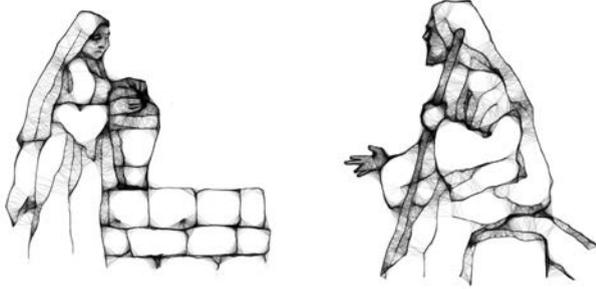


Cross-Cultural Missions



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 4:4–30, Matt. 8:5–13, Mark 5:1–20, Matt. 15:21–28, Luke 17:11–19, John 12:20–32.*

Memory Text: “Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles.” (*Matthew 12:18, NKJV*).

How interesting that Jesus spent so much of His earlier years in Galilee, known as “Galilee of the Gentiles” (*Matt. 4:15*), no doubt named because of the non-Jewish influence in the province. In this region, in Nazareth, Jesus spent the majority of His years before starting His public ministry. Thanks to its position, Nazareth was near major routes traveled by Roman army units, as well as merchant caravans. As a result, Jesus must have been in contact with non-Jews His whole early life (not to mention the time in Egypt).

After His rejection in Nazareth (*see Luke 4:16–31*), Jesus centered His ministry in the cosmopolitan Galilean city of Capernaum. Contacts with Gentiles and their world significantly impacted His ministry and teaching. Even though He focused on Israel, the wider world was His concern. During the more than three years of His ministry between His baptism and ascension, on at least six occasions Jesus had direct contact with persons from Gentile nations. We will look this week at the Gospel accounts of these contacts.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 22.

The Samaritan Woman

In the time of Jesus, ancient Israel was divided into three provinces: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Samaria was situated between Galilee and Judea. The Samaritans worshiped the God of Israel, but they also worshiped pagan gods imported from foreign lands. As an initial mission field, Samaria was ideal for the apostles because it was geographically close to Israel.

Read John 4:4–30. What can we learn from this story about how Jesus witnessed to non-Jews? In what ways did Jesus step outside the bounds of tradition in order to reach out to this woman?

The Samaritan woman was alert, was well-informed about the history of her people, and asked intelligent questions. She led the conversation with her questions. Jesus, however, responded to her questions and statements with the things that would benefit the woman spiritually. The only point where Jesus changed the conversation was when He told her to bring her husband, knowing that she wasn't married but had been with several men. Of course, asking her to do this opened the way for Him to reach out to her, however uncomfortable she had become. Nevertheless, by doing this, He was able to witness to her in a powerful way.

Also, we shouldn't miss what happened in John 4:27. The disciples were surprised because Jesus was talking with this foreign woman. Jesus transgressed a few Jewish customs: first, asking a Samaritan woman to give Him a drink; second, being alone with her. In Israel, a man could not be seen alone with a woman unless she was a family member. Jesus followed Jewish customs when in Israel. However, in Samaria, He was outside Jewish territory and not bound by Jewish traditions, even though as we have seen elsewhere, Jesus distinguished between human-made traditions and the commands and precepts of God.

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

The Roman Army Officer

Read Matthew 8:5–13 (see also Luke 7:1–10). What does this story teach us about how even the largest cultural divides can be breached for the sake of the gospel?

In Capernaum, a Roman officer of centurion rank (commander of 100 men) sought out Jesus. The Jews resented the occupying Roman army, and many Romans hated the Jews. Despite this vast cultural and political divide, we can see the close relationship here between this Roman and the Jews.

In Luke’s account, he said that the centurion went to the “elders of the Jews” (Luke 7:3, *NIV*) to ask them to bring Jesus. And, fascinatingly enough, they did just that, asking Jesus to come heal the man’s servant. Who were these elders? The text doesn’t say, but it seemed to have related to Jesus differently than did some of the other leaders.

Meanwhile, the centurion was obviously a man of faith; his words to Jesus, “speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed” (Matt. 8:8), were an incredible testimony to his belief in Jesus. The centurion “did not wait to see whether the Jews themselves would receive the One who claimed to be their Messiah. As the ‘light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world’ (John 1:9) had shone upon him, he had, though afar off, discerned the glory of the Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 317.

