

## **THE GOSPEL—ITS PROCLAMATION AND POWER**

### ***1. Introduction***

Before we launch into our subject, let us see that the Gospel covers the whole range of Christian teaching and experience. It is over-simplifying it to limit it to the short crisp message given by evangelists, that is to say, some evangelists of our day. Therefore if we are seeking the 'gospel in a nut-shell' in this study we will be disappointed.

Whilst the Gospel is simple enough, it is also profound, and many aspects of it appeal to many areas of the interested mind, as well, also the heart. Since it is the revelation of God Himself, in His nature of holiness and love, as they relate to His being Creator, Father, and Redeemer, we need to spend time and thought on its whole scope.

### ***2. The Proclamation***

The word 'proclamation' or *kerugma* as it is in Greek, is simply the substance of what the herald would proclaim, in the public square or market place of the emperor's decree. The act of proclaiming, is of course, part of the *kerugma*. The decree as given was not debated. The announcement had to be obeyed.

In I Cor. 1:21, Paul says, 'For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach (*kerugma*) to save those who believe'

Another word, which is almost the same is *euongellion* or 'evangel' from which comes the Saxon word gospel. It means 'good news', and relates to the verb to evangelise. The content of the *kerugma* and the *euangellion* is the same. The words can be used interchangeably.

At this point it will not be profitable to list the elements which constitute the proclamation or evangel, but simply to observe, from the text above, that it is God's one chosen method to save persons. The text says, in effect, that this is His way of saving people, even though it is, humanly speaking, foolishness both as to message and mode.

### ***3. Initial Proclamation***

We must not think that the first proclamation came through the apostles, following Pentecost. As far back as Genesis 3:15 the Gospel was announced. It can be traced through the history of Israel, and emerges in the idea of the covenant with Abraham, then Israel, and especially through the prophets. However the theme is so bound up in concepts of Kingdom, Messiah, covenant, and the like that it only becomes explicit, as we shall see, with the actual coming of Messiah, and his messianic liberation.

The closest to an explicit Gospel pronouncement is that of John the Baptist. His life and ministry must be studied closely to see the juncture of history at which he came. His message was 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. However when it is looked at closely it has **three** great promises:—

- (i) The Kingdom is about to come, and the baptism of repentance is necessary preparation for that Kingdom.
- (ii) The Messiah of the Kingdom is coming, and will bring the remission of sins, and such remission will be universal.
- (iii) Through Messiah will come the outpouring of the Spirit upon the people of the Kingdom. These three elements must be understood, because to talk about kerugma if these are ignored is to miss the central truths of the Gospel.

When Jesus comes he does not have to explicate this Gospel. He says simply, 'The time appointed is fulfilled. The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent and believe the Gospel'. This is clearly the Gospel of the Kingdom, and it is this Gospel, or kerugma that Jesus announces, as he goes about his ministry.

The third initial proclamation that is made is by the apostles and the early church. Since this will require quite a deal of examination, we will not comment on it here. We must observe, however, that whilst the disciples did preach the Gospel under Jesus, in their Palestinian ministry, they did not initiate the post-resurrection preaching on their own initiative. They were commanded to preach, and certainly the content of this Gospel was clearly shown to them (a) by Jesus during his ministry, and in the forty days between his resurrection and ascension, and (b) by the Holy Spirit in His coming at Pentecost.

## ***4. The Commands To Proclaim***

### **(i) In the Gospels, Prior to the Resurrection**

It would be foolish to imagine that the Gospel proclamation would have to await, totally, the events of the cross, resurrection and ascension. Whilst that Gospel was not complete in content, yet it was in the making, and had its authentic being in that it was fulfilling the prophetic predictions. Hence in Mark 3:14 we read, 'And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim, and have authority to cast out demons'.

This is amplified in Luke 9:1, 'He called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God, and to heal'. Likewise he sends out seventy (Luke 10:120)... 'heal the sick and say unto them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you.'

We gather from this (cf. Matt. 12:28) that the message of the Kingdom was not merely didactic, but dynamic, and effected its aims by its own action. In fact the Kingdom, with and through the proclamation was coming at that very point. Hence Peter later summed up the Messianic ministry, within the Gospels period, by saying, 'Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, who went about doing all manner of good, and healing all those who were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him'. (Acts 10:38).

### (iii) Commission and Command

The following four passages in the Gospels should be studied closely: Matt. 28:16–20, Mark 16:14–20, Luke 24:44–49, John 20:19–23. Then should be added to them, Acts 1:1–8, 10:42, whilst the commission to Paul will be treated separately.

What emerges from the passages is to be understood in the light of the ministry which the apostles had already had with Jesus, in Palestine. For example, in Matt. 28:20, and Mark 16:20 the idea that Jesus will still be working with the disciples is present. The mission begun will still require his presence and power. At the same time from Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8, and John 20:22 it is clear that the Holy Spirit will be even more directly present to both guide and empower them in proclamation.

It should also be noted that the obedience of the apostles in regard to proclamation is taken for granted. Whilst it is true that there are imperatives in these passages, most of the passages are cast in the indicative. The use of the participle ‘going’ in Matt. 28:19, and Mark 16:15 assumes there is no need for a command to go, so that the rest of the commission is cast in the form of accepted directives or, as we say, ‘guidelines’. John 20:19–23 simply speaks of their going as similar to the Father’s original sending of the Son, an act which he gladly concurred. Luke of course is totally in the indicative, even if it implies an imperative. These points are important, since they assume the powerful thrust of understanding the Gospel and being seized with both its importance, and necessity, for mankind.

