The Watchtower’s View of the Anointed and Great Crowd

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As I was talking to an older Jehovah’s Witness couple, the wife asked me to ask her if she wanted to go to heaven. She said this a number of times, so I asked her, “Do you want to go to heaven?” She said, “No.” Then she went on to explain about the “Anointed” and the “Great Crowd” (a.k.a. Great Multitude in the King James Version) in the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ interpretation of the Bible.

She wanted to live on Paradise Earth. Her husband on the other hand believed he was one of the “Anointed.” He would live in heaven with Jesus and rule from there. I asked him how he knew he was one of the “Anointed” and he said he just knew.

Their spiritual vision was definitely distorted as to the truth of scripture. How odd for both to want to go to different places. This elderly couple didn’t seem to care that they were going to different places. How can we correct their vision distortion? How can we give them real HOPE??

The Anointed Class

Let us look at the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ conception of two hopes. The first hope is a heavenly hope. This view states that 144,000 will live in heaven and be with Jesus (a.k.a. Michael the Archangel to Jehovah’s Witnesses). This is the “little flock”, or the Anointed.

Jehovah’s Witnesses point to Luke 12:32 as evidence of the “little flock” concept. This and following verses from the New World Translation, (NWT) read, “Have no fear, little flock, because your Father has approved of giving you the kingdom.” According to the Witnesses, Jesus said, in John 10:16, “And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold....” Here, the disciples, the little flock are contrasted with the other sheep, which later on will be seen as the great crowd.

Finally, this “anointed class” will reign with Christ as priests and kings. Rev 20:6 reads, “Happy and holy is anyone having a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no authority, but they will be priests of God and of the Christ, and will rule with Him for the thousand years.”

These verses culminate in Revelation 7:1-8 and 14:1-3 as limiting the group to 144,000. It is this group that participates in the New Covenant. This is the true spiritual Israel, according to the Watchtower Society. They believe this group is born again and will be raised as spirit creatures like Jesus/Michael.

The Great Multitude

The “Anointed” reign with Jesus in heaven over the earthly, or “Great Crowd.” According to, “Revelation; It’s Grand Climax at Hand!” p 119, the Watchtower Society said, “In 1931 God’s slaves on earth had received, with great joy, the name Jehovah’s Witnesses. They could subscribe wholeheartedly to the words of Psalm 97:11; “Light itself has flashed up for the righteous one, and rejoicing even for the ones upright in heart.” They could clearly discern that spiritual Israel alone had been brought into the new covenant, (Hebrews 9:15; 12:22, 24). Unresponsive, natural Israel had no part therein, nor did mankind in general. The understanding cleared the way for a brilliant flash of divine light, outstanding in the annals of theocratic history.”

What is this brilliant flash of divine light? The acceptance or revelation of the “Great Crowd”. According to the Watchtower Society, “Revelation: It’s Grand Climax at Hand!” p120,21 we read, “The Understanding of Revelation 7:9-17 was now about to burst forth in all its sparkling brilliance! (Psalm 97:11). J.F. Rutherford, president of the Watch Tower Society, gave scriptural proof that the modern-day other sheep are identical with that great crowd of Revelation 7:9. At the climax of this talk, the speaker asked: ‘Will all those who have the hope of living forever on the earth please stand?’ As a large part of the audience stood up, the president declared: ‘Behold! The great multitude!’ ... On the following day, 840 new Witnesses were baptized, most of these professing to be of that great crowd.”

There is a class distinction in the Watchtower society. Your witness to them will be effected unless you understand the basic concept. It is important to know how to ask the right questions and deal with their distortion of scripture.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses the door to being one of the 144,000 closed in 1935 and the “sparkling brilliance” of the great crowd entered. They are unnumbered multitudes who will live forever on Paradise earth and do not need to be born again.

Today, there are anywhere from 5 to 9 thousand Anointed left on earth out of which the Governing body of the Watchtower Society must be drawn. Their job is to feed the sheep, or the great multitude, proper food, i.e., doctrine, etc.

The “Anointed” enjoy the benefits of the New Covenant. They, only, can participate in the Lord’s Supper, celebrated once a year, around Easter. Christ is Mediator for them. The “Great Crowd” neither participates in the Lord’s Supper nor has Christ as their mediator. So, as the elements are passed around the congregation, very few will take them. Only those who claim they are the “Anointed” will partake.

