

“Where to start when seeking to reach Jewish people”

FRIDAY 10 AUGUST 2007

9am - 12:30pm : Centenary Conference – Worship & Seminars

* “Where to start when seeking to reach Jewish people” (John Atkinson)

1 The Great Commission

Luke and the Great Commission (Luke 24:44-49)

- 44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."
45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.
46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,
47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.
48 You are witnesses of these things.
49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

The key concept that makes this statement unique among the other Great Commission statements is “context.” The disciples needed to understand what they had witnessed and the task Jesus was assigning them within the larger context of God's purposes in history. Jesus provided that context through the Hebrew Scriptures, the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.

In so doing, Jesus showed His disciples then and now the broad foundation and context upon which the Great Commission is built. The missionary enterprise of the church is not some isolated idea tenuously balanced on a few texts in the New Testament, upon which we have built this huge structure known as missions. No, the missionary enterprise of God's people is at the very foundation of what God cares most about and has revealed from Genesis to Revelation. (David Brickner – Director Jews for Jesus)

Matthew and the great Commission

Matt 28:18-20

- 18 Then Jesus came to them and said,
"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
And surely *I am with you* always, to the very end of the age."

Isaac

Gen 26:24

24 That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for *I am with you*; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."

Jacob

Gen 28:15

15 *I am with you* and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Joshua

Joshua 3:7

7 And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that *I am with you* as I was with Moses.

People of Israel

Isaiah 41:10

10 So do not fear, for *I am with you*; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 43:5

5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west.

Jeremiah 30:11

11 *I am with you* and will save you,' declares the LORD. 'Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1:8, 19

8 Do not be afraid of them, for *I am with you* and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 15:20

20 I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for *I am with you* to rescue and save you," declares the LORD.

The People of Jerusalem

Jeremiah 42:11

11 Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you now fear. Do not be afraid of him, declares the LORD, for *I am with you* and will save you and deliver you from his hands.

The People of Israel

Jeremiah 46:28

28 Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, for *I am with you*," declares the LORD. "Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you.

Haggai 1:13

13 Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "*I am with you*," declares the LORD.

Haggai 2:4

4. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For *I am with you*,' declares the LORD Almighty.

Jesus uses a well known rabbinic method of teaching known as *charaz* or *stringing pearls*. This could be described as of a diverse collection of Bible passages or phrases that have been gathered together in order to illustrate a key theme.

John and the great Commission

John's account of the Great Commission to gain additional insight into the same upper room event. Y'shua said “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21).

If Luke's account looks back to the Scriptural context of the Great Commission throughout the sweep of redemptive history, John looks forward, showing the continuity between our mission and that of our Messiah. John's focus is on Jesus as our model for how we are to carry out the Commission.

In what ways did the Father's sending His Son compare to how Jesus has sent us? We can't mirror Jesus in all that He accomplished in His mission—we are not saviors. Yet we are to be crucified with Christ. We are not the Suffering Servant who bears the sin of the world, but we are sent to serve. To accomplish our mission we must identify with others as Jesus identified with us and become vulnerable as He became vulnerable. Have you noticed that it is easier to proclaim the gospel to people from a distance than it is to involve ourselves in their lives? Yet genuine, effective proclamation leads to personal encounters and opportunities to build relationships. (David Brickner – Jews for Jesus)

Now you may think that this is an open and shut case. We are commissioned to take the gospel to all people of which Jewish people are naturally a part.

2 Attitudes to Evangelising Jewish People

2.1. Roman Catholics

The Second Vatican Council, commonly known as *Vatican II*, was a pastoral ecumenical council of the Catholic church opened under Pope John XXIII in 1962 and closed under Pope Paul VI in 1965. One of the most revolutionary changes that resulted from interpretations of this council's documents are those which concerned the document *Nostra Aetate*.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by

God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

This new understanding of the relationship between Christians and Jews is reflected in the revised liturgy of Good Friday in a particular way. The 1962 edition of the Good Friday Prayer had Catholics praying for the "perfidious Jews" that they might convert to the truth. (The word "Perfidious" was dropped in 1964). The current prayer prays for "the Jewish people, first to hear the word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of His name and in faithfulness to His covenant."

2.2 Protestant Churches

In 1981 the Assembly of the Church of Scotland declared "its belief in the continuing place of God's people of Israel within the divine purpose."

