



# Acts

CHAPTERS 1-8

MARTYN  
LLOYD-JONES

“Dr. Lloyd-Jones’s preaching was based on deep reading and scholarship, yet it was accessible to everyone. It was close, instructive Bible exposition, yet it stirred the affections and changed the heart. It was highly effective at a city-center in a secularizing society, but it has had broad, worldwide appeal. The Doctor’s preaching ministry is, I believe, unique in the English-speaking world during the last hundred years.”

**Timothy Keller**, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York

“Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the titanic figures of twentieth-century Christianity. What now sets him apart is the fact that his writings, sermons, and other messages are even more influential now, more than two decades after his death, than when he engaged in such a massive ministry at Westminster Chapel and beyond. Why? I think the answer is simple: his profound commitment to biblical exposition and the great skill with which he preached and taught the Word of God. In an age when so many preachers seem so unsure of what preaching is, in Lloyd-Jones we find a minister who leaves no doubt.”

**R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of God’s special gifts to the church in the twentieth century.”

**Mark Dever**, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC

“Martyn Lloyd-Jones was without question the finest biblical expositor of the twentieth century. In fact, when the final chapter of church history is written, I believe he will stand as one of the greatest preachers of all time. His style of biblical exposition was meticulously thorough and yet full of energy. ‘Logic on fire’ was his famous description of preaching, and he had an amazing gift for blending passion and precision in copious measures. He influenced countless preachers (myself included), and he stood steadfastly against the superficial, entertainment-oriented approach to preaching that seemed to dominate the evangelical world then as it does now. Lloyd-Jones still desperately needs to be heard today.”

**John MacArthur**, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA

“I regarded Martyn Lloyd-Jones with admiration and affection during the years that we were both preaching in London, so I am delighted that his unique ministry is to be more widely available in the United States.”

**John Stott**, Rector Emeritus, All Souls Church, London

“The preaching and subsequent writing of Martyn Lloyd-Jones have been and continue to be a huge source of inspiration in my own life and ministry.”

**Alistair Begg**, Parkside Church, Cleveland

“Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the twentieth century’s finest gospel preachers—clear, warm, intelligent, Christ-centered.”

**Cornelius Plantinga**, President, Calvin Theological Seminary

“Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the great preachers of a previous generation who rooted his message in God’s Word. For those wondering how the Word applies to life or seeking textually rooted preaching, his ministry provides a solid model. His books and messages are worth pondering. His messages encourage us to faithfulness. That is commendation enough.”

**Darrell L. Bock**, Research Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas  
Theological Seminary

“From my student days onwards Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a preacher whom I loved to hear for the sheer quality of his biblical expositions and his stance for evangelical Christianity. It is good to know that efforts are being made to introduce him to a new generation.”

**I. Howard Marshall**, Emeritus Professor, University of Aberdeen

“Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the great expository preachers of the Bible in his era. His expositions over many months on Romans are in fact the stuff of legend. Few preachers have ever better exhibited what it takes and what it means to do one’s exegetical homework before preaching and then bring that information to light and to life in life-changing sermons. May they provide the necessary spur and antidote to those preachers who now think that the art of preaching involves dumbing everything down and over-simplifying things. As Martyn knew, it’s not a matter of boiling down the gospel, rather it’s a matter of boiling up the people, teasing their minds into active thought and engagement with the gospel.”

**Ben Witherington III**, Amos Professor of New Testament Interpretation  
for Doctoral Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary; Doctoral Faculty,  
St. Andrews University

*Acts: Chapters 1–8*

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# Christianity—The Only Hope

*The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*

—Acts 1:1-3

There can be no more urgent question at this present time than just this: What is Christianity? I say that because this Gospel is the only hope in the world today. Everything else has been tried and found wanting. Everything else has failed. You will not find hope with the philosophers or with the statesmen, and you will not find it in the so-called religions of the world. Here is hope, and here alone.

“But,” someone may say, “surely you can’t claim that there is any hope in the Gospel either, because it has been tried now for 2,000 years and has obviously failed quite as much as the various other things to which you’ve referred.”

The only reply to that is the one that was given so perfectly by the late G. K. Chesterton when he reminded us, “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.” That is the simple truth. The world, speaking generally, has never tried Christianity. It has talked a lot about it, but it has not really tried it. So I argue that this is still the only hope for the world. Therefore it is urgent that we should ask what Christianity is. Or, to put the question another way, what is the Christian church? What is her business, and what is her message?

It can be put like this: Why am I, or why is anyone else, a preacher of the Gospel? There is only one answer to that question. I am a preacher because I believe I have been called; because in my little way God has given me a burden; because I know by personal experience, by the experience of others,

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and by experience garnered from the reading of history that there is nothing under heaven that can enable men and women to conquer and to master life and to have a hope that cannot be dimmed except this Gospel. Therefore, the most urgent task in the world today is to make the Gospel known to men and women. And this is the function of the Christian church.

But as we all know, the great tragedy is that there is utter confusion with regard to what the Gospel is, what the church is, and what Christians are supposed to do. I call your attention to this, God knows, not because I am anxious to be controversial but because I have a burden for the souls of men and women. I would not be a preacher were it not for that. That is what originally put me in the ministry and makes me go on. I see the confusion. I see men and women bewildered, asking, “What is Christianity? What is the church?” And I am not surprised that they are bewildered.

Furthermore, this confusion is not confined to men and women outside the church. Indeed, I have an increasing fear that the confusion of those outside has been produced mainly by the so-called Christian church herself. A man who has held the highest position in one of the religious denominations and is well-known as one who speaks in the name of Christianity has recently said that he thinks certain things should be done at once, and the first is that the church must give up the foolish habit of having two services on a Sunday. “One is enough,” he says, “and let’s have it at nine o’clock in the morning so that having got that out of the way, we can then give ourselves to what we want to do.” He also says that if he had the power, he would decree that there should be no reading of the Bible at all for twelve months—this in the name of the church and of Christianity! And then he says that any preaching that is done in the one and only service at nine o’clock in the morning should, for at least a year, be on a political text alone.

I call attention to this because it is so typical of what is being said at the present time. Is it surprising that men and women are in a state of confusion? Speaking generally, the current idea is that the Christian message is, after all, nothing but a kind of teaching with regard to how our affairs should be ordered—that is why it is held that all texts should be political. It is said that the main business of the church is to deal with injustices and to do the work of reform and that in the Sermon on the Mount we have a kind of social charter. People who say this are never interested in the Old Testament; they generally dismiss it *in toto*, and they have no use for the apostle Paul. Instead, they point to the ethical teaching of Jesus. “There’s your political program,” they say. “There’s your political charter, and all you must do is apply it as best you

can. You must not even read the Bible, but pick up these general principles, and try to put them into practice.”

Others say that Christianity is mainly an elevated, optimistic view of life, a sort of philosophy. Having found out how life can be lived on a higher plane and having experienced a moral uplift, you try to get others to adopt these principles.

And then there are others who, perhaps nearer to the Christian position, regard Christianity as being mainly a matter of morals and of conduct. They say that what makes people Christians is that they have adopted this ethical teaching and put it into practice. So by living a good life, they have made themselves Christians.

Common to all those teachings is the view that what really matters is the kernel of moral teaching that is to be found in this book that we call the Bible. Unfortunately, the Bible is cluttered up with a lot of unimportant history. Most of it is false, with a lot about miracles that obviously are not true and that no one with any scientific understanding can possibly believe for a moment. We must get rid of all that, they say, and find this kernel that is hidden away in all the husks and straw. Having extracted this kernel, we can ignore the Bible and start with the political or moral situation. Then we must try to persuade people to put these things into practice. That is the common idea of the Christian message and the common notion with respect to the function of the Christian church.

Now I want to deal with all this, and that is why I am calling your attention to the first three verses in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Look at it like this: What is the origin of the Christian church? Surely that is the question to ask. You do not start with the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Here is something that can be traced back nearly two thousand years. So surely, if you want to know what the church is and what Christianity is, your duty is to go back to the very beginning and discover how the church started and what she did.

I think you will agree with me that the question of authority is primary and fundamental. When people think they have the right to announce, “This is what I think Christianity is, and this is what the church should do,” then we have the right to ask, “Can that be fitted into what we have here in the book of Acts? What is our authority in these matters? Are we competent to decide what the Christian church is? Can we divorce ourselves from the history of nearly two thousand years and say that we do not care what happened in the past, this is what we say now?” Of course, you can say that if you like, but the question is: Have you any right to call that Christianity?

Surely, common honesty demands that we say that we have only one

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authority on the origin of the church, and it is the authority of the Bible. Here in the Acts of the Apostles a man is writing who is undoubtedly Luke, the evangelist. He says, “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus.” This is a reference to the Gospel of Luke, which has a similar introduction. In Luke 1:1-4 Luke writes:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

That is why these books were written. We do not have exact information concerning Theophilus, but it is generally assumed that he was a man in some prominent position, a man of culture and of learning, who had heard various reports about Christianity and wanted to know more. He found Luke, a doctor and a most competent historian, who had accompanied the apostle Paul and so was in a very good position to know exactly what the story was. They got in touch, and Luke wrote to Theophilus saying in effect, “I will give you an account of exactly what happened. I will tell you why we believe what we believe. I will tell you the story.” And he did it in two parts—the first, the Gospel, and the second, this book of the Acts of the Apostles. My argument is that we must go back and consider this story. We are not only honor bound to do that, but we must, if we want to understand it.

