

What SHOULD the evangelists be telling them?

Although the focus of the Uhakika Program is the evangelists' understanding of Justification by Faith alone, obviously, the evangelist's message should not *begin* there. People need to know what God has revealed about his nature and character, who he is and who we are. They need to know about their personal responsibility to God, about the rebellion of the father and mother of all tribes, and that we inherit our first chief's defiance. They need to hear about God as the Creator and the Judge to whom we must *personally* answer; they need to hear God's law, and see how it applies to their culture, going further than what is known from traditional religion, and bringing to light truth that may have been suppressed by tradition. They need to see that the weight of their sin is such that the priest-chiefs and even the spirits of the dead are powerless to intercede for them. They need to know what happens after death. They need to know that it is Jesus King of heaven and earth, who is firmly in control of everything; it is not the spirits of the dead who run the show! And it is not a dualistic setup, with God reigning today and satan tomorrow.

Most importantly, they need to learn to ask, "How do we know?" and "How can we know?" They need to hear how God has spoken through his dealings with his *example* tribe, Abraham's tribe, and through his (God's) prophets and finally through God the Son coming here himself. They need to learn about Jesus. They need to see enough of him to know that all of the above is not just western tribal tradition – and 'true' merely because it comes with might - but is straight from God himself. And this places the teaching of God's spokesmen, the prophets, Jesus himself and his special sent ones, on a radically different level to the traditions handed down from the tribal fathers. All this is imperative for a genuine conviction of guilt and a genuine faith in Jesus as their guilt-bearer, as distinct from a 'faith' which is merely putting your money on the stronger contestant in a power contest.

Most of the people I am engaging with in African churches seem to me to have considerable knowledge of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Although they may struggle with taking personal responsibility for their sin (A demon of stealing entered me!) and may even live in a state of near constant denial of sin (which is understandable when your state of salvation depends on your sinlessness!), they appear to have no doubt about Jesus' rightful authority as God. Their parents, pastors or evangelists – and their own Bible reading - have given them some grasp of God's authority, law and the consequences of disobedience. The evangelists may have thundered this bad news on them. BUT, all too often, that seems to be where they have been left.

The evangelists can proclaim loudly and aggressively the need to submit to Jesus as King, and they can scream at the Holy Spirit to Come down! Come down! Come down! upon the frightened hearers they have lured to the front at their crusades (and they can scream at demons to “Go out! Go out! Go out, in the name of Jesus!”), so that their hearers might be empowered to submit to the King’s rule *and so be saved*. Salvation is being empowered to submit, and while you submit you’re saved!

All this is a far cry from the good news of the Saviour King. Christ came not only to spell out the submission that the King is entitled to (which he clearly did), but to take the full punishment we deserve for NOT submitting as we should! The true good news of the kingdom is the news that the one who is King over all creation is none other than the humble Servant who came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:44-45; Isaiah 53). His glorious resurrection and majestic exaltation assures us that the ransom payment was fully acceptable: we are ransomed by the slaughter of the Lamb who was none other than the one now seated at the Father’s right hand above all authority and power. It is not merely that the Jesus who told us how we are supposed to behave is King. If that were the gospel, it would even compound our guilt and condemnation and despair, since even with the Spirit in us, none of us is absolutely ruled by the King in the sense that we never rebel.

The good news that seems to be least proclaimed (or least heard) in East Africa is that even my future failure to submit has been punished in advance. The King who commands my full allegiance is the very one who bore the punishment for all my disobedience. Even my future non-submission to the King has been covered in advance by the sacrifice of the Lamb who reigns over heaven and earth. The killed Lamb is alive and on the throne, and the Spirit of the King (“the Spirit of life”) cleans, transforms, rules, leads and guides us, the King’s evil subjects. But even while that inside cleaning is still a work in progress and we are still evil by contrast to the King, we already have eternal life: the full purchase of that eternal life is a work completed.

Usually, when I ask East African ‘Christians’ who it was who punished Jesus on the cross, the answer comes back, “We did” or “I did”. If I ask what they think of the teaching that it was God the Father who punished Jesus, there is a chorus of “No!” When confronted with Isaiah 53, vv4-6 and especially v10 (“It was the will of the Lord to bruise him...”) there is general shock. And someone may ask, “But *why* did God punish him? Jesus had no sin!” The heart of the gospel, the word of the cross, seems to have gone right over the heads of these ‘Christians’.

Overwhelmingly the responses of pastors to our grace questions (pastors from a wide variety of denominations across East Africa) appear to indicate a dependence

for salvation upon their new Spirit-led living. That is frightening. At best the merit-based thinking suggested by their answers is not their real thinking (though the consistency of the answers suggests otherwise), and they are, in fact, trusting Christ alone for salvation but would have trouble articulating that and telling the gospel to others. At worst, if the abundance of merit-salvation answers (and the answers most popularly and vigorously defended in our follow-up workshops) does in fact betray where their faith lies, the situation is alarming. It would mean they do not trust in, or rest upon, Christ alone – his death – for their salvation. In that case their condition would match that of the Israelites whom Paul agonized over in Romans 10:1ff. If, in fact, they are seeking to establish their own righteousness, then, in spite of their zeal for God, Paul would pray for their very salvation. He would see them as unsaved. They are still proudly appealing to their own faithful obedience and not submitting to being simply gifted a clean judgment that they don't deserve to have. Likewise, in terms of Romans 4:4-5, it is "the one who *does not work but trusts*" who is judged to be righteous (clean in the eyes of the law, obedient), implying that the one who trusts *and works* to procure that judgment does not get it – he is *not* judged to be clean.

Back in 1992, in Kenya, I discussed this graceless 'gospel' phenomenon in Africa with Richard Gehman, who wrote *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*. He told me of a conference where one of Africa's well-known evangelical theologians was asked, "What is the greatest problem facing the African church today?" He replied. "A lack of understanding of grace."

What is extraordinary is that some current "New Perspective on Paul" theologians in the west should come out with an understanding of salvation that is remarkably similar to what I hear from bush pastors in Africa. You *get into* God's international tribe as a gift but *staying in* is another question – you need to come up to the mark and be faithful to your new tribal obligations; and at the final judgment, you're not freely judged "Clean" purely because of what Jesus did on the cross. No. You get off only if, by God's Spirit, you've actually become clean – or at least clean *enough*, (presumably as clean as these theologians), since the bar has had to drop to allow us to get in this way!

We *do not* need such teachers in Africa. The same old enemy is fighting the gospel of grace in the halls of Oxford and Cambridge, just as he does on the slopes of Kilimanjaro and just as he did in Rome, and Galatia before that, appealing to men's pride. I appeal to churches who believe God's gospel to send us labourers.

"Come over and help us."

JOHN ROWSE.