

A SHORT GOSPEL PRESENTATION FOR MUSLIMS BASED ON THE MISSION OF THE PROPHET ISSAH

I once read somewhere that a Muslim needs to hear the Gospel at least 10 times before it can begin to sink in. The number may have been greater. I don't remember. Anyway, since I work as a missionary in West Africa, my work is mainly with animists, but since I also have a lot of contact with Muslims I decided to try to develop a short presentation so that I could at least contribute to one of the 10 hits that might start a Muslim to thinking seriously about Christ. I've often called it my "Taxi Presentation" because it was worked out mainly through discussions with Muslim taxi drivers and was eventually perfected to take just about the time it takes to ride a taxi from the mission guest houses to the downtown offices in the Capitol city.

Now, the folk Muslims that I work with do not have a deep understanding of Islam, so this presentation may not work with harder-core Muslims. This presentation also hits the questions that I ran into in the field even when I would never have dealt with them in the same way according to my readings on Islam. For example: I often hear that Islam really doesn't present a God of love. But over and over drivers responded to the idea of God sending people to hell by saying, "but God loves us. We are his children. He would not send us to hell". So my presentation needed to answer the "Love" question.

Another consideration was that in the short time available I did not want to get side-tracked into the "Is Jesus really God?" issue. So you will see that I word things to avoid it entirely. You may not like that, but it is the only way to get the whole story in at first. The whole story is usually quite a surprise, and the idea that Jesus is the son of God makes more sense later, after they have the whole picture.

The presentation is based on the difference between the mission of the Prophet Mohammed and the mission of the Prophet Issah. After a little small talk in which I have established that the driver is Muslim I ask,

"Since you are a Muslim, do you know about the Prophet Issah?"

They have usually heard of him but don't know a lot about him. Then I ask,

"Do you know the difference between the mission of the Prophet Issah and the Prophet Mohammed?"

Most don't even try. Some do but don't come up with anything substantial, so I ask,

"Would you like me to tell you the difference?"

I usually get an eager agreement to listen, and we are off. I begin by saying,

The mission of the Prophet Mohammed was to tell men the Word of God (THEIR idea). Most people think that the Prophet Issah had the same mission, but that is not true. The Prophet Issah did tell people the Word of God because he knew it, but that was not his mission. His mission was completely different. To understand the mission of the Prophet Issah one must first understand that we are all sinners.

Our Muslims seldom have trouble with this. They know they have all broken Mohammed's rules at some point. We can even point out that Mohammed was a sinner because the Quran says that God forgave all Mohammed's sins.

"Now, God's punishment for sin is to send people to hell. If that is the case, we are all in a lot of danger" (and I spend a little time emphasizing the point.) "But Islam has an answer to this problem. They say there is a scale. (They usually brighten right up at the mention of it.) God puts your good works on one side and your bad things on the other. If the bad are more than the good, you go to hell, but if the good are more than the bad, you go to Paradise." They agree emphatically.

"But," I continue, "the Book does not say this." (I suppose I could be accused of deception at this point since a Muslim could easily assume that I am speaking of the Quran, while I am actually speaking of the Bible, parts of which are also accepted as "the Book" by Mohammed.) "The book says that if you have even one bad thing you have broken God's law and you can no longer enter into God's Holy paradise. You and your sin must be condemned to the fire. Let me give you an example."

At this point I go into a little play. When I tell it I use more detail and justification. This is the gist of it in general: I present myself as a man with no sin. I go to the market one day and steal a loaf of bread. I am arrested, but I tell the policeman that he can let me go because I have many, many good works on my scale, and today I have just put the first very small bad thing there. So since my good things are so much more than the bad, he should let me go. I then ask the driver if the policeman will let me go. NO! He has no interest in my good works. I, as the policeman, explain that our country has laws. When you break the law you are punished. I, as myself, explain that it is like this in every country in the world. Good works are never weighted against the bad. There are laws, and if you break just one law, just one time, you are punished. It is the same with God. He gave us His laws through the Prophet Mussah (Moses) and the Prophet Mohammed (I add this for their sakes.) If we break those laws God will punish us and send us to fire.

