



Southwestern

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY



Theology Applied



THE GOSPEL, EVANGELISM, AND MISSIONS: Exegetical Observations and Theological Implications of Apostolic Proclamation and Action (Acts 2:22-41)

Matt Queen*

When defining *evangelical Christianity*, or the *evangelical faith*, John Stott claimed, “[E]vangelical Christianity is original, apostolic, New Testament Christianity ... [T]he evangelical faith is not a deviation from Christian orthodoxy.”¹ He continued, “In seeking what it means to be evangelical, it is inevitable that we begin with the gospel. For both our theology (evangelicalism) and our activity (evangelism) derive their meaning and their importance from the good news (the evangel).”² Evangelistic and missionary episodes of gospel proclamation in the New Testament, as well as theological explanations of the gospel in the Scriptures, govern and form a practical theology of evangelism and missions.

Acts 2:22-41 presents a thorough expression of the gospel, evangelism, and missions. Lewis Drummond affirmed, “*The heart and essence of the basic gospel that holds for all* can be found in Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost.”³ Through his teaching, preaching, and example, Jesus prepared his apostles for the evangelistic and missionary proclamation and practice they would enact when they received the Spirit. As George W. Peters stated in his classic theology of missions,

¹John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity, and Faithfulness* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2013), 2-3.

²Stott, *Evangelical Truth*, 11.

³Lewis Drummond, *The Canvas Cathedral: Billy Graham’s Ministry Seen through the History of Evangelism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 93 (emphasis added).

*Matt Queen serves as the associate dean of the Roy J. Fish School of Evangelism and Missions. He also holds the L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

“The sense of the missionary thrust of Christ comes into clear focus as we consider His basic theological concepts and presuppositions. All of them are filled with missionary content and charged with missionary dynamic. They only awaited Pentecost to be discharged with full fervor and force.”⁴ For these reasons this essay exegetically examines and interprets the earliest apostolic proclamation of the gospel, as well as the first episode of apostolic evangelism, as recorded in Acts 2:22-41, with the intent to draw biblical-theological implications about how it governs and informs gospel proclamation and practice in contemporary evangelism and missions.

I. AN EXEGETICAL EXAMINATION OF ACTS 2:22-41⁵

The account of Peter’s Pentecost discourse comes after Jesus had given his disciples the command to wait for the arrival of his Spirit (1:5). He then ascended into heaven as they awaited his gift of the Spirit that would empower them to be witnesses of him, beginning first in Jerusalem and then to the rest of the world (1:8). Luke’s accounting of Peter’s speech summarizes the message and describes the evangelistic methods by which the apostles and the early church proclaimed the gospel that was announced at Pentecost.

After presenting the audience an explanation and defense of the Spirit’s manifestation through the disciples of Jesus, Peter addressed the religious Jews in attendance in verse 22—an important detail for two reasons. First, he appealed to an audience who, like him, accepted the veracity of the Scriptures. Second, Peter addressed his audience as *andres Israelitai* in a religious context, reminding them of the covenant established between them and Yahweh.⁶

Peter urgently presented to them Jesus Christ, who was the core of his message and preaching. His example teaches that Christian preaching should focus upon Jesus.⁷ He explained that Jesus was *apodedeigmenon apo tou theou* through the *dunamesi kai terasi semeiois* he performed. James D. G. Dunn pointed out the uniqueness of this

⁴George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 39.

⁵Portions of the exegetical content of this article have been modified from Matthew Burton Queen, “A Theological Assessment of the Gospel Content in Selected Southern Baptist Sources,” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 43-62

⁶Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 92.