What is the story? Well, there were a handful of people whom the authorities in Jerusalem regarded as ordinary, simple, unlettered, and ignorant men and women. There were just twelve men essentially, and a number of others with them. They had nothing to recommend them, no great names, no degrees, no money, no means of communication or of advertising. They had nothing at all—they were nobodies. And yet what we know to be a fact is that this handful of ignorant and unlettered people “turned the world upside down,” to use Luke’s phrase in chapter 17:6. Within about two centuries Christianity became the most powerful force in the great Roman Empire. By the beginning of the third century it had become such a powerful force that a Roman emperor named Constantine deemed it a wise move to make the Roman Empire officially Christian.

I am not concerned to consider that fact now. All I want to ask is: How was it that this small group of people ever got into a position in which they

could shake the whole Roman Empire so that it became officially Christian within such a short space of time? Was it because they preached politics that these people turned the ancient world upside-down?

Christianity is a phenomenon of history. It is a fact. The Christian church is one of the most vital facts in the total history of the world. We cannot understand that history without bringing in the story of the church. But does this modern idea as to what the church is and what her message is account for what has already happened? My answer is that it does not. So not only do honesty and common sense tell us to come back to Acts, but if we really want to have an understanding of what Christianity means, we are compelled to come back here. Only one thing can account for the phenomenon of the Christian church and this amazing history that has continued through the centuries, in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil and the malignity of men and of hell, and it is the explanation given in this book of Acts.

Therefore I propose to hold the message of Acts before you. I shall not preach systematically through the book, but I shall pick out certain themes that are put before us here. I feel that the modern world is very much in the position of Theophilus. At any rate, anyone considering these things who is not a Christian is in the position of Theophilus. You have become interested. You want to know what Christianity is. Perhaps you are in trouble in your moral life or in your married life. Perhaps you have some running sore of the soul, something that gets you down. And you say, "I've tried this and that—I wonder what the Christian church has to offer."

All right, Theophilus, you want to know, and fortunately we are able to tell you. I am not here to tell you what I think about Christianity. I am not here to tell you what I think the Christian church should do. I am in the position of Charles Wesley, saying, "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise." My own personal opinion is that even two services on a Sunday are not enough. How can people be satisfied with but one statement? The world is dying all around us, and it needs to hear the Word of God. These early Christians went everywhere, and they spoke and they preached, and that is the explanation of this tremendous phenomenon of the church.

So let us see what Acts has to say to us. First, what was the message that these people preached? Luke told Theophilus quite plainly. He said:

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many

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infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

—Acts 1:1-3

That is a summary of the whole of the Gospel of Luke and also of the other Gospels. What does it mean? Here are some of the great principles.

The starting point, the fundamental thing, is that Christianity is about Jesus. “I’ve written to you already about Him,” said Luke in effect, “and I’m going to tell you more about Him.” Christianity is not a teaching—it is a person. It is not merely a moral outlook that is to be applied in the realm of politics. You start with a historical person. Luke was a pure historian. He was giving an account of events and of facts.

The Lord Jesus Christ was the theme of the preaching of the early church. He is the theme of the Gospel of Luke. He is the theme of the Acts of the Apostles. This is the tragic thing that has been forgotten at the present time. “What we need,” people say, “is the application of His teaching.” But it is not. What you need is to know Him and to come into a relationship with Him. You do not start with His teaching—you start with Him. This is the message: “All that Jesus began both to do and teach.” Our Lord Himself said to his disciples, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:8). He was sending these men out to preach. He said, “You are not simply going to preach My teaching. You are going to preach about Me.”

As you read the book of Acts, you will find that our Lord’s disciples always preached “Jesus, and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18). They went to people and told them about this person. This was the whole of their teaching. You never find them starting with the political or social situations. They said, “Listen, we have something to tell you about a person whose name is Jesus.”

And what did the disciples say about Him? The facts are all-important. In the Gospel Luke gave facts, and here in Acts he gives them again. But he does not stop at that; he is equally concerned about the meaning, the significance, of these facts. And he expounds that. He writes not only about all that Jesus did, but also all that He taught. The two must always go together—our Lord’s acts and His teaching.

There is also this most extraordinary addition that our Lord himself made: “Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This is truly staggering. Here was a Jew, born in poverty, one who worked as a carpenter, who began to preach at the age of thirty and after some three years was cruci-

fied on a cross, dying in utter weakness, and was laid in a tomb. But here he was, telling these men they would be witnesses to Him “unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Here is a message for the whole world.

I emphasize that because there are people who say that the Christian faith is all right if you happen to be interested in religion, but if you do not happen to have a religious mentality and outlook, then it does not matter, you can just take up what you like. But that is shown to be a lie by our Lord’s words. Here is a message that is to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Why? Because something happened in this person, Jesus, that affects every single individual who ever has been or ever shall be in this world of time.

Now if Christianity were merely a philosophy or a political idea, no one would be bound to believe it. There are rival schools of philosophy; there are rival teachings and theories, and one person believes this and another that. But what we are facing here is not what you and I believe, but facts, and the facts are about this person called Jesus—what He did and what He said and the meaning of His person. So there is nothing more tragic than when men and women say, “Shut your Bibles; the facts don’t matter at all. What does it matter whether Jesus was a man, or God as well as man?” They have got it all wrong. It is the person who matters most of all.

So let us go on and follow what Luke says. We have seen that he begins, “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” And that word “began” is emphatic. Luke is saying to Theophilus that all that he has written in the Gospel is nothing but the beginning. This is vital. It is why Luke wrote his Gospel. Here was a man interested in Christianity who wanted to know what it was all about. “I’ll tell you,” said Luke. And he told the story that is unfolded in the twenty-four chapters of his Gospel. And here he sums it all up in two words—it is all that “Jesus began both to *do* and *teach*.”

You may say to me that you know about Jesus. Do you? Do you realize what His life means? Do you realize its significance? What did Jesus begin to do? In his Gospel Luke tells us who Jesus was. And the first thing we want to know is how He was born. Was He a man like every other man? Luke’s answer is that He was not. Luke tells us how the angel Gabriel went to Mary and told her that she was supremely blessed among women, that she was going to bear the Son of the Highest, and that He would be great. He would occupy the throne of His father David, and of His kingdom there would be no end. Read it all in the first chapter of Luke’s Gospel. Mary was perplexed and asked how this could be since she was a virgin. Gabriel said:

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The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

—Luke 1:35

That is what Luke tells us, and this means that Jesus came into the world. He was not just born like everybody else. He came out of eternity into time; he came from heaven to earth. This is Christianity. Whatever may be your moral and political views, the question confronting you is this: How are you related to the fact that the babe of Bethlehem is the eternal Son of God?

But He not only came into the world, He did many other things. He worked miracles. Oh yes, that is an essential part of the gospel message.

“But,” you say, “modern men and women don’t believe in miracles. They can’t. They have a scientific outlook.”

Yet Luke refers Theophilus back to his first treatise, the Gospel, where he told him about our Lord’s miracles. Our Lord attracted attention. The miracles were signs, and people came and watched. Luke tells us that when certain Pharisees went to see Him one day, “the power of the Lord was present to heal them” (Luke 5:17), and He created a great stir. There is no Christianity apart from these things.

But our Lord also did something else. Though He knew that His enemies in Jerusalem hated Him and were determined to kill Him, and though He knew that Herod the king, who would be in Jerusalem for the Passover, wanted to kill Him, nevertheless, “he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). He went there and was arrested. At His trial He would not speak and was condemned to death. He was forced to carry a cross through Jerusalem until He staggered, and it had to be put on the back of somebody else. Then they nailed Him to the cross, and He died. Two of His friends took down His body and laid it in a tomb. But He burst asunder the bands of death. He arose triumphantly out of that tomb. He appeared to a chosen number of His disciples and other people, as Luke tells us here: “To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). And then, standing with them on the Mount of Olives, He ascended from their midst into heaven.

It is all here. This is history. Luke the physician, Luke the historian, wanted to help this intelligent man, Theophilus. Theophilus had said, “I’d love to know what Christianity is. I’m amazed at you people. I see what has

happened to you, and I hear you preaching. I can see the effects. I want to know what this is.”

So Luke said in essence, “Theophilus, if you want to know, listen—this is it—it is Jesus. This is what He began to do. He came. He taught. He worked miracles. He gave Himself. He died. He was buried. He rose again, and He ascended into heaven.”

Luke emphasizes the resurrection. There would be no Christian church were it not for the resurrection. Here in Acts is the history of the church. Here is the account of this amazing institution that turned the world upside-down and has continued throughout the centuries. It is all due to the fact that Jesus who was dead is alive again and has given “many infallible proofs” of it. These are facts.

“Theophilus,” says Luke in effect, “you must believe these facts. There is no explanation except Jesus. This is what He began to do.”

But Jesus also began to “teach,” and again I can do nothing but summarize this teaching for you. It is all in the Gospels. He taught concerning Himself. He said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). He called Himself “the Son of man.” He said, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . . but I say unto you” (Matt. 5:21-22). He claimed to have unique authority. He claimed, indeed, to be the Son of God. That is what He began to teach.