Elements contained within these passages are:– (i) The Gospel is to be preached to every person. (ii) It is to result in the discipling of nations, and not only persons. (iii) Its message includes repentance and the forgiveness of sins. (iv) The basis of all proclamation is the death and resurrection of Christ. (v) Baptism into the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, will mean the submission of convert–disciples into the authority and purposes of the Triune God. (vi) Baptism will bring salvation, where there is true belief. (vii) The converts are to follow all that Messiah has taught, and this implies a wide coverage relating to the Kingdom of God. (viii) The Kingdom will cover the world, to ‘the uttermost part’ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, in his people, as they witness to Messiah.

### (iii) The Commission to Paul

This commission is extremely important, for two reasons.

(i) The apostles and others had to await the revelation by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus promised that

(a) He would lead them into all the truth, and

(b) That he would empower them to witness to Messiah.

Hence, in the commissioning, certain elements of what was to be called ‘the apostles’ teaching’ were not present, even if fully implied.

(ii) Paul was given a special ministry to rationalise the kerugma. His was the mind which was to see clearly the implications and nature of the Gospel. His argument for apostolic authority in Galatians, even if it seems, at first sight, to be drawn out somewhat is made because apostolic

authority confirms that his understanding of the Gospel is revelatory, and to be accepted.

Passages which deal with his commission are:– Acts 9:4–22, 22:6–16, 26:12–20, (cf. Gal. 1:15–16, I Cor. 15:1–3). The elements within these are

- (i) Paul is to carry the name of Messiah to the Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel.
- (ii) Jesus is the Christ.
- (iii) Paul is to witness to the things he has seen and experienced, in regard to Messiah.
- (iv) Going to both Jews and Gentiles he is to preach repentance, conversion, forgiveness of sins, and to bring about the sanctification of hearers, namely those who believe.
- (v) He is to turn the Gentiles from the powers of darkness to light, from Satan to God.

In the case of the apostles who had companied with Jesus, the Spirit was to reveal the truth concerning Messiah. In Paul's case he had met Messiah, and having heard the commission was himself anointed of the Spirit.

#### **(iv) Conclusion**

It is obvious that the apostles, including Paul, did not merely need doctrinal directives, so much as they needed the equipment of both the Spirit and his revelation, in order to understand the events and teaching they themselves, under Christ, had experienced. Hence the actual message should not be confined to the relatively few details of kerugma which are contained in the commission passages.

### ***5. The Elements of The Kerugma***

It is difficult for us, because of our evangelical conditioning, to examine the kerugma without certain presuppositions, drawn mainly from what we understand kerugma to be in our age. Nor would it be possible by synthesising the sermons in Acts. That is, we cannot merely take the elements which are preached and then form a kerugma which we would hope to preach.

This is why the Gospels must be read thoroughly, and understood before proceeding to the Acts. Again the Acts must be read before a thorough understanding of the Gospels can be completed. Yet again the Old Testament must be understood, in its basic thesis of Covenant, Messiah, and Kingdom, before the Gospels and Acts can be really understood. The epistles of the New Testament are invaluable for their interpretation of the Old Testament events and predictions and the events of Christ as recorded in the Gospels and Acts. Hence it is against this background that we really understand the Kerugma. Nevertheless, this having been said, we can adduce, fairly substantially, from reading the proclamation in Acts, the true nature of the kerugma. For this reason we will list the various elements of the kerugma as we can trace them.

#### **(i) The Gospel is Biblical**

The preachers are anxious for their audience, when it is Israel, to understand that the events of Jesus are in conformity with the Old Testament. Nothing would have been intelligible to a Jew which, so to speak was snatched

out of the air. It had to be part of the continuity of his history. Hence in Acts 2, Peter uses Psalm 16 to prove the fact of the resurrection of Messiah, and then says this event has assuredly taken place. The death of the cross is also rationalised in the light of the Old Testament predictions of the Suffering Servant.

### **(ii) Jesus is Lord**

Following this rationalisation of the prophecies the fact of Jesus' resurrection proclaims him to be Lord. Hence the teaching that Jesus is Lord is immediately emphasised. Having risen he is obviously Lord over both life and death. Hence in him men can be forgiven, since death and sin are closely related.

The teaching that Jesus is Lord necessarily relates to the prophecies concerning Messiah. Hence Peter says 'both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36, cf. 10:36). Hence he is variously called 'the Holy and Righteous One', 'the Author of life', 'a Leader and a Saviour'.

### **(iii) The Cross is Predestined**

The cross was necessarily a stumbling block because of its criminal connotations, and none believed that Messiah was to be judged as criminal. To the contrary, he was to be judge of all. Peter says, '....this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed and crucified by the hands of lawless men'. (Acts 2:23), 'You... killed the Author of life whom God raised from the dead'. (Acts 3:14f). 'The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree'. (Acts 10:39). There is no 'theology of the cross' as such, but to speak of him being raised means that the cross has its own rationale. God does not reject Jesus because of it. Indeed, to the contrary, there is purpose in the Cross.

