

The Faith of Gentiles

Matthew 8:5-13

Halifax: 14 November 2004

Introduction

Under OT Law, God appointed an elaborate system of rituals and ceremonies to teach the world about Himself.

- One of the main things He wanted to show the entire world was that He is holy.
- Because the human race has fallen into sin,
 - He taught that nobody could come into His presence unless that person had been cleansed and sanctified.

To drive this lesson home,

- God appointed worship at a central sanctuary, first a tabernacle and then a temple.
 - This was to represent His presence to the world.
 - But before anybody could worship there, that person had to be cleansed and sanctified...
 - There were all sorts of cleansings and washings, there was circumcision, there were sacrifices that had to be offered by priests (who themselves had to be sanctified).
- Those who had been sanctified were those distinguished from those who were unclean.
 - And because God sanctified in particular the nation of Israel,
 - They were set apart from all the other nations who were pronounced unclean.
 - Those other nations were called Gentiles and the people of Israel whom God sanctified were called Jews.
 - This meant that the Jews could worship God at the temple, as long as they went through all the proper ceremonies of cleansing—
 - but the Gentiles were excluded except for those few who were proselytes—that is, who joined themselves to Israel, were circumcised, and underwent all the cleansing requirements.

All this was to teach that nobody could come into God's presence unless God Himself sanctified them.

- Now of course, all these rituals and ceremonies were types, pictures if you will, of what God had purposed to do in His Son, Jesus Christ!

- All the ceremonies that were performed and all the sacrifices that were offered could only cleanse the persons outwardly for this earthly worship...
 - But the true cleansing and sanctification could only be effected by the offering of Jesus Christ!
 - It was by Him, and by Him alone, that sinners could be reconciled to God.
 - Without His sacrifice, we would all be cut off from the presence of God for eternity...
 - But by Him, all who believe are given eternal life.

And so you see that there are still two kinds of people in the world...

- There are those who have been sanctified by faith in Jesus Christ...
- And there are the rest who are unclean, and so remain cut off from God because they have not been cleansed by Christ—they have not been sanctified by God.

And I should add that the purpose of the OT ceremonial law is to lead both Jew and Gentile to faith in Christ.

- It teaches both that God must sanctify us or we are unclean.
 - The OT Jews were not supposed to rest in the outward service, but were pointed by the ceremonies to look to God to cleanse them according to His promise in Christ.
 - And so it was that when Jesus came in the fullness of time,
 - that the whole world was called to believe on Him for the remission of sins!
 - The whole world is called to come to Him and be sanctified through faith in Him.
 - And all who come to Him believing are assured of eternal life...
 - They are reconciled to God by His offering and adopted as sons and daughters...
 - For you are sons and daughters of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Matthew's gospel, like the other gospels, was written to declare this glorious salvation in Jesus Christ upon all and to all that believe.

- And of all four gospel's, Matthew is the most Jewish of them all...
 - That is, it was written especially with the Jews in mind.
 - And because this is so,
 - Matthew focuses more than the other gospels and blasting Jewish hypocrisy...
 - He presents us with more of the nasty things Jesus had to say about those who considered themselves righteous just because they were Jews...

- And how their faith in their pedigree was worthless unless they had faith in God's promise to sanctify them through His Son.
- So much of Matthew's gospel, as we have already seen, draws a line between covenant people who believe and covenant people who do not believe.
- Those who have entered in by the wide gate that leads to destruction, and those who have entered in by faith in Jesus Christ—
 - the way that leads to life...
 - And one of the things Matthew brings to focus that Jesus used to stir up the Jews forsake their hypocrisy and believe...
 - is the faith of the Gentiles in contrast with the Jews.
- That is what we have in the passage before us today...
 - A Gentile whose faith Jesus tells His followers was greater than the faith He had found anywhere in Israel!
 - Jesus is actually said to marvel at this man's faith!
 - There are not many times that He marvels...
 - He never marvelled at His own miracles, but they flowed out of him as naturally as words flow out of you when you speak...
 - In fact, the only other time He marvels, it also has to do with faith...
 - He marvels at the unbelief of some of the Jews.

And so to boil this all down,

- What we have in Matthew 8:5-13 is an example of the faith of a Gentile that shows us what faith ought to be like!
 - Gladly, Jesus does not say we must have faith equal to this man's great faith to be saved...
 - but we certainly must have faith that is *like* this great faith, even though it may be small and weak—it must be faith in Jesus.