⁷C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (The International Critical Commentary, vol. 1; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 140.

passage, along with 10:36-39, in that they are “the only passages in the Acts speeches which say anything about Jesus’ pre-crucifixion ministry.”⁸ Luke appears to mean that these “miracles, wonders, and signs” did not constitute his appointment or even serve as proof of Jesus’ status. Rather these acts revealed Jesus was God’s special agent, through whom he was working in a unique way.⁹

Peter explained that this unique way in which he was working occurred through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Frank Stagg asserted, “The first major task of apostolic preaching was to deal with the ‘scandal of the cross.’”¹⁰ In dealing with it, Peter explained in verse 23 that the cross was a part of God’s purpose in Jesus Christ, but mankind was held responsible for his death. Eckhard J. Schnabel suggested, “This is the paradox of Jesus’ death: it was engineered and carried out by human beings, while at the same time it was the climax of God’s plan of salvation.”¹¹ Although Peter succinctly presented his case about Jesus’ death, he expanded his case by expounding on his resurrection. As Craig S. Keener explained, “Although Jesus’ death is pivotal, it is his resurrection over which the speech ‘lingers’ (Acts 2:24-36). Dwelling on that point was one way to emphasize it.”¹²

Verses 25-28 comprise the next section of Peter’s discourse. In these verses he employed the LXX translation of Psalm 16:8-11. David G. Peterson explained, “The contrast between God’s exaltation of Jesus and the attitude of those who opposed him is a central aspect of the apostolic preaching. Jesus’ resurrection was his ultimate accreditation and vindication as God’s servant and Messiah. The latter point comes out emphatically as Peter begins to demonstrate the fulfillment of David’s words (vv. 25-36).”¹³

F. F. Bruce claimed that from its earliest days, the Christian church maintained that the exaltation of Jesus occurred in direct

⁸James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Narrative Commentaries; Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 29.

⁹Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 141.

¹⁰Frank Stagg, *The Book of Acts: The Early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel* (Nashville: Broadman, 1955), 58.

¹¹Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 142.

¹²Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 943.

¹³David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 147.

fulfillment of God's promises to David, as those found in Psalm 16.¹⁴ Although Luke's understanding of the original meaning of Psalm 16 is disputed, Keener asserted, "At the least, the psalmist spoke of deliverance from death (probably beforehand), and if the principles in the psalms of righteous sufferers applied to Jesus par excellence, so did the vindication they promised."¹⁵ Peter incorporated this Psalm into his sermon in order to support his contention that God raised Jesus from the dead and thus fulfilled David's prophecy concerning the Messiah and his resurrection.

Peter's use of this Old Testament prophecy infers that he sought biblical evidence to corroborate the case he presented. As Simon J. Kistemaker suggested, his use of Psalm 16:8-11 taught that: 1) David puts his trust completely in God (2:25); 2) Because of the intimacy between God and David, along with the trust he places in him, David's heart was filled with joy and happiness (2:26); and 3) Although David referred to himself in the first part of v. 27, the second half of the verse is clearly a prophecy about the Messiah and his resurrection. The prophetic nature of this psalm proves evident when Peter points to the evidence of David's tomb in Jerusalem, but Christ's tomb is empty because God raised him from the dead, something of which Peter can testify (2:29-32).¹⁶ After presenting his case, Peter confidently presented two witnesses concerning the veracity of the gospel—the Word of God (2:25-28) and the eyewitnesses of the apostles, themselves (2:32).

In vv. 29-36, Peter explained the prophecy of Psalm 16:8-11. While many in the audience may not have known enough about Peter to trust his words, they all knew enough about David. Peter referred to David as *patriarchou* (2:29), as well as *prophetes* (2:30), and his prophecy (2:27b) remained unfulfilled until the resurrection of Christ (2:31). The fact that David was referring to the Messiah instead of himself is explained by Peter when he informed his listeners that David's body could still be found buried in a tomb, whereas Jesus

¹⁴F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, rev. ed. (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 71. Keener states concerning Luke's use of the messianic psalms in Acts, "Luke readily follows the early Christian christocentric hermeneutic." Keener, *Acts*, 946.

¹⁵Keener, *Acts*, 945, presents a summary of disputed views about how Luke understood the original sense of Psalm 16.

