

UNDERSTANDING MUSLIMS

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Introduction (Luke 5:17-26)

Observations:

1. Note that it is “the **power** of the Lord” (v. 17) that was at work in this situation, not the power of men. Cf. Rom 1:16. Only the power of God in the Gospel has the authority and force necessary to convert anyone.
2. Note the **partnership** or the unity and compassion of the community for a fellow citizen (v. 18). The Muslim *ummah* is united in more ways than it is divided (72 different factions). Muslims have a sense of community and also have compassion.
3. Note the crowded condition—**people** everywhere (v. 19a). This is reminiscent of conditions in many third-world Muslim nations today: Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Nigeria.
4. Note the **persistence** of the men in finding a way to help their brother (v. 19b). For Muslims such persistence is a product of the basic characteristic of Islam: submission to Allah's will.
5. Note the **priority** from the divine viewpoint (v. 20). Jesus forgave the man's sins rather than healing him. Clearly, God's purpose and goal in this situation was different than man's. Jesus knew what the man really needed even more than physical healing.
6. Note the **polarizing** that took place (v. 21). Immediately, the religious sensibilities of the Jews at the scene condemned what they believed to be blasphemy. Only God can forgive sins. Muslims react to Christ in much the same fashion today.
7. Note the **proposition** presented by Jesus (vv. 22-24). He challenged their thinking by both a logical conundrum and by the declaration of His authority (“power” in v. 24 is a different Greek word than in v. 17) to forgive sins.
8. Note the **product**: glorifying God and religious awe (vv. 25-26). A right understanding of who Jesus is and what He came to do results in the same two mindsets today among Muslims.

A. Characteristics of Islam (see #4, above)

A.1. Islam means *submission*.

A **Muslim** is one who is *submitted* to the will of God.

- For a Muslim it is more important to submit to all that Allah has decided rather than to obtain forgiveness.
- Result: Fatalism—submission to *kismet* (divinely predestined fate).

A.2. Muslims are **theocentric**—centered, focused on God. *Inshallah* = “If Allah wills”; *bismillah* = “in Allah’s name.” Cf. the materialistic orientation of Americans and Europeans. This mindset presents the Christian witness with a great opportunity—far greater than that offered by members of our own materialistic and self-centered culture.

A.3. Muslims view Islam as the **final revelation**. The Taurat of Moses, Jabur of David, and Injil of Jesus have been superseded by the Quran.

- Popular Muslim belief holds that the OT and NT have been corrupted and have been abrogated.
- The Quran (5:72) indicates that the OT and NT of the 7th century A.D. were authoritative and uncorrupted: “Say thou: ‘O People of the Book, ye are [founded] upon nothing, until ye observe [or establish] the Taurat and the Injil and that which hath been sent down unto you by your Lord.’”
- Muslims acknowledge 4 sources of authority: (1) The *Qur’an*, (2) the *Hadith* (traditions of the prophet), (3) *Qiyas* (analogy taught by Muslim scholars and based on the first two sources), and (4) *Ijma* (consensus of the Umma and especially of Islamic scholars).

A.4. Islam’s tradition is steeped in warfare. The Battle of Badr (624 A.D.) is the equivalent of Israel’s exodus from Egypt. It was actually a raid by Muhammad’s followers on a large and rich Meccan caravan from Palestine. Receiving information about the raid, the Meccans sent 900 men to defend it. Muhammad’s force of 300 was victorious, however. Contrary to current popular etymology, **Islam** does not mean “peace.”

Belief in martyrdom as the only guarantee of salvation contributes to the willingness of Muslims to give up their lives in lesser *Jihad* activities.

- “And if ye are slain, or die, in the way of Allah, forgiveness and mercy from Allah are far better than all they could amass” (3:157).
- “So those who ... fought and were slain, verily I shall remit their evil deeds from them and verily I shall bring them into Gardens underneath which rivers flow – A reward from Allah. And with Allah is the fairest of rewards” (3:195).
- Mainstream Islam says it can only be indulged in defense from an aggressor (but not an aggressor who is a brother Muslim). Osama bin Ladin’s *fatwa* was issued

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in February 1998 with the aggression against Muslim nations like Iraq being the defining cause:

- “The best proof of this is the Americans’ continuing aggression against the Iraqi people ...”
- “These crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims.”
- “We call on every Muslim who believes in God and wished to be rewarded to comply with God’s order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it.”
- Bin Ladin was offended by the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia and the presence of women as members of those forces.

Pillars of Islam:

- Faith (confession of faith)—*Shahadah*: “There is no god but Allah. Muhammad is the Messenger of God.”
- Prayer—*Salat*: 5 times a day (early morning, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening).
- Almsgiving—*Zakat*: not to be confused with charity. Due once annually and is a percentage of one’s wealth. Owed by all 16 years and older. Some Muslim governments collect this “tax” even though they might allow the Muslim to designate it.
- Fasting in Ramadan—*Sawm*: during the 9th lunar month.
- Pilgrimage—*Hajj*: once in each Muslim adult’s lifetime. In the last lunar month (8th-12th days).

B. Compassion for Muslims

B.1. Hope: “Abandon All Hope” is the title of a documentary on Afghanistan and the Taliban. Muslims have no real, certain hope and seek it by earthly means.

Cf. 1 Peter 3:15 – What are we doing to bring hope to Muslims?

B.2. Grace & Forgiveness: Every chapter (*sura*) except one (the 9th) in the Quran commences with “In the name of God, the gracious, the merciful.”

The Muslim concept of merciful involves Allah’s benevolence or providential care—not His gracious mercy in not punishing people as they deserve.