The centurion understood and respected Jewish religious sensitivities. He knew that according to law a Jew was not allowed to enter a Gentile’s house; so, he requested that Jesus minister from a distance. The servant was healed. The faith of the Gentile centurion was rewarded. Jesus pointed out that the centurion was a prototype of the great day when people from all over the world would join the Jewish patriarchs at the Messianic banquet.

Whatever else one can take from the accounts of this healing, we can see that vast cultural divides were not able to keep the Jews and this Roman apart. What lessons can we take from this about how we must learn to transcend whatever cultural differences we can (in good conscience) in order to reach out to others?

Dealing With Demons

Read Luke 8:26–39 and Matthew 15:21–28. How do these stories help us to 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, seeing Jesus minister to those who were not part of the “covenant people”?

The region of the Gadarenes was an area formerly dominated by Greece, but it had become part of the Roman province of Judaea. The man in the tombs was obviously possessed, and his possession manifested itself in horrific ways. He truly needed divine aid, which he got.

That this liberation took place in Gentile territory is confirmed by the presence of the pigs. It is interesting to notice the reaction to this economic loss when the pigs drowned; the townspeople asked Jesus to leave their territory. Jesus in turn asked the healed man to stay. He was to witness to his own people about Jesus; no doubt, too, his changed life, even more than his words, would be a powerful testimony.

In the next incident, the child in the region of Tyre and Sidon was “‘demon-possessed and suffering terribly’ ” (*Matt. 15:22, NIV*). Her mother, a Canaanite, illustrated the cultural melting pot of that region. Her Canaanite ancestors were displaced from their land when Israel inherited it under the leadership of Joshua. Here, again, we see Jesus reaching out to those who weren’t of Israel proper.

In talking to her, Jesus used somewhat harsh language, likening her people to dogs, but it tested her faith and showed her humble willingness to get the help she needed.

“The Saviour is satisfied. He has tested her faith in Him. By His dealings with her, He has shown that she who has been regarded as an outcast from Israel is no longer an alien, but a child in God’s household. As a child it is her privilege to share in the Father’s gifts. Christ now grants her request, and finishes the lesson to the disciples.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 401.

The lesson was that, contrary to their understanding, the work of the gospel is not just for the Jews but is to go to other nations, as well.

Ten Lepers

Read Luke 17:11–19. What lessons are here for us, regardless of our nationality or origins?

Notice first that the unfortunate men all knew Jesus. They called Him by both name and title, pleading for intervention. What’s fascinating, too, is that they were not cleansed right then and there. They were told simply to go and present themselves to the priests, as specified in Leviticus 14:2. The fact that they just turned around and went showed that they believed in Him and His power to heal them.

Only the Samaritan, though, expressed appreciation for what Jesus had done. The nine did not forget to go to the priests, but they neglected to give thanks to their Healer. The Samaritan, as the text reads, turned around even before he got to the priests. Though the text doesn’t say that the other nine were Jews, the location makes it very likely; besides, the fact that Luke specifically mentioned that he was a Samaritan, and that Jesus called him “this stranger” (*Luke 17:18*), makes it likely that the other nine were, indeed, Jews. Although Jews normally had no dealings with the Samaritans, their malady transcended those barriers. Common misfortune and tragedy, what Albert Schweitzer termed “the fellowship of suffering,” had broken down an ethnic divide. Their common need for cleansing, healing, and saving had brought them, collectively, to Jesus.

Nevertheless, Samaritans and other foreigners were not the immediate goal for Jesus’ ministry—“ ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel’ ” (*Matt. 15:24, NIV*). He planned first to establish a strong mission base among the Jews. Throughout His ministry, however, He gave His followers evidence that the gospel should go to the whole world. Although this point became clear only after His resurrection, even before then Jesus did things that were to open the minds of the disciples to the idea that world mission would become their main task.

Though all these men showed faith, only one turned around and thanked the Lord for what he had received. What does this tell us about the reasons that praise and thanksgiving are so important for faith? What are the things you have to be thankful for? Think about how much happier you’d be if you constantly kept them before you, and what better way than by thanking God for all that you have to be thankful for?