¹⁶Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, 95-96.

had been resurrected and exalted to God's throne.¹⁷

In vv. 32-33, Peter recognized the redemptive facts about Christ's resurrection and ascension and made a connection between them and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ For those who did not have the benefit of witnessing the resurrected Christ as the disciples did, the Spirit manifested himself to the crowd to attest to his presence and his role in fulfilling Old Testament prophecy.

Finally, as if David's body in the tomb and Christ's exaltation to the Father's right hand were not convincing enough, Peter incorporated one more Davidic exclamation. He quoted Psalm 110:1 and used it to argue for the lordship and messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth. Peter used this Scripture reference as one final piece of biblical evidence to confirm his contention that Jesus is both Lord and Messiah. Psalm 110:1 confirmed Peter's claim for more than just the obvious reason that David, by virtue of his body's being in the tomb, could not be the one seated at the Lord's right hand. He included this psalm as further biblical evidence because, as Kistemaker explained:

The Jewish people interpreted Scripture with the hermeneutic rule of verbal analogy. That is, if two passages have a verbal analogy (as in the case of the two quotations from the Psalter), then the one passage must be interpreted as the other. The Jews considered Psalm 110 to be messianic, and therefore they had to interpret the passage from Psalm 16 messianically.¹⁹

Clearly Peter's belief that Jesus is Lord and Messiah was not a cleverly constructed fable he fabricated. From their post-Pentecostal perspective, this claim was found and foretold in the Scriptures.²⁰

¹⁷Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, 98.

¹⁸Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, 100.

¹⁹Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, 101.

²⁰Darrell Bock emphasizes the presence of Jesus' lordship in this passage, as well as in Acts as a whole. He writes, "[Acts 2:21, 32-39] is one of the most important [passages] in Acts. It sets forth the first post-resurrection preaching about Jesus. Acts 2:21 shows that salvation was the subject at hand; the promise of salvation was held out for those who responded to the message." He continues by asking, "What is the nature of the Lord who was offered to the audience in this chapter? (Note how the response called for in v. 38 is preceded by the confession in v. 36 that God made Jesus κύριον ... καὶ Χριστόν.) Acts 2:32-36 gives the answer ... The term κύριον in verse 36 looks back to the previous use of κυρίου in verse 21. The repetition of the term serves to underscore the point that the κυρίος who is confessed is Jesus. The exalted position of Jesus is why baptism is to

Jesus employed Psalm 110 in his teaching (Matt 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37), as did other biblical authors, who referenced and alluded to it throughout the New Testament (*e.g.*, Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20, 22; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13, 8:1, 10:12, 13, 12:2; and 1 Pet 3:22).

John Polhill stated:

Psalm 110:1 was a favorite text for the early church. ... Originally it may have been an enthronement psalm acknowledging the earthly king as God's representative. For the early Christians it became the basis for the affirmation that Jesus has been exalted to God's right hand. For Peter it served as a natural transition from the confession of Jesus as Messiah, the dominant concept to this point, to the ultimate confession that Jesus is Lord.²¹

Perhaps in some way, Peter's use of Psalm 110:1 served the church as a template in order to teach the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Verses 37-41 form the final segment of this passage. The Holy Spirit used the witnesses of Scripture and the apostles' proclamation to convict the crowd. Convinced by the evidence and seized with remorse, the hearers begged Peter and the apostles to instruct them in what they should do. Concerning their conviction and convincing, Ernst Haenchen asserted, "The very form of address they use, *andres adelphoi*, shows that their hearts are already won over."²² Peter explained to the anxious audience that they should receive the promise of salvation through repentance, signified by water baptism. Concerning the meaning and importance of the call to repentance Schnabel explained:

The exhortation to repent means, here, that the Jews in Jerusalem regret their (active or passive) involvement

be in His name (v. 38). 'Lord' in verse 36 serves to identify Jesus with God.

... He is the One who is exalted and sits at God's right hand mediating the gifts and promise of God. Thus, the Lord Jesus confessed in Acts 2 is the divine Mediator of the gifts of salvation. He is the One on whom men must call to be saved." Darrell Bock, "Jesus as Lord in Acts and in the Gospel Message," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (April-June 1986): 147-148.