- Men and women cannot have a close relationship with Allah—He is too distant and impersonal, too powerful and sovereign.
- Forgiveness is earned, not granted. If even one of the five daily prayers is missed, a Muslim is believed to be sentenced to thousands of years of purgatory before he can qualify to enter the presence of Allah.

“Those who believe, and adopt exile, and fight for the faith, in the cause of God as well as those who give (them) asylum and aid, -- these are (all) in very truth the Believers! For them is the forgiveness of sins and a provision most generous.”
(Quran 8:74)

- Allah’s forgiveness is inscrutable ... He forgives whom He will.

“Forgiveness is surrendering my right to hurt you for hurting me.” (Archibald Hart quoted by James Dobson, *Love Must Be Tough*)

- In Islam, no one can be certain until the Day of Judgment.
- There is no example of a direct confession of sin in the Quran.
- Islam has no developed personal analogies like Hosea or the Prodigal Son.

C. Conflict with Islam

C.1. Different viewpoints:

- To the Muslim, Christians represent lascivious life styles.
 - Parents mourn when their children convert to Christianity because they believe they have thrown off all moral restraints.
 - The future of Muslim nations is threatened by degenerate cultural influences through TV, movies, and other music. Hindu-dominated India is the propagator of such media in South Asia.
 - Muslim young men boldly approach Western women, regarding them as not much more than prostitutes—after all, look how they dress and act!
- To the Muslim, Christendom is inconsistent regarding their judgment of “terrorists.”
 - America helped place Sinn Fein terrorists in government positions in Northern Ireland and encouraged the release from prisons of convicted terrorists.
 - America appears to turn a blind eye to every “terrorist” act of Israel—Israel can do no wrong (they are the fulfillment of prophecy as interpreted by the Church).
 - See, Fareed Zakaria, “Why Do They Hate Us?,” *Newsweek* 138/16 (Oct 15, 2001): 22-40.

C.2. Comparative World Views:

| Concept | Muslim | “Christian”* |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Unity | Emphasized— <i>umma</i> | Only if pragmatic |
| Time | Respect past** | Orientation to future |
| Family | Solidarity | Individualistic |
| Peace | Integration, external | Contentment, internal |
| Honor | All important | Not the priority |
| Status | Family, name, age | Wealth, accomplishment |
| Individualism | Subordination to group | Independence a priority |
| Secularism | Totally unacceptable | Largely acceptable |
| Change | Undesirable | Desirable |
| Efficiency | Little or no concern | Imperative |

* Not necessarily biblical.

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** Arabic poet:
 He in whose heart no history is enscrolled,
 Cannot discern in life's alloy the gold.
 But he that keeps the record of the Deed,
 Adds to his life new lives a hundred-fold.

Cf. memory of past wrongs: crusades.

“ “ past martyrs

Cf. death anniversaries—like that of Jinnah, Sept 11 (?)

Concluding Thoughts:

Witness & Missions to Muslims:

- **F**orgiveness—what they desire deeply.
- **A**ssurance—what they lack completely.
- **C**ompassion—what they need as evidence of Christian faith.

We found the Muslims in Bangladesh to be warmly hospitable. Sometimes, in the current tensions, we might think that the Palestinians celebrating the World Trade Center atrocity are the clearest indication of how Muslims really feel worldwide. It is necessary that we listen to their “Yankee go home!”, but we must keep in mind that many are also saying in their hearts, “and when you leave, please take me with you!”

- **T**ime—what it takes.

It takes time to demonstrate true compassion and it takes time to remove all the false concepts and suspicions. Even after 3 terms of service in Bangladesh, we found some Muslim friends still convinced that we were paid to be missionaries by the U.S. government and were really CIA agents.

That brings up the current trend to so-called Limited Access Missions, secret missions to lands hostile to Christian missions. I am not convinced that such an approach is either biblical or pragmatic. An Indian college president told E. Stanley Jones that the first time Christ came to India He came in the company of a trader, a business man (William Carey). They did not like his company. They shut the door.

The second time Christ came to India he was flanked by a diplomat and a soldier. They did not like them. They shut the door.

The third time Christ came to India He came as an uplifter of the outcast and the poor. He came as an educator, a relief worker, and a doctor. They liked Him better, but were not certain of what was behind it—was it just the religious side of Western imperialism and colonialism?

When Christ comes to India disentangled, with nothing but the Gospel and the forgiveness it offers, they will open the door.

Cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-7. Paul declared that they spoke the Gospel openly, not secretly (“bold,” v. 2) even though there was conflict. Nor did they use any “decoy” (basic concept in “deceit,” v. 3).

Secret missions:

1. Confirms the suspicions of Muslims.
 2. Ignores the respect Muslims have even for Christians who live according to convictions rather than convenience.
 3. Produces added persecution of nationals who must remain even after a missionary is expelled or voluntarily departs.
 4. Gives in prematurely to gaining access to a so-called closed nation. (Some missionaries have openly declared their identification as Christian missionaries to the police and government officials in Muslim countries. They have been open concerning their purpose and work and have been allowed to remain in those countries. God has given them unprecedented opportunities to witness to high officials and success in protecting national Christians from harassment and persecution.)
 5. Fails to be opportunistic in reaching closed nations by establishing work on the borders of such nations rather than within if access is denied. Borders are porous—citizens of closed nations freely pass over borders (cf. Afghanistan’s border with Pakistan, Myanmar’s border with Thailand, Indonesia’s proximity to Singapore, etc.).
- **Scripture**—without which nothing will happen: “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom 10:17).

Discuss Jesus (Isa) with Muslims. Ask them about His title of *Kalimatullah* (“Word/Speech of God”)—cf. Quran 3:45.