And I say, this is something covenant people need to hear!

- You see, the gospel has been with us for a long time in the West.
- Most of you have parents and grandparents who were baptised into this covenant, so that makes you like the Jews to whom Matthew wrote His gospel...
 - You are today's covenant people, and you need to be challenged by this Gentile's faith...
 - first to make sure that you have saving faith...

- and secondly that your faith made become a greater faith, like his.
- It is so easy for the faith of God's covenant people to grow cold from one generation to the next.
- The solution is not excommunicate all our children and pretend that they are not in the covenant until they get old enough to profess their faith...
 - But the solution is to continually challenge all those who are in the covenant to have faith as a great as this Gentile.
 - So now let us take a good hard look at this wonderful faith that made Jesus marvel!

I. First of all, Gentile faith is a humble faith!

A. Yes, here is a marvel, a captain of mighty Rome pleading with one of his captives!

1. His faith is all the more striking because he is a great man in the world...
 - a. The centurions got their name from being in charge of a company of one hundred soldiers... often there were even more than that.
 - This man had been sent across the sea by the emperor to maintain Roman rule in Capernaum and the surrounding region.
 - The centurions were known to be the finest men in the Roman army...
 - Polybius says of centurions:
 - "They must not be so much venturesome seekers after danger, as men who can command, steady in action, and reliable; they ought not to be over-anxious to rush into the fight, but when hard pressed, they must be ready to hold their ground, and die at their posts."
 - As you can see, centurions were highly respected as the most disciplined soldiers of the most disciplined army in the world.
 - b. So here is a man that was, as far as the world is concerned, a very self-sufficient sort of man...
 - He was used to giving orders...
 - He was used to success and power...
 - He was used to being respect and honour.
2. But see how he puts all that aside when he comes to Jesus.
 - a. He comes as one who is totally dependent on the will of this Jew whose land his mighty army occupies.
 - He does not come demanding, but he comes pleading, beseeching, looking for mercy.
 - He comes not as a captor to his captive, but as a servant to his Lord.

- b. He comes as one who is helpless and unable to accomplish what he now desires...
 - He can conquer nations, he can put down disorder, but he cannot heal the servant he loves.
- 3. My friends, you will come with the same humility when you realise how dependent you are on Jesus to obtain what you desire...
 - Here is the creator who holds the dust of your body together at this very moment!
 - Here is the Only Saviour that the world has ever known to whom all judgement is committed...
 - and by whose will you will be committed to eternal misery or eternal life.
 - Here is the one who alone has the power to cleanse you.
 - No matter how successful you may have been in this world,
 - no matter how important you may think your own desires are,
 - when you come before Jesus, you must put all that aside and come humbly.

B. See also this Gentile's humility in that he pleads for his servant...

- 1. The word translated servant here is an affectionate term that could be translated "my boy."
 - a. It speaks of a young servant—it could even refer to a son, but Luke in the parallel passage says that the body was a slave.
 - How moving it is to see this man accustomed to warfare pleading for a young slave in his household!
 - Many other Romans would have had little to do with a suffering slave—
 - "Get him out of my sight and bring someone to me who is fit to serve me..."
 - but not this man...
 - It makes no difference to him that he is a slave...
 - He will do all he can to see him relieved.
 - b. It is obvious that his concern is not a selfish one...
 - He was well able to handle the economic loss involved in replacing a servant...
 - But his words show that he is concerned for the servant's comfort and welfare...

- “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed, dreadfully tormented.”
- Apparently, this servant had some type of paralysis that also caused him to writhe in pain,
 - and this rugged soldier is filled with tender compassion for him.

2. Mercy is always present with strong faith...

a. Strong faith realises that we all depend on the mercy of God...

- And so strong faith considers that if God has sustained us by His mercy, we ought to do all we can to sustain those who are under our power.
- Surely, if we are harsh with them, God will be harsh with us...
 - But where He has been so kind and gracious to us, we ought to be kind and gracious to others who are weaker than we are.

b. And so you Fathers ought to plead for your wife and children...