Refutation

A refutation of their view is critical in order to communicate the gospel to the Witnesses. In sharing

the gospel, some may ask, “Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you know for certain that if you were to die today, you would go to heaven?” That assumes that they want to go there! As we’ve seen earlier, not everyone does.

When we use terms like “saved” or “born again” or “heaven” we can count on being misunderstood. They will say, or they will think to themselves, that what is being said doesn’t apply to them and that we really don’t know what we are talking about.

To a JW, only the anointed are “born again,” so when we talk to them we must deal with this issue. Again, since the majority of the Witnesses will think themselves part of the Great Crowd we want to confront them with the need to be born again, and take them to passages where this is demonstrated. Turn to I John 5:1, and have them read out loud:

“Everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God, and everyone who loves the one that caused to be born loves him who has been born from that one.” (NWT)

Read the first part, “Everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ has been born from God.” Ask them directly, “Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ?” If the answer is yes, and it should be, then they should be born of God, but they will say they are not. Ask why, since the verse says, “Everyone believing.” Who is included in the phrase “everyone believing?” If scripture says everyone, and the Witness say they are not, then who is to be believed? (Note: Doctrinal definitions of Christ, including His deity, are left out of this discussion but are essential to being born again.)

Ask what it means to be born from God. To be born of God means to be born from the Spirit of God. Go to John 3 and Jesus’ talk with Nicodemus:

John 3:3 In answer Jesus said to him: “Most truly I say to you, Unless anyone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (NWT)

John 3:5 Jesus answered: “Most truly I say to you, Unless anyone is born from water and spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (NWT)

What we read in the above verses talks about being born again, born from above, born of the Spirit. The Great Crowd denies they need this spiritual birth. I John 5:1, stresses that “everyone.” Does this limit the number in any way? Let the JW know that we must have the Holy Spirit to belong to Christ.

Romans 8:9 “However you are in harmony, not with the flesh, but with the spirit, if God’s spirit truly dwells in you. But if anyone does not have Christ’s spirit, this one does not belong to him.” (NWT)

If one does not have Christ’s Spirit, then he does not belong to Him and cannot even “see” the

kingdom of God. At some point in this discussion, talk about the deity of the Holy Spirit. Refer back to News and Views, Volume 2 issues 6 and 7, for an in-depth look at the Holy Spirit being Jehovah.

The purpose of what we just did was to open up their thinking to the concept of having something only the “Anointed” are to have, namely God’s spirit.

Revelation 7:4-8

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: …” (following this statement is a list of the number from each named tribe).

These 144,000 make up the group which the Watchtower calls the Anointed Class. They believe this group represents those Jehovah’s Witnesses who have given up an earthly prospect for a heavenly one. But, the Witnesses have been inconsistent in interpreting and applying this text. They see the number 144,000 as literal, yet view the twelve tribes as figurative.

They change the method of interpretation right in the middle of the first line. If the tribes are figurative, then the number should be. If the number is literal, then the tribes should be as well. Ask what the reasoning is behind changing from literal to figurative in the first line.

Revelation 14: 1-5

“And I saw, and, look! The Lamb standing upon Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand having his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads. …. These are the ones that did not defile themselves with women; in fact, they are virgins. …These were bought from among mankind as first fruits to God and to the Lamb, and no falsehood was found in their mouths; they were without blemish.”

Ask the Jehovah’s Witness if the 144,000 are all men? They will say no! Ask them why it says “they did not defile themselves with women.” Revelation, chapters 7 and 14, say nothing of women being in the 144,000. To say they are is to go beyond scripture.

One thing the Witnesses use to explain their belief that the tribes represent Jehovah’s Witnesses is that the tribes Dan and Ephraim are left out, while the tribe of Levi is included. Let us be aware that lists in the Old Testament vary. Since they all vary, it is consistent that the tribes vary in their makeup.

Scholars say that the tribe of Dan was probably omitted because they were guilty of idolatry on many occasions. (Lev 24:11; Judges 18:1,30; I Kings 12:28,29) “Reasoning From the Scriptures with the Jehovah’s Witnesses”, Ron Rhodes, p 267).

Ephraim and Manasseh are both sons of Joseph. The sons of Joseph are either listed by including Joseph and excluding the two sons, or omitting Joseph and counting the two sons as one tribe each (Ezekiel 48). In

In this continuation of our look at what the Watchtower teaches about the 144,000 and the Great Crowd, we will consider what the scriptures have to say.