²¹John B. Polhill, *Acts* (New American Commentary, vol. 31; Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 115.

²²Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (trans. Bernard Noble, Gerald Shin and R. McL. Wilson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 183-184.

in the crucifixion of Jesus, that they confess this tragic sin, that they feel sorry for their rejection of Jesus, that they turn away from and change their former attitude concerning Jesus, and that they accept Jesus as the promised Messiah and the risen and exalted Lord.²³

All that Peter had conveyed to them found its climax in his call for them to repent. Peter's invitation to receive the forgiveness of sins through repentance summarizes the standard call issued to first-century audiences.²⁴

The correlation between baptism and salvation in verse 38 calls for an excursus at this point. Polhill notes the uncommon connection of the forgiveness of sins and baptism in Luke-Acts. In addressing its connection found in this passage he writes, "In fact, in no other passage of Acts is baptism presented as bringing about the forgiveness of sins."²⁵ Scholars have widely debated on the grammatical interpretation of the relationship between the forgiveness of sins and baptism in this verse. Schnabel explained,

The preposition "for" (*eis*) in the expression "for the forgiveness of sins" raises the question of the relationship between immersion in water (baptism) and the forgiveness of sins. Some interpret the preposition as expressing purpose (the purpose of baptism is the forgiveness of sins), some as expressing result (baptism

²³Schnabel, *Acts*, 161. Schnabel proceeds to elaborate on what he understands the Pentecostal audience's repentance to entail: "When the repentant Jews are immersed 'in the name of Jesus the Messiah' (ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), several things happen as they invoke that name. 1. They publicly acknowledge that Jesus is Israel's Messiah and Savior—the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord who rules on David's throne at God's right hand. 2. They acknowledge that immersion for cleansing from impurity is *now* fundamentally connected with the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah. 3. They acknowledge their personal need for repentance on account of the fact that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior whom they had rejected. 4. They acknowledge Jesus as the cause of the forgiveness they seek. They publicly confess that Jesus has the authority and power to cleanse them from their sins. They invoke the name of Jesus, who is at God's right hand in heaven, calling on him to be saved. 5. They acknowledge Jesus' presence in their lives, Jesus' attention to their needs, and Jesus' intervention for their salvation" (163-64).

²⁴I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 80.

²⁵Polhill, *Acts*, 117. Moreover, Polhill cites B. Sauvagnat's contention that a further reading of Acts reveals that if not linked with repentance, forgiveness is connected with faith over that of baptism. B. Sauvagnat, "Se repentir, etre baptize, recevoir l'Esprit: Actes 2:37ss.," *Foi et Vie* 80 (1981): 77-89.

results in forgiveness). A contextually more plausible interpretation assumes a causal meaning (forgiveness of sins is the cause of baptism).²⁶

Concerning the causal use of *eis*, most advocates of this view note J. R. Mantey's hypothesis of its occurrence in both Hellenistic Greek and New Testament sources.²⁷ Critics, however, point to Ralph Marcus's rebuttal of Mantey's work.²⁸

In response, Daniel Wallace has suggested four alternative views of *eis* in Acts 2:38:

If a causal εἰς is not in view, what are we to make of Acts 2:38? ... 1) *The baptism referred to here is **physical** only*, and εἰς has the meaning of *for* or *unto*. Such a view, if this is all there is to it, suggests that salvation is based on works. The basic problem of this view is that it runs squarely in the face of the theology of Acts, namely: (a) repentance precedes baptism (*cf.* Acts 3:19; 26:20), and (b) salvation is entirely a gift of God, not procured via water baptism (Acts 10:43 [*cf.* v [*sic*] 47]; 13:38-39, 48; 15:11; 16:30-31; 20:21; 26:18). 2) *The baptism referred to here is **spiritual** only*. Although such a view fits well with the theology of Acts, it does not fit well with the obvious meaning of "baptism" in Acts—especially in this text (*cf.* 2:41). 3) *The text should be repunctuated* in light of the shift from second person plural to third person singular back to second person plural again. If so, it would read as follows: "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized at the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins." If this is the correct understanding,

²⁶Schnabel, *Acts*, 164-165.

