

An Interview with Rikk Watts



Rikk Watts brings an understanding of Scripture that has infiltrated each corner of his life. Much of his passion comes from the ups and downs of his theological education. He began with an emphasis in biblical exegesis, studying under Gordon Fee when he was teaching at Gordon-Conwell in the early 1980s. From there, Rikk uprooted his family once again, and headed to England, where he pursued a doctorate at Cambridge.

“Boston was my first experience of North American education, which allowed me to do well. Having permission to do well was nice,” he says. “Cambridge was subtle. I enjoyed very much being a part of British education, where raising an eyebrow is the same as an American shout.”

As subtle as Cambridge was, it was by no means easy. In fact, it was the quiet rigour of those years that took him through his dark night of the soul. “I had to face some critical issues I’d never faced before; I had to look at my faith from the ground up on some issues,” he recalls. “At Gordon-Conwell, I wasn’t faced with some of the major issues which could cause some problems for faith. I had an almost disembodied view of the way God works.”

What took its toll was constantly reading material that came from a critical point of view and seeing how so many scholars can explain God away ideologically and do it so well. “What do you do with that?” he asks. “This raised a lot of issues I’d never dealt with.”

What he ended up with, beside a headache, is what he calls a “more human” approach to the Scriptures and the God they testify to. The revived spiritual life, after passing through this dark night, also gave him a desire to communicate the gospel in a dialogue with secular culture.

“Christians are very good at talking to ourselves but not at talking with our culture,” he says. “Surely, there’s a need to teach the church, but if we don’t talk with the world we’ll become increasingly more marginalized.” As our surrounding culture identifies itself, by presenting us

with certain defining symbols in TV, movies, literature, and the visual arts, he says, “We have to learn to interpret what those symbols are and put the gospel in ways that address those needs that those symbols represent. We talk about it but I don’t know how good we actually are at doing it.” In other words, we need to have one eye on the world and one eye on the Word.

About Rikk Watts

Rikk Watts is associate professor of New Testament at Regent College, Vancouver. Initially trained as an aeronautical engineer, Rikk worked for a number of years with IBM in large retail systems engineering while undertaking a degree in Philosophy, Art History and Sociology. He later joined a para-church organization engaged in Christian awareness projects in public schools and in providing crisis accommodation and various rehabilitation programs for the urban poor. He was a founding member of *On Being*, a major Australian Christian magazine, and supported himself and his family as a professional drummer. A popular lecturer and speaker, he is frequently engaged in churches, universities and camps around North and South America, England, Europe, Asia and Australia. Rikk has a strong passion for biblical teaching in both the Old Testament and the New Testament; and his seminal work *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* was published in 2000.