

The Jew Vs The Greek

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[0 : 00] I'm going to turn to Romans chapter 2 and verse 9 in your Bible, and that you will find on page 143.

And the expression that I want you to look at is that which concludes the ninth verse, the Jew first and also the Greek.

This is a special Sunday for me, only because I'm going to go away for three weeks now, and I won't be seeing you again.

Also, it's a special Sunday because three years ago, I came to visit the selection committee of St. John's on such a beautiful August morning, and my clothes were dirty and my shoes weren't shined.

And I'm sure I had matching socks on, but otherwise I was a fairly disreputable looking character and felt that it was entirely of the grace of God that I was invited to come and be rector of the parish.

[1 : 06] So now I have to try and justify their wisdom. And so far, I don't have a great deal of confidence that I've succeeded in that, but I'm prepared to persist.

And so it's for those kinds of reasons that this is a kind of milestone in my life this Sunday morning. And I want to share with you something of the sense I have of how God is dealing with us as a parish.

And I've chosen as the text these words, the Jew first and also the Greek. And I want you as members of this parish to assess or to answer this question.

Are you a Jew or are you a Greek? Now, you won't, of course, be able to answer that immediately, but I'd like to fill in the content of what I mean by that. Paul was writing this letter to the Romans to a cosmopolitan community such as Vancouver might be.

And he reduces the whole community. In fact, he virtually reduces the whole world to Jew and Greek. So I don't want you to think of Jews as merely Jews, but it's the kind of personality which you run into, particularly in the Western world now, because we are such an admixture of Jewish religion and Greek philosophy that we hardly know who we are.

[2 : 40] So it's important to try and discern. Now, the Jew I take to be a man who is obsessed by the God of religion. He's caught up in the process of history.

He's deeply concerned with morality. And he demands signs of the activity of God. And in that he finds his fulfillment.

On the other hand, the Greek is the man who is cultured, ascetic, interested in art and architecture and drama, the theater, philosophy, mythology, and wisdom.

And so you find these men sort of at tension with one another, the Jew and the Greek. For purposes of this parish, you may have noticed that you passed Moses on the way in the door.

That is a copy of, I think, a famous sculpture by Michelangelo, which shows Moses with the Ten Commandments under his right arm.

[3 : 49] Well, that's in a sense typical, because the Jews are essentially concerned with what's written on those tablets, but the tablets are blank.

There's nothing written on them. While the Greeks are concerned with the man, with the craftsmanship that produced that sculpture, with the stature and physique and attractiveness of humanity, as it's expressed in one of the great men of history, even Moses.

And so you get this kind of tension, the beauty and aesthetics, if you want, of this sculpture, and the fact that it says nothing about the law of God.

Well, the Jew doesn't care what Moses looked like, whether he's a hunchback, disfigured and deformed, what's really important is what he's got under his arm, because that expresses the moral and religious purpose of God.

And that's the thing that we should be interested in, not just in man. And so there is this tension between the Jew and the Greek. Paul in Romans shows very little sympathy for the Jew or the Greek, not by being disrespectful of what they've got, but pronouncing for the benefit of them both.

[5 : 12] And this is Romans chapter 2, verse 9. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being that does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek.

And if you read the first chapters of Romans, you will discover that the evil of the Greek is that he lives by a sophisticated lie.

Now, if you look up what a sophisticated is or what a sophist is, he's one that is skilled in persuasion by unsound thought and plausible argument, which is the only way that you can support a lie, is by unsound thought and plausible argument.

Pick something that you want to believe is true and then build around it a structure of things that look plausible, though they are unsound and not really stable, but they make it look as though that's the truth.

The Greek is concerned with what appears to be the truth. The Greek finds reason to believe what he wants to believe.

[6 : 26] The Jew despises him because the true glory of Moses is not his human form but his imparting of the law. Well, the evil of the Jew, on the other hand, is that he knows God's moral law and he knows that God's purpose is expressed in that law.

And he can look at the pagan world around him and be shocked by the immorality of all that he sees. He takes almost a sick delight in seeing the moral failures of men because they don't know the law of God.

He sees robbery and adultery and idolatry. And he has no difficulty seeing the futility and ultimate condemnation of men because they don't understand history, they don't understand the law.