²⁷See J. R. Mantey, "The Causal Use of *Eis* in the New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 70 (1952): 45-58, and "On Causal *Eis* Again," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 70 (1952): 309-311.

²⁸See Ralph Marcus, "On Causal *Eis*," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 70 (1952): 129-130, and "The Elusive Causal *Eis*," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1953): 43-44. One should be aware; however, that along with Marcus's strong conviction against any evidence indicating the causal use of εἰς in the Hellenistic Greek sources Mantey offers, he does concede this much: "It is quite possible that εἰς is used causally in [Acts 2:38] but the examples of causal εἰς cited from non-biblical Greek contribute absolutely nothing to making this possibility a probability. If, therefore, Professor Mantey is right in his interpretation of various NT passages on baptism and the remission of sins, he is right for reasons that are non-linguistic."

then εἰς is subordinate to μετανοήσατε alone, rather than to βαπτισθήτω. The idea then would be, “Repent *for/with reference to* your sins, and let each one of you be baptized.” Such a view is an acceptable way of handling εἰς, but its subtlety and awkwardness are against it. 4) Finally, it is possible that to a first-century Jewish audience (as well as to Peter), *the idea of baptism might incorporate both the spiritual reality and the physical symbol*. In other words, when one spoke of baptism, he usually meant *both* ideas—the reality and the ritual. Peter is shown to make the strong connection between these two in chapters 10 and 11. In 11:15-16 he recounts the conversion of Cornelius and friends, pointing out that at the point of their conversion they were *baptized* by the Holy Spirit. After he had seen this, he declared, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit ...” (10:47). The point seems to be that if they have had the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit via spiritual baptism, there ought to be a public testimony/acknowledgment via water baptism as well. This may not only explain Acts 2:38 (*viz.*, that Peter spoke of both reality and picture, though only the reality removes sins), but also why the NT speaks of only baptized believers (as far as we can tell): Water baptism is not a cause of salvation, but a *picture*; and as such it serves both as a public acknowledgment (by those present) and a public confession (by the convert) that one has been Spirit-baptized.²⁹

Wallace’s reasoning for not accepting the first three views is strong enough to discount them. He evidently prefers the fourth interpretation, as he does not include a critique of it as he does the previous views.

Because this specific linkage occurs nowhere else in Acts, it seems reasonable to determine Peter meant repentance, not baptism, served as the requisite act of his audience’s regeneration. Keener and Schnabel

²⁹Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 370-371.

favor this causal meaning of *eis*.³⁰ Concerning the association between baptism and the forgiveness of sins, Bruce argued the following:

It would, of course, be a mistake to link the words “unto the remission of your sins” with the command “be baptized” to the exclusion of the prior command “Repent ye.” It is against the whole genius of Biblical religion to suppose that the outward rite had any value except in so far as it was accompanied by true repentance within. In a similar passage in the following chapter, the blotting out of people’s sins is a direct consequence of their repenting and turning to God (3:19); nothing is said there about baptism, although it is no doubt implied (the idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the NT). So too the reception of the Spirit here is associated not with baptism in itself but with baptism as the visible token of repentance.³¹

Although employing an interpretation that affirms the causal use of *eis* has its valid criticisms, this conclusion fits best with: 1) the repentance formula that follows in Acts 3:19, which omits “baptism;” 2) the meaning and understanding ascribed to baptism in Acts as a whole; and 3) an overall, biblical understanding of baptism. For these reasons, the causal use of *eis* is to be preferred.

Peter’s and the apostles’ invitation to receive the forgiveness of sins through repentance resulted in an astounding 3000 professions of faith (2:41). Some have argued that the incredible number of converts was nothing more than an exaggerated figment of Luke’s

³⁰Keener writes, “The ‘forgiveness of sins’ is explicitly associated with repentance in Acts.