We should note at this point that the declaration of the forgiveness of sins cannot be separated from the Cross, but it is rarely, significantly, directly related to it, in preaching, in the book of Acts.

### **(iv) The Resurrection**

It can almost be said that this is primary in the kerugma. The fact of his resurrection, underscored by the inability of anyone to produce the body of Jesus, was the power of the kerugma. Jesus, being raised from the dead, was truly Lord (cf. Romans 10:9). Moreover there was Scripture which was predictive of resurrection. A new factor had come before men, in this resurrection. In I Cor. 15:1-14 Paul pursues the implications of resurrection, basing his argument on 'he died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and was raised again the third day, according to the Scriptures. However these are not, as such, immediately spelled out, in the sermons of the apostles.

### **(v) Messiah, Kingdom of God**

Jesus' lordship is his Messiahship. It is against this background that the Gospel is proclaimed. However, the use of the term 'kingdom' as such, rarely comes into the apostolic preaching. In Acts 8:5 Philip (not an apostle) 'went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ'.

In verse 12 'But when they believed Philip as he preached about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised,' shows that the concept of Messiah was powerfully before the people. No exposition as such, on the Messiah, or the Kingdom is necessary for the Jews, for they already understand these facts, but for the Samaritans clarification is necessary although the idea is by no means new to them. (Cf. John 4:25).

It is clear from Paul's statement in Acts 20:25, as also from Acts 28:23, 30–31, that the Kingdom of God was the essence of Paul's teaching. Acts 1:3–8 indicates that the Kingdom is what the apostles are about. Nevertheless we must keep in mind that in the text of the message there are no explicit mentions of the Kingdom.

### **(vi) Implications of Christ's Lordship: The Response to the Gospel**

Acts 2:37 is illuminating. When the Jewish audience heard what they had done with Messiah, they were shocked, and cried out in terror, 'What shall we do?' They recognised the Lordship of Messiah, so Peter enjoined, 'Repent and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'. He meant that they must submit to Christ's Lordship, and receive the forgiveness of sins. This forgiveness, presumably, was linked with his Lordship. To be baptised in his Name was to become his disciples and to receive the Holy Spirit must relate to the Kingdom, as we will see. Let us look at the details:

#### **(a) Repentance**

This is generally demanded, explicitly (cf. Acts 2:38, 3:19, cf. 5:31, 11:18, 20:21, 26:20), although in Acts 10:42f. it is not even mentioned, when the Gentiles are offered the gift of forgiveness. Repentance must be understood for its true nature. It was demanded by both John the Baptist and Jesus, as essential to entrance into the Kingdom. Meaning 'a change of mind' it is universally demanded, and commanded (Acts 17:30, cf. Luke 24:44f.). Without repentance there is no real submission to the Gospel.

#### **(b) Conversion**

The command is really to 'convert'. One has to turn. This is used in Acts 3:19 and is strange in regard to its use for Jews, for it seemingly makes them, as Gentiles. However it is explained in 3:26 as God having turned 'every one of you from your wickedness'. Paul uses the term in Acts 26:18f. for his task is to turn the Gentiles to God. However he has also used it with Jews as is evident from Acts 20:21. To convert (or, be converted) is to turn from having one attitude to God (i.e. the wrong attitude) to another (the true one) and at the same time to turn away from all that is wicked.

#### **(c) Believing**

John's Gospel is filled with the verb 'to believe'. rather than simply the noun 'belief'. In the Acts believing is enjoined in the proclamation, but usually implicitly, rather than explicitly. In Acts 2:4, the ones baptised are those who 'received his word' (Peter's), and this is believing. In 4:4 'But many of those who heard the Word believed'; in 5:14 'And more than ever believers were added to the Lord'. In Acts 8:12 the Samaritans believed Philip. In 9:42 many, seeing the miracle of Dorcas being raised from the dead, believe. Hence belief is enjoined. This is explicitly so in Acts 10:43 and 13:39. In Acts 20:21 Paul calls it 'faith in our Lord Jesus Christ'.

This, of course, is no simple thing. Belief in God is one thing, but that the man Jesus is the Lord by resurrection, and indeed the Son of God, this is another matter altogether. Faith, in the epistles, constitutes a gift of God, as indeed does repentance and forgiveness.

#### **(d) Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is undoubtedly offered as part of the kerugma, especially where there is repentance and turning. This was the gift John the Baptist had promised and Christ's Kingdom call was also implicitly a statement promising forgiveness. In much Rabbinic thinking the Kingdom would bring total forgiveness. Forgiveness would naturally follow if Jesus were Lord, a point which we will discuss, later in the study. Forgiveness is said to be a gift to Israel (Acts 5:31) and is promised in 2:38, 3:19, 10:43, 13:38 and other passages. The epistles make mention of the gift of forgiveness.

With forgiveness, in the Acts, is another related element. It is cleansing. When Peter in 3:19 speaks of the people's sins being 'blotted out' he is taking a figure other than forgiveness as such. In 22:16 Paul is told 'Rise and be baptised, washing away your sins'. Hence in 2:38 to be baptised is to have one's sins washed away. In 10:42f. the Gentiles are offered forgiveness, and in 10:47 they are baptised. Peter later explains what happened to the Gentiles. In 15:9–10 he speaks of them having their hearts cleansed by faith. This refers of course to their uncleanness as Gentiles being washed away, but it also refers to them now being a sanctified people, for in 26:18 Paul speaks of the Gentiles as receiving the forgiveness of sins and a place among those are sanctified by faith in Christ. (cf. I Peter 2:9–10 and Exodus 19:56).