The Greeks and Jesus

“Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’ Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified’ ” (*John 12:20–23, NIV*). **How does this incident help us to understand the heartfelt cry of people everywhere for salvation, for hope, for answers that can be found only in Jesus?**

These Greeks were probably converts to Judaism, since they came to Jerusalem to worship at the feast. Commentators have noted that these Greeks went to Philip, who, though Jewish, had a Greek name, which might have attracted them to him. Thus, while pioneering Christian work can be accomplished by foreign missionaries who have cultural sensitivity and a sympathetic understanding of the people they want to win for Christ, the most effective 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 amazed by His words about His suffering, death, and final victory. (The voice from heaven gave them something to think about, as well.) Jesus would have been encouraged by their desire to “see” Him. Their approach signaled the beginning of world evangelization. It was acknowledged even by the Pharisees, who had exclaimed, “ ‘The world has gone after Him’ ” (*John 12:19, NKJV*).

What we see here are men, outside of Judaism, wanting to come to Jesus. What a sign that the world was ready for His atoning death! These Greeks, representing the nations, tribes, and peoples of the world, were being drawn to Him. Soon the Savior’s cross would draw the people of all lands and in all subsequent times to Him (*vs. 32*). The disciples would find the world ready to receive the gospel.

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 immediate context? How have you experienced just what He is talking about?

Further Study: “ ‘I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ ” (*Matt. 8:11, 12, NIV*). Though these words were spoken in a particular context, in reference to a particular people, we shouldn’t miss the principle. Those who have been given great privileges, great advantages in terms of spiritual and theological truths, need to be careful. It’s easy to become complacent about truths that we have been given, truths that in some cases no one else is preaching and teaching. First, we need to make sure that we keep ourselves grounded in these truths; then, second, we need to be willing to teach these to those who don’t know them.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 The Cross has shown us the absolute universality of all humanity. Before God we are all sinners, and we all need grace for salvation. Nevertheless, many groups often do see themselves as superior to others. This is common and has been all through history. What about yourself and your own ethnic, social, financial, or cultural group? In what ways do you harbor (and don’t fool yourself—you do harbor) a sense of superiority to others different from you? What’s wrong with that attitude, 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 particular 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. Jesus, of course, is now in heaven, and the church, His people, represent Him here on earth. What does this mean for us in terms of the kind of life we live and the kind of witness we present?

Faithful Bride: Part 2

by REENA MURMU, BANGLADESH

A year after Bhudroy became a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, his elder brother died. Then Shanti became seriously ill with malaria. She didn't respond to medicines, and she became increasingly ill. When the fever left, Shanti's mother-in-law accused her of pretending to be ill. Shanti pleaded with God, "Why are You allowing me to suffer so in this family?" Even her husband grew discouraged and blamed God for their troubles.

Shanti's mother learned of her daughter's grave illness from some other villagers, so she set out to see her daughter. Shanti's mother-in-law greeted Shanti's mother with a demand: "Take her home with you. She is no good to us." Shanti's mother took her daughter home, but her baby, Reena, remained with Shanti's husband and mother-in-law.

Shanti's mother took her to the hospital, where doctors could treat her properly. Meanwhile Shanti's mother-in-law was sure that Shanti would die and began looking for a new wife for Bhudroy. But Bhudroy told them he was not interested in marrying someone else.

In time, Shanti recovered from her illness but, instead of returning to her mother-in-law's home, she stayed with her mother.

Meanwhile her sister-in-law, whose husband had died, demanded that she be given her share of the family's land for her three sons. While she had a right to the family land, her demand put her parents-in-law into crisis, because they could not survive without their land. The selfish daughter-in-law wanted everything she could get for herself and her sons. Slowly Shanti's mother-in-law realized that Shanti had been a faithful daughter-in-law while her other daughter-in-law had been selfish and demanding. She asked Bhudroy to go bring Shanti home.

Bhudroy went to visit Shanti. He told her of his mother's change of heart and invited her to return home with him. Shanti was eager to see her little girl again. She packed her things and returned with her husband.

She was overjoyed to find that her mother-in-law had changed so much. The older woman welcomed Shanti back into the home and treated her with respect and kindness. Shanti was determined to be the best Christian she could, hoping that her once cruel mother-in-law would give her life to Jesus. Several years later, Shanti's mother-in-law gave her life to Christ before she died.

Bhudroy also renewed his commitment to Christ, and now the family lives together in peace as Christians. The faithful young bride had survived trials and taunting and led her husband and parents-in-law to Jesus.

