

Apostolic Evangelistic Addresses

Cornelius invited Peter to his house in order for the apostle to tell him, his relatives and his friends what God had commanded him – the apostle – to say; that is, the word of God, the gospel (Acts 10:22,33; 11:1,14,18). The Holy Spirit, through Luke, has left on record a brief report of Peter’s address (Acts 10:34-43). As he came to the climax of his evangelistic discourse – for that is what it was, an evangelistic discourse – the apostle summed up what he had been saying, and why:

[Christ] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the [old-covenant] prophets [of Israel] bear witness, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:42-43).

Even though Luke has left us only a brief report, there is no mistaking the thrust of Peter’s preaching: it was full of Christ, the whole Christ, and nothing but the whole Christ: ‘He... he... him... him... his...’, the apostle said, over and over again, referring to the Lord Jesus Christ; Peter, as had Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:5), preached Christ to the gathering. It would be Paul’s way, too (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; Col. 1:28-29). And John was of the same mind (1 John 1:1-4).

Because it is important, let me immediately point out the obvious. Peter was not ‘conducting’ a ‘church service’. He was speaking at a meeting expressly called so that unconverted people could gather to hear him address them on the word of God, the gospel. Nothing else was on offer.¹

Specifically (Acts 10:42-43), Peter declared that Christ is the coming Judge of all men; that he is the One of whom all the

¹ I drew attention to this point in ‘Note to the Reader’. See my *Gadfly*.

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prophets spoke; that he is the Redeemer; and that whoever trusts him and his work will be saved, receiving the forgiveness of their sins. Indeed – so the apostle’s words clearly imply – it is precisely because Christ is coming again to judge the world that the Father sent his Son into the world as a man in order to redeem sinners and save them from everlasting wrath.²

Peter did not merely hint at these things; he did not suggest them; he did not tuck them away in a corner; he did not introduce them gently, unobtrusively, tangentially, as an aside. He was upfront – direct and honest – his message³ undisguised. He did not pull the trick of hiding the bitter inside something sweet. Above all, he was not content to add a token ‘gospel message’ at the end of a discourse which had borne little or no relation to it. No, what we have in Acts 10:42-43 is surely the essence of the apostle’s evangelistic preaching, the substance and thrust of what he openly proclaimed that day.

And ‘proclaimed’ is the very word: Luke told us that Peter was heralding, he was solemnly testifying the gospel.⁴ This is what Christ told his people to do. So said the apostle.

Peter, therefore, did not offer advice; he did not read a paper or an article; he did not blandly present a structured ‘study’ to the people;⁵ he did not take them through a catechism; he

² Peter, in Acts 10, spoke of judgment in terms of the last day. With the apostolic letters, and the Spirit’s revelation of ‘all the truth’ (John 16:12-15), God’s present judgment in the gospel would play its full part. In this regard, in due course I will have something to say on John 3:18-19,36; 9:13 and Rom. 1:18-32.

³ The word ‘message’ will occur frequently in my book. By ‘message’, I do not mean an ‘address’. Rather, I am speaking about the gospel, God’s revelation. We preach ‘the message’. Of course, when I quote others, they may use the word more loosely.

⁴ See Vine’s *Expository Dictionary*; NASB; Holman Christian Standard Bible; Weymouth’s version.

⁵ I have noticed quite a few preachers talking about ‘today’s study’, often reinforcing this idea by PowerPoint with accompanying

did not offer them a few lectures of a course. Far from it! He preached the gospel; he really preached, heralded, proclaimed the gospel.

Peter could not have been clearer on two of the offices of Christ: he is both Judge and Redeemer, and in that order. Indeed, as I say, it is precisely because he will judge all men at his second coming at the end of the age that, to begin the age, Christ became a man in order to save sinners.

The final judgment is the inescapable fact. It dominated Peter's preaching. Listen to what the apostle said about it.