#### **(e) The Gift of the Spirit**

This is promised explicitly in Acts 2:38 implicitly in 3:19–20, but obviously comes as the gift to those who believe. The Epistles assume that every believer received the gift at conversion. (Cf. Rom. 5:5, Gal. 3:3–5, Ephes. 1:13–14 etc.) Acts 19:1–7 is easily resolved when it is seen that the disciples there were of John the Baptist, and that they had not known of the coming of the Spirit. Following Christian baptism they receive the gift.

## ***6. The Response To The Kerugma***

The response was generally fairly clear-cut. Listeners either reacted against the message, rejecting it, or they responded, accepting it, and obeying it. As I Cor. 1:21 shows this method of kerugma is God's appointed method to save men and women. Hence the word of God brought either salvation or judgement. This is seen in John 20:23, where sins are either 'forgiven' or 'retained', and in Acts 2:38ff. where some reject and others accept. Likewise in Acts 5: 27–42 we see that the same proclamation enrages the Sanhedrin. Likewise in Acts 13:41 Paul warns against rejection. 13:42 to 52 shows both acceptance and rejection. Hence sins are either remitted or retained.

It is clear from Acts 6:7 that a 'great many of the priests were obedient to the faith', whilst later we see that a considerable number of Pharisees had joined the believers.

## ***7. The Mode and Context of The Proclamation***

We have seen that it is insufficient to try to disengage the basic

kerugma from the whole text of Acts. In fact we have seen that it is not genuine kerugma when we are simply trying to deduce a methodological teaching from the sermons given. Again, if we loose the action in the Acts from that of the Gospels, we cannot really understand it. In the Gospels the basic theme is the Kingdom of God.

John opens the action by preaching the Kingdom of God, and drawing in disciples, primarily in preparation of the coming of Messiah, whom he sees to be Jesus. John's promise was of three things – the Kingdom, forgiveness of sins, and the baptism (outpouring) of the Holy Spirit. It was expected that Jesus' ministry would be on these lines.

In one sense it was, and in another, it was not. Without doubt Jesus regarded his teaching and action of miracles, healings and exorcisms as being the very nature of the Kingdom which 'came upon' the believing hearers. He also taught much about the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom as such did not come in any dramatic or universal sense. It came upon persons, but did not come into overt and permanent operation. On one occasion Jesus encouraged his own disciples by saying, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.' On the night of his betrayal he had said, 'I appoint to you a Kingdom, as my Father has appointed to me a Kingdom'.

In regard to the gift of forgiveness, whilst Jesus occasionally spoke on forgiveness, he did not really promise it as total until the last supper, where he said the wine signified his blood, to be shortly shed for the remission of sins. Likewise he said little of the baptism, or outpouring of the Spirit until the night of his betrayal when he spoke at length concerning the coming (or the sending) of the Spirit.

For this reason we must recognise the significance of Jesus' post-resurrection teaching. Acts 1:3 indicates that this was concerning the Kingdom of God. This is perhaps one of the most significant comments in the whole matter of the kerugma, partly because the term kingdom is rarely used in the Acts, and not often in the Epistles, and partly because what was proclaimed must fit into this pattern.

The apostles recognised the inter-connection between the Kingdom (1:3) and the baptism in the Spirit (1:4-5). The summary of Acts 1:3-8 is as follows:- The subject Jesus taught in the forty days before he ascended was the Kingdom. This was linked with the outpouring of the Spirit for in every O.T. prophecy of the outpouring of the Spirit there is also equally a promise of the restoration to Israel of the Kingdom. The disciples saw the connection and expected immediate restoration of the Kingdom, although they limited it to Israel (see 1:6). Jesus had once indicated an immediate manifestation of the Kingdom (see Mark 9:1), and it was reasonable to believe seeing he had risen from the dead, that he might manifest the Kingdom at this point. His answer, however, put the matter of the Kingdom on a broader canvas, namely that of Israel, Samaria, and the entirety of the Gentiles. Also it was not for them to know the 'times or seasons'. The Father had them in hand. Nevertheless the coming of the Spirit would mean their participation in the whole work-out of the Kingdom, until it had come upon the entire earth, i.e. 'to the uttermost part'. (Cf. Psalm 2:8, Acts 1:8).

We must then understand this to be the background of the Kingdom proclamation.

This leads us on, also to see that the mode was related to the effecting of the proclamation. Their one precedent in Kingdom proclamation had been the action of Jesus as Messiah, operating as King-Messiah, in the locality of



Palestine. However another counsellor or paraclete had come (or, would come), namely the Holy Spirit (cf. John 14–15–16). He would guide them, and empower them in the work of the Kingdom. In Jesus this same Holy Spirit had directed the proclamation through Messiah. Now he would direct it through the church, that is the proclaiming people.