REENA MURMU is the eldest daughter of Shanti and Bhudroy. She would like to become a physician.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 21:42, 43*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand key biblical principles that should guide cross-cultural mission.

Feel: Foster compassion for people from other cultures who have not heard the good news about Jesus.

Do: Find ways to support cross-cultural mission through prayer, finances, and, where possible, personal involvement.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Across All Cultures

A Although Jesus spent most of His time ministering in Israel, on several notable occasions He ventured into non-Jewish territory and ministered to Gentiles. What principles of cross-cultural ministry can you find in the way Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman (*John 4:4–30*)?

B Is it possible to share the good news in another cultural setting without carrying your own cultural baggage with you? What steps can we take to make sure the gospel is expressed in a way that connects with a person's cultural setting?

II. Feel: Open-Heart Mission

A What sorts of feelings could make someone reluctant to be involved in cross-cultural mission? What biblical principles could help change those feelings?

B How important is empathy for people in cross-cultural mission, and why is it not sufficient to just share doctrinal truth?

III. Do: Becoming Involved

A You don't have to travel overseas to encounter a different culture. What are some of the different cultures you encounter in your neighborhood?

B What practical steps can you take to become involved in cross-cultural mission?

► **Summary:** The good news of salvation was never intended to be limited to the Jewish people; it is good news for all people. As Christ's followers, we are invited to join Him in His mission to all peoples.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 8:11*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The gospel commission is a call to every believer to be involved in the task of making disciples among all people groups. Jesus' command to go is not a suggestion; rather, it should be a way of life for every one of His followers.

Just for Teachers: The apostle John paints a compelling picture of the results of God's cross-cultural mission on earth in Revelation 7:9. Explore with your class the broad cross-cultural vision of God in which each one of us is invited to participate.

Opening Discussion: “Everything you're sure is right can be wrong in another place,” says a character in Barbara Kingsolver's book, *The Poisonwood Bible*, in which she describes a Baptist missionary family in the Belgian Congo in the late 1950s. In one scene, Nathan, the missionary pastor, tries preaching in the local dialect. “‘Tata Jesus is bangala!’” he declares, meaning to say, “Jesus is ‘precious.’” The problem is, in the Kikongo language, emphasis is all-important. Unfortunately, he doesn't get it right, and his American accent changes the meaning of *bangala* from “precious” to “poisonwood tree.” The book is a ruthless attack on insensitive missionaries exporting culture along with their Christianity. This book is just one of many examples in popular culture where Christian mission is criticized.

Discuss the extent to which words such as *conversion*, *proselytizing*, and *missionary* have become dirty words where you live. How can we explain how something so wonderful—telling people about God's plan for their salvation—is often treated with such suspicion and hostility? What are some basic steps we should take to guard against insensitivity—whether our mission is to a foreign country or within our local neighborhood?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The incarnation of Christ signals a radical shift—in focus and activity—in the divine mission plan. As you lead your class today, try to draw out these two ideas: (1) that Christ came to affirm and continue the Father's mission, and (2) Christ's coming also jolted that mission plan into a brand-new era. Most important, lead your

class to reflect on how Christ invites each one of us to partner in His mission.

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus Breaks Down Cultural Walls. *(Review Matthew 8:5–13 with your class.)*

The incredible faith of the non-Jewish centurion astonished Jesus, leading Him to comment, “ ‘I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven’ ” (*Matt. 8:11, NKJV*). In Luke’s account of Jesus’ remark, he underscores even further that salvation extends in all directions: “ ‘People will come from east and west and north and south,’ ” and “ ‘there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last’ ” (*Luke 13:29, 30, NIV*).

Sitting at the heavenly feast will be giants of the faith: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As we know, Abraham was the father of many nations (*Gen. 17:4–6*), and it’s appropriate that he should be seated with people from every language, tribe, and people.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus made clear the good news extended to all peoples, and He prefigured the heavenly feast each time He sat down to eat with sinners. Jesus’ open-table policy riled the Jewish leaders. And, of course, when He threw the moneychangers out of the temple, He quoted from Jeremiah: “ ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’ ” (*Mark 11:17, NIV*)—not just for the Jews.