- As the Lord Jesus was so concerned for your infirmities that He bore them all the way to cross—
 - As He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities even to the point of bearing them in His own body...
 - So you ought to be pained for those under your care—
 - not looking at them as there merely for your comfort,
 - but as there for you to show mercy too.
- In fact, the Bible teaches us that the poor and the needy are God’s receptors or the mercy we show.
 - If you only plead for yourself, it is a sign of a deficient and selfish faith.
 - How beautiful to see mercy from the strong to the weak.

TRANS> So you see that humble faith not only forgets its own honour, but also remembers to show mercy...

- But that is not all

C. Humble faith also recognises that it is unworthy of Christ’s blessing...

1. There is little doubt that this centurion would have had a fine home that was well furnished,

- a. But he tells Jesus that He is unworthy to have Jesus come into His home.
- How could this be when Jesus was born in a cattle stall, was the son of a carpenter in Nazareth, and had no place to lay His head?
 - Is this a translation error or something—

- Did the man mean to say that Jesus was not worthy to come into his home?
 - No, he said that he was not worthy to have Jesus come to his home.
- b. How could he come to such a conclusion, given the way Jesus was living?
- 1) Probably, this has something to do with the fact that he was a Gentile.
 - And it appears that though he was what the Jews called a God-fearer, he was not a full proselyte and so had not been circumcised.
 - This meant that as a Gentile, he was unclean and he knew it!
 - Even though he was good friends with many Jews—
 - Luke’s gospel informs us that he had built them a synagogue and that he spoke to Jesus by sending them to plead in his behalf...
 - he knew the longstanding practice that Jews would not enter a gentile’s home lest they become unclean...
 - 2) And what is remarkable about this man’s humility is that instead of sneering at that,
 - He respected it and declared himself to be unworthy to have Christ come to his home.
 - He was, you can suppose, a little take back when Jesus said,
 - “I will come and heal him!”
 - He knew that he had not been sanctified by God in the way the Jews had, and so he could receive Jesus into his home without making him unclean...
 - He drew back from such a thought and protested:
 - “I am not worthy!”
2. This is so foreign to anything that anybody in our proud society would ever say!
- a. But brothers and sisters, how true it is!
 - In order to dwell in our hearts by His Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ had to become unclean for us.
 - To cleanse us, He who was holy had to be made unclean!
 - b. As it turned out in this passage, Jesus did not go the Centurion’s house,
 - but you can see that He was perfectly willing to do so!

- Now I want you to understand that these ceremonies were there to teach us that we really are unclean until our iniquities are laid on Jesus Christ and He takes them to the cross.
 - To show mercy to us, He had to take our uncleanness.
 - To sanctify us, He had to be defiled before His Father and before all the world.

- c. And I tell you that you cannot come to Jesus until you understand that you are unworthy of the least of His mercies!
 - It cost Him dearly to sanctify the Jews...
 - And it cost Him dearly to sanctify the Gentiles...
 - How unworthy we are to have God come under our roof!
 - Let us not be too proud to see that it is so.

 - Gentile faith is not a faith that says,
 - “We are just as good as the Jews,” or
 - “Why did you only bless the Jews for all those years?”
 - But it says,
 - “We are all unclean unless you sanctify us.”
 - And those who have been sanctified say,
 - “We are clean only because you cleansed us—we are just as unworthy as the heathen—salvation is all of your grace.

TRANS> So you see first of all that Gentile faith is a humble faith.

II. Secondly, Gentile faith is a trusting rather than a seeing faith.

- A. All throughout His ministry, Jesus did not go to the Gentiles, and He told His disciples not to go to them.
 - 1. And there was good reason for this...
 - a. The great triune God had ordained that salvation was first be revealed to the Jews...
 - that the Messiah would come to them to save them, and that after that the blessing of salvation would extend to the Gentiles.

 - b. To the Jews, God promised that the Messiah would come and that He would work signs among them.

