

Witnessing to those of Jewish Heritage

by Ben Hoyer

“Salvation is found in no one else, For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Peter spoke this now famous line some two thousand years ago. He and John had been arrested by the temple guard and the Sadducees for preaching and healing in the name of our Lord the Christ. Witnessing the healing and acknowledging that Peter and John were ordinary unschooled men who had been with Jesus the Jewish leaders...

“ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thinking from spreading any further among the people we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

Acts 4.12-17

The relationship between first century Jewish and Gentile Christians was tenuous at times: which rituals should be maintained, which must be applied to the gentile converts, which must be abandoned by Jewish Christians. The connections between the religion that developed out of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, and the teachings of Christ were not always clear. But one point was always clear: there is only one name under heaven by which men must be saved. For Jew and gentile alike faith in the sacrifice of the Son of God is the only way to salvation. For a variety of reasons this simple affirmation has been subtly challenged when it comes to the people of Judaism. Some understand scripture to provide an exception of the Jewish race of people.^[1] Part of this confusion stems from the Apostle Paul's words in his letter to the Romans...

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.”

Romans 11.25-26

When considering this section of Scripture it is imperative to remember that from its inception with the call of Abram, Israel has been a community of faith. Membership in the true people of Israel was based upon faith in Yahweh (Gal 6:26), and Yahweh has now made himself clear through the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Paul is comforting the Roman Christians. They should not be concerned Yahweh will ensure that all of his people, whether gentile or Jew, will come to faith in Christ and be saved.

As we think about outreach to Jewish people, we have to start with the conviction that Jewish people need Jesus! Salvation comes only through the God-man Jesus, and inclusion in the Israel of God is dependent upon faith in that man. This is true for all people.

Tips:

Don't make assumptions:

Judaism is by no means monolithic. The website Judaism 101 (jewfaq.org) asserts that around half of Jewish people living in Jerusalem consider themselves secular, meaning they don't believe in a God.

A person is Jewish, if their mother is Jewish or if they have converted. It does not necessarily denote a set of beliefs. Judaism is more consistently about actions, with some observing more or less of the holidays and rituals. Judaism could even simply be a racial identity, sometimes without any ritual observance at all. In conversation with a Jewish person very little can be assumed. Instead you can exhibit concern and love for the person by asking them what being Jewish means to them. What role does Judaism play in their life? Does their family life revolve around the holidays? Do they attend synagogue? These sorts of questions are good places to begin conversation.

Listen:

How many times in a week does the phrase "How are you doing?" or "How's it going?" come out of your mouth? How many times are you actually concerned about the response? When involved in a dialogue where you hope to influence people with the Love of Christ, the single most important thing you can do is really listen to what they say. Our world is so segmented. We are isolated from people, with little opportunity for community. You would be surprised how much people will talk, and the things they will reveal when someone is willing to really listen.

Just before he feeds the five thousand, Mark records that

"Many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."

Mark 6.33-34

It was compassion that moved Jesus to teach and feed those people. He perceived what they were missing, and gave them what they needed. In order to deliver the gospel, we must first perceive the situation people are in. When you really listen in a conversation you can begin to perceive where they are. Is their conscience convicting them, are they feeling guilty? Do they figure that they have life pretty well under control? Are they choosing to ignore the realities of their shortcomings, or the inevitability of death? Until you perceive what they need, you don't know how to respond.

Speak from experience:

You have been where they are. You have felt the weight of sin. You have believed the lie of self-sufficiency. What has helped you?

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us."

1John 4.4-6

You have been called, redeemed and sanctified by the triune God. Your thoughts and words are not like those of the world; yours have been enlightened by the truth of the Gospel and are empowered by the Spirit. You do not need to quote the Bible to them, nor do you need to have a polished presentation of the salvation story. Instead speak to them from your life, from your common emotional experiences. The Holy Spirit will work to convict and forgive through you, and the person will understand more clearly what you are trying to communicate.

Make it clear who you follow:

There is a strong sense of solidarity among Jewish people. Much atrocity has been committed in the name of Christianity, some of it directed specifically at the Jewish people. This will no doubt come up in conversation. It is important to remember who you follow. It is Christ alone. There is no room, nor necessarily even a need to defend these past actions. It is best to simply agree that atrocities like the Holocaust are inexcusable, express concern, and apologize that people had to endure persecution. But then make it clear that Christ commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and that Christ as revealed in the Scriptures is the supreme authority.

Resources:

Appleofhiseye.org: this is an evangelistic mission to Jewish people that originates within the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. There is useful information, email addresses to ask specific questions, speakers that will come to your church, and contacts to find local branches. It is a great Synod resource.

JewsforJesus.org: this is quite possibly the largest group of messianic Jews. On their website you will find a myriad of materials, resources, answers and support.

Jewfaq.org: This is a website maintained by a lay Jewish person. It will answer questions from a knowledgeable Jewish person's perspective. It can give you some basic answers about the faith and practice of Jewish people.

More Than a Carpenter: Josh McDowell set out to write a book demonstrating that Jesus was not the Jewish messiah. However in his writing he was converted to the truth of the Gospel. This is a very handy book. It is concise and clearly demonstrates how Jesus fulfills the Jewish Bible.

Practice:

It is difficult to rehearse evangelistic conversations (remember the goal is not a neatly worded presentation of Christian theology, but a conversation of influence that reveals the Grace of our God). It is good, however, to have an awareness of where God the Father has taken you and how he has changed you.

Take a few minutes and **pick out three key moments in your life of faith**. Maybe there was a turning point in high school or college where faith became real. Perhaps in the early days of your career there was a particular sin that finally got your attention or a decision that gave you perspective. Maybe there was a time when you were dealing with your children which God used to teach you something about faith. Try to remember your thought process and the emotions you went through. Try to remember how you thought about God before and after. All of this will help you identify with the

person you are influencing and allow the Holy Spirit to use your experience to instruct them. The words you use to describe the lessons God taught you, when empowered by the Holy Spirit, can become the Word of God.

A scenario:

Imagine that you have a coworker who is Jewish. He and his wife do not practicing, they still consider themselves Jewish but they don't go to synagogue or observe the Holy Days. They have just had a kid and are decided weather they should raise them in a more Jewish home.

He tells you that he fell away from the practice because it felt like dead ritual. It was nice to have the connecting point with family and tradition, but it wasn't enough to get him to go through the motions.

Empathize:

Rather than jumping on the idea that Judaism is just a bunch of dead ritual, perhaps you could empathize with your coworker. Certainly there has been a time in your life that Christianity felt like you were going through the motions. How did you pull through. Perhaps you encourage yourself to realize that God is real, that you have seen him act in your life, and that you know he has acted in history. Whatever the case be truthful and transparent. People can tell when they are getting a sales pitch or talking to someone with ulterior motives. Remember you have been called, redeemed and sanctified by the triune God. He will use your thoughts and words. It is his job to convert; yours to be his creation.

There are definitely some walls between Judaism and the Gospel, but none to big for our God. Be yourself, and let him be himself. He is willing that none should perish!

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