

Reconciliation
Jamie Hilsden,
Young Adults & Music Coordinator, King of Kings Community, Jerusalem

I've been asked to speak on the subject of reconciliation, and I'm very honoured to be given this subject because I believe that reconciliation is truly at the heart of the Gospel. This book - that we call the Bible – is primarily – at its very core – a book about reconciliation. From the beginning chapters of the book of Genesis until the end in the Book of Revelation we see this overriding theme - the theme of reconciliation – the theme of going from a state of enmity with God to a state of friendship with God.

Arguably the most important case in the Old Testament is where God goes out and finds a 75-year-old son of an idol worshipper from Mesopotamia named Abram and he cultivates a friendship with him. Not because God was looking for A friend, but because God was pursuing friendship with the entire world. And this is the theme that permeates the entire scriptures – God pursuing friendship with us.

This is a pretty amazing concept when you think about it – the idea of God actually pursuing a friendship with us. Most of our friendships here in this world tend to happen organically - they happen naturally. You meet someone with similar interests to your own, you have a fun conversation and before you know it, it blossoms into a friendship. But every once in a while, both in romantic contexts and in more platonic contexts, you might meet someone or hear about someone and decide that you're actually going to PURSUE a relationship with that person. You say to yourself "this seems like a really neat person - I'm going to call them up and see if they'd like to hang out – I'm going to pursue a friendship with this person." But this is no easy thing, is it? There's something humbling about doing that. You have to make yourself vulnerable – you have to 'put yourself out there', so to speak.

How much more difficult is it to pursue a friendship with someone that is hostile towards you? How much more difficult is it to call up a (quote unquote) "enemy"?

Well, that's exactly what God does all throughout the scriptures, and He is doing this with us today.

Romans 5 verse 10 tells us that we were all enemies of God. Yet what? Even though we were God's enemies "We have been reconciled to Him through the death of his son".

And this is the crux of it all. This is the centre of the Gospel, that "while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us." We ourselves are not the instigators of reconciliation with God. No. We love him because he first loved us.

Every act of reconciliation, every "sulcha" has to have an instigator – it has to have an initiator. Someone has to make the first move. And in the case of our reconciliation with God, it is clear who that person is. God did not wait for humanity to turn to him. He did not wait for humanity to correct their behaviour. He did not wait for humanity to correct their theology. No. While we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us.

And this is why I am involved in reconciliation. Ephesians 5 says "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as the Messiah also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

Be imitators of God. What does it mean to be a follower of Yeshua? Very simple. Everything that God did for us through Yeshua, we do for one another. It's not rocket science. But it is difficult.

It's difficult because it means that not only do we have to reconcile with our brothers and sisters, but it means that we actually have to pursue reconciliation. We make the first move, and that's no easy thing to do. We have to be prepared for rejection. We have to be prepared for confrontation. And we have to be prepared to compromise.

And I know that compromise is a dirty word. When I say compromise, I don't mean it in the Keith Green sense. I don't mean that we should compromise our own beliefs and our own standards of holiness or anything like that. But when it comes to the standard of theological correctness that we require from others before entering into relationship with them – this we must compromise!

Where would we be now if God had held us to his own standards of holiness before entering into relationship with us? Where would we be if he held us to his own standard of theological understanding before entering into relationship with us? Where would Abraham be? Where would Peter be? Where would all of us be?

So many times I have heard, "sure I'll be open to reconciliation if the other side does x, y, z..." But I submit to you that this is how the world reconciles - but it is not the way God reconciles.

Take a look at the body of Messiah in Israel today. On the one hand we have thousands of Messianic Jewish believers, more or less ostracized from their own society, and the other hand you have thousands of Arab Believers – more or less ostracized by their society. And what do these two groups do to each other? In many cases they ostracize each other – mostly hiding behind the mantra "sure, I'll reconcile IF..." And it can't go on. This is not the God way of doing things. This is not the Biblical way of doing things.

And I'll finish by reading Romans 5 verses 6 to 11:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

This is our model for reconciliation as we seek to be "imitators of God".

So what do we do with Musalaha? Well, I'm not actually officially affiliated with Musalaha, but I do make it a point to be involved in their activities whenever possible, and I can say that at the

centre of what Musalaha does lie dialogue and relationship building. I just recently returned from a Young Adults trip to Wadi Rum in Jordan, which by the way, is breathtakingly gorgeous. I recommend that everyone check it out. But this particular trip was part two of a project that began last summer in Washington State where 9 young people from the Messianic community, 9 people from the Christian Arab community and 9 American Christians spent 3 weeks hanging out together, worshipping together, praying together, doing activities together - basically just building relationships and building trust. And let me tell you, once friendship and trust were built, it brought us to a place where civil, godly and respectful dialogue could take place, and we could actually talk about all the problematic issues in a constructive way.

One of the main things that I took away from the trip is how many misconceptions the two groups have about what the other group believes. I'll give you one example – I was having a conversation with one person and towards the end of the conversation she said, "ok I understand where you're coming from, but I just don't understand why you believe that Jews don't need Jesus to be saved."

And this is just one example of how once you build trust and relationship, you can actually get to the bottom of some of the problems and lovingly explain "no, we don't actually believe that."

One of the other activities that I'm involved in with Musalaha is where every couple months a few younger leaders both from the Hebrew speaking and Arabic speaking sides, along with some of the older leaders, get together and actually study and discuss theology together. And again, I believe that it's so crucial for there to be an avenue like this where people from both sides can come together and really get a better understanding about what the other side actually believes and openly and lovingly discuss the issues in an educated and respectful way. It's so important that we get our information about what other people are saying from the source instead of the rumor-mill.

And yes, sometimes it's like walking through a theological and political mine-field and I am often confronted with ideas that I find offensive, but I believe that this is a process that can't be avoided if we are going to be an effective Body of Messiah in the Land.

*Jamie Hilsden
jhilsden@gmail.com*