God's judgment will be universal, none exempt; it will include the living and the dead; no-one will escape. It will encompass not only every Gentile, but every Jew; not only the disreputable, but the respectable; not only the careless, but the concerned; not only the thoughtless, but the religious. It will encompass all Peter's hearers in the house of Cornelius that day. So the record of the apostle's words clearly implies.

And because of this impending day of judgment, Christ came into the world to save sinners.

And all this work of Christ – in particular, his first coming as the suffering Saviour to save sinners, the Redeemer of all who trust him – was predicted by the prophets, all of them. So said Peter.⁶

notes. And that is what they deliver: a mediocre lecture or bland article – a factual 'study'.

⁶ So important is this, Peter would later set it down in his first letter. Writing to believers, the apostle declared: 'Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look' (1 Pet. 1:10-12; see also Acts 3:24).

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What is more, as Peter was preaching, the Spirit came upon all his hearers in power. Of course – since it signalled the gospel’s breakout into Europe – the descent of the Spirit was accompanied by the same extraordinary signs as Pentecost.⁷ Even so, allowing for the extraordinary element,⁸ the point is clear:

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared: ‘Can anyone withhold water for baptising these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days (Acts 10:44-48).

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He got it, of course, directly from Christ himself (Luke 24:27; John 5:46).

⁷ As Peter, when called to account for his actions, reported to the believing Jews in Jerusalem: ‘As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning... If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?’ (Acts 11:15-17).

⁸ One ‘extraordinary’ aspect of Peter’s preaching was that he did not base what he said on any New Testament scripture. There was nothing odd about this: after all, no New Testament scripture had yet been written. Moreover, the apostles were unique: they could speak of what they had actually witnessed, seen, heard and handled, and, in so doing, left us their vital historical record (John 1:14; 2:11; 2 Pet. 1:16-19; 1 John 1:1-5; 4:14). We, however, being now in possession (in Scripture) of the ‘all truth’ Jesus promised (John 14:26; 16:13), preach that. Note: we are to preach Scripture, nothing else. It is in Scripture that we find the apostles’ experience – and, more important – their doctrine. And we must preach *Scripture*, not, as is so commonly done, merely *preach upon it*. There is a world of difference between the two!

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Why has the Spirit of God recorded this meeting, and given us a summary of the apostle's preaching? Just to let us have a few historical facts? To fill out the story? Or are we being given a pattern which we have to follow?

To ask these questions is to answer them.

Can there be any doubt that in Acts 10 we have the heart of the gospel message in evangelism, and the manner of evangelism?⁹ That which Luke recorded as the summary of Peter's preaching surely tells us *what* we should be doing in our evangelistic efforts, and *why* we should be doing it.

For, as Peter stated, he was doing nothing more or less than obeying the instructions of Christ himself: 'What I have just been doing, what I have just been telling you is nothing other than what Christ himself "commanded us to preach to the people and to testify"'. So said Peter. Thus the apostle confessed he was a man under authority – the authority of the Lord Christ, and that he was simply obeying his Master's command, doing what he could to fulfil Christ's mandate to his people throughout this age regarding the purpose, the means and the message of evangelism.

This must sink in. What we read in Acts 10:42-43 is not Peter's idea. It is not something cooked up by a committee of clever men. It is nothing but apostolic obedience to Christ himself. Furthermore, the Spirit has left it on record in Scripture. Hence it must be the pattern for us. We too are under Christ's command; and we, too, must obey that command. And Peter has shown us the way.

Let us remind ourselves of Christ's unchanging and unchangeable mandate for all his people throughout this age:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me [Christ declared]. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that

⁹ The principles we see here apply to private conversation, also.

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I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:47-49).

Hence Peter's preaching in the house of Cornelius:

[Christ] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

This is what Peter understood by Christ's mandate, this is what he did, and by this record we must surely understand that this is what we should be doing. This must be the thrust of our approach to the ungodly. If ever the Bible gives us a statement of evangelism, Acts 10:42-43 is it. After all, this, as I have said, is nothing but *an evangelistic discourse*, delivered in obedience to the command of Christ.