He went on to tell His followers why He had come into the world. This is the most staggering event that has ever happened. Why did He do it? “The Son of man,” he said, “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). He said He had come into the world because it was the only way by which anybody could be saved. He said He was sent by His Father: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

But nobody understood Him. Luke had reminded Theophilus of that in the Gospel. In chapter 24, two people were walking on a road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They had been with Him and had believed in Him, but now, after His death, they were utterly cast down. Then suddenly, as they were walking along, Jesus, the risen Jesus, joined them and listened to their conversation. Earlier that day certain women who belonged to their company had been in the garden where Jesus had been put in the tomb and had reported to the disciples that the tomb was empty, and this is what we read: “Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not” (Luke 24:11).

The two people walking to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus when He

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joined them. They told this stranger what had happened and said, “But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel” (Luke 24:21). They had thought His teaching was wonderful; they had seen His miracles. They had said that this must be the Messiah. But He could not be, of course, for He had been crucified. He was dead.

And then our Lord began to speak to them:

O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

—Luke 24:25-27

Later that evening, in Jerusalem, our Lord came among the disciples. They were terrified; they could not believe it was really Him. He had told them repeatedly that He was going to die and rise again, but they had never taken it in. Yet here He was appearing among them, and He said, “Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (vv. 38-39). And He ate a bit of broiled fish and honey. Then He began to speak again: “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (v. 44).

If you want to understand Christianity, do not shut your Bible—open it, read it! Read the books of Moses, the prophets, the Psalms; they all point to Him. Study your Bible. It is ignorance that blinds men and women of this generation and keeps them outside of Christ. So do not have a hurried service at nine o’clock so you can go out and play golf and bathe in the sea—listen for your life! Here is the only message of hope for you.

Then our Lord went on telling His disciples the meaning of His coming. Luke writes: “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:45-47). There is his own explanation of why He came and why He did all He did. It is the only way anybody can be saved. Every one of us is born in sin. We are born under the wrath of God. We do not know Him, and we are evil by nature. Our greatest need is to be reconciled to God, to have our sins forgiven, to know God as our Father, to be blessed by Him, and to start as a child of God. And Jesus came

in order that men and women might know this. This is His message—not that we improve the world but that you and I be redeemed. You may set out with your political program. You may say, “Now, if we can get this onto the statute book this year, then that, then the other . . .” But you may be dead before tomorrow morning and be in eternity facing God and the judgment.

How can this message be made known? The answer is this: Jesus. In effect He said to the disciples, “I’m going to send you out to preach, and I want you to tell people that repentance and remission of sins is only possible in My name. Preach it among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. I do not care what color, class, or creed people are. The human race is one; humanity is one in sin, one under the wrath of God, one in its destiny in hell. And there is only one Savior. Tell them about Me, and be witnesses to Me.”

“That is what Christianity is all about,” said Luke to Theophilus in effect. “That is what I told you in my former treatise. But now I want to tell you a little bit more. ‘The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.’ This is the vital emphasis—‘all that Jesus began.’” This means He has not finished! He is going on with it.

Luke said, “Listen, Theophilus, I have a second treatise. I’ve told you what He began to do; you’ve got it, you’ve read it—that’s the Gospel. I want to tell you now what He’s continuing to do.”

This is important because the modern teaching that Jesus of Nazareth was just a man, though a very fine moral and political teacher, would have us believe that He was like other teachers—Plato, Socrates, and all the rest. He was in the world, and He died. “Well,” people say, “that’s all right if you’re interested in such people, but the thing that really matters, of course, is the teaching.” They may “prove” to you that Plato and Jesus never existed. “But it doesn’t matter,” they insist, “we’ve got the teaching. All that remains is for us to apply it.”

But the answer to that is that Jesus Christ is still active. It is what *He* does that matters, not what we do; and the message of the Christian church is not only one of what He has done but of what He is doing. He is going on. He is still working. And the book of Acts tells us about the further acts of Jesus. Some people say it ought to be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. That is quite wrong. It is Jesus who dominates.

How is Christ still active? Well, this book tells us that He is seated at the right hand of God in the glory everlasting. After His resurrection He Himself told us something that is demonstrated so clearly in this book. He said to those men, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:18-19). They were to preach the

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Gospel and to disciple the nations. I know of nothing more comforting and encouraging than that wonderful, blessed statement. This world is not in the hands of the politicians; it is in the hands of this living Jesus, this risen Christ. This is the message: God the eternal Father, the Creator, the Owner of all things, has handed over the business of this world and its redemption to His Son. And He has “all power . . . in heaven and in earth.”

And in this wonderful book of Acts we see Jesus demonstrating some of that power. He sent the Holy Spirit down upon the early church. That was a manifestation of His power. Then He began to give power to His disciples. We will see Peter and John walking up to the temple one afternoon at the hour of prayer and healing a man who lay paralyzed on a mat, so that he went into the temple walking and leaping and praising God. That is Christianity. Not simply a political, moral program, no, no—but the living Jesus who has all power, giving power.

What else did our Lord go on to do? Well, there was a man called Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee and a bitter opponent of the first Christians. Here was a man who hated our Lord and hated His cause and did his best to put it to an end by going out and having believers thrown into prison and even put to death. Saul was so keen on this persecution that he went to the high priest at Jerusalem and asked for authority to go down to Damascus to exterminate the little Christian church there. So they gave him authority, and off he went, “breathing out threatenings and slaughter” (Acts 9:1), confident he would be able to destroy the church.

What happened? Ah, this Jesus revealed Himself to Saul of Tarsus. About midday Saul saw a light in the heavens “above the brightness of the sun” (Acts 26:13). Paul said, “Who art thou, Lord?” And the answer came back, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 9:5). Jesus was continuing to act. He floored Saul. He humbled him. He cast him down. He led him to repentance. Jesus saved him.

So the story does not end at the ascension. Jesus Christ continues to act with all power. Nothing is impossible for Him, and here He is, calling out men and women, saving them, building up His kingdom. He instructed them after His resurrection, “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). He said in effect, “This is how it will happen. I am sending you out, just a little handful, but I will be with you. I am with you all the way, even until the end of the ages. Go out and disciple the nations; bear witness to Me.”

But thank God, Jesus does not stop even at that. The Bible tells us that in heaven, “he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). He has taken human nature back with Him into heaven, and there He is seated at

the right hand of God. He is our representative, our great High Priest. He takes our feeble, unworthy prayers, and He transmutes them with all the glory of His own intercession at the very throne of God. He still remembers our weak and fallible frame. He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). And why? It was in order to “succor them that are tempted”—you and me (Heb. 2:18).

So when you read your New Testament you will find the apostle Paul able to say he was on trial, and all his friends forsook him, but “the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me” (2 Tim. 4:17). In the court the Lord stood by His servant, and Paul knew He was there. What did it matter that all Paul’s helpers had forsaken him, Demas and the rest of them? The Lord stood by him. Paul was able to say, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). And our Lord will continue to act “till his enemies be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:13). That is the message.

And when we read the book of Revelation, we see Jesus continuing to act, and we see what He will yet do. His people are persecuted and killed, the whole church seems to be disappearing, but He intervenes, and there is judgment; eventually He will come riding that blessed white horse. He is at the present time saving us as individuals out of this present evil world, putting us into His glorious kingdom, preparing us for the Day that is coming when He will return.

And what then? In Acts 1:10-11 we read: “Two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” If you think that Jesus finished when He died and was buried, listen to the message of Luke, listen to this treatise written to Theophilus—it is written to you. He will come again, even as He went. He will return, in bodily, visible fashion, riding the clouds of heaven, surrounded by the holy angels. And He will judge the world in righteousness and set up His glorious kingdom, to which there shall be no end.

That is the message of Christianity. That is what has made the church what it is. Do men and women need to be told about some kind of program that will give them better conditions? That is not our greatest need. Our greatest need is to know God. If we were all given a fortune, would that solve our problems? Would that solve our moral problem? Would that solve the problem of death? Would that solve the problem of eternity? Of course not. The message of Christianity is not about improving the world, but about changing people in spite of the world, preparing them for the glory that is

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yet to come. This Jesus is active and acting to that end, and He will go on until all the redeemed are gathered in, and then He will return, and the final judgment will take place, and His kingdom will stretch from shore to shore.

That is the message that turned the ancient world upside-down. It is the only message, and I want to ask you a simple question: What does this message mean to you? What is your idea of Christianity? What do you think the business of the church is? Do you say, “I don’t want your sermons, I don’t want your argumentation—I just want to feel that I’ve said my prayers and paid my respects, as it were, to God, before I go out and do what I like”? Is that it? Do you think Christianity is something that you can take up and use as a minimum, in the hope that it will somehow put you right? Or is it the most amazing and astounding thing that ever happened or ever will happen? Is it the thing by which you live, the thing that you long to know and to experience more and more? Do you realize that this Jesus came into the world to save you from hell, from the punishment that your sins and mine so richly deserve? Do you realize now that the essence of Christianity is not that it calls you to do something, but rather that it tells you what Jesus came into the world to do for you?