- And so He came to them in the time appointed by the prophets with all manner of signs, the very signs that God had promised.
 - And He was presented to them as the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of the world.
 - And after He had finished His work, it was given to them to see Him rise from the dead for the justification of all who would believe.
2. The Jews were supposed to see all this, and seeing it, they were called to believe.
- a. After He arose and appeared to His disciples with the exception of Thomas,
 - Thomas declared that he would not believe until he had seen....
 - Here is the account from John 20:24 and following:
 - 24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"
 - b. There is a sense in which it was right for Thomas to refuse to believe until He had seen...
 - He was appointed by God to be an eyewitness of these things that he might declare what he had seen and heard to others that they might believe.
 - It was ordained by God that the Jews would see...
 - c. But something different was appointed for the Gentiles...
 - Jesus did not come to them in the flesh.
 - It is not for them to know Him after the flesh as the Jews did...
 - That's why Jesus also declared to Thomas,
 - John 20:29: "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."
 - And why John added the comment:
 - John 20:30-31: And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

3. And so the chief characteristic of Gentile faith as compared to Jewish faith was believing based on the word instead of believing based on seeing.
 - a. Obviously, this is a much greater faith that brings more glory to God.
 - The Jews require a sign, but the Gentiles believe by the bare hearing of the word.
 - b. It was a marvel to Jesus to see this Gentile believing that Jesus could heal His servant from a distance—without coming to see the servant...
 - The only other time Jesus is said to marvel was at the unbelief of the Jews who saw signs and yet did not believe.
 - c. See how this Gentile is different than the Jews...
 - Martha and Mary said,
 - “Lord, if you had only been hear sooner, our brother would not have died...”
 - But this Centurion says,
 - “Only say the word and my servant will be healed.”
 - That is the difference between Gentile and Jewish faith.

B. But do not suppose that Gentile faith is a blind faith.

1. It is not a leap in the dark kind of faith, it is a very reasonable faith...
 - a. The Centurion reasoned that even he, a man under the authority of others...
 - was able to speak a word and have things done by those under him...
 - In verse 9 he explains...
 - Matt 8:9: For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this *one*, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does *it*."
 - b. Thus He was sure that the true God could simply speak and whatever He spoke would be done...
 - This was like the faith that Abraham had when He believed that God was able to
 - “give life to the dead and call those things which do not exist as though they do.”
 - Abraham and this centurion simply acknowledged that God was God.
 - And that the same one who called the world into existence could surely call to be whatever He wants to be.

- The Centurion and Abraham knew that there is a God in Heaven who brings all things to pass by the mere power of His word.
 - He knew that the bread on his table was there because God had willed it be there...
 - he knew that every plant that grew in his garden grew because God willed it to grow...
 - He knew that every battle he had ever won he won because God decreed that He should win.
 - He knew the truth declared in Psalm 33:
 - Psa 33:6-11: By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was *done*; He commanded, and it stood fast. The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations.
 - Brothers and sisters, when we finally get to heaven, we will see the hand of our gracious Lord in the growth of every tree and the placement of every dew drop on every flower petal!
- c. Now when the centurion learned that Jesus was healing and cleansing lepers and such things,
- He saw the power of God in Him...
 - He was sure that He did not need to be present with the sick to heal the sick.
 - He was sure that Jesus could do whatever He chose to do by a mere act of the will.
 - He saw in Jesus the power of God and did not suppose that Jesus would have to be physically present to bless his servant.
 - All He had to do was say the word and his servant would be healed.
2. And so now it is also most reasonable for you to believe in Jesus without seeing Him...
- a. But it is only reasonable to you if you will accept the fact that you are totally dependent on His will...
- That the reason for suffering is because it was His will to curse this world on account of our sins...
 - And that reason suffering is relieved is because He willed to show mercy.

- b. I say, if you accept the fact that you are totally dependent on His will,
 - as soon as you hear His word that you are a sinner you will acknowledge it and you will be as helpless and desperate as this man was for his servant.
 - You will see that there is absolutely nothing you can do...
 - c. But likewise, when you hear the gospel of salvation,
 - You will recognise it as the only possible solution!
 - You will believe based on the testimony of God's word...
 - That will be enough for you!
 - You won't need a sign to prove to you that Jesus is the way because you will clearly see the way!
 - A man who is caught in a burning building does not need special signs to show him that an opened door is the way of escape!
 - As soon as the way is pointed out to him, he believes and by that way he goes!
 - It is only the one who wants to deny that the building is on fire...
 - the one who wants to pretend that he has no need of salvation that will be all muddled and confused about the way of escape.
 - He will say, "show me a sign to prove this religion to me."
3. Let me see if I can put this same truth another way just to make it clear...
- a. Those Gentiles whom God has prepared to believe without seeing He prepares by first causing them to believe what He has done in the world...
 - Nature itself teaches them that there is a God who has created all things and who upholds all things by His word...
 - And nature itself teaches them that God has cursed the world because of death and suffering...
 - And nature itself teaches them that they have sinned against God...
 - b. And so when the word of God comes to them, they immediately recognise that here is a book that deals with reality...
 - And how happy they are when they see that it presents a way of salvation from sin and the curse of God!
 - It becomes very clear to them that this is a divine way, and they do not need signs to confirm it—
 - the message itself is enough.