The precedent of kingdom–action they had had was the coming upon the powers of evil by healing, miracles and exorcisms (cf. Acts 10:38) with anticipation of a full revealing of the Kingdom. It is reasonable to assume they understood that much of their activity would be of a similar nature. Let us repeat, however, they would not have Jesus with them in the visible form, although he promised to be present. They would have with them the Holy Spirit and his power. He had also been present with them in the Kingdomaction when they were with Jesus. He had been amongst them, now he would be in them. See John 14:17. So then they would have reason to believe that the proclamation of the Kingdom, and the Gospel of the Kingdom would have similarities to their previous experience.

## **Proclamation in the Acts**

### **(a) Signs Wonders, Powers, Power**

The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost not only baptised the apostles and the remainder of the 120 present, but gave them their mode for proclamation. Because the Spirit was present their words were really the Word of God. The impact upon the hearers was powerful. The apostles did not seek to attract by doing healings, yet the signs of Pentecost certainly drew attention to their proclamation. For this reason we must take notice of Paul's stated mode of operation. In Romans 15:17–19 he tells us:

‘In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles (the nations), by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders) by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ’. It is often said that such signs were only ‘the signs of an apostle’ (see II Cor. 12:12) yet such were by no means limited to the apostles. See Philip, Stephen, and the list of I Cor. 12:29.

It must be seen that signs and wonders are not supernatural gimmicks to attract attention. They are ‘the powers of the age to come’ (Heb. 6:5) for ‘It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will’. (Hebrews 2:3–4). It is undoubtedly this to which Peter refers, ‘those who preached to you the good news through the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven’ (I Peter 1:12).

We have the evidence of the Holy Spirit giving Peter a power to communicate and convict, at Pentecost, and in the days following. We see the ministry of the Spirit through him to Jew, Samaritan and Gentile. Paul speaks likewise of ‘I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling: and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power’, and ‘Our gospel came to you, not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction’, whilst also he says, with contempt of the mere talkers, ‘For the Kingdom of God does not consist

in talk but in power'. See I Cor. 2:3–4, I Thess. 1:5, I Cor. 4:20.

The case of Philip and Stephen lends strength to the principle we have outlined above ~~ that the proclamation of the gospel is the Kingdom in action, coming upon men with power, for grace or judgement. Stephen, one, who with Philip, has helped in the arrangement for feeding widows, is now seen as one who 'full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people', and 'they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke'. (Acts 6:8–10). Philip, likewise, acts with great power, and in Samaria his ministry most closely approximates to that of Jesus when he was in Palestine.

'Philip went down to a city of Samaria, and proclaimed to them the Christ, and the multitude with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralysed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city'.

It is clearly true that such signs and powers are not mentioned continually in Acts, and that these operations are ascribed to the Lord himself. In Acts 19:8 we read 'And he (Paul) entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly arguing and pleading about the Kingdom of God and God did extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul...So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily'. (Acts 19:8,11,20). However, in some situations no miracle is mentioned. This does not mean then that everything is not 'kingdom-action', for the Gospel itself does not need to be adorned by supernatural happenings. It is in itself the power of God (Romans 1:16–17, I Cor. 1:18) and we shall examine this. Nevertheless Paul is able to write to the Galatians some time after the church has formed in their area, and say, 'Does he who supplies the spirit to you, and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' He means, 'God not only did miracles in the presence, but goes on doing them, especially where faith is present'.

### **(b) Team Ministry**

Proclamation is rarely a ministry undertaken by a single person, itinerating enthusiastically with the proclamation in mind. The corporate nature of the church, and its gifts, meant that the Gospel would be proclaimed by no less than two, working together. Jesus had sent his disciples out, two by two. Whatever the reason for this, maybe it is clear that the workers in Acts would wish to convey the nature of their fellowship, for this was a practical evidence of the Gospel and the proof of their love. Hence we find the Gospel is proclaimed in a team.

Paul and Barnabas go together, sent out by the church, and John Mark accompanies them. Paul, Silas and Timothy on another occasion at Antioch travel together, and the epistles speak of other travelling companions. Immediately the churches spring into life the corporate nature of the Christian fellowship is evidenced. It is this corporate nature which is itself part of the very proclamation. Individualistic salvation as such is not known although personal salvation is certainly pressed. However it is the new church which itself is the chief mode of proclamation.

This can be seen from Paul's commendation of the church at Thessalonica. He says, 'You became an example to all believers in Macedonia and 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'. By this it can be seen that proclamation was powerful where the church itself was vitally operative. Paul, as we have seen, spoke of

having 'fully preached the Gospel' where he had been. Observation shows that he did not go into every village and hamlet, but lit fires of proclamation at some central point, and these spread to cover those villages and hamlets. Hence the importance of having first a small team, – the apostolic band and then the larger team – the local church.

### **(c) The Personal Mode of Communication**

In some ways this is complex. Paul, in Romans 1:16–17 says he is not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes. He means that he must not adorn the Gospel, nor seek to argue its proofs, as such, but rather tell it as it is, and let it work.

Behind this thought is (a) The knowledge of the Spirit's power and presence to make the Gospel intelligible to human beings, and to convict and convert them. Without the Gospel – so to speak – the Spirit is helpless to do any of these things. The Gospel actually meets the personal and eternal needs of man. The Spirit only makes them appear in their true relevance and efficacy. (b) Because the Gospel is fitted to man's need, the proclaimer must himself first have experienced the Gospel.