## The God Who Acts

*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.*

—Acts 2:1-2

I have pinpointed the two verses above, but we shall be considering together the first twenty-one verses of Acts chapter 2. We are going back to this book of Acts because it is the only authoritative account that we have of the beginning, the origin, of the Christian church. Let me remind you that I am calling your attention to this because I believe that the most vital need of the world today is the need to know exactly what the Christian message is. And that in turn leads us to seek to know what the church is, the church that delivers this message.

There is a real confusion today about Christianity and about the Christian church—her nature, her task, and her message. This is a great tragedy. Think of the problems harassing people today, individually and collectively. Think of the unhappiness, the heartbreak and the cynicism and bitterness in life. We are all aware of these human problems, as they are called. But if only people were truly Christian, most of those problems would immediately be solved. And it is the same with our international tensions and difficulties. Enmity and war and strife are due to the fact that men and women are in a wrong relationship with God, and they will only find out how to enter into a true relationship by knowing, believing, accepting, and submitting themselves to the message of the Christian church, the message of the Gospel.

We have seen that the great message of the church is, as Luke puts it here at the very beginning of Acts, a message about the Lord Jesus Christ. This is Christianity: “all that Jesus began both to do and teach”—what He is doing and what He is yet going to do. So now we continue from there because we see that our Lord addressed these men, these apostles of His, and gave them a commission. So we come, in this second chapter, to the origin of the Christian

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church. This is what throws light on the nature of the church, what she has been commissioned to do and how she does it. And here it is emphasized that the whole thing is the action of God. This is not something that was done by this handful of people. We are told so often about them, and so often they say about themselves that they were nobodies. We never tire of hearing how they were dismissed by the learned people, by the authorities, as “unlearned and ignorant men” (Acts 4:13), and that is what they were.

It seems to me to be simply ludicrous to suggest that such men, without learning, without any influence or authority, without any money behind them, with none of the means of propaganda that we are familiar with today, that such men by their own efforts and abilities could succeed in doing what we read of in the pages of this book. How did it come about? There is only one answer. The world was turned upside-down not because of what they did, but because of what God did to them, in them, and by means of them. And that is the essential message concerning the Christian church—her meaning, her function, her message, her purpose.

So here before us is the beginning, but if you take the trouble to read the long history of the Christian church, you will find that it has continued in the same way. Indeed, I want to show you that the history of the church has been a great fight between two ideas: the false human idea as to what the church is, and the true one, which is God acting in the church.

So let us look at all this in the light of what we are told in these first twenty-one verses of Acts 2. What is Christianity? What is the church? First of all, we must remind ourselves of what it is not, and oh, how urgently this reminder is needed today! I am more and more convinced that the masses of people are outside the Christian church because they have a totally wrong conception of what she is. Mark you—I want to be honest—I do not blame them. They just believe what they are told, and that is the false view that I shall put before you. If they only knew what the church really is, if they only knew what is being offered them in the Gospel, they would not be outside. Like the people at Jerusalem, they would come crowding to listen.

First, then, Christianity is not dead religion. The greatest enemy of true Christianity has always been religion, and this is as true today as it has ever been. It is religion that confuses the minds of men and women. They would be right to reject Christianity if it were a religion. But it is not. Christianity is not a state religion; it is not an official religion in any sense at all. But that is the idea that many people have of it. They identify the church simply with what happens on certain great ceremonial occasions—a coronation, the burial of a monarch or of a great statesman, or some official action. During the Second

World War people in Britain thought of the church in terms of national days of prayer. They did not think about Christianity at any other time; but when things went wrong and we were losing every battle, then there would be a national day of prayer. But that is national religion; it has nothing to do with authentic Christianity.

Then again, people think of the Christian church in terms of formal occasions—a christening, for example. A baby is born, and people who have perhaps not thought about Christianity for years insist on having the child christened. Then they forget all about the church again. Or there is a marriage and a service in the church—“So much better than the registry office, more dignity.” Or someone dies, and it is said there must be a church funeral. So the church is seen as an institution to provide what is needed for these so-called “rites of passage.”

But again, that has nothing to do with Christianity. I almost feel like summarizing it like this: Christianity is not what the media seem to think it is. I am second to none in my admiration of human greatness, but a man is not necessarily a Christian just because he is a great man. And the Christian church does not revolve around any person, however great and distinguished. That is religion, something entirely different.

We must get rid of this notion that the church is a national institution or any other form of human institution. She is not a club or a society where people meet together and do certain things. I never like to hear people referring to a building as a church. “I’m going down to the church,” they say. But the church does not consist of a building; it consists of people, living souls with the Lord in their midst. We must get rid of this external notion, this idea of just paying a kind of formal visit upon God and then forgetting all about Him. That is religion, the very antithesis of the Christian faith.

Any notion that Christianity is mainly the result of something that we do is always completely, fatally wrong. We must cast off any idea that the Christian church is the result of our action and that we are perpetuating some tradition. If that is our view of Christianity, it is false. That was the curse of the Jews who finally crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. They were traditional religionists, and such have always been—and are today—the greatest enemies of the true church and of the true Christian faith and message. But how much of so-called Christianity is just this!

Let me ask you a serious question: Why do you attend a place of worship? Have you thought enough about it even to ask that question? Are you going simply because it is a tradition? People, you say, have always gone to church on Sundays. But church attendance is something you do. You are simply per-

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petuating a tradition. Large numbers of people have gone to church out of a sense of duty, hoping each week that the service will not be too long. Each week they have felt nothing at all; the service has been absolutely lifeless, the singing miserable, the intoning of the Scriptures boring. There has been no power, no vigor. And because they have thought that is Christianity, they have turned their backs upon it. And they are perfectly right to do so. That is the logical step. God knows, I myself did that many years ago. And I would not be in a Christian pulpit now but for the fact that I saw through that false view. You cannot fit that into the book of Acts. That is traditional, formal religion, whatever form it may happen to take and in whatever denomination it may appear.

Let me be still more specific. There are some people who seem to have seen through the formality and who compensate for it by producing an exciting kind of worship and have stunts and entertainment to make services lively and bright. But that does not make the slightest difference because it is still men and women who are organizing it. True Christianity is always the activity of God. “Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind”—God. So, bright services and an entertaining and varied program is not Christianity either. It is livelier, but the life is not the life of the Spirit. Anything controlled by us, whether lifeless or lively, is not Christianity. Christianity is that which controls us, which masters us, which happens to us.

My second negative is that in Christianity the God who is worshiped is not an unknown God. But the God of religion is always an unknown God. A classic description of this is given by Luke in the seventeenth chapter of Acts where he describes the visit of the great apostle Paul to Athens. Paul saw the place cluttered with all sorts of temples to Jupiter, Mercury, and the rest, but he came across an intriguing and fascinating altar that had a most peculiar inscription over it: “To the unknown God.” Having accounted for the gods of love and war and peace and so on, the philosophers felt there was still another power they could not overlook. They did not know him, so they said he was the unknown god, and he seemed to be the most powerful of all. And Paul said, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:23).

The god of religion is always unknown. There are many people who have never really thought about God at all. I do not usually adopt the language of people whose views I totally dissent from, but they are perfectly right when they say that large numbers of people are worshipping a “father figure,” making some idea of fatherhood their god. It is possible for us to say our prayers

mechanically without even thinking about God and who God is. And to many people he is entirely unknown, some kind of superstition.

But there is another group of people who are very popular, even notorious, and it is most interesting to observe them. They are great critics of the first group who, they agree, are worshiping religion and tradition. What, then, do they say people should worship? Here we come to what one may call the god of the philosophers. "God," they say, "is the ground of all being." Or they describe him as the "Absolute" or the "Ultimate." He is the vague power that is somewhere behind the universe; he is "force." God, they say, is love, and by that many of them really mean that love is God, and wherever you find love you find God. So they tell you not to go to a church to find God, but to go out into the world, into the pubs, and there you will find kindness shown by one person to another, and that is God.

So God becomes something abstract, some general benevolence, some vague activity or power, and this, we are told, is what we must substitute for that old superstitious notion of God. This is up-to-date religion. This is down-to-earth; this is honest-to-God; this is the truly intellectual view. God is the ground of all being, so do not talk about a person. But you cannot pray to such a god; you cannot pray to goodness or to love or to power. But that, we are told by so many today, is the living truth and real Christianity, and the result is that we are left not only very much in the same position as those people in the first group but perhaps even worse because it is almost impossible to follow their intellectual arguments and almost impossible to know what you believe, and certainly everything is left up to you.

Yet we are told that this is the religion for twentieth-century men and women who in this postwar, atomic, scientific age think in terms of "the ground of being" and talk about "the absolute." They dismiss traditional Christianity by saying, "Of course, it's all right when people are ignorant and unintelligent. Primitive peoples have always been superstitious, and therefore they've always been religious." So they dismiss Christianity by saying that it is for ignorant people and therefore has nothing to do with them. Real Christianity is for the philosophers, for the specialists, for the thinkers, those who can read scientific journals and have understanding.

The basic notion is that the Christian faith is something one arrives at as the result of one's own reasoning processes. You do not accept any tradition or teaching, but, starting with your own reason, you examine everything. That is the method followed in the realm of science, so why not here? So you apply your mind and only believe what you can understand. As the result of your own reason and effort, you arrive at a knowledge of the truth. You inquire, you do

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your research, helped by others who are on the same quest, and at last you arrive at some satisfaction. You say, "I've got it! God is the ground of all being!" With your great mind you have arrived at this saving formula.