I continue that Muslims often say, *"We are God's children. He loves us and would not send us to the fire."* (Again, this is from my own experience.) *"They say that if we keep the Ramadan fasts he will forgive our sins."*

I go on. *"This is true. God does love us. He does not want to send us to the fire. He does want to forgive us. But there is a problem. Let me give you another example."*

Here I tell the story of a powerful chief. In my case I made it a chief of their particular tribe before white people came. The King's word was law in those days. It was life or death without question. Again, I tell the story with a lot of detail and play the parts, but in general it goes like this:

Cows were being stolen so the king makes a law that anyone who steals cows will be put to death. Several times cow thieves are caught and they are all put to death. Now, the king also has a son who is the joy of his life. He loves his son and believes his son will follow him as king after he dies. One day the son and his friends go out and steal a cow just for fun. They are caught and brought before the king. When he sees his son he is very upset. Now, as king, he can kill the others and save his son, or even save them all. But if the king is just, what will he do? He will have to kill his son even though he loves him and would love to save him. I usually get the drivers to answer that last question themselves, and I don't have much trouble convincing them. Then I ask if God is just or not. They agree that God is just, so I tell them that this is how it is with God. He loves us as His children, but He is also just and must punish those that break His laws.

Now, while my West Africans are usually 100% with me at this point and are really enjoying the stories, it is exactly here that a strong, well-informed Muslim could tear the presentation apart. In true Islam, God is not compelled to be just. He can do whatever He pleases, whenever he pleases. But up to now, no one has brought up that point.

So, now, God loves us and does not want to condemn us, but since He is just, He must do it. But God is God, and God knows how to deal with any problem. And this is where the mission of the Prophet Issah comes in.

Some people might not agree with the way the next step is handled. I introduce Jesus as a pre-existent being in heaven among the angels. I don't get into the Son of God thing. First of all, once you mention Jesus as the Son of God, the continuity of the presentation is over. People get so distracted by that, that if you ever do get back on track you still have lost them. They will be on guard and not nearly as interested in what you have to say. Secondly, this presentation is just designed as one of several encounters with Christ. Third, I believe that once these men understand Christ's work it will be more obvious later why He must be God.

Anyway, I continue by saying, *"God had a plan to save us. He called the Prophet Issah, who was a person of Paradise with the angels. God said, 'Prophet Issah, you know that I love the people of the earth, but they have all become sinners and broken my laws, so I must send them to the fire. But I have a plan to save those people, although it would be very difficult for you. As a being of Paradise, you have no sin. You are holy. So here is my plan. I would take all the sins of the people of the world, and place them on you, on your head and shoulders. If I do that, the people would then be sinless. They would be holy, and they would be free to enter Paradise. But then you would receive the punishment for all those sins. You would have to suffer long and terribly for every one of those sins, and finally you would have to die for those sins. You would die as a sacrifice. Would you be willing to do this?' The Prophet Issah answered, 'God, this would be very difficult, but you know that I also love the people of the earth very much. If this is your will, I am ready to die to save the people. I will take their punishment.'*

"So the mission of the Prophet Issah was to die as a sacrifice. He came to earth and was born by a virgin".

Now I emphasize that the Quran tells us that Jesus was born of a virgin, but it does not tell us why. It was because Jesus already existed in Paradise. He did not need to be given life. He just needed a body, so God let him be born by a virgin.

I continue, *"The Prophet Issah grew up like one of us. When he became a man he began to teach people the Word of God, but that was NOT His mission. His mission was to die as a sacrifice. But since he came from Paradise he knew the Word of God very well and He taught the people. He also did many miracles and healed people. He could do this because he came from Paradise. That is why Mohammed did not do these things. He was a man of the earth. "The Prophet Issah told the people that they were sinners and must be condemned. But He told them to believe in Him, to trust him and have faith in Him. He knew what to do to save them"*

"At that time the religious leaders were very proud. They were upset to hear that people were going out and honoring the Prophet Issah and leaving them. 'Who is this Prophet Issah?' they asked. 'He is not one of us.' They went to hear what He was saying. When they heard His words they said, 'Issah, it's true that the people are sinners, but don't say that we are sinners. We are the religious leaders. We are not sinners.'"