By this we mean that the Spirit of truth cannot (or, will not) testify to the truth of the Gospel, when that truth has not yet become the experience of the proclaimer. We realise this is somewhat shaky ground on which we tread, because, in the sovereignty of God the Spirit can use anyone or anything. However the nature of truth is such that it comes through with conviction to others when the person who proclaims has already himself, come under its impact.

The truth of the Gospel is that man, created in God's image has become depraved, and whatever lines of the image remain in him, yet man is all the more evil because he denies the truth of creation, his subjection to the God of creation, and the Father of the Son. His guilt and impurity is such that none can do anything about it. He himself has no wish or desire to repent, change himself, and be reconciled to God and had he any such wish he has no moral power by which he could accomplish anything. God, in His love has planned man's salvation, and his return to the Father–Creator. The plan has at its core the redeeming cross of Christ. This alone meets man's needs and it meets them fully. The torturing conscience of man can only be set at rest at that cross. No other faith or religion, in all time, and in all space, can set the human conscience at rest. Only forgiveness and justification, based on the Cross can do that.

So then the Gospel sets it at rest. Therefore the proclaimer himself must have undergone what Paul calls 'washing', 'sanctification', 'justification'. So we can say 'He who has come under the cross and resurrection, and who lives under the Lordship of Christ, and the tutelage of the Father, he it is who can proclaim the Good News with power, sincerity and conviction'. We mean that the Spirit has fashioned him into a truth–teller, and the ring of truth is strong and clear in his proclamation. It is undeniable, it is powerful. It convinces.

It is also pertinent to add that the Epistles of all the New Testament writers show us that they related very warmly, personally, and lovingly to their converts. Their personal way of love, concern, and care adorned the teaching they brought, and helped to establish the new believers in the community of love and the Spirit. Hence there was a flow–on of the proclamation from the moment of reception.

## ***8. The Content of The Proclamation Applied***

We have seen how difficult it is to abstract the kerugma as such from the sermons of the Acts, and from the action of the apostles and evangelists. The use of the epistles to detect the deposit of apostolic teaching is a very intricate task. So much so that many good researchers have found themselves arguing for positions which would probably surprise the original proclaimers, could they read them, today.

It is clear, as we said previously, that the New Testament reader must be familiar with the Old Testament. He must also follow very closely the ministry of an apostle which was to interpret the events of Christ in the light of the Old Testament and the Old Testament in the light of the events of Christ. This was given as a complete revelation by the Holy Spirit, for on the day of Pentecost we are told that the church occupied itself not only in fellowship, prayer, and the breaking of bread but in 'the apostles' doctrine'. It had crystallised.

The mode of teaching in the early church was not after the modes we use today. Those proclaiming knew what they were saying. They knew they commenced where the people were seeking to lead them on to the full truth of salvation. For example Jews were never asked to believe in God. It was assumed they did. Non-Jews were told of God, and his nature. This is seen clearly in Acts 14 and 17. Then they were taught concerning Messiah, and the demand was that they respond to him.

It is sometimes said that none of the sermons, for example, speak of the cross as a means of redemption, and it is true that nothing of explicit nature is stated. Yet Paul says in I Cor. 1:17 – 2:5 that he was sent not to baptise but to preach the Gospel, not with wisdom of words lest the cross of Christ be made of none effect. He also said he resolved to know nothing amongst them save Christ crucified. He tells the Thessalonians that his gospel came not in word only but in power and much assurance. It is patent that there is no gospel apart from the Cross. He tells the Galatians that when he came Christ crucified was set forth before them. At Ephesus he argued and pleaded for three months in the school of Tyrannus. What about, if not the cross and the resurrection? The cross, as he says, was the stumbling block to the Jew. Again, the primary nature of the resurrection, so used in the sermons makes little sense without the cross, so that Paul argues in I Cor. 15 that if Christ be not risen then their sins are not forgiven.

It is sometimes argued that the apostles came preaching the Kingdom, expecting men to repent of their sins, and submit to the Lordship of Christ. It is said that since all men have departed from the God of creation they must repent. This, of course, is true enough, but the apostles go beyond this, declaring that grace of God which either evokes repentance or seeks the judgement of the hearers. Yet that Lordship would have been totally unintelligible, to the hearers except as some eternal authority (the eternal Son-Creator), unless it were shown that by the cross and resurrection he defeated the powers of Satan and evil by destroying the guilt of man. To show that the man Jesus is Lord is to show what he has effected. Even where Paul says that God has commanded all men, everywhere, to repent, he refers them back to their origination by the Father-Creator and forward to the judgement of Christ. (cf. Acts 17:24–30).

In acts 13 Paul's first message in Asia Minor promises forgiveness and justification through Christ. This must have some 'surround' or rationalisation of the cross and resurrection, for otherwise it would be unintelligible. Hence we can conclude that the brief speeches of Acts were much fuller in their speaking, than is recorded. We must also see that the homiletic method used was that of discourse. That is the audience would be allowed to raise points and have them answered, in which case the cross and resurrection must have been debated as to their significance and congruity with the Hebrew Scriptures.