...[I]t seems that ‘forgiveness of sins’ is linked more often with repentance (although grammar alone could not decide this), which is never missing when baptism and forgiveness are both mentioned (Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38) or even when forgiveness is mentioned without baptism. For Luke, however, baptism is not dissociated from repentance but constitutes an act of repentance; under normal circumstances, one does not separate the two (Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4).” Keener, *Acts*, 975.

In defending the causal meaning, Schnabel explains, “[T]he Jews who had heard Peter explain that Jesus was the crucified, risen, and exalted Messiah and Lord who saves Israel in the ‘last days’ had repented of their sins and come to faith in Jesus. Otherwise, they would not have been willing to be immersed in water for purification ‘in the name of Jesus the Messiah;’ they were immersed in water for purification ‘on the basis of the forgiveness of sins,’ which they had received from Jesus.” Schnabel, *Acts*, 165.

³¹Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 77.

imagination due to complications surrounding the mass number of baptisms.³² However, Marshall explains that Luke's report was entirely possible. The apostles had ample time to have baptized the number of believers Luke records because the other disciples, not Peter alone, shared in the actual baptizing. Despite the suggestion that the Romans would have disrupted such a large assembly, they likely allowed the peaceable assembly due to the overcrowding of pilgrims on the occasion of Pentecost.³³ As such, Luke accurately records Peter's preaching resulted in a large, unexaggerated number of sinners' receiving forgiveness through repentance and faith.

II. EXEGETICAL OBSERVATIONS FOR THE GOSPEL, EVANGELISM, AND MISSIONS

This exegetical investigation yields four significant conclusions. First, *the Old Testament Scriptures, as well as the meaning Jesus attributed to them in the Gospels (e.g., Matt 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37), serve as convincing evidence that supports the apostles' claims about the gospel.* During the time that Peter preached, the Old Testament served as the biblical record for first-century Christians. Although Peter incorporated his own witness of the resurrected Christ, he did not exclude the witness of the Scriptures. In fact, his expositions of Joel 2:28-32; Psalm 16:8-11; and Psalm 110:1 comprised the majority of his Pentecost sermon. Peter's example teaches that the Bible and its use by God's Spirit are far more important in evangelistic work than anything else the evangelist has to say.³⁴

Second, *the message itself included a number of distinct elements about Christ.* In 1936 C. H. Dodd published a series of three lectures he delivered the year before at Kings College, London. This landmark book, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, presents Dodd's six-fold formula of the Petrine, or Jerusalem, *kerygma* (or preaching about Jesus) found in Acts 2:14-41:

- 1) The age of fulfilment has dawned; 2) This has taken

³²For example, Gerd Lüdemann states, "The number 3000 comes from Luke's imagination and is meant to bring out the magnitude of the event. The number of Christians has risen enormously from 1.15 ('about 120')." Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity According to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 47.

³³Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 82.

³⁴James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 50.

place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus; 3) By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God; 4) The Holy Spirit in the Church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory; 5) The Messianic Age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ; and 6) The *kerygma* always closes with an appeal for repentance, the offer of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of "salvation."³⁵

Subsequent gospel presentations made by the apostles, deacons, evangelists, and the churches in Acts reflect these Christocentric fundamentals.

Third, *Peter presented the gospel in a contextualized form to which the listeners could both relate and comprehend.* The message of the gospel was contextualized only in its presentation, not in its offer. As Michael Green asserted,

It would be a mistake to assume ... that there was a crippling uniformity about the proclamation of Christian truth in antiquity. That there was a basic homogeneity in what was preached we may agree, but there was wide variety in the way it was presented ... But much of the variety will have been necessitated by the needs and understanding of the hearers. Evangelism is never proclamation in a vacuum; but always to people, and the message must be given in terms that make sense to them.³⁶

Peter's contextualization of the gospel did not avoid asserting truths about his audience's complicity in Christ's death, facts that had the likelihood of offending them (*e.g.*, "you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him" [2:23]; "whom you crucified" [2:36]; and "Be saved from this corrupt generation" [2:40]).³⁷ His incrimination of their culpability was not intended to offend them into resisting

³⁵C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 21-23.