But this is only for certain types of people. I am almost tempted to say that if I had the power of dictatorship in these matters, I would compel everybody to read some of the latest books on this whole subject because, I tell you, they will not understand them. So the masses of people are not interested; they are not concerned. They see these clever men bringing out their books and arguing and debating with one another, and their verdict on it all is, "I couldn't care less. No doubt they make money out of it. No doubt it helps to keep their jobs going."

I am telling you what the man in the street is saying, and this is one of the greatest problems facing western Christians today. Our Christianity has become a middle-class movement; the so-called working classes are not touched by it. But this is wrong. A message that only appeals to a certain type, a certain class, is not the Christian Gospel. There is something wrong somewhere. Christianity, by definition and by the example of history, is not confined to a certain type, a certain class of person.

So much for the negatives. Now let us turn to the positives. What is Christianity? What is the Christian church? What is her message? How did she come into being? How has she acted? How has she persisted? The first thing that should strike anybody who reads the Bible, a chapter such as Acts 2 or any other, is that the starting point is the living God, the Creator, and not human beings. The first verse in the Bible is, "In the beginning God created . . ." God! The whole book starts with God and is dominated by God. I am convinced that the trouble with the world today is that it does not believe in God. And so much of our evangelism goes wrong because it starts with the Lord Jesus Christ. But you must start with God the Father, God the Creator, One whose glory fills the heavens, who is over all. With reverence I say that you cannot understand the Lord Jesus Christ, and indeed there is a sense in which there is no meaning to Him and to the message about Him, unless you start with God the Father.

Christianity puts this before us in this way: "God in three Persons, blessed Trinity"—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. God—a God who is personal, a God who can say, "I am" (Ex. 3:14) and "I will . . ." (Ex. 3:17). He is a God who, because He is a living God, reveals Himself. Contrary to modern teaching, God is not an abstraction. He is not the mere "ground of all being." He is not "the absolute." He is a God who thinks, a God who speaks, a God who makes proclamations. Or, looking at it the other

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way round, He is a God to whom we can pray, a God whose help we can seek. This is the message throughout the Bible.

I could give you many illustrations. As we have seen, this was the very message that the apostle Paul preached to the people in Athens. We are told that “his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry” (Acts 17:16). Paul said in effect, “I can’t stand this. I must tell these people they’re worshiping nothing. They’re worshiping idols they made themselves, mere projections of their own minds. There are no such gods. These people know nothing about the living, true God.” This is what he said to them:

Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.

—Acts 17:22-26

In Thessalonica Paul proclaimed the same message. In his letter to the Thessalonians, he later wrote, “Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). Christianity is no dead religion; we serve a living God.

But God is not only a living God, He is a God who acts, and this is the point I want to make. Here it is again: “When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” They had come together and were praying together; they were waiting. And in the end, people can do nothing but wait. “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” Now that is the truth about God. This is the special point about the Christian message, the thing that differentiates it from every other message. Every other religion worships a dead god. Take the so-called great religions of the East. Their adherents have no living God to turn to, no God who acts. They talk about Nirvana, about being absorbed into the absolute, and people think it is intelligent to believe in something like that. All is dead and a matter of passivity.

Christianity is the exact opposite. The people in Jerusalem, Jews from Crete, Arabia, and all the other places, were astonished and exclaimed, “We

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do hear them speak in our tongues”—speak of what?—“the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). This is the whole message of the Bible and of the Christian church. These men, filled with the Holy Spirit, were not protesting against the tyranny of the Roman Empire; they were not deciding what resolutions they should send to the Emperor or to their representatives, their senators and others; they were not expressing their opinion on current affairs. No, no: “the wonderful works of God.” The Christian message is a proclamation to men and women fumbling and stumbling, even at noonday, trying in the darkness to solve their problems and understand the mystery of life. It is a proclamation that this is God’s world, that God has made it. It has not just evolved. “In the beginning God”—He created.

But God not only made the world, He owns it and controls it. Psalm 104 tells us how He gives breath and life to everything and how, when He withdraws the breath of life, all creatures collapse and die. God is over all—not men and women, not even the greatest of them, but God, who has made everything and who gives every gift. Even the greatest people have nothing to boast of; they have nothing but what they have received. They have not generated it or produced it. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17).

Furthermore, God is actively interested in this world. He is not some god in the distance, in the vagueness of impersonal religion. No, no! He looks down upon the world He has made and is concerned about it. The great message of the Bible, the immediate message of the early Christian church, is to tell men and women something about “the wonderful works” God has done upon this earth.

Let me emphasize some of these works for you. God has not abandoned this world. It is in a terrible mess; it has been in a mess since Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. All our troubles have come out of that. But the message is that it is not men and women who will redeem the world and lift it up again. They have been trying to do that for many centuries, and that is the story of civilization and of political activity. I am not here to criticize them. Let them do their best. They are meant to preserve order as far as they can in the chaos, but they will never redeem this world.

But the God that Christianity preaches came down into the garden in the cool of the evening. This is a God who is concerned. He came down and spoke to the man and woman, exposing their evil and punishing them, but also giving them a promise, and if I did not have this promise I would not be a preacher. The promise reveals that God is concerned about this world and its affairs and is doing something about it.

The Bible is the book of God, the history of the activity of God. After the account of the Fall, we go on to read that men and women turned their backs upon God and sank so deeply into sin that they were living not only a materialistic, immoral life, but an amoral life, and God visited the world with the punishment of the Flood. And that is the sort of world we are living in now.

And then later on, in their cleverness, men and women said, “Let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven” (Gen. 11:4). That is the time in the Old Testament that seems to me to correspond most clearly to the twentieth century: “We’ll build a temple, a tower that will reach to heaven. We’ll do it with our scientific knowledge. We’re going to get right into heaven.”

But God acted. He came down and confused it all. The same God acted in Sodom and Gomorrah, and in many a similar society, and in Babylon too. All these great places have come to nothing; they all turned to rubble.

But, thank God, that is only one side. There is another—He is the God of Abraham. How did the great Old Testament story of the Jews ever come to pass? The answer is that God looked on a man called Abraham, living in paganism in Ur of the Chaldees. He spoke to him and called him out, and Abraham went out, “not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8), simply obeying the call of God. It is all of God. This is the essence of Christianity, this is the true message—not you and I dragging ourselves to a church service in which we do everything and feel nothing, while God is some abstraction, away in some infinity.

There was also a man called Jacob, a pretty poor character. He had a twin brother called Esau who, as a natural man, was much nicer and a better fellow. But Jacob, disguised as Esau, received the blessing that his dying father had intended for Esau. So Jacob had to run for his life. On the first night of his escape, he lay on the ground and put a stone under his head as a pillow, and there he had a most amazing dream. God spoke to him. This is it! God interfering in a man’s life, God addressing him, a ladder sent down, and traffic between heaven and earth—between God and man. Jacob awoke, astonished and amazed, and said, “This is none other but the house of God” (Gen. 28:17). “I didn’t realize it,” he said in effect. “I thought I was in a wilderness, and I put my head upon a stone, but I’m in the house of God, at the very gateway and doorway of heaven. I’ve met with God.” And he had. This is Christianity.

Or take another illustration, this time from the third chapter of the book of Exodus. Here was a man who had been a shepherd for forty years. His name was Moses, and he was a great man. Because of something he had done

in Egypt, Moses, too, had had to escape, and he was apparently destined to spend the rest of his life as a simple shepherd. But one afternoon he took his sheep to the back side of a mountain, not expecting anything at all, and “the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed” (Ex. 3:2). We would never have heard the story of the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan but for this. It was not an idea that suddenly occurred to Moses. He did not plan and scheme and order it. Far from it!

God appeared to him, and poor Moses stammered, hesitated, and did not understand. When Moses first saw the bush, he said, “I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.” He was going to investigate. He was a modern man, you see, a scientist. “What is this? What is this phenomenon? I’m going to understand it.”

But God called out of the middle of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses, . . . Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. . . . I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:4-6). Then we are told that Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God—and rightly so. And the Lord said—if this were not true, there would be no message, no hope—“I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt.” God is not some ground of reality, not some impersonal force or idea or mere love or goodness or kindness. He is personal—“I have seen . . . and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows [He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15)]; and I am come down to deliver them” (Ex. 3:7-8). And He did.

Then the great story follows. Let me urge you to read your Old Testament. Go on to the fourteenth chapter of that book of Exodus, and there you will find that Moses and the people, having gone out of Egypt, found themselves with the sea in front and the hosts of Pharaoh behind. They felt they were at the point of being annihilated. Then Moses turned to God, not knowing what to do. And God said, “The Lord shall fight for you. . . . Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward” (vv. 14-15). They went—and God acted! Then God went on to speak to Moses on Mount Sinai, revealing His character, giving the Ten Commandments and the moral law.

I feel like the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. Time would fail me to tell you all these great stories—David, the prophets, Elijah on Mount Carmel in the great trial. There they were, the 850 false prophets with one true

prophet—Elijah, the man of God. He challenged them and said, “The God that answereth by fire, let him be God” (1 Kings 18:24).

