

## GOSPEL MESSAGES FOR MUSLIMS : THE TWO ADAMS AND JESUS THE PURIFIER

*Colin Bearup*

What exactly do we need to get across to Muslims to draw them into discipleship? It is my contention that it is possible to present a simple and authentic message that communicates. Many of our approaches reflect the richness of Biblical theology in a way which conflicts with the Muslims' worldview at almost every point. This does not reflect the examples of Gospel proclamation given by the scriptures themselves. In this article I review some basic principles and then apply them with examples developed through work in the field. It is about connecting with ordinary people, not engaging with their theologians, recognising their need before God as they experience it and presenting Christ accordingly, working with the mindset not against it. This paper is a sequel to 'How Effective are Chronological Approaches?' October 2012.<sup>1</sup>

If we were to ask Western Christian workers what were the essentials of the message they wanted to get across to Muslims, they would typically mention a range of things such as the deity of Christ, the death of Christ on the cross, the necessity of blood, the importance of sacrifice, the trustworthiness of the Bible, free forgiveness, Christ being the only way, the love of God, along with other important themes.

Dr Colin Edwards<sup>2</sup>, speaking in the Friendship First DVD course<sup>3</sup>, talks about the research he did among believers of Muslims background (BMBs) in South Asia. He asked them about their understanding of salvation in Christ. He found that the majority talked about being joined to Christ in his death and resurrection. This is a major theme in the epistles of Paul but not something on which Western workers typically focus. Edwards reported that very few of the BMBs he spoke to talked of the death of Christ without reference to the resurrection and ascension and very few used courtroom imagery. He went on to talk about the awareness people had of their need to be clean before God and the stories of Jesus that demonstrated that even his spittle had saving power.

The contrast between our typical message priorities and their understanding of the Gospel gives pause for thought. We are all talking about genuine threads of the Gospel fabric, but our thread selection is quite different.

With this in mind, it is instructive to examine the Acts of the Apostles. Unlike the Epistles, Acts gives us a record of the Good News being announced to people who were not believers. If we read through Acts examining the messages intended for making converts what do we find? What do we find if we seek to tease out the material that is new to the listeners that required a response? Broadly speaking, the messages recorded or summarised in Acts are addressed to people who fall into three groups: 1. Jews in Jerusalem; 2. synagogue participants away from Jerusalem (both Jews and Gentiles); 3. Gentiles with no knowledge of scripture. The content of the message varied accordingly. In Jerusalem the fact that Jesus had been crucified was taken as known, in synagogues away from Jerusalem this was part of the new information. Groups 1 and 2 were frequently reminded of what they already knew— scripture, history and the promises of God. The few messages we have addressed to uninitiated Gentiles always started at a different point and expressed the required response in different terms too.

It is important to draw the correct inferences. It is not that we should slavishly copy what we find in these scriptural examples, rather the example of scripture encourages to adapt the presentation of the message to the audience, specifically to what they already know. We can also note that only one of the 16 messages in Acts proclaims Jesus as Son of God and that was to a Jewish audience (Acts 9:21-22). In all likelihood, this example is using Son of God primarily as messianic title rather than a statement of divinity as indeed was reflected in Caiaphas's challenge in Matthew 26:63. Many other messages— to Jews— identify Jesus as the Christ without addressing questions of his nature. As Christ he brings salvation, the fulfilment of God's promises, good news enough to require a response. It is also interesting to note that not one of the messages in Acts attempt to

---

<sup>1</sup> Colin Bearup 'How Effective are Chronological Approaches?' *St Francis Magazine* 8 no 5 (October 2012) p.593-598.

<sup>2</sup> Colin Edwards of Interserve and Redcliffe College, England.

<sup>3</sup> Friendship First, 2011, Steve Bell & Tim Green, Interserve, UK.

explain the theology of the cross. This is not to say that expounding atonement theology is never appropriate in initial Gospel proclamation, but it does indicate that it cannot be seen as mandatory. The Apostles didn't do it.

Such a survey of Acts should prompt us to re-evaluate what we regard as essential in our initial Gospel message. Is our selection based simply on our background and the habits of our sub-culture or is it based on what is going to be most helpful to our listeners? The Gospel is deep and rich. We have much material to draw on. The goal of a Gospel message is to persuade people to begin a process of learning and believing, or in other words to become disciples. It need not, it cannot, cover all the riches of Gospel teaching.

One of the striking things about examining the accounts in Acts is the high proportion of each message given over to reminding the listeners of what they already know and linking it together. The various chronological approaches so popular these days are premised on the need to address ignorance, to tell unsaved about the background that they do not know so that they will be sufficiently instructed that they are finally able to understand the Gospel message (*our* Gospel message?) and respond to it. While it may be legitimate and effective, it contrasts with the approach we see in Acts.

Is it really the case that Muslims know nothing that we can draw on? To oversimplify for a moment, the Gospel message is about God's solution to Man's need. What is man's need? The scriptures gives us a variety of expressions : human beings are sinful, guilty, lost, dying/dead, in darkness, deceived, under evil, unclean, separated, under wrath and so on. Each of these expressions carries its own emotive resonances and associations. How does God bring a solution in Jesus? Again we have many expressions to draw on. He is saviour, Lord, redeemer, deliverer, shepherd, sacrifice, mediator, the way, the key holder, the giver life and so on. We may have our own default selection from this library of themes, but the question is which of these terms best expresses human need to our listeners and which descriptions of Jesus communicate with credibility?