Although God called a special people in Old Testament times, it was always His intention that they would share His Word and love to the ends of the earth. As His followers, we are called to reach out across cultures to all His sons and daughters—every kindred, tongue, and people.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul shares a vision of God’s salvation going to people in places unreached by the gospel message. To make his point, he reaches back some eight hundred years and quotes Hosea: “ ‘Those who were not my people I will call “my people,” and her who was not beloved I will call “beloved.” And in the very place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” there they shall be called children of the living God’ ” (*Rom. 9:25, 26, NRSV*).

Consider This: In what ways are these passages a corrective to cultural or spiritual arrogance? The first followers of Jesus clearly needed to catch a broader vision for mission. But in what ways do we today need to be reminded that Jesus is the Savior of all people, everywhere?

II. Jesus for All *(Review Luke 4:21–28 with your class.)*

In the synagogue of His hometown, Nazareth, Jesus quotes from the story of the widow of Zarephath (*1 Kings 17:7–24*) and the story of Naaman (*2 Kings 5*). He uses these stories to illustrate how God had found faith outside of Israel, not inside it—and makes the point that, in the same way, He would not find faith in His own hometown. This made the people so angry that they tried to kill Him.

Consider This: In what ways could Jesus’ words in this passage serve as a warning to us as Seventh-day Adventists?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: “Contextualization” is a term used by missiologists that’s widely misunderstood. Many people think of compromise and watering down the message when they see that word. However, rightly understood, it is a fundamental and essential principle of mission, demonstrated by Jesus, the apostle Paul, and others in the Bible. Basically, it means “dressing” the message in a way that will be understood and meaningful to people in different cultural settings. It reminds us that a method of sharing the gospel that works in North America, for example, may not be appropriate in the middle of China, and vice versa.

Ellen G. White points out: “The people of every country have their own peculiar, distinctive characteristics, and it is necessary that men should be wise in order that they may know how to adapt themselves to the peculiar ideas of the people and so introduce the truth that they may do them good.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 213.

Life Application: Jesus challenged His listeners by focusing on the “camels” of faith and relegating the “gnats” to lesser status. This is also an essential part of contextualization—identifying eternal principles that can be applied no matter what the cultural context.

Survey members of your class by asking, “Have you ever felt confusion between what’s vital to your faith and what’s culturally driven?” Ask those who are comfortable to share their experience. How did they resolve the issue and come to a deeper understanding of what obedience to God requires?

Thought Questions: Over the years, educationalists have debated whether teachers should tailor their efforts in the classroom to the student (focusing on individual needs and learning styles) or concentrate on the curriculum (focusing mainly on the content of what the student needs to learn). Could there be a spiritual analogy here? How do we find a balance between adapting our mission approach to the “student” (being sensitive to their cultural background and

understanding) and delivering the “curriculum” (the truths of Scripture)?

In trying to contextualize our mission approach, how do we make the message understandable and meaningful, yet avoid the pitfall of syncretism—where our message becomes so buried in the audience’s beliefs and practices that it loses any meaning?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Don and Caroline Richardson, missionaries to the Sawi people of Irian Jaya, found that just “preaching Jesus” as they would back in America wouldn’t work. They discovered that the Sawi elevated treachery to a virtue. So, in the story of Jesus, Judas emerges as the hero.—*Don Richardson, Peace Child*, 4th ed. (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2005).

Seemingly thwarted, the Richardsons finally discovered that the Sawi made tribal peace by having a father in each of the warring villages give one of their children as a peace child to their enemies. Immediately they saw the opportunity to tell the gospel story in terms the people could understand—Jesus, the peace Child, given by the loving Father. The missionaries contextualized the message, without compromising it, and finally they were able to convey the meaning of Jesus in terms the people could understand. In the following activity, explore the process of contextualization with the class.

Activity: Review with the class some of the parables Jesus told. Guide them in observing the way in which He adapted His stories according to the particular audience. For example, when talking to farmers, He told stories about wheat, animals, and sowing seed. He told fishermen stories about fish and nets. Invite the class to consider what kind of parables Jesus might tell today. If you have access to a blackboard or chalkboard, make a list of different audiences, such as the following (feel free to adapt for your local area):

1. Plumbers
2. Teachers
3. Computer programmers
4. Accountants
5. Doctors
6. Carpenters
7. Athletes

Ask the class to consider what sort of parables Jesus might tell to each audience to connect spiritual truth to their daily lives.