What could be clearer? I am not saying that in Acts 10:42-43 the Holy Spirit has given us a formula to follow, a formula, which, parrot-like, we merely repeat over and over again, but I am asserting that the essence of Peter's words is the very message we must preach.

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But was it a one-off? Do we have any other scriptural examples of similar preaching?

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There is a wealth of biblical material to show that the preaching of Acts 10 (apart from the extraordinary Pentecostal signs of the Spirit) was far from being a one-off in the early days of the gospel. It may be found in evangelistic addresses recorded throughout Scripture. References, in the main, must suffice.

As for the prophets, bearing in mind the time in which their words were first issued – that is, in the age of the old covenant – Isaiah 45:22-25; 55:1-13, Ezekiel 18:20-32; 33:1-20, Micah 7:18-20, along with Zechariah 13:1, can be read as mighty gospel discourses. See also Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-11; 9:1-6. For the preaching of John the Baptist, see Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-20; John 1:1-36; 3:27-36. For Christ himself, take John 3:1-8,14-21, as but one example. For Peter, in addition to Acts 10, take Acts 2, 3 and 4. I have already referred to Philip in Acts 8. Take Paul through Acts from Acts 13 to 28. As for the apostolic letters, naturally – since they were written to believers – while we should not expect to find many passages which deal with evangelistic addresses, even so, we do have overwhelming evidence of the kind of material they would have used in their discourses. I make no apology for quoting the following examples, and doing so at length; I want to let Scripture speak for itself, both in word and weight:

The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart'. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men...

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And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory...

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written: 'He catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again: 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile'. So let no one boast in men (1 Cor. 1:18-25; 2:1-8; 3:18-21).

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor. 9:16).

What we proclaim is... Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor. 4:5).

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others...

We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God... Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 5:10-11, 19 – 6:2).

Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the

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believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:5-10).

The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying: 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing (1 Thess. 4:16 – 5:11).

I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost... I received mercy...

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God our Saviour... desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth...

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: [God] was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory (1 Tim. 1:13-16; 2:3-7; 3:16).

Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me...

The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will...

The sacred writings [that is, the Scriptures]... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:8-12; 2:24-26; 3:15).

We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our

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Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people (Tit. 3:3-8).

[Christ] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them... He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Heb. 7:25; 9:26-28).

You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God...

Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone', and 'A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence'. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy...

[Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls...

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Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...

It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And 'If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?' (1 Pet. 1:18-21; 2:7-10,24-25; 3:18; 4:17-18).

The heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed (2 Pet. 3:7-10).

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world...

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is... The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil... By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us... This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ...

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In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins... we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world...

Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony [of God] in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 1:7 – 2:2; 3:1-2,8,16,23; 4:9-10,14; 5:10-13).

These extracts, please note, tell us what the apostles wrote (and often preached) to saints. It doesn't take an Einstein to see how and what they said to unbelievers. Indeed, Paul left us a clear testimony about it:

You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ... I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God... I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:18-27).

No! Whatever else Acts 10 is, it most definitely is not a one-off!

Putting all this together, we can come to only one conclusion. Peter's preaching that day should be the hallmark of our evangelistic addresses today. As Peter said,

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this is what Christ commanded! ‘He commanded us’ – not just the apostles, but all believers throughout the gospel age.

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The question I want to raise is this: Does the evangelistic approach of modern evangelical churches square with Acts 10:42-43?¹⁰ Can the evangelistic preaching – where there still is any preaching worthy of the name – in today’s evangelical churches, be described in such terms?

That is what I now explore.

¹⁰ In this book, by ‘modern’ I refer mainly to the radical re-engineering of *ekklēsia* to accommodate the kind of ‘seeker-friendly’ or ‘deeds-ministry’ evangelism which began in the 1980s, and is fast becoming the dominant evangelical approach to church life today. See my *Relationship*.