And he sees and condemns them all with righteous indignation. The fault is, however, Paul says, that he himself is just as immoral in his own life, that knowing the law of God has not changed him, that he's no different from the Greek, basically.

He considers himself to be superior, but he's not superior because he does the same thing. He's almost, as it were, like the judge who dispenses the law, but lives outside of it himself.

[8 : 03] That is, because he knows it and understands it, he thinks perhaps it's not important for him to be obedient to it.

And that's how Paul characterizes the Jew. And I've asked you whether you are a Greek or a Jew. Does your salvation lie in your appreciation of a rich and varied cultural life and the exercise of your reason to persuade you of the truth of what you have chosen to believe?

Or is your salvation found in the signs of God's blessing upon you, your wealth and health, your prestige and the respect you hold among men?

And when you sin, you know what you're doing, and suppose that God will forgive you because you're not like those who sin without knowing it. and therefore they never say they're sorry.

My concern for this parish is that it tends to be a parish of Greeks and Jews, both of whom find in each other something distinctly lacking.

[9 : 18] I suspect that I waste a lot of my time as the minister of this parish persuading the Jews to understand the Greeks and the Greeks to understand the Jews.

And the conflict that exists between their different points of view occupies most of the energy that's involved in the life of this parish.

I don't think we're different necessarily than others, but I want to look at our situation. Well, this is where I sense that I'm a bit lost in knowing how to minister to a parish like this.

How to? Because ultimately you can't persuade the Jews that the Greeks are wiser or persuade the Greeks that the Jews know God better. You can't do it.

We've been trying to do it for centuries and nobody's ever won. And this battle goes on. Well, Paul saw a kind of mutual respect building up between the Jews and the Greeks.

[10 : 31] If Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified, the Greeks snorted foolishness. You know, if as it says in Galatians, Jesus Christ is publicly portrayed hanging as a condemned man upon a cross and somebody says, there's the truth, the Greek says that is utter rubbish.

And there are those in our society who think that. And if you take the Jew and turn him to the man hanging on the cross and say, there is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Jew would tear his clothes in indignation and say, that can never be.

God would not allow such terrible and defiling humiliation of one whom he was prepared to say was the Son of God.

It couldn't happen. And so the coalition grows between the Greek and the Jew. The Greek saying foolishness and the Jew saying an unworthy humiliation.

The very fact that he is not who he claims to be is proven by the fact that he ended up on the cross and there's nothing more to say. Well, that's what happens between the Jew and the Greek and the endless debate that goes on between them.

[12 : 16] But then Paul says there is a third option. And that is that when Jesus Christ is publicly portrayed before men as crucified, on the one hand, we can scream defiance, or on the other hand, we can find ourselves drawn to believe.

We find the Greek concept of the glory of man and the Jewish awareness of the glory of God find their true fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

And that's why in Romans chapter 1, verse 16, Paul says, for that reason I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

so that, while Paul says the condemnation of the Jew for his Jewishness is complete and the condemnation of the Greek for his Greekness is complete, and that they both come under the wrath of God, he says there is that further purpose of God which is revealed to both in the gospel, and that is Jesus Christ crucified, the good news which as we are given the faith to believe it and to hear it, we enter into that salvation which God has prepared for us in Christ.

And you see, if you go and take this story to the Greek, you're humiliated because he says foolishness.

[14 : 25] If you go and take it to the Jew, full of his own religious self-righteousness, he scorns you. But Paul says, whether you take it to the Greek or to the Jew, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

because I know that it is the power of God under salvation to everyone that believes that in Jesus Christ something else is opened up.

And that's the basis that Paul later says in Corinthians, woe with me if I preach not the gospel, if I don't declare Jesus Christ and him crucified.

To refuse to be ashamed of the gospel because it offends the sensibility of Jew and Greek and to know that it is the power of God at work to bring about our salvation.

and that's what it is. And that essentially is what our communion is. The sophisticated Greek with his thirst for wisdom and the Jew with his thirst for God coming together to receive the body of Christ which was broken for you and the blood of Christ which we shed for you.

[16 : 12] And thereby entering in to the purpose of God the first glimpse of which comes when we have been given the faith to hear and respond to the declaration of Christ crucified.

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