The false prophets said they had a god, Baal. “Very well,” said Elijah in essence. “We’ll test our gods. We’ll see which of them is God. Kill a bullock, cut it in pieces, put the pieces on a pile of wood on an altar, and ask your god Baal to send down fire to consume the offering.”

So they began, the 850 false prophets, with Elijah watching them. He knew the result before they began. He spoke to them now and again and said things like, “Why doesn’t your god answer you? Perhaps he’s gone on a journey, or perhaps he’s asleep and can’t hear you. Shout a little louder!”

That is the way to deal with false prophets. Let them produce their god, let them show the results of their “living” god—where is he? That is why chapels and churches are empty. People are not worshiping the true and living God but mere projections of their own minds and philosophies.

On Mount Carmel nothing happened. The prophets cut themselves with knives and went into a frenzy. But they failed completely. Then Elijah stepped quietly forward and offered a simple prayer to God. He began, “Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel” (v. 36). And God answered by fire. He is the living God. He is the active God. He is the true God.

In one way, the story of the New Testament begins in Luke 3: “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee”—what happened?—“the word of God came unto John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” There had been no word from God for about four hundred years, not since the prophet Malachi, but now here was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness, and the word of God came to him. That is the whole story. It is always God acting and sending His word. But the climax is this: “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal. 4:4). “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, sent into the world, appearing among men—God sending, God acting.

And here in Acts 2 God is starting the Christian church: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” God was continuing, acting in them and through them. It is quite certain that we would not be considering this now were it not for the fact that God has continued to act. Men and women in their blindness and sin have done their very best to ruin the

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Christian church. If she were our creation, she would have disappeared long ago, like many another institution. People have misunderstood, they have gone wrong, they have preached error, and the church would have died. So why is there still a church? There is only one answer: God comes in revival. God sends His Spirit again. Look at the Protestant Reformation. God, just as He sent his word to John the Baptist, sent it to Martin Luther; and when God sends His word even to one man and gives him great power, He can awaken a great church with fifteen centuries of tradition behind it. Only one man—but it was enough. Martin Luther, called of God, given the message and filled with God’s Spirit, overthrew a church that had become quite pagan in its teaching.

God, the living, active God, sent the rushing, mighty wind. Why does He do it? It is for salvation. “It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). Everyone needs to be saved, however great, however illustrious. We are all sinners. We are all born in sin, “shapen in iniquity” (Ps. 51:5). “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). The wrath of God is on us all. “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away” (1 Pet. 1:24). The greatest lose their faculties. Final illness and decay come to each of us.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e’er gave,  
Await alike the inevitable hour,  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Thomas Gray

Oh, there is no hope in humanity. The only hope is that God is, and that He is the God who comes down, the God who offers salvation. He sent His only Son into the world, even to the cross, to die, His body to be broken, His blood to be shed, so that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

This is Christianity: It is the message that you need to be saved and that God has provided the means whereby you can be saved. It is all His action. It is a supernatural action, a miraculous action. I am not telling you to be good, for I know you cannot be. I am not telling you to read books of philosophy in order to arrive at a knowledge of God and learn how to live—I know it is all useless. My message is that God “hath visited and redeemed his people” (Luke 1:68). It is no use anyone telling us to pull ourselves together—that is the one thing we cannot do. We are mastered by lust and passions and evil de-

sires. We are victims; we need to be delivered. And thank God, He does deliver us. That is our message. It is a surprising one. Like the visitors to Jerusalem, people today ask, "What meaneth this?" (Acts 2:12). We cannot understand. It is powerful. It was a mighty rushing wind, and it is a transforming power. It changes people. It changed these disciples so that rather than being weak, frightened, alarmed, helpless, and useless, they became mighty men of God.

But above everything else, Christianity is entirely beyond understanding. "What meaneth this?" they asked. Of course they did. If you can understand your religion, that is proof it is not Christianity. If you are in control of your religion, it is not Christianity. If you can take it up in a bag on Sunday morning when you go to church and then put it down again, that is not Christianity. Christianity is a miracle. It is a marvel. It astonishes people.

When Blaise Pascal, the French thinker, had a great experience of God, he said, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Then, negatively, "not the god of the philosophers and seers and thinkers." That is the contrast. The God of the Bible is the God who reveals Himself in all the glory and the wonder of His miraculous, eternal power. Thank God for such a message, such a Gospel. It made the church. This is what she preached, and on the day of Pentecost three thousand men and women were added to the church.

But, finally, because all this is true, Christianity is a message for all people: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). You will need to be very clever to understand the modern books about God, but thank God, you do not need to be clever to be a Christian. "The common people heard him gladly," wrote Mark (12:37). "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called," says the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 1:26). Rather, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty . . . and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (vv. 27-28). There is a hope for all who realize their need and cry out to Him.

Is that your idea of Christianity? Do you know this living God, this true God, this active God, this God who intervenes and comes? Have you ever met Him in any shape or form, as Moses met Him in the burning bush, as Jacob met Him at Peniel, as Elijah met Him on Mount Carmel? Have you ever felt the touch of God upon your soul? Are you aware that you have been dealt with, that God has entered into your life and has done something that you could not do? Do you know that you are what you are by the grace of God? Do you say, "I can't explain it—all I know is that God has done something to

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me in Christ"? If you can say that, you are a Christian. But if all you have is what you do and what you think, I am afraid you are not a Christian. God's coming to you need not be the rushing, mighty wind, but it is always the power of God. It is always the hand of God. It always brings the knowledge that God has had pity upon you and has come down in the person of His Son to enter into your life, to save you and set you free. Oh, that men and women might know the living God and His power unto salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord!

## The Great Fact of Prophecy

*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face; for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.*

*Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he, seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see*

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*and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

—Acts 2:14-36

The day of Pentecost was a most notable and vital day for the Christian church, and it was also one of the great turning points in the history of the world. Without understanding it, it is quite impossible to have any correct notion as to the character and nature of the Christian church and the Christian message. In Acts 2 we have the first sermon that was ever preached under the auspices of the church, and therefore it is of unusual importance.

I am calling attention to Peter's sermon because we are confronted by the tragic fact that the world, speaking generally, is not interested in this message. That is particularly staggering since we now find ourselves in a world that we understand less and less. The other day I was reading an article in a learned journal that pointed out that toward the last quarter of the nineteenth century scientists had become exceedingly confident and optimistic. Even a great and sane man like Lord Kelvin did not hesitate to say that it was merely a matter of time before all the secrets of nature would be discovered. Discoveries and inventions had led men and women to believe that scientific research and endeavor held the key to unlocking the secrets of life. But the article went on to point out, quite rightly, that in a very short time indeed all such notions were exploded.

By what? Well, by further discoveries of science! The discovery of X-rays shattered nineteenth-century optimism and dispelled the idea that all the mysteries of the universe would soon be fathomed. The discovery of radium increased the sense of mystery, and then later research in the twentieth century on the nature of the atom and so on completely destroyed this optimism. The universe has become mysterious.

But apart from that, what is life itself? What is the purpose of it all? What are we doing here? And then, of course, there is death, that inevitable event toward which everybody is moving. What is it? What lies behind it? We are only here for a short while—threescore years and ten, says the Bible. Some are taken beyond that, yes, to ninety and even more, but death is bound to come.

So is it not amazing that, confronted by such ignorance about the universe, ourselves, life, death, and eternity, the majority of men and women will still not consider the only book, the only teaching, that gives us even a

modicum of explanation and understanding? It is astounding that people in the world can still go on in their fatal optimism in spite of facts that are shaking their world, even in the face of their own discoveries, and even when confronted by the sort of event that is undoubtedly uppermost in the minds of all the people of this country at present.<sup>2</sup> But this is the truth that is before us, and I assert once more that the only help and guidance we have is to be found here, in the pages of the Bible.

When we come to the Bible, we come to something that is entirely different from what passes for Christianity in the minds of so many people, both with regard to the nature of the church and the character of her message. But because people do not know that, they are not interested in it, and so turn away from it. They are left to their own misery, disturbed by events, shaken for a moment when they stand over an open grave, but then rush away to take a drink or plunge into pleasure or watch television in an attempt to forget all about it. But it is foolish to dismiss these fears by brushing them away and turning your back upon them. Here is a message that asks us all to think and to face solid facts of history, and that is why I come back to it once more.

One reason that people very often give to explain why they are not interested in Christianity is that it can be understood and dismissed finally and completely—so they say—in terms of psychology. This argument takes many different forms. Some say, “You Christians claim to have religious experiences, and people like you have claimed this throughout the centuries. It used to be thought, of course, that all this was real, but now we know otherwise.” (Incidentally, with reference to Lord Kelvin’s confident assertion, which I quoted earlier, he was answered not only by the discovery of X-rays, but perhaps quite as much by the theories of Freud and his school of psychology.) The argument is this: “Of course, we are not all the same. We have different temperaments, and we react in different ways to the same set of facts. Furthermore, people’s own minds can produce things. People used to think there was a great God in the heavens. Of course, we have now discovered, as the result of psychological research, that there is nothing there at all, but people have conjured up the idea of some powerful father figure, some great being outside us. When they say there is a God, they are merely projecting their own feelings, their own sensations. And that is the essence of religion.”

