

## For the Love of Zion and Jesus

**Rev Alex Jacob, Director of CMJ, England**

I have been asked to present a brief paper on the theme of ‘For the love of Zion and Jesus. I am very pleased to do this for this theme is at the very heart of the ministry I serve, namely, The Churches Ministry among Jewish People (CMJ). I will explore this theme in the context of evangelism among Jewish People. I hope this paper will be a helpful contribution to our reflections and will stimulate helpful debate and reflection.

I understand that the love of Zion and Jesus is the core motivation for Christian ministry to and among Jewish People. In terms of the love of Jesus, I understand this in two main ways. The first way is his love given to us and then secondly in response to his love, our love for him. His love to us is primarily the outworking of God’s grace, as the Apostle Paul declares:

*God demonstrates his own love for us in this, for while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Rom 5v8).*

Our love for him is equally a work of grace, for his love brings into our lives the reality of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5v5). The Holy Spirit enables and leads us to respond faithfully and effectively to God. This loving response is a rich and wonderful mixture of gratitude, hope, joy and obedience.

One outworking of this loving response is a desire to tell others of the love of Jesus. We are encouraged and guided in this responsibility and privilege of telling others throughout the New Testament writings. One powerful example is that given by the Apostle Peter:

*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3v15)*

As we seek as widely as possible to tell others of God’s love, we also receive the understanding that within this universal work of telling others there is also a special responsibility to share this with Jewish People. This special responsibility is declared and celebrated by the Apostle Paul:

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first (especially) for the Jew, then (equally) for the Gentile (Romans 1v16)*

While it is beyond the scope of this brief paper to comment further on Romans 1v16, I would want to recommend an excellent book which explores this key evangelistic verse in detail. The book is titled: *To the Jew first-* Darrell L. Brock and Mitch Glaser (Eds), Kregel, 2008.

For the Christian then out of our love for Jesus there is a call to share the gospel with Jewish People. Yet the question which needs to be asked is ‘how will this take place’? What ‘shape’ with this evangelistic work take? Sadly, throughout much of Church history this evangelistic work has been ‘misshaped’ by Christian arrogance. This arrogance has often been fuelled by a theology rooted in a theological context of replacement (suppercessionist). On occasion,

this theological context has been nuanced with a punitive understanding of replacement, which in turn, has given rise to some horrific Anti-Semitic consequences.

This is why we need the love of Zion to guide us. This love of Zion helps shape our evangelistic work along biblically faithful contours. It prevents the Church from the errors of a replacement model. Historically and theologically the love of Zion and the love of Jesus have been the two complimentary

motivating factors for the work of The Church's Ministry among Jewish People (CMJ).<sup>1</sup>

This love of Zion creates new theological contours for our evangelistic work. Historically the hope for the restoration of Zion as a nation, the hope of seeing the natural branches being re-grafted into the one olive tree and the future hope of Israel's national salvation has been a great motivating factor in Christian ministry to and among Jewish People. What then are the positive consequences for Jewish evangelism when carried out alongside a biblical love of Zion?

I suggest there are three main positive consequences:

Jewish evangelism while focusing upon the individual<sup>2</sup> must also be placed within a corporate context. God has plans for Jewish People as a nation. Our love of Zion helps prevent our evangelism from falling into a narrow over-individualist gospel presentation.

Jewish evangelism sees Jewish identity as a gift of God. This identity is not a sin to be repented of when becoming a Christian, but rather Jewish identity is fulfilled and renewed in Jewish People as they respond to Jesus as Messiah and Lord. This renewal of identity must be celebrated within the ongoing renewal and reformation of the Church especially in appropriate partnerships<sup>3</sup> with emerging patterns of Messianic Jewish community expressions.

Jewish evangelism sees its work within the bigger context of God's faithfulness. God is faithful to all his promises, including his promises to Zion. Our hope is a Kingdom hope, where all Israel will be restored, renewed and saved. This hope is part of God's Kingdom purposes, which will be fully consummated through the person and work of Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

In conclusion, our love of Zion and Jesus proclaims that the future of Israel is connected with the final and glorious events of history. As Alfred Edersheim so eloquently stated (in 1896, some 52 years before the modern day restoration of Israel as a nation):

*Israel and its history are inseparably connected with Scripture. We meet them everywhere; and everywhere their past, their present and their future are full of the deepest meaning and so it shall continue to be, till their bringing in prove "as life from the dead"*<sup>5</sup>

Alex Jacob

[alexj@cmj.org.uk](mailto:alexj@cmj.org.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> For a helpful introduction see *For the Love of Zion*, Kelvin Crombie, Terra Nova, 2008. (First published by Hodder and Stoughton, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> All evangelistic work must begin with a loving focus upon an individual. It is a truism that evangelism which does not begin with a call to an individual never really begins, while evangelistic work which does not develop to go onto affect wider communities never fully develops.

<sup>3</sup> In terms of 'appropriate partnerships, I am trying to allow for 'diversity within unity' to develop. My reading of the New Testament Church is that 'diversity within unity' is a gift to be celebrated, while disunity must always be avoided.

<sup>4</sup> I have tried to draw out and reflect upon the theological consequences of this understanding in my book- *The Case for Enlargement Theology*, Glory to Glory, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> *History of the Jewish Nation*, Alfred Edersheim, Keren Ahvah Meshihit, 2001, page 3. (First published by Longmans, Green and Co, 1896).