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Ephraim and Manasseh are both sons of Joseph. The sons of Joseph are either listed by including Joseph and excluding the two sons, or omitting Joseph and counting the two sons as one tribe each (Ezekiel 48). In Revelation 7 it appears that Ephraim is omitted because he is guilty of idolatry like Dan (Judges 17; Hosea 4:12).

We still must deal with the question of why Levi is listed? Though he existed in the Old Testament he was not counted as one of the twelve. Levi took the place of the firstborn and took care of the tabernacle/temple and the priesthood. When Jesus Christ fulfilled the priesthood and the need for the temple (Hebrews 7-10), the earthly priesthood came to an end.

There is no need for the Levites to continue in the function of priests. Therefore they are one of the twelve tribes of Israel. (Ibid, p.268)

The Great Crowd

Revelation 7:9

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;”

This verse follows the 144,000 or the anointed class. All that is mentioned is that they are from every nation and tribe, that no one could number this great crowd and they are before the throne and before the Lamb. To us, it seems obvious that they are in heaven. Why? Because they stand BEFORE the throne and the Lamb. The Watchtower says it is in the sense of being before Him on earth or in His sight. We are all in His sight, they say.

They will then take you to I Timothy 5:21. The verse reads, “I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the chosen angels to keep these things without prejudgement, doing nothing according to a biased leaning.” Here Paul charges Timothy in the sight of God and Jesus. The Watchtower says they are obviously not in heaven, therefore, neither is the great crowd in heaven.

As we share with the Witnesses, we must keep the context ever before us. Read all of chapter 7, asking if the context of Revelation 7:9 seems to dictate being in heaven or on earth. The immediate context is important.

Verse 11 reads, “And all the angels were standing around the throne and the older persons and the four living creatures, and they fell upon their faces before the throne and worshiped God.”

Notice that the older persons and the four living creatures fell upon their faces BEFORE the throne. Is this “before” in the sense of Paul charging Timothy? No, it implies that they are literally in His presence and fell before the throne and worshiped.

But let us look at verse 15; “ That is why they are before the throne of God; and they are rendering him sacred service day and night in his temple; and the one seated on the throne will spread his tent over them.” Again the emphasis is before the throne, but something new is added. They are in His temple. Where is His temple located?

Look at the following verse in Revelation 11:19; “And the temple (sanctuary) of God that is in heaven was opened...” His temple is in heaven. Read Revelation14:17 also. One other verse needs to be added to this arsenal.

Rev 19:1

“After these things I heard what was as a loud voice of a great crowd in heaven. They said: “Praise, Jah, you people! The salvation and the glory and the power belong to our God.”

The great crowd, according to the normal reading of the text, is in heaven, before the throne. Those in the great crowd render Him sacred service in the temple! The temple is in heaven. The voice of a great crowd is in heaven. Therefore the great crowd, contrary to the Watchtower Society, is in heaven and not on earth.

We need to see the big picture in scripture. The Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that the earth is to be inhabited forever. They say the Great Crowd will live on Paradise Earth and serve Jehovah and King Jesus; that Jesus and the 144,000 will forever be separated from what occurs on earth; that the definition of a New Heaven and New Earth is simply a new righteous heavenly government and a new righteous earthly government.

The Witnesses will automatically see the dichotomy between the two as appropriate, because the Watchtower says so, unless God opens their eyes to the truth of His word. For us the Bible makes it clear that there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth and that they will be one. We can say that we will live forever on a new earth because scripture teaches it. Read Revelation 21 and 22 and the description of the New Creation realized.

Yes, things will be awesomely different, yet things will in ways be the same. God has so much more for us than the Jehovah’s Witnesses can ever hope to realize. We need to catch that vision and as the church, preach, teach and proclaim the truth of Jesus and all that it entails. We will be with Him wherever He is (John 12:26). All of us will be His one flock (John 10:16).

In Conclusion

The Watchtower Society controls the thinking of the JW’s by making class distinction, i.e., the 144,000 and the Great Crowd. They view scripture through the distorted lens of this picture. The majority of Witnesses that come to your door will not want to go to heaven and will stress Paradise Earth and the Great Crowd.

We, as Christians, must understand this to share the gospel with them. Then we need to understand how to refute their arguments biblically and ask them questions in light of scripture. We can expect God to use His word to make an impact on their lives. II Tim 2:23-25

By Don Malin