- There does not have to be a special visitation of the Lord or some special feeling worked up in the heart...
 - God has spoken to their need and it is enough...
 - His bare word is enough.
- c. This is the way God has chosen to work in the times of the Gentiles (which are the times we live in today).
 - When covenant people grow wanton and become evil and adulterous, they demand signs...
 - They say, “We will not believe unless we see signs.”
 - They are not content with the word of God alone to give them life.

TRANS> Oh how we need the faith of the Gentiles who believe that God saves because He says so.

- That is Gentile faith...
 - It is humble and it trusts without seeing...

III. Thirdly, Gentile faith is a rewarded faith

A. Gentile faith obtains the full blessing of Abraham!

1. Jesus Himself marvels at this faith and presents it to us as the way by which the blessing of Abraham is to be received.
 - a. In verses 11-12, He shows that the Jews who saw and did not believe will be cast out of God’s kingdom...
 - But the Gentiles who did not see but yet believe will be brought into the full privileges of God’s children!
 - b. Look at what He says in verse 11 and 12:
 - Matthew 8:11-12: “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
2. The word “sit down” means “to recline” as was done at the table!
 - a. Jesus is referring here to that great heavenly banquet that all the redeemed will enjoy!
 - He is saying that the Gentiles who believe will obtain the same blessing as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!
 - They will be seated at the table with them enjoying the same privileges and the same food and the same benefits!

- b. God Himself will be their God and they will His people...
 - And His will shall be directed to their good for all eternity...
3. But in contrast to this blessing will be the curse upon those Jews who do not believe.
- a. They will be cast into the outer darkness—away from the light of this wonderful banquet with Abraham and all who believe!
 - b. For them there will anguish and misery, weeping and gnashing of teeth.
 - What a warning this is to covenant people who take their privileges for granted!
 - Who have the truth preached them all their lives and yet do not believe!
 - It is a most dreadful prospect, but one that is surely deserved for all those that despise God’s mercy and reject the truth.
 - Let me urge you to believe like this centurion did.
- B. He was blessed as he had believed...
- 1. That is what Jesus says to him in verse 13:
 - “Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.”
 - a. Matthew then informs us that his servant was healed that very same hour—
 - which is to say, that very moment—even as Jesus spoke.
 - The centurion got what he came looking for.
 - b. Now I remind you that this is not a pattern for us so much for the healing of physical paralysis as it is for the healing of spiritual paralysis.
 - The Gentiles were paralysed when it came to serving God.
 - But Jesus is the one who restores them to move freely for Him by faith.
2. And note well that here we are encouraged to pray for those under our care in our household...
- a. When we see paralysis, we are to intercede for them and bring their case to Jesus.
 - And as we believe, it will be done for us.
 - Jesus invites us not to give up in unbelief on our children, but to come to Him and intercede for them...
 - and as we believe, it will be done for us.

- b. And I would observe here that there are different degrees of faith with different degrees of reward...
 - Those who earnestly look to Christ for great things will see great things...
 - And those who expect little for their children from Him and little for their own sanctification will have little.
 - As you believe, it will be done for you.

- a. But do not let anyone suppose that a certain degree of faith is needed for salvation.
 - It is not the amount of faith, but the presence of true saving faith—
 - Faith that looks to Jesus as He is promised in the gospel.
 - Anyone who has that faith, no matter how small it may be, will be found in the kingdom of God...
 - But let us not be content with small faith,
 - for we have a great Saviour who is worth of great trust.

Let us aim to have the faith of Gentiles...

- A humble faith
- A faith that believes without seeing
- and a faith that receives God's full reward.

Jesus presents this Gentile faith to us to stir us up to imitation.

- He delights in such faith.
- It will not lose its reward.