

On Witnessing to Jews

by Art Katz

Christians must witness to Jews in a way that is authentic and confronts their culpability in the death of Jesus, promoting repentance and separation from sin.

Scripture: Matthew 23:29, Acts 2:23

Topics: "Repentance", "Witnessing"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the importance of approaching Jewish people with humility and compassion while witnessing to them about the gospel. He warns against condescension and the need to challenge traditional Jewish beliefs without reinforcing victim mentalities or absolving them of their historical culpability in the death of Jesus. Katz argues that true witnessing involves confronting the reality of sin and the necessity of repentance, rather than merely seeking common ground. He highlights the significance of acknowledging the Jewish people's role in the crucifixion and the need for a genuine understanding of their spiritual condition. Ultimately, Katz calls for a bold and truthful presentation of the gospel that respects Jewish heritage while revealing the need for salvation through Christ.

Transcript

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Some Do's and Don'ts in bringing the gospel to the Jewish people.

Guard yourselves from any condescending or superior attitude towards Jews. Your hearts should be going out to them; they are doing the best they can in what they know. They have traditions that have kept them through the ages, through much opposition and persecution; but it is not the pure thing. It is tradition fashioned by well-meaning men. The rabbis had to devise an answer to the predicament of a destroyed temple and priesthood that would now give coherence to Jewish life under rabbinical authority. But Jews need to see the authentically Hebraic faith and reality, as was found in the patriarchs, the prophets and the psalmists of old.

However, I think we make a remarkable concession to allow the terms 'Jewish' and 'Christian' to be uncritically expressed as if they denote positions with which we are in agreement. Classic rabbinical posture in any kind of debate, discussion, or witnessing opportunity is "to explicate the Jewish position." Our failure to take issue about such usage makes us complicit in it, and reinforces the very traditional Jewish prejudices we want to contest. Further, we don't need to give our time to reinforce the victim mentality of Jews by reiterating the crimes of the past. There may be some value before a Christian audience ignorant of that history, but before Jews it is likely to be interpreted as a flattering and ingratiating condescension.

'Commonality' between Jews and Christians over the issue of God is at best dubious when what is at issue are two essentially conflicting views of cosmic proportion as antithetical as darkness and light, heaven and hell, the wisdom from above and that of below. More important, in my view, is to turn their intellectual and ideological world upside down rather than to confirm them in it!

The greatest error, however, in my opinion, is to absolve Jews of any culpability in the death of Jesus. That He died by the pre-determinate counsel of God we know. That however does not absolve those who willingly make themselves the instrument of its fulfillment! Such a concession lets our Jewish people 'off the hook' and robs that very point of conviction, anointed by the power of God at the day of Pentecost, that eventuated in the salvation of thousands of Jews upon their trembling question: "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?" That they were "pricked in their hearts" had to do with their clear indictment "you nailed to a cross (Acts 2:23)...and put Him to death." Nothing is more calculated to reveal the truth of our condition before God than our participation in the ultimacy of that act, for which distance and time does not abrogate. Its very nature demands either our present repentance separating ourselves from the sin of our fathers in instigating His death, or our silence indicts us as being in agreement still! This perspective needs to be commended to my Jewish kinsmen, for which, I believe, they will be judged. Matthew 23:29-36, the indictment of Jesus to those who garnish the tombs of the prophets and are yet guilty for their death, is supportive of this point.

Peter begins his address to the "Men of Israel" thus indicating that the entire nation is implicated, not just the religious elite, who at any rate are the statement of the people themselves for: "as the priest, so also the people." Peter asserts this again in Acts 4:10, "Let it be known to you and all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene whom you crucified..." Once again, in the prayer recorded in which "the place where they had gathered together was shaken," they who lifted their voices to God "with one accord" included in those who "opposed thy holy servant Jesus, not only Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the gentiles, and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predetermined to occur" (Acts 4:24-28). What was predetermined, in my opinion, was not only the atoning sacrifice of Jesus but the ultimate, irrevocable, revelation of the truth of Israel's condition in its complicity in His death. Considering the inveterate absence of sin consciousness in ourselves as Jews, nothing less will suffice. As for Isaiah, so also ourselves: it is the seeing of the Lord high and lifted up, whether in the Temple or upon the Cross, that elicits the cry, "Woe is me, I am undone."

Don't be intimidated by self-congratulatory affirmation of assumed righteousness displayed by my Jewish people! That human confidence needs to be challenged. We who killed the prophets (Nehemiah 9:26)-and killed Jesus by the same propensity-still do! As Jesus says in Matthew 23, we are, both adamically and genetically, "the sons" of those who killed the prophets until a new seed is born in us. For it is only at the repentant acknowledgment obtained at the Cross that such a propensity can be met and altered. We omit the greatest provision for Jewish repentance by an absolution nowhere expressed in the Church's earliest,

consistent, and powerful witness to the Jew.

Don't be intimidated by Jewish reference to New Testament scriptures that supposedly promote anti-Semitism! Also, in demeaning Luther for his anti-Semitism, we, at the same time, inadvertently deprecate and bring into question the Reformation itself, the very substance of evangelical faith! Don't be sympathetic to any plaintiff appeal to Jewish references to having suffered enough. The Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us of the divine perspective: That which has been is now; and that which is to be has already been; and God requires that which is past (3:15 KJV). Can so cosmic an event as the crucifixion of Jesus be shunted aside because of its 'inconvenience,' because it gives to anti-Semites fresh occasion? Can that historic, persisting, troubling 'curse' be itself the very judgment of God for our failure as Jews to acknowledge our culpability, and provoke us to a repentance unto salvation? Why should not anti-Semitism itself be understood as part of the Deuteronomic curse? Why do we choose to see anti-Semitism sociologically rather than biblically?

Jesus wept because they "did not know the time of their visitation" (Luke 19:44). In view of Jewish calamity that continues to haunt us and for which we will yet pay double, He weeps still. How much graver the consequence now, after 2000 years of the testimony of the validity of the Christian faith by hundreds of millions of adherents, for what we opposed as Jews in ignorance then! No, Jew and Christian do not grieve over the same things. Mere agreement over social and moral ills pales at the enormity of the greater immorality of the continuing rejection of God in the rejection of His Son!

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