testament responded?** Jesus Himself says in **Mark 16:15+16** “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”.

Now that’s good news, but it’s not only good news for the Jews and Gentiles, but its good news for everyone here today.