³⁶Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 115.

³⁷All Bible citations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible (Nashville: Holman, 2017).

the gospel; rather he called attention to their guilt for Jesus' death on the cross in order that the gospel message might convince them of their need for reconciliation with the God whom they had offended.

Finally, *Peter's Pentecost sermon presented the gospel so that, in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit, an accurate witness to the work of the Father through Jesus his Son would result in regenerate disciples.* Luke emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit, specifically in his aid in human proclamation, throughout Acts. Keener counted 59 references to the Spirit in Acts, nearly a quarter of the times he is mentioned in the entire New Testament.³⁸ He continued, "Luke focuses on the Spirit's empowerment for, and the Spirit's guiding the church in, cross-cultural evangelism ... Such an understanding and experience of the Spirit undoubtedly fueled earliest Christianity's phenomenal growth rate."³⁹

III. THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GOSPEL, EVANGELISM, AND MISSIONS

Theology meets evangelism and missions when faithful gospel doctrine intersects with active evangelistic duty. As Robert Coleman said, "In their origins ... theology and evangelism belong together. When the two are separated in practice, as so often happens, both suffer loss—theology loses direction and evangelism loses content."⁴⁰

³⁸Keener, *Acts*, 520.

³⁹Keener, *Acts*, 521-22.

⁴⁰Robert E. Coleman, *The Heart of Evangelism: The Theology Behind the Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 9. Lewis Drummond identified other reasons theology and evangelism must not be separated: "If evangelism loses sight of basic, biblical theology, it does so at its own peril. And it goes without saying that theology divorced from the fervor of evangelism is superficial and faulty. It cannot be stated too strongly that the two disciplines, when separated, part to their mutual detriment. Several reasons arise as to why theology and mission must not be separated, the first and by far the most important being that they are never divorced in the Scriptures. ... A second reason for the uniting of theology and mission is that without sound theological content, evangelism soon degenerates into sentimentalism, emotionalism, and gimmicks. ... The third reason for fusing theology and evangelism rests in the pragmatic fact that God has honored most profoundly the ministry of those who do.... Other reasons could be given for the necessity of a strong theology for effective evangelism. For example, a knowledge of theology helps make the presentation of the gospel message plain; it makes the evangelists more sure of his message; a genuine understanding of the rich content of the Bible will fill one with zeal; theology is an important agent in conserving evangelistic results." Lewis A. Drummond, *Reaching Generation Next: Effective Evangelism in Today's Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 99-101. It should be noted that although Drummond does not credit Skevington Wood with the reasons he gives for why theology and evangelism/mission must not be separated, the reasons he cites appear to be original with Wood in *Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966), 11-27.

A practical theology of evangelism and missions is a biblically and theologically governed evangelism. Bruce Ashford warned, “If we are not careful ... fissures between belief and practice will derail our mission and render our evangelical theology impotent ... In order to foster a healthy mission, therefore, we must seek carefully, consciously, and consistently to rivet missiological practice to Christian Scripture and its attendant evangelical doctrine.”⁴¹ The biblical record and the theology that naturally flows from it informs evangelism’s and missions’ meaning, motive, method, and maintainability. As demonstrated by the four exegetical observations in the previous section, Acts 2:22-41 theologically informs evangelism and missions in terms of bibliology, Christology, anthropology, and pneumatology.

IV. A BIBLIOLOGICAL IMPLICATION

As observed in Acts 2:22-41, the majority of evangelistic proclamations of the gospel in Acts overwhelmingly incorporate the Scriptures (e.g., 3:11-26; 4:1-12; 7; 8:4, 35; 13:13-49; 16:25-32; 17:10-13; 18:5, 28; 20:27; 26:22-23; 28:23-27). In addition to providing evidence to those who hear the gospel, the utilization of the Scriptures in gospel proclamation theologically implies that the Scriptures verify and confirm the biblical faithfulness of the gospel evangelists and missionaries proclaim. Evangelizers who desire to transmit the gospel faithfully to unbelievers will ensure they integrate relevant Scriptures into their presentations that communicate biblical-theological gospel content consistent with apostolic preaching.

