

'To prepare God's people for works of service'

WITNESSING TO THE WITNESSES



Study No. 3

WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED

- The glory of the cross
- JW understanding of atonement

WE HAVE A GOSPEL TO PROCLAIM

- But why should I? ... MOTIVATION
- So how can I? ... METHOD
- What will help me? ... MATERIALS

"In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

1 Peter 3:15,16

1. We preach Christ crucified

We have seen that God has revealed himself by name: Yahweh/Jehovah, the I AM, the one who is fully able to meet every need, to ensure that every purpose he has planned is fulfilled. But then he has done more than that: our God has become one of us – “the Word became flesh and ‘tabernacled’ among us” in the person of Jesus, the Messiah.

But ... the focal point of Jesus among us was his death;

... the central element in all world history is his cross;

... the outshining of God’s glory is in the darkness of Golgotha.

There mercy and truth met. There righteousness and peace kissed. There love and justice toward sinners found full resolution.

a) The glory of the cross of Christ

If Jesus is the answer to the conundrum of God remaining just yet, in love and grace, justifying sinners, what was achieved at the cross? Here are several facts about our condition and Jesus’ achievement:

- We deserve to die as the consequence of sin. And yet ... “Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Hebrews 9:26)
- We do deserve to bear God’s wrath against sin. And yet, Christ has died so as to remove us from that wrath ... “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)
- We are separated from God by our sins. But in Christ fellowship is restored, for God ... “... through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself.” (2 Corinthians 5:18,19)

This is the very heart of the gospel of God’s grace. These are the magnificent achievements of Christ’s work upon the cross. This is the glory of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

b) The inadequacy of Watchtower 'atonement' teaching

Sadly the 'good news' we have outlined above does not feature in *Awake* or *Watchtower*. Yet the JW folk who visit have a deep need to see what Christ has achieved in the cross.

Witnesses do like to point to Mark 10:45 concerning Jesus' death: "The Son of Man came, not to be ministered to, but to minister and to give his soul a ransom in exchange for many." (NWT) Ransom here (for JWs) means 'that which buys back, looses or releases ... more especially releasing from inherited sin and from prospects of eternal death as a result of sin.'

JWs teach that 'those of men who have faith in God's provision may come into harmony with him and, serving him faithfully, they may receive the gift of life, being freed from inherited sin and from eternal death as a result of sin.' (*Let God be true* p.113)

We do need to query, though, some perspectives hidden within this:

- 'eternal death' in this quotation is understood as annihilation.
- 'receiving the gift of life' depends upon serving God faithfully.

This 'ransom' teaching is used to support the idea that what was lost in Adam was 'perfect human life ... with earthly rights and prospects.' So what is redeemed is just that – perfect human life. Which is exactly what Jesus laid down: a perfect human life with all its rights and earthly prospects. However, since this **human** life (they teach) was not given back to Christ (he was raised a spirit) then his sacrificed human life remains available for and effective for "... use on behalf of faithful men needing to be ransomed." (*Let God be true* p.116)

This is not the teaching of Jesus, Paul, Peter or John.

The explanation of Mark 10:45 given here requires the need to accept that there was no bodily resurrection of Jesus!

And we recall Paul's teaching: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:17)

2. We have a gospel to proclaim

a) What should *motivate* our engagement with JW's?

In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul identifies a double emphasis driving his ministry: v11 "Since we know what it is to **fear the Lord**, we persuade men." v14: "For **Christ's love** compels us for we are convinced one died for all...".

Just before verse 11 he reminds us that all must appear before the 'judgement seat'. With a feeling of awe and sense of accountability before God he knows he must persuade others:

- yes, unsettled Corinthians concerning his apostolic integrity;
- but also persuading unbelievers that God has provided a Saviour.

And we too, in the light of that 'accountability' day, but also because of the love of Christ for us and for all men, are prompted to point our JW contacts to the uniqueness of Jesus, to his propitiatory death.

b) As for *methods* we might adopt: Prayer and Preparation

Pray "that God might open a door for our message" says Paul. With JW's we open the door! Let's pray it will be the right person standing there.

Prepare by having some 'seeds to sow':

- Sow **a seed of scripture** ... perhaps a verse that will focus on the deity of Jesus.
- Sow **a seed of testimony** ... If 'the Lord has done great things for you' (Psalm 126) – then tell them!
- Sow **a seed of doubt** ... perhaps a snippet of JW history showing the *Watchtower* organisation is not infallible.

c) Some *materials* that can help our witness. Useful books ...

<i>The Four Major Cults</i>	A.A. Hoekema	Paternoster	1963
<i>Jesus of Nazareth</i>	A. Wallis	CLC	1959
<i>The Deity of Christ</i>	F.F. Bruce, W.J. Martin	NEEv Trust	1964
<i>Awake! to the Watchtower</i>	D. Harris	Reachout Trust	2006
<i>Held by the Watchtower</i>	S. Thorne	Crossway	1998