In 1982 the Lutheran World Federation issued a consultation stating that "we Christians must purge ourselves of any hatred of the Jews and any sort of teaching of contempt for Judaism."

The *European Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People* (Lutherische Europäische Kommission Kirche und Judentum, LEKKJ) is an umbrella organization representing twenty-five Lutheran church bodies in Europe. On May 12, 2003 they issued *A Response to Dabru Emet*:

In its Driebergen Declaration (1991), the European Lutheran Commission on the Church and the Jewish People...rejected the traditional Christian "teaching of contempt" towards Jews and Judaism, and in particular, the anti-Jewish writings of Martin Luther, and it called for the reformation of church practice in the light of these insights. Against this background, LEKKJ welcomes the issuance of *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*. We see in this statement a confirmation of our own work of these past years....We know that we must re-examine themes in Lutheran theology that in the past have repeatedly given rise to enmity towards Jews....Fully aware that *Dabru Emet* is in the first instance an intra-Jewish invitation to conversation, we see in this statement also an aid to us in expressing and living out our faith in such a way that we do not denigrate Jews, but rather respect them in their otherness, and are enabled to give an account of our own identity more clearly as we scrutinize it in the light of how others see us.

In March 1995 the Alliance of Baptists issued "A Baptist Statement on Jewish-Christian Relations"; a revision of this statement was released on April 25, 2003. In part, it says:

As Baptist Christians we are the inheritors of and, in our turn, have been the transmitters of a theology which lays the blame for the death of Jesus at the feet of the Jews; a theology which has taken the anti-Jewish polemic of the Christian Scriptures

out of its first century context and has usurped for the Church the biblical promises and prerogatives given by God to the Jews...The madness, the hatred, the dehumanizing attitudes which led to the events known collectively as the Holocaust did not occur overnight or within the span of a few years, but were the culmination of centuries of such Christian theology, teaching and church-sanctioned action directed against the Jews simply because they were Jews.

This document lists recommended actions that they asked all Christians to join them in:

- "Affirming the teaching of the Christian Scriptures that God has not rejected the community of Israel, God's covenant people (Romans 11:1-2), since 'the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable' (Romans 11:29);
- Renouncing interpretations of Scripture which foster religious stereotyping and prejudice against the Jewish people and their faith;
- Seeking genuine dialogue with the broader Jewish community, a dialogue built on mutual respect and the integrity of each other's faith;
- Lifting our voices quickly and boldly against all expressions of anti-Semitism;
- Educating ourselves and others on the history of Jewish-Christian relations from the first century to the present, so as to understand our present by learning from our past.
- Commit ourselves to rigorous consideration of appropriate forms of Christian witness for our time.

The United Church of Canada issued a statement in May 1998 entitled "Bearing Faithful Witness: United Church-Jewish Relations Today."

This calls upon Christians to:

- Stop trying to convert Jews to Christianity;
- Reject Biblical interpretations which negatively stereotype Jews, as this leads to anti-Semitism;
- Reject the idea that Christianity is superior to, or a replacement for, Judaism;
- recognize that anti-Semitism is an element of historic Christianity, but not an inherent part of it - therefore one can remove it from Christianity and still remain faithful to Christianity.

Bearing Faithful Witness, has continued within the Church as a study program; on August 13, 2003, the 38th General Council of The United Church of Canada received a new report from Bearing Faithful Witness; it then approved a statement on relations with Jews today. Their report states, in part,

"No other religion is as closely related to Christianity as Judaism. The Christian God is the God of Israel. Jesus and all the apostles were of Israel. Christian scripture includes the scriptures of Israel."

They call for no longer seeking the conversion of Jews. The statement, *United Church-Jewish Relations Today*, "acknowledges a history of interpreting the New Testament in a way that has failed to acknowledge the context within Judaism in which many passages are rooted; rejects all teaching of contempt toward Jews and Judaism and the belief that God has

abolished the covenant with the Jewish people; affirms the significance of Judaism as a religion, a people, and a covenant community and that the State of Israel has the right to exist in peace and security."

2.3 Donald Coggan Archbishop of Canterbury

In 1985 in a lecture at St Paul's Cathedral entitled 'When Christian meets Jew' he suggests five attitudes or postures which a Christian might develop in such an encounter.