V. A CHRISTOLOGICAL IMPLICATION

Peter’s Pentecost sermon focused exclusively on Christ. Any “gospel” presentation that fails to emphasize the Christological locus of his life, death, burial, and resurrection for sins ceases to be in the apostolic, theological tradition. In his classic theology of evangelism, A. Skevington Wood declared, “Theology and evangelism are seen together supremely in Christ. Not only was He Himself both teacher and evangelist: He is Himself the subject both of theology and evangelism. Each has its being in Him. Theology means

⁴¹Bruce Riley Ashford, “A Theologically Driven Missiology,” in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (ed. Bruce Riley Ashford; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 294-95.

thinking about Christ. Evangelism means telling about Christ. Surely we must think before we speak?”⁴² Lewis Drummond agreed: “Of prime importance, on the day of Pentecost, Christ was preached. The disciples had but one message. This does not mean that later the New Testament church failed to minister in many different ways and to preach many other truths ... [T]o each audience they simply presented Christ as the answer to life’s basic needs. This is an inescapable principle of [the] effective evangelistic endeavor and a vital part of a sound theology of evangelism.”⁴³ “Evangelism” that presents a “gospel” void of Christ is neither evangelism nor the gospel. Personal evangelists and missionaries must understand Christology, consistent with what the Scriptures teach, in order to be able to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

VI. AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMPLICATION

Anthropological dimensions exist within the content and method of Peter’s sermon. In relationship to its content, Peter included in his message the theological doctrine of humanity and their guilt before God. Reference to the theological doctrine associated with anthropology—hamartiology—occurs in Acts 2:23, 36, and 40. Peter informed his audience of their corporate culpability of sin against God by 1) their association with those who crucified Jesus; 2) their identification as those who crucified Jesus; and 3) their inclusion in a corrupt generation. Personal evangelists and missionaries must apprise their listeners of the responsibility they share in Jesus’ death because of their disobedience to God.

In relation to Peter’s evangelistic method, he communicated the gospel in anthropological terms and concepts without compromising the gospel’s essential biblical and Christological doctrine. In other words, he contextualized his gospel presentation in such a way that it could be understood by those who heard it, while it remained faithfully biblical and theological in its content. Evangelists and missionaries must resist the temptation to emphasize the anthropological dimensions of gospel communication over the theological fidelity of the gospel’s content. As Edward Rommen acknowledged, “We are under great pressure to adapt the Gospel to its cultural surroundings.

⁴²Wood, *Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice*, 27.

⁴³Drummond, *Reaching Generation Next: Effective Evangelism in Today’s Culture*, 118.

While there is a legitimate concern for contextualization, what most often happens in these cases is an outright capitulation of the Gospel to the principles of that culture.”⁴⁴

VII. A PNEUMATOLOGICAL IMPLICATION

Finally, Acts 2:22-41 necessitates that personal evangelists and missionaries consider and incorporate a pneumatological dimension to their evangelistic practices. The Holy Spirit empowered Peter, a Galilean fisherman, untrained in formal rabbinical teaching (Acts 4:13) and who days earlier had demonstrated cowardice in denying Jesus, to preach the gospel boldly and publicly. In addition, the Spirit convicted Peter’s hearers (2:37) of their need for forgiveness through Jesus and to receive him as their promise (2:38-39, 41). Personal evangelists and missionaries who ignore this theological implication from the text will evangelize in their own power, yielding their own results. However, those who fully depend on the preceding work, directing, emboldening, enabling, and accompanying presence and power of the Holy Spirit will follow in the apostolic tradition of evangelistic proclamation and practice, and in doing so will see him yield any and all conversion results.



⁴⁴Edward Rommen, *Get Real: On Evangelism in the Late Modern World* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2010), 182.