For this reason the 20th chapter of Acts is immensely valuable. In verses 20 to 32 Paul speaks of his preaching, previously given as relating to

- (i) For both Jew and Greeks the need for
  - (a) Repentance to God, and
  - (b) Faith in Jesus Christ.
- (ii) This is the gospel of the grace of God.
- (iii) It is the preaching of the Kingdom.
- (iv) It constitutes the whole counsel of God.

The Epistles indicate that the content of the Gospel is fully known to readers. They may need to be reminded of it, or need to see the application of it for their fellowship, and way of life, yet they have heard it. Whilst it is reasonable to agree that in the very first impact the entire details of that Gospel would not be expounded yet the related elements of it would have to be known before a person could respond.

Sometimes in a rare instance, such as that of the Philippian jailer, it is claimed that there was immediate belief and conversion without the substance of the Gospel being preached. Whilst, doubtless, anything can happen, yet the reader of the account will perceive that Paul had been for some time in this city and that it had been publicly proclaimed by the demon-possessed girl that 'these are the servants of the Most High God. They will show you the way to salvation', and that what Paul taught must have been known, generally, in the city. Add to this the public trial, the examination and the sinning of Paul and Silas and there was probably little unknown to the jailor of Paul's basic teaching. Such situations could be multiplied.

We conclude, then, that the content of the kerugma must have been given intelligibly, and when understood the listener would know that forgiveness was based upon the cross and resurrection, whilst his promised freedom was based upon the liberating Lordship of Christ. His repentance would be evoked by the 'fear of the Lord', and 'the love of God', and he would see the Gospel in the context of the Kingdom of God, and the sovereign action of God in history. He would know, at least in rough outlines, 'the whole counsel of God'.

## ***9. The Responsibility of The Proclaimer***

In the text of the commission we see the fact that it is unintelligible, that men and women, wrought upon by the saving proclamation would not themselves then turn to proclaim. It has been argued that the commission was for the twelve, and at the most the 120. This is strange reasoning, because in the Acts believers are occupied in the matter of the Gospel. Those scattered by Stephen's death, many of whom were not in the 120 go to the Gentile city of Antioch and a church begins, composed of both Jews and Gentiles. The 'utter

most part of the earth' is the fixed perimeter for Gospel preaching, and this has involved centuries of expansion, and countless numbers of Christian believers.

The command to proclaim involves every believer, and the whole dynamic operation of the entire church. Whilst it is true that Paul received a personal commission, as an apostle, and especially as an apostle to the Gentiles, yet he knew that the blood of man was upon him if he did not execute this commission fully. Cf. Acts 20:26–27, I Cor. 9:16. His reference back to Ezekiel 3 signifies that he saw the importance of his commission, and his answerability before God if he failed.

All this being said, the very nature of the Gospel, in its saving power, naturally condemns the silent believer. He must, somehow, communicate, however inarticulate he is as a person, and however uncalled as an evangelist. In the whole situation he has a part to play in the action of proclamation.

This, again, must be understood in the light of the whole plan and counsel of God. It must be understood in the light of the action of the Kingdom of God. Below we speak of the proclamation as the command of God, and of the need for man to obey. When we understand this we will strip ourselves of current misunderstandings, such as extending the numbers of our denominational groups, or seeking to get the upper hand as a power-group, or seeing missionary work as an application of western enlightenment, or a counter to growing evil. None of these constitutes the proclamation. Hence, if we are not proclaimers in the sense that we are evangelists, nevertheless in the intricate working of the church, the body of Christ, we have been given a functional part, and we must be aware of this, and be faithful to it.

It may, then, be observed, that much of the incipient guilt many believers feel, and some of the unaccountable surges of anxiety, could well stem from a refusal, either explicit or otherwise, to participate in the proclamation of the good news.

## ***10. The Final Nature of Kerugma: Kerugma is Command***

The nature of the proclamation as command seems to have evaded some New Testament readers. This may be because the wider context of the Gospel is not seen. For example the use of Psalm 2 in the New Testament indicates that the early believers saw Jesus as the King–Messiah–Son of that Psalm, and of course other associated scriptures which claim that he was to be the one to whom the world was to listen. He was attested by God at his birth, baptism, transfiguration, and resurrection as the Son. He claimed to be the Son of Man, the ruler of the Kingdom of Daniel chapter seven. He was seen to be Messiah, son of David, the one on whose shoulder was the Kingdom, and this Kingdom was to be eternal.

Hence, John the Baptist's announcement of the imminent Kingdom was likewise proclamation of its Messiah–King, and the need for men to obey him. The kerugma statement of I Cor. 1:21 (and context) infers that God has spoken, and acted, in Christ, and His command is now proclaimed to men, who are to repent and obey the Gospel.

The following Scriptures bear out this proposition:– In II Thess. 1:7–8, '...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus'. Romans 6:17 'But thanks

be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you become obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed'. Acts 6:7: '... a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith'. Romans 1:5 'Jesus Christ, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith ... among all the nations.' Romans 15:18 '... to win obedience from the Gentiles...' Romans 16:26 '....to bring about the obedience of faith'. Romans 10:16 'for they have not all obeyed the gospel'.

In addition to these Scriptures is the fact that God has commanded all men, everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Hence when the Gospel is preached and men seek to escape the wrath of God they must obey the command to repent and believe. So often these statements are couched in the imperative. If it is said, of II Cor. 5:20 that Paul 'beseeches' his hearers, then it should be seen that word 'beseech' is in fact, the word 'exhort', and does not so much indicate pleading as it does urgent warning, i.e. 'You must obey!'