Here are the outlines of two brief Gospel presentations that seek to apply this thinking. They were both developed with African Muslims in mind.

#### **The First Adam and the Second**

We all know the first Adam, do you know about the second?

God created our father Adam and made him a perfect man. God put him in an ideal place. Adam heard the words of God with his own ears— Glory to God.

But Satan was stronger than our father Adam and Satan deceived him and Adam went wrong. Because of that he fell and in the end he died.

And the descendants of Adam became like him. They also did wrong and it was easy for Satan to deceive them and ruin them. And they die.

God sent them prophets to give them words of truth but the children of Adam like Adam were not strong and they could not follow the truth as they should and it was easy for Satan to deceive them and ruin them.

God gave rules, laws and commandments, but the children of Adam are no stronger than their ancestor and Satan easily leads them astray.

And so God sent the second Adam. His birth was different from that of the children of Adam. He had no human father. And he was strong and did no wrong. Satan was not able to deceive him.

The second Adam defeated the Devil and drove demons from people. He healed the sick and encouraged the poor and his name is Isa al-Masih, Glory to God.

We are all children of Adam by our birth and so we inherit his weakness. We can become brothers of the second Adam by faith and he shares his strength with us. He offers us new life.

God sent Jesus Christ to save us from Satan's power. The Second Adam is alive.

Believe in him and follow his way.

This approach echoes Paul's teaching about Christ and Adam in Romans 5:15-17 and I Corinthians 15:21-22 & 45-49. It describes the Fall in terms that Muslims will recognise. Rather than correcting what is lacking in the Islamic account of the fall it draws out its implications<sup>4</sup>. Indirectly, it challenges the standard Islamic message of salvation through obedience by pointing to

---

<sup>4</sup> This approach is also advocated by E M Hicham *How Shall They Hear?* (Greenville, S.C. : Ambassador Press, 2009) chapter 11 p.99-100

human experience. It presents Christ as “like Adam” (an expression used in Islam but with different connotations) as being powerful and alive. It draws on the familiar to put together a new unfamiliar message (“news”) with immediate relevance. The terminology is so familiar that Muslims have been known to have worked out that we are talking about Jesus before his name is used.

The theme of this paper is developing approaches that connect with the intended audience. In the culture for which the Adams message was intended, it is accepted that the devil is strong and man at a disadvantage. A colleague with experience in Turkey commented that Turks tend to assert that man is stronger than the devil, that temptation can be resisted and that the individual is therefore responsible. It is to be anticipated that any approach be limited in its applicability. In Africa, unlike every other part of the Muslims world, Adam is a very popular boy’s name. An Adam-based message is all the more appropriate.

The second presentation is about *tahārah*, ritual purity or cleanness without which one’s worship is not accepted. Although only the text is given here in this article, it has been developed into an illustrated paper tract and put into an MP4 for phones.<sup>5</sup>

Al-salām alaykum.

How can God accept someone who is not clean? Being clean before God is vital.

A man with leprosy came to the Lord Jesus. At that time, a person with leprosy was considered unclean. He could never enter the place of prayer. He knelt before Jesus and said: “Heal me so I will be clean”.

And Jesus touched him and immediately the man became clean. Glory to God.

There was a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She said to herself: “If I touch the clothes of Jesus, I will be well and become clean”. She approached him and touched the hem of his garment.

Jesus turned and saw her. He said: “My daughter, take heart. Your faith in me has saved you”. Right then she was completely healed and became clean. Glory to God.

Even if a person’s body is healthy he is not pure if his heart is unclean. Christ said: “What comes from inside a man, from his heart, that is what makes him unclean”.

For from inside a person, from his heart, come bad thoughts, wicked desires, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deception, corruption, evil eye, slander, pride and folly.

Can a man wash his own heart clean? No he can’t.

But Christ is able to purify the heart of the person who believes in him, Glory to God.

Jesus Christ is alive and active. He does what no other can.

While most Muslims do not wrestle with sinfulness, uncleanness is a constant preoccupation. This approach takes the felt-need of being clean seriously. It identifies two examples of physical impurity which generally resonate, leprosy and blood, and draws on something that Muslims know, namely that Jesus healed. It also draws on what they have not thought about, namely that Jesus not only healed but made clean with his touch. This approach also adds the teaching of Jesus concerning the true nature of uncleanness as being sin proceeding from the heart. However, rather than unpacking atonement theology it simply affirms that faith in Christ brings inner cleanness. Hopefully this is enough to encourage serious enquiry and the beginning of learning.

In addition, this tract intentionally gives both a male and a female example. Incidentally, doing so follows the example of Jesus in Mat 13:31-33 and Luke 15:1-10. Ritual uncleanness is a big issue in the life of Muslim women. The direction the story takes may well surprise many Muslims women and impart hope. And that hope points them to Christ the living saviour.

It is not the intention of this article to simply posit new presentations to replace old ones. Rather it is a call engage seriously with Muslims as they are and as they have been taught to think and then to re-examine the vast resources we have in the Gospel. The time is surely past for seeking ever more ingenious ways to make our preferred simplification of the Good News comprehensible and credible to those with a radically different mindset.

---

<sup>5</sup> The English language edition can be found at <http://youtu.be/twfbmB4DwVY>