"The Prophet Issah answered, 'You also are sinners, and if you do not change and come and have faith in me, you will go to the fire.' The religious leaders became very upset about this. They called the soldiers and sent them to kill the Prophet Issah. "

I go on, *"Now here we have a very important point. Many Muslims say that the Prophet Issah then put his face on his enemy, Judas, and the soldiers arrested and crucified Judas instead. They say this because they say that no one can kill a prophet of God unless God agrees. And they are right about that. No one can kill a prophet of God unless He agrees. But Muslims say Jesus changed His face because they do not know the mission of the Prophet Issah. What was His mission? He came to die in our place as a sacrifice. If the Prophet Issah had changed his face and escaped, could He have fulfilled His mission? No. So the Prophet Issah did not change his face. He let the soldiers take him."*

"The soldiers nailed the Prophet Issah to the cross." (Here I ask if they have seen pictures of the crucifixion. They almost always have.) "When the blood poured out of the wounds of the Prophet Issah, that was a sacrifice, just like when your people sacrifice chickens or sheep. But this was God's own sacrifice and it was much, much more powerful than any sacrifice that we can make."

"When that sacrifice happened, God took our sins - your sins, my sins, the sins of all people - and placed them on the head and shoulders of the Prophet Issah. So the Prophet Issah took on the punishment of all our sins. He suffered terribly. Finally, after He had taken all the punishment for all people He cried out and said it was finished. All the sins were taken and paid for. Then He died. God's own sacrifice was complete."

"The friends of the Prophet Issah buried His body. He was in the ground for three days. But God was very happy about the great thing that the Prophet Issah had done. After three days He raised the Prophet Issah from the dead and brought Him out of the grave alive again."

"The Prophet Issah gathered His followers and He told them, 'See, I am the one who died, but I am alive again. My death was a sacrifice for all people. If anyone believes that I am the sacrifice for his sins then he will receive the sacrifice and my blood will wash his sins so that he can enter Paradise. But if anyone does not accept that I am the sacrifice for his sins then he will not have my sacrifice, and because of his sins, he will not be able to enter paradise.'"

Here I do a little playing to show how a sinner cannot enter heaven because of his sins. I pretend to play the part of both a sinner who thinks he should be able to enter, and the part of God who cannot allow sin into heaven. Then I play the same parts, but this time the sinner is able to agree he is a sinner, but is also able to declare his faith in the sacrifice of Issah to forgive him. He is welcomed into Paradise.

Then I continue, *"After this the mission of the Prophet Issah was completed, so He went back to Paradise. His work was done. But before He left He told his followers, 'Now go and tell everyone in the whole world about the sacrifice that God has offered for them.' That is why we Christians continue to go all over the world to tell people about this sacrifice."*

If there is time I continue to discuss a bit about how great prophets like Mussah (Moses) and Mohammed give us good laws, but that none of us can follow them perfectly, and neither of them can do anything to help us if we fail. Only the mission and sacrifice of the Prophet Issah can help.

If there is time I also talk about why we do good works. A Muslim must do good works to get into heaven, but he never knows if he has done enough. With the sacrifice I already have the knowledge that I can enter. I do good things because I love God for what He did, and I want to make Him happy.

In the end I always pray for the person by name. This is impressive to them because the imams in our area charge money to pray for people.

Since I began writing this article I made a trip back to African, and once again several drivers said they had never heard about the prophet Issah like this. One said, "When I hear it like this I know it is the truth."

I know that this presentation, in and of itself, may be lacking and even incorrect on some points. But I believe that the difference between the mission of the Prophet Mohammed and the mission of the Prophet Issah may be a very good starting point for moving a Muslim down the path toward salvation.