



The Message of the Apostles: A Model for Proclamation

A Christian who reads the first twelve chapters of the book of Acts in the New Testament will notice that the fledgling church consistently *witnessed* and *prayed* as the means by which people were brought to salvation. Indeed, a picture emerges of the early church in the New Testament which is occupied with a burning compassion for the lost. The commission Jesus gave to His disciples to go into the whole world seemed foremost in all of their thinking and planning.

Good News

It is very informative and interesting to analyze the twelve messages of Peter and the twelve of Paul which are recorded in the Acts. Whether to Jews (Acts 2:14ff.; 13:16ff.) Gentile proselytes (Acts 10:34ff.) or pagans (Acts 17:22ff.) the message was consistently good news, i.e., it was positive. It attracted people to Jesus. J. B. Phillips identified this key to the early church's message in his commentary on Acts:

I would warmly commend to every modern evangelist a study of the actual Message proclaimed by the young Church. The call of the Good News was not the emphasis on man's sinfulness, but that the Man Jesus *whom many of them had known personally* was no less than God's Chosen One. Through this Man Jesus, God had made Himself personally known; the proof that the Man Jesus was God's Christ was the Resurrection, a shining fact to which many of them were eyewitnesses; the Good News was that if men would turn from their former ways and accept the forgiveness of God through Christ, then the Spirit of God was living and available to enter their hearts and transform them. Those who so accepted the fact that God had become Man in Christ were "followers of the Way," and since they now shared the truest human loyalty they enjoyed the deepest possible fellowship. (J. B. Phillips, *The Young Church in Action* [New York: Macmillan, 1955], p. xiii., [emphasis added])

This is not to say that the reality of man's sinfulness and consequent separation from God is absent from apostolic preaching. The message of Romans makes that very clear. Rather, the *emphasis* is on the grace of God which has provided the way of righteousness through Jesus Christ. It is an invitation to be set free to follow Him, to experience victory and His touch, and to have assurance of eternal life. Its focus is Jesus—and He is Good News!

The Substance and Pattern of the Apostolic Message

There is a New Testament word appearing about eight times which has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, i.e., *kerugma* (Greek: κηρυγμα, pronounced kay'-roog-mah). This Greek noun is thought by some to emphasize the *substance* of the apostles' preaching as distinct from their *activity* of preaching (the latter usually identified with the verb *kerusso* [Greek: κηρυσσω, pronounced kay-roos'-so] cf. Acts 19:13; 28:31; Romans 10:15). Indeed, Paul's use of the word sometimes does refer to the message itself. He says that salvation has come through the message (*kerugma*) preached (1 Corinthians 1:21; cf. 2:4) and he rejoiced to Timothy that the Lord gave him strength so that the "message (*kerugma*) might be fully proclaimed" (2 Timothy 4:17). What is the message to which he refers?

"What?"

The apostle Peter clearly revealed that the central focus of the church's message at Pentecost (Acts 2:22-40) is a person—that is, *Jesus*. The church is alive, he said, primarily for one reason: Jesus is alive! Peter appealed to the historical and miraculous *life* of Jesus (verse 22); His purposeful and voluntary *death* (verse 23); and His triumph through the *resurrection* (verses 24, 32). In other words, the "what" of the apostolic message was: *Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus lives*.

The certain truth of the resurrected Jesus is the message of hope which is repeated again and again in the Acts. After healing the lame beggar (3:2ff.) Peter spoke of the "Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses" (3:15). Note that Peter used the evidence at hand—the historical facts. In his case, he could speak as a personal eyewitness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He also appealed to the audience's own knowledge of historical events (they knew of Jesus, cf. 2:22; 3:13, and in fact had had a hand in his death). He also drew their attention to the power exhibited before them in Jesus' name (they had seen the lame man walk, 3:9,10).

The priests and Sadducees were upset, and arrested Peter and John because they were "teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4:2). Even after being threatened, Peter and John steadfastly maintained, "We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard" (4:20). This is summed up later: "And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (4:33). The apostle Paul likewise appealed to the eyewitness

quality of the “what” in his preaching (cf. Acts 17:31; 26:23; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

“So What?”

The foundation of historical and extraordinary facts concerning Jesus made possible a second important component of the apostolic message. In his preaching at Pentecost, Peter drew out the *theological consequence* of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus: that is, that He is both Lord and Christ, i.e. Messiah (Acts 2:36). The historical facts authenticated His deity. Because of this, Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father with absolute authority, and all will eventually stand in judgment before Him (Philippians 2:9-11).

“Oh, I see!”

Finally, the message of Peter—spoken by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—concluded with an *invitation* or call for the people to respond. They were to repent of their sins and be baptized. As a result, Peter assured them of forgiveness from God and the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, i.e., they were saved (verse 40). The pattern of the apostolic Gospel was only complete when a summons to commitment was delivered.

Putting it all together

The apostles of Jesus established the substance and pattern used most effectively to present the Gospel of salvation to the unbelieving world. This threefold pattern is referred to as the “kerugma”—after the Greek word used to identify it in the New Testament.

1. “What?” – The historical evidence and facts concerning Jesus’ life, death and resurrection
2. “So What?” – The resulting consequence that Jesus is both Lord (God) and Christ (Messiah)
3. “Oh, I See!” – The call to respond by repentance from sin and by faith to follow Him

This is what preaching the Gospel means in the New Testament. For example, Paul, writing to the Roman Christians (1:16) says, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” When the contemporary church senses that it is ineffective in its ministry to the world, it needs to reevaluate the message it is preaching. Only the substance and pattern of the Gospel as modeled by the apostles will be adequate to satisfy the mind and transform the heart of lost people.

The Apostolic Message is the *FaithSearch* Message

FaithSearch Discovery, our flagship materials and event, was built and has been presented for thirty years on this apostolic pattern. Indeed, our *FaithSearch* mission is “to proclaim the Gospel with evidence.”

1. The “What?” is accomplished by proclaiming Jesus’ life, teaching and miracles as recorded in the New Testament. Whereas Peter could appeal to his audience’s firsthand knowledge of the life of Jesus, two thousand years later we must point to the New Testament account of those events. And in today’s culture of skepticism, it is necessary to use historical and archaeological evidence to establish the New Testament as an accurate, eyewitness record of the facts concerning Jesus. Through this “Gospel with evidence” approach, skeptical resistance is removed and the mind of the unbeliever is satisfied.
2. The “So What?” then follows: Having established the New Testament account as authentic and its recorded facts as historical, we can discuss the import of the life of Jesus: Someone who has demonstrated authority and power over sin, death, nature and the spirit world is surely not mortal man alone. He is God incarnate and the only Savior. He said and did things which no mere man can say or do. And as God, He made claims upon those who heard and saw Him.
3. Finally, we do as the apostles did: We invite people to respond in faith to this Jesus: by repentance from sin and confession of faith to receive new life by the Holy Spirit. What a joy it is to see hundreds and hundreds of people each year exclaim, “Oh, I see!” They now have not only a satisfied mind, but a transformed heart as well.

FaithSearch Discovery faithfully embodies the complete “kerugma”—the apostolic substance and pattern of preaching salvation. That’s why each of our evangelists must have—or must develop—a *FaithSearch* passion. That is, that our apostolic message is still the critical need in the world today—and it’s worth giving our lives to its proclamation.



“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.... God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact” (Acts 2:22,32).