We are asked to look at the science of the development of religions—the philosophy of religion, as it is called. And we are told that the further back we go in the story of the human race, and the more primitive people are, and the more superstitious they are, the more frightened they are of life. Primitive natives are always frightened of everything, and they tend to personalize

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everything. They hear a thunderclap and say, "Oh, there's some great being up there who has just roared," and they see a flash of lightning and add, "He struck some tinder or something." And so they turn every natural event they do not understand into the work of a god. That is primitive man.

Then we are told that as societies develop and people become more sophisticated, religious belief becomes less crude. If we go up the scale, we find fewer and fewer gods, and eventually we arrive at the Jews who reached the topmost pinnacle, maintaining that there is only one God and that the others are not gods at all. But of course, the theory continues, even the Jews were wrong. They had advanced tremendously—it is a great advance to have only one god instead of dozens—but we know now that there is not even one God. And even the most intelligent people, not only the Jews but Christian people also, are still just doing the same old thing, objectifying their fears and phobias and putting them all together into a being, a person, whom they call God. To sum up, this is the sole explanation of religion, and of Christianity, which is a higher and modified form of the religion of the Jews.

That is the argument, and I am very concerned about this because I often find that Christian people do not know how to answer it; indeed, they have even lent their support to that argument. Back in 1935 I had the privilege of taking part in a summer school for ministers. One evening I was leading a discussion, and I was most interested to notice that certain men, who were arguing from the same position as I was, were almost giving me more trouble than the people with whom we were arguing. They got up one after another and said something like this (how often one has heard it!): "It doesn't matter what you say, I don't care what scientific evidence you produce, you can argue as you like, you can ridicule my Bible with your learning and take most of it from me, and maintain that science can prove this and that, but you will never take my experience from me."

These men thought that in that way they were answering the scientists, but they were simply delivering themselves lock, stock, and barrel into the arms of the psychologists! "Quite so," says the psychologist. "That's exactly the trouble with you religious people. You shut your eyes to the facts. You say, 'my experience,' but of course we can explain your experience quite simply. Think of the man who says he has had an experience of God and has felt awe in his presence. Now if you were to psychoanalyze that man, you would probably find that as a child he was once terrified by his own father. He had done something wrong; so his father had reprimanded him very severely and perhaps struck him. This began to rankle and to build up until it became his idea of God." That is the kind of response you may

get when you base the whole of your position upon your experience. Yet so many Christians do that.

Do not misunderstand me. I believe in the objective validity of religious experiences. All I am trying to show is that you cannot base the Christian message on experiences because people explain them away like that. Sometimes they go further and say, "You say that the only explanation of these experiences is your Christian message, but of course we know something about the cults. We've heard similar things about Christian Scientists, for example, who claim that whereas they used to be worried and troubled, now, since they've taken up this teaching, they are no longer ill or worried." So if you put the Christian case in terms of some wonderful experience you have had, or in terms of an appeal like "Come to Jesus and you will find a friend" or "Come to Jesus and you will get physical healing" or "Come to Jesus and you will receive guidance" or "Come to Jesus and you will discover peace and joy," if you put it like that, you are just opening the door to a psychological explanation of your faith.

Or again, some people may say that though they are very glad that others have had these experiences of healing and deliverance from various troubles, they themselves have never been worried by such things. "I'm very glad that you are better than you used to be," they may say. "I'm thankful for any kind of agency that can deliver people from their troubles. I think you may be wrong in your explanation, but as long as it makes you feel better, well and good, carry on. I'm obviously a different kind of person, and I don't need what you're talking about. Life is going very happily and smoothly. I have a good job, I'm earning good money, I have a wife and children, we have a wonderful home, there's nothing that I desire. So when you come with your great stories and ask me to take this, that, and the other, the answer is, thank you, but I don't need it!" And many people are in precisely that position.

The answer to all these comments is Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. Why did Peter preach? It was in order to give an explanation. The people in Jerusalem were suddenly confronted by a group of men and women, some of whom they may have already known, and who were obviously very simple people—fishermen and others—who were suddenly entirely changed. Something astounding had happened to them, and the people of Jerusalem "were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue?" (Acts 2:7-8). Some said the disciples were full of new wine. The crowd was confronted by a phenomenon, an experience, a change in the lives of men and women. So the question was: What has done this? And in his sermon Peter gave the answer to that question.

Notice first of all that Peter did not just talk about his experience or say, "This is wonderful, and you people can have the same thing." No, he said, "This is that which was spoken . . ." and he quoted a prophet, and then another prophet, and he expounded the Scriptures. In addition, he expounded the Scriptures in terms of certain facts. The whole of this sermon is a recital of facts and an explanation of them, put in this most interesting manner. Peter said, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (v. 32). Indeed, he addressed them, saying, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (vv. 22-24). Peter pointed his listeners to objective facts and then worked out his great argument. And the essence is this: "You are asking what this is, and I can only explain it to you in terms of a person called Jesus of Nazareth. He is the sole explanation."

"If you want to understand what has happened to us," said Peter in effect, "if you want to understand this amazing phenomenon, you have to look at that person, Jesus of Nazareth." So Peter told them about our Lord's birth and His life, about His teaching and especially about His death upon the cross, His burial in the tomb and then His resurrection and ascension. Finally, he explained this thing that had just happened on the day of Pentecost.

Now the apostle's argument is that the events on the day of Pentecost would not have happened were it not for those facts. Were it not that our Lord had risen from the dead and appeared to His disciples, nothing would have happened. Peter was claiming that this Jesus of Nazareth is the only begotten Son of God and that such a claim is proved by His resurrection from the dead. So Peter gave a long quotation from David. He said that David had foreseen this event and prophesied it. David could not have been talking about himself because, said Peter, "he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day" (v. 29), whereas Christ, having died, had been raised and had ascended to heaven from where, "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (v. 33). Christ, said Peter, had sent down this power, even as He had promised He would. And that, Peter argued, was the sole explanation of what had happened to them. Now you will notice that Peter did not answer in terms of a theory; he did not make a psychological analysis; he did not try to explain it. He said in essence, "I

*The Great Fact of Prophecy (2:14-36)*

have only one explanation, and it is Jesus whom you have seen and heard and whose miracles you have witnessed.”

So I say to you that it does not matter what your temperament is; it does not matter what your psychological makeup may or may not be. Like Peter, it is my task to remind you of certain historical facts. May I put it like this to fix it in your mind? This age may well be known as the age of Winston Churchill—a fact of history. There has been an age of Cromwell; there was an age of Julius Caesar. These are facts—these people were historical personages. And Jesus of Nazareth is a historical personage. I am not trying to explain some experience or a theory. I start with certain events that have taken place and belong solidly to history. That was Peter’s argument. That was how he started his sermon. But he put it in a most interesting way. He put it in terms of this next element that I want to emphasize—prophecy. “This,” he said, “is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (v. 16), and then he proceeded to quote that prophet who had lived many centuries earlier.

That Jesus’ life and death is the fulfillment of prophecy is one of the main arguments in this sermon, and I want to show you its importance. It is very interesting to notice how these preachers repeated themselves. Much later on, when Peter came to write a letter and was talking about this great salvation, he said:

Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

—1 Pet. 1:10-12

And in Peter’s second letter, when he reminds his readers that he is an old man, he says:

I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me.

—2 Pet. 1:12-14

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Peter's body was but a tent ("tabernacle"), and he says in so many words, "I am going to put it off; I am going on to the realm of the spiritual." So what was Peter reminding his readers of? Well, he says:

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

—2 Pet. 1:16-19

You see, the old man is saying, "I am going to die and shall not be with you much longer. So I want you to hold on to those things that you have heard, because you are living in a difficult world, and you are confronted by the world, the flesh, and the devil. You yourselves have to die, and I am thinking of your having an abundant entry into the everlasting kingdom of God when you come to die. The only way to have this is to hold on to the truth you have heard."

But somebody may say, "Why should we believe it? On what grounds do we believe it?"

"Well," says Peter in effect, "I am being a witness. I remember the day when this Jesus of Nazareth turned to James and John and me and said, 'Come along, I want you to go with Me to the top of the mountain.' So we went up, leaving the other disciples at the foot, and you know, I shall never forget it. There the three of us were with Him on top of this mountain, and suddenly the place was overshadowed by a bright, shining cloud; and as we looked at Him, He was entirely transfigured. He began to shine with an amazing luminosity—even His clothing was shining, and a radiance of heaven came into it. Two men appeared, speaking to Him—Moses and Elijah—and we heard a voice speaking from heaven saying, 'This is my beloved Son: hear Him.'

"Now," continues Peter, "I am an old man, on the verge of the grave, but I testify to you that I was there. I heard it. I am a witness to it, and so were my brethren, James and John. We heard that voice on the holy mount; we heard God speaking about this Jesus. You have not followed cunningly devised fables. We have not been telling you fairy tales. We have had to suffer for this, and I know that I am going to suffer again. He told me; He prophesied that I was going to die in a most extraordinary way."

*The Great Fact of Prophecy (2:14-36)*

Jesus had predicted that when Peter came to die, he would be crucified (see John 21:18); and according to tradition he was crucified upside-down. So here is an old man who knows that is coming, and he says, “I tell you in the presence of God, I heard the voice.” But notice that in his letter Peter does not stop at that. The facts are there, and they are important, but he also says, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy.” “If you do not believe my testimony,” says Peter in effect, “if you do not believe my witness, then I have another bit of evidence—prophecy, verified prophecy.”