An understanding that Jesus is Lord, and that judgement is coming does not decrease the love-content of the Kerugma, but in fact enhances it. It is love to warn: it is godly to command repentance and belief. If men will not obey the Gospel, then it will judge them. This does not place the proclaimer in a position of judgemental action or spirit. He has shown the way to life. It has been ignored 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation' (Hebrews 2:1-4) in its context means that under the old law disobedience received a terrible punishment, How much more where there is this rejection of grace! Hence Paul says, 'Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men', meaning not that he is afraid of the Lord, so much as he sees the terror of the Lord's judgement upon sinners. When he persuades it is no mere academic matter. It is a matter of life and death. He may not hesitate to plead, but his pleading is that of a man with his brother man. He is pleading with him to obey!

Again, this command must be seen in the light of the fact of the Kingdom, the King, the ultimate triumph of God upon earth and the destruction of evil, and the punishment of unrepentant sinners. This adds urgency and a solemn sense of responsibility to his ministry. He senses that 'woe is upon me, if I preach not the Gospel.' For this reason we must all be in the ministry of reconciliation, expecting the power of the Spirit to communicate the Word in all its convicting, converting and judging elements.

As we have said: to live under this proclamation is to be able to utter it, and utter it effectively. As for the powerful elements of 'Kingdom-action' – they take many forms, sometimes in unusual signs and wonders, outwardly and sometimes inwardly. Whether seen or not, we cannot pause. We must ever be about proclaiming, knowing the power of the Gospel and the Spirit, knowing our own innate weakness, yet glorying in the mystery of men and women responding, in obedience, to the glory of the Father and His eternal grace and love.

## ***11. What Then, Do We Proclaim?***

A study such as this must be inconclusive. If the proclaimer should know the whole of the Gospel, the full counsel of God, then it means he must fashion it out for himself. He must have come under its operations, and have been so gripped by it that he cannot desist from sharing it with others. Nevertheless at any point any believer should know what he is about, and what he should tell. We conclude then that the following elements should be covered.

‘God is Creator. He made man in His image and to be His child, and to reflect his glory. Man rebelled against God, and became sinful and lost. God promised Abraham that he would bless all nations of the earth through his seed. He made a covenant with Abraham, and that covenant particularised itself with Israel, God's chosen people. They were to cradle Messiah, and although they failed in many respects they fulfilled this prophetic prediction, for in it was God's purpose to save His elect, and to produce His true people. This the prophets spelt out clearly.

In accordance with these predictions – the will of God – the Word of God, God's eternal Son became flesh, and dwelt with men, and being attested as the Son of God, the Messiah of the Kingdom, he went about doing good, and healing the oppressed of evil, and in accordance with the Scriptures died on the cross, becoming sin for man, being the curse of sin, and bearing the sins of mankind in his body on the tree, thus setting up the remission of sins apart from, and beyond the sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant. He was the mediator of the better covenant, the new covenant, or the Abraham covenant come to fulfilment. In the cross, and by his resurrection he triumphed over the power of sin, evil, and death, and fulfilled the demands of the law, thus setting men free from the law's condemnation, and reconciling them to God.

The man Jesus, through the cross and resurrection was attested both the Son–Messiah, King of the Kingdom, and Lord over all the universe. In the light of this men must repent, and have faith in Jesus Christ, and come under his Lordship. Repentance and faith will bring the forgiveness of sins, and by the work of Christ, such will be justified, and sanctified, becoming part of the holy people of God. Moreover they will be adopted, that is God will make them His sons by this decree of love. He will send 'the Spirit of His Son, into their hearts, both the sons and the Spirit crying ‘Abba! Father!’ They will also cry ‘Jesus! Lord!’

Those who do not repent cannot receive forgiveness, and are cast out. They will have no part in the Kingdom of God. The Gospel, therefore is a command to all men, everywhere, to repent, and come to God by Christ. This same Christ is working out the victory of the cross in history, until ultimately every enemy will be subjected to him, and he will have conquered the kingdom of evil and of rebellious man and will give it to the Father that God may be all in all. In the light of these things men must repent, either in fear of judgement or in response to the love and grace of God.

This ‘foolishness’ of the Cross – as men count it – is the wisdom of God, whereby He redeems man, and judges the finally impenitent. The announcement of the good news must be obeyed, for ultimately all will have to obey.

The result of this Gospel–obedience is not only the freedom from sin's penalty, its pollution and its power, and not only reconciliation with God, and membership of His family, but it is assurance of eternal life, now, and to come, and participation in the age to come in the joy and bliss of the new heaven and the new earth, in which all things will be pure, and redeemed man will be glorified, and see God, face to face’.

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The manner of our proclamation, the motive and thrust, as we have seen will be from three sources, which operate as one the love of the Father, the Lordship and direction of the Son, and the power, enablement, and love of the Holy Spirit. As sons, we will do that which the Son does, for he is



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with us 'unto the end of the age'. When needs be, it will be the Spirit of our Father who will speak from within, and we will be empowered and made bold by the Holy Spirit.

Best of all, some will hear, and be redeemed, and that is the sweetest and most wonderful fruit of all!

....ooOoo....