

BEYOND THE MOSQUE... AND INTO THE HEART OF ISLAM

Let us look beyond the mosques, the clothing, the turbans, and the form of religion, and focus in on our response to the needs of the Islamic world.

What goes through your mind when you hear the word “Muslim”? “Allah”? “Mohammed”? Is there a suspicious feeling that rises up in your heart? Do you look at Muslims as terrorists?

Before September 11, 2001, the typical American hardly knew what a Muslim was. Most Americans’ understanding of Islam has come from what took place on September 11! Since that time, our understanding of Muslims and the Islamic world has exploded. Americans were suddenly faced with the reality of the Muslim people and who they are. Since that time, Americans, including many of us Christians, have gained our views and understanding of the Islamic religion and Muslim peoples from the news media. Are we going to allow the world news media to form and dictate our views and understanding of Islam and the Muslim people? Are we going to allow the prejudices of our day to affect us? By doing so, we are cul-

tivating and carrying an attitude that is totally against any form of loving, concerned outreach.

What do you think when you see that Muslim man sitting behind the counter of a gas station? Or when you see that black-shrouded Muslim woman in the grocery store? Do you look at this person as a soul? Do you have their eternal destiny in mind? Do you see the glory that God



“When you think of Muslims, is there a suspicious feeling that rises up in your heart?”

deserves and desires through that person’s life? These are souls, brothers and sisters!

Almost every nation on earth has on its soil a community of dedicated Muslims. Muslims are spread throughout most of the world, though they are primarily found in North and Central Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia. After Christianity, Islam is the largest religion in the world.

The Muslim peoples, as a whole, are the largest unreached people group in the world today, numbering around 1.6 billion. That is one-fifth of the world’s population! Within that 1.6 billion people, only 14%

of them personally know a Christian and even fewer the saving Gospel message. Out of the approximately 460,000 missionaries in the world today, less than one percent go to the Muslim peoples. That is about 347,000 Muslims to one missionary! Stop and ponder that! Let us take these things to heart!

More than three-fourth of the Islamic world, approximately one billion people, are what we call “folk Muslims”. In theory they are Muslim, but they are also animists in practice. While Muslims confess the greatness of God, many live in great fear of evil spirits. Their religion teaches that there is one God, but no mediator between God and mankind. For example, there is a widespread fear of curses throughout these “folk Muslims”. Tunisians are afraid that someone will find

“That is about 347,000 Muslims to one missionary!”

their fingernail trimmings and use them to curse them, while in Yemen and other countries they use hair. In many Islamic countries, charms are worn to ward off evil spirits. They also chant verses from the Qur’an for protection from evil. In other countries they visit the tombs of dead saints for blessings or healing from infirmities. If the spiritual well of Islam satisfied their thirst and met their felt needs, Muslims would not be involved in animistic practices. Powerless people know they are in need of supernatural power!

The word “Muslim” means: “to submit” or “submission to Allah”. Islam is full of hopeful trying, a trying to work out their salvation by good works. A constant hoping that their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds. Nowhere in the Islamic faith is there a solution for people to go to for power over sin, power to overcome fear, and power for personal problems. The Islamic religion is a religion of obedience to Allah and submission to his requirements.

What is our response to these people who are dear to God’s heart? How do we look at them? Can we see these people through God’s loving heart? Do we have a Christ-like understanding of who Muslims are? We MUST go beyond the mosque and show them what true Christian love is!

Muslims are taught many misconceptions about Christianity. They look at Christians with a skeptical eye. Muslims associate Christianity as a whole with

the Western world. After all, most Americans say they are “Christians”! The word “Christian” to a Muslim means - a people with no respect for God, a people who flaunt an immoral lifestyle, and a people who are unjust and unfair in their international relationships. Muslims tend to “lump” all Christians together into that category. Who will show them that the true meaning of the word “Christian” means “little Christ” or “like Christ”?

In like manner, we in the West look at Muslims as a whole and classify them as a people of war and terrorism. We see September 11th, Bin Laden, and the suicide bombers in Israel. We are guilty of grouping all Muslims together into that category. Many Muslims are just simple people who desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. If we Christians are going to ask the Muslims to separate the true Christians from Hollywood and main-stream America, then we must be willing to separate September 11th from the majority of the Muslim people.

We as conservative Christians have a unique opportunity. Muslims look at us and are unable to place us in a category. We do not fit their conception of Christianity. Let us use these valuable bridges to span the gap between us! Let us cause them to look in wonder at the clear, upright life of Jesus Christ being lived out through us. That will require building trusting, firm relationships with our Muslim friends. And that will take time and prayer!

Many Muslims are Muslims because they know nothing else. Islam is all they know to attempt to fill the void in their hearts. They have never been presented with the opportunity for truth! Many are seeking for something to fill the void that Islam leaves in their hearts. We know the treasure they seek is to be found only in Jesus Christ! The Muslims are entrenched in the bonds of a false religion and will not be won easily. But they are winnable. We must pray that the Spirit of God would tear down the misconceptions in their hearts toward Christianity. May the God they seek to worship, who is far off, be brought very near to these Muslims through the sacri-



fice and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. *“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ”* (Ephesians 2:13).

God’s blessing was given thousands of years ago to the offspring of Abraham, which included Ishmael. God said that He would bless them and make them a great nation, and indeed He has. God loves the children of Ishmael, the Muslim people, and has promised that there will be a harvest among them. *“And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation”* (Genesis 17:20).

“And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none” (Ezekiel 22:30). God is seeking for men and women to stand in the gap before Him on behalf of the vast Muslim peoples. Who will stand in that gap? Who will represent Jesus to the Muslim peoples? Who will carry the seriousness of their dark, empty hearts before God? They have no idea that Jesus suffered the agony of their sin to reconcile them back to God! God created the Muslim peoples to shine forth His glory and to be His delight and pleasure!

“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2). Who will be those laborers?

—(name withheld)