So at the end of his life Peter was, in a sense, preaching the same sermon as his very first sermon on the day of Pentecost when he reminded these people of Jerusalem, “. . . as ye yourselves also know . . . this Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.” But he also said, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.”

In his sermon in Acts 2, Peter quoted two prophecies in particular—the prophecy of the prophet Joel, and that of David who, because he was a man of God who was at times illumined by the Spirit, also prophesied and wrote his prophecies in the form of psalms. The apostle’s argument is that prophecy is a fact. These prophecies were written centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ. So it does not make the slightest difference whether you are volatile or quiet, whether you are an optimist or a pessimist. It is a solid fact of history that many centuries before the birth of Christ, various men wrote down, in documents that were preserved, prophecies about a person who was going to come. They gave the most extraordinary details concerning Him—details about His birth in Bethlehem, about His poverty, and about the character of His life. They told of His ride into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey, of the betrayal for thirty pieces of silver, and they predicted that He would be “brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isa. 53:7) and killed. They said He would die, yes, but that He would rise again and would ascend and send down the Holy Spirit. All of that was prophesied.

This is the basis of the Christian faith. I do not simply preach experiences to you. Thank God, I have had experiences, but I do not tell you what has happened to me. I do not talk about myself. With the apostle Paul I say, “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5). That is why I never believe in just having people give their testimonies and say, “Come to Jesus and you will get the same thing.” No, no. My task is to hold these facts before you, the facts recorded in the Gospels and, behind them, the fact of prophecy.

But how do you explain prophecy? How did it come about that so many centuries before the events, these men were able to tell us about them in such

## Lloyd-Jones on Acts

detail? The answer is given by Peter in that last letter of his when he says, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Pet. 1:20). This means that none of God’s prophets ever wrote a prophecy that he simply conjured up out of his own mind or imagination. The prophet was not just a man who sat down and thought philosophically about life, trying with his insight to understand it, and then had a brilliant idea. A human being cannot by himself foretell facts. He can give theories, he can make a forecast, though it is generally wrong rather than right, but that is all. These men, however, were right, and right in detail. If they had told a one-time fact, you could say it was a coincidence, but there are dozens of details. It is extraordinary. How do you explain it? Peter said, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). That is the only explanation: It is God who was behind everything, revealing it, making it known, and that is what the prophets say. Read their words for yourselves. They do not say, “I’ve suddenly had a bright idea.” No, it is, “the word of the Lord came unto me,” “the burden of the Lord,” “the Lord spake unto me.” They were given the words to say.

Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection were fulfillments of prophecy. This was the basis of Peter’s message, and I suggest to you that it is unanswerable. So let me summarize what it all means. First and foremost, it reminds us of the living God. He is not an abstraction. He is not a philosophic *x* about which you argue and debate. No, no, He is a living God who gives revelation, gives knowledge, and imparts information.

Peter also made this striking point: In those revelations that God gave to the prophets, He was revealing that He has a great plan and purpose with respect to this world. That is the message of Christianity, and that is really why I am a preacher. It is because there is no other hope. Princes and lords may flourish, but then they fade. The great statesman dies; the great leader goes. There is an enemy that conquers all—death. Today is a historic occasion; it is a great day that will go down in history—January 24, 1965—the death of Sir Winston Churchill. So let us look at history. What does it tell us? It tells us that great men arise, that they give an impetus to the human race and solve certain problems. But they die, and they leave us in a world of tragedy and pain.

Churchill said that he did not believe he had been called to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire, but he witnessed it, did he not? And that is the whole message of history. Men and women come, they strive, they cut great figures on the stage of history, then out they go, even the greatest of them, and the problems remain. I am not detracting from them in saying

*The Great Fact of Prophecy (2:14-36)*

that. All honor goes to great men and women, but it has nothing to do with Christianity. The message of Christianity is that God has a plan and purpose.

In his sermon Peter, referring to the death of our Lord, said, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Notice the words, “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” That is what the Christian message is about. It tells us that the death of Christ on the cross was not an accident, that ultimately it was not even something achieved by men; it was part of the plan and purpose of God. So whatever your temperament, whether you are an optimist or a pessimist, whether you are mercurial or phlegmatic, with all your scientific and psychological knowledge, listen to this: The great eternal God who revealed the plan hundreds of years ago is carrying it out; and as part of His plan, He sent His Son into this world, even to the death of the cross.

And the object of this plan? It is to save. The end of the quotation from Joel is this: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (v. 21). Saved from what? Saved from eternal misery, which is the punishment we all so richly deserve from God, against whom we have rebelled and whom we have offended. And we are saved for a positive knowledge of God, for a new, a fuller life, an expanding life, a life that leads to glory everlasting. That is God’s plan, and that is what He revealed through the prophets all those centuries before the events. Isaiah said, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God” (Isa. 40:1). All eyes would see God’s salvation.

And God would bring about this salvation by sending His Son into the world. The prophets had foretold that a baby would be born of a virgin in Bethlehem. He was coming—the Deliverer, the Messiah. They were to wait for Him. That was the message of the prophets.

God would send a Deliverer, but how would He bring about deliverance? Would it be by giving us an example, by saying, “Follow Me. Imitate that”? Thank God, that is not the message. Who can imitate God? It is easy for the philosophers to talk and write about it, but have you ever tried to do it? No, no, God’s Deliverer did not come merely to teach us; He did not come and tell us, “Do this, and you will save yourselves.” He knew we could not. It was because the whole world lies guilty before God that He came. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). He came because man could not save himself.

This is the answer: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” God sent His Son into this world to bear the guilt

of our sins. God punished our sins in His Son. It was God who contrived the cross. The cruel hands of men actually knocked in the nails, but it was by the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God. This was God's way of saving—in His Son and by His death; and to prove it, He raised His Son from the dead. Our Lord was big enough and strong enough to bear all our sin: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." Why? Because He was God the Son in the flesh and He could not die. He is divine; He is eternal. He rose, bursting asunder the bands of death.

And so Peter taught the people, and that is the Christian message—that all of us need to be delivered from the guilt and the bondage and the power and the captivity of sin, and that it is Christ alone who can deliver us. This is God's plan, determined and purposed before the foundation and creation of the world.

And finally, not only has God a plan, but it is a plan that is certain; nothing can stop it. The Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes and all the others were against Christ. They all delivered Him up to death. He was a danger, a nuisance, and they regarded Him as a political agitator. "Away with Him," they shouted. The unintelligent mob crucified Him, and they thought that was the end. But they did not know that even as they were hammering in the nails, they were carrying out God's will. The God I preach to you can use His enemies, and He has often done so. They do not know what is happening, but He does. He used His enemies to carry out His own plan. Human malignity could not frustrate it. Our Lord's enemies thought that when they crucified Him and saw His body taken to a tomb, that would be the end of Him, but it was not. Hell had let itself loose, man and devil had done their utmost, but God smashed it all. God raised Christ from the dead. He is over all, and He triumphed over all, even over all His enemies, even the devil and hell and everything else that was against Him. All are to be defeated: He has announced it by the resurrection.

So the apostle says here, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (v. 36). It is a solemn thought that we are face to face with God. You may say, "I'm all right. I'm happy. I have all I want. It's a wonderful life." Yes, but how do you explain these facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth? Why did it happen? Why did it have to happen? Why did God send Him? Why was this God's plan? You are a living soul, and this has happened in your world, and it has happened with respect to you, just as it has with respect to everybody else, because in spite of our differences, in one respect we are all

*The Great Fact of Prophecy (2:14-36)*

the same: We are all sinners in the sight of God. “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10).

The issue cannot be evaded by talking about psychology and temperament and by quoting experiences. Every one of us is confronted by the fact of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, it is Sunday, January 24, 1965. Why? Not because Sir Winston Churchill died, but because Jesus of Nazareth was born and lived and taught and died and rose again and sent down the Spirit. It is 1965 A.D.—*Anno Domini*—the year of our Lord. That is what we must all face. It does not matter who you are. It does not matter whether you are able or whether you are lacking in talent, whether you are learned or ignorant. It does not matter what you have been or what your constitution is. Nothing matters except that you are a human being and that God sent His only begotten Son into a world of human beings.

So the question confronting you is not what you need, but who this person is. Why did the prophets write about Him, and, especially, why did God ever send Him to die? Has this got anything to do with me? That is your question. That is the way to face history. That is the way to face the history even of a great man. You do not just say, “How wonderful he was!” You say, “What has all this got to do with me?” You relate yourself to history, and that is right and good; we should all be trying to do that. But here is the supreme fact of history: Why Jesus Christ? Why Bethlehem? Why Golgotha? Why the tomb? Why the resurrection? Why the descent of the Holy Spirit? Why the church? Why all these things?

Have you ever asked those questions? It is because men and women never face the fact of Christ and the fact of prophecy that they continue in the darkness and the misery of sin, not knowing where they are going, not understanding life, not ready to die, afraid of the eternal future. So today make use of history. Ask yourself this fundamental question: Who is this Jesus? And if you do that seriously, you will come to see that He has everything to do with you, for He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He came “to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). My dear friends, look at the facts, and especially this great fact of prophecy, of which the facts are a verification.

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