The first is the **attitude of silence**. This might be the silence of sympathy and empathy. 'Which people in the history of the world,' he asks, 'has suffered more than the Jewish people?' Perhaps, he said, 'we Christians have talked too much and listened too little to our Jewish friends - and to their God and ours.'

Second, he explores the **attitude of listening and learning**. We should 'adopt the attitude of disciples with ears at the ready to receive the wisdom that Israel has to teach us.'

Third, Donald considers the **attitude of penitence** - 'new generations of Christians must be made aware of the terrible things which Christian leaders like Ambrose and Chrysostom and Augustine and Luther have written and of the silence - how damning silence can be! - kept by Christians in the face of persecution suffered by the Jews.'

But then Donald suggests two more positive relationships we might adopt. The fourth attitude is that of **joint-trusteeship to the world around**. We - Jews and Christians - share a message of vast importance addressed to our world. He says, 'Let me mention certain treasures which Judaism has held and at the best still holds in trust for the world: The high value of the family, the involvement of the family in worship in home and synagogue, the observance of one day in seven for rest, the clarion call for social justice, the doctrine of God as Lord, Creator, Judge and Redeemer.' He continued: 'It is the supreme privilege and duty of Jews and Christians to proclaim these truths, to incarnate these truths, together in a spirit of joint-mission.'

The fifth and final attitude was one that Donald offered with great hesitancy and delicacy, and which he called the **attitude of invitation**. He says, 'To a Christian his most precious possession is his faith, the new life that has come to him, through Jewish channels, consummated in Jesus. It is natural that, precisely because he loves his Jewish opposite number, he should be eager to share his discovery with him. No pressurising! No proselytising! No conversionism! Rather an invitation.'

In the second lecture given in 1992 at the 50th Anniversary of the Council for Christians and Jews, what is notably absent from this lecture is the theme of 'invitation.' Similarly in the third address, the Annual Sacks Lecture in 1995 at the University of Essex, Donald Coggan picks up the theme of partnership and unites it with the theme of joint trusteeship, but once again the theme of invitation is missing.

2.4 A Jewish Statement:

'Dabru Emet' - 'To Speak the Truth'

In recent years, there has been a dramatic and unprecedented shift in Jewish and Christian relations. Throughout the nearly two millennia of Jewish exile, Christians have tended to characterise Judaism as a failed religion or, at best, a religion that prepared the way for, and is completed in, Christianity. In the decades since the Holocaust, however, Christianity has changed dramatically. An increasing number of official church bodies, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have made public statements of their remorse about Christian mistreatment of Jews and Judaism. These statements have declared, furthermore, that Christian teaching and preaching can and must be reformed so that they acknowledge God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people and celebrate the contribution of Judaism to world civilisation and to Christian faith itself.

And the second paragraph goes on to say:

We believe these changes merit a thoughtful Jewish response. Speaking only for ourselves-an interdenominational group of Jewish scholars-we believe it is time for Jews to learn about the efforts of Christians to honour Judaism. We believe it is time for Jews to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity. As a first step, we offer eight brief statements about how Jews and Christians may relate to one another.

These eight statements are as follows:

- Jews and Christians worship the same God.
- Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book - the Bible (what Jews call 'Tanakh' and Christians call the 'Old Testament').
- Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.
- Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah.
- Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon.
- The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture.
- A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice.
- Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.

③ Preparation for an encounters with a Jewish person

- The Gospel according to the Nicene Creed
- Replacement Theology
- Covenant Faithfulness

Preparation for an encounters with a Jewish person

An Appreciation of God's love of the Jewish People

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

- 7 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

•8 But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Preparation for an encounters with a Jewish person

An Appreciation of God's love of the Jewish People

Deuteronomy 32:9-10

- For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance.
- In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye,

Preparation for an encounters with a Jewish person

Appreciation of Jewish Faith

Romans 11:18

...consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.

Preparation for an encounters with a Jewish person

A Commitment to Friendship

Romans 9:2-4

- 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.
- 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

Paul.

Preparation for an encounters with a Jewish person

An interest in the Jewish community

Gen 12:2-3

- 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
- 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Preparation for an encounters with a Jewish person

1. An Appreciation of God's love of the Jewish People

2. Appreciation of Jewish Faith
3. A Commitment to Friendship
4. An interest in the Jewish community