

**The Heart and Mind of the Church under Christ as Lord**  
**(The Apostles' Speeches in Acts)**  
**Study 1    30/1/14**

## **What is Happening when the Apostles Speak?**

I have titled this series 'The heart and mind of the Church under Christ' because when the Apostles speak, they reveal their own hearts and minds, and so, the mind of the Church that arises because of what they say. In fact, without words, it is impossible to understand any action in history. This is all the more so because Jesus had said the Apostles would be witnesses to him and that he would be with them. In their doing what he said, Christ is present building his Church; so, we get the heart of what the Church is.

If we ask, 'What is it like to live under Christ as Lord?' the answer, at least in part, is here in this book of Acts. In fact, the book may be answering the question 'Can we be sure that we are living under Christ as Lord?' Luke wrote his first volume (The Gospel of Luke) so Theophilus would know the *certainty* of all that Jesus began to do and teach (Lu. 1:4). In this second book, he reminds us of where the earlier story finished: resurrection appearances, teaching about the kingdom, the command to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit and the promise of Spirit baptism. The inference is that he now tells us what Jesus *continues* to do and teach, and we may presume that his purpose is the same as the first book: that we may know the *certainty* of the doing and speaking of Jesus through his apostles and church. Certainty is in short supply in our world and on this point of our living under Christ as Lord, we need to be sure that this is what we are doing, and have some idea of what it may look like.

*Acts* is not just history, though it is that. As with OT history (the 'Former Prophets' as Israel called the books of *Joshua* to *Esther*), it is prophecy—that is, God speaks to us about the certainty of his engagement with us in the real world through Jesus Christ. We may think Christianity is a system of belief and an appropriate behaviour, but its essential content is Christ himself speaking to us and acting among us. We need to know the certainty of this and the book of Acts is here to help.

The speeches we will look each have their particular setting and purpose but also have some similarities, particularly with regard to the Scriptures they quote and how they use them. They use them to prove that Jesus is the Christ and that he needed to suffer and be raised and that forgiveness must be proclaimed to all nations. The consistency of these references, regardless of whether it is Peter, Stephen, James or Paul who speaks, suggests that a written document had been assembled to show what Scriptures had been fulfilled by Jesus. Scholars sometimes refer to these as *The Testimonies* and they may well go back to the teaching of Jesus himself.

Jesus spent his 40 days between resurrection and ascension giving irrefutable evidence of his resurrection, and teaching the apostles about the kingdom of God. One example of this was Jesus speaking to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He shows them that the entire OT speaks about him and proves that he needed to suffer and be raised from the dead. When the same message is given to the apostles, Jesus adds that these prophecies also indicate that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be announced to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lu. 24:44-46, based on Is. 2:3).

The only other knowledge we have of Jesus' teaching after the resurrection (beside the few references in *John*) is because of the disciples' question about Israel and when the promises concerning her would be fulfilled. No information is forthcoming about their request. It is important to know what we don't know! Their duty however is to be witnesses to Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, reigning and returning as King, and to announce forgiveness. It is rightly said that revelation is given on a 'need to know' basis.

Clearly, the Spirit broke open to the Apostles the truth of Christ, the love of Christ and the power of all this, but it may well be that Christ himself laid the groundwork for what we hear them teaching, particularly, his revelations of how he was fulfilling all that the prophets had foretold.

The book of Acts is the record of God fulfilling his promises, and of Jesus fulfilling his promises, that the Spirit will come, that the apostles will be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth, that the Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement, and that he would build his church. We will see how emphatic the apostles are that everything is happening as foretold. The source of their gospel is the faithfulness of God. The connection between God's promises and what they are announcing is the proof they offer to a sceptical world.

*Acts* has five movements, each concluding with a summary statement about how the word of God growing and increasing—in Jerusalem (to 6:7), throughout Judea, to Galilee and Samaria (to 9:31), to the Gentiles (to 12:24), to Asia (to 16:5), to Europe (to 19:20) and to Rome (28:31). At each point, it is the Holy Spirit who takes the initiative to see that the commission of Jesus is fulfilled. Someone has made an educated guess that each of these periods lasts some five years.

The numerous speeches recorded in the book, obviously, summaries from memory and collected by Luke, reveal the heart and mind of the apostles, and so, the church, as they lived under the Christ they proclaimed as Lord. They remained 'on message', that is, proclaiming the kingdom, engaging the world as it was but singularly unaffected by its morés. In each of the speeches we consider, we will look at its setting, its content, and its outcome.

The major speeches in Acts are:

by Peter at Pentecost (2:14-40),  
and in the Temple (3:12-26);  
by Stephen before the Jewish Council (7:1-53);  
by Peter again at Ceasarea (10:34-43);  
by Paul at Pisidian Antioch (13:13-41);  
by Peter and James at the Jerusalem Conference (15:6-21);  
by Paul again at Athens (17:22-32),  
and then to the elders at Ephesus (20:17-35).  
Paul's address to the crowd in Jeruaem (22:1-21),  
his defence before the Roman governor Felix (24:1-21),  
and then and before Herod Agrippa (26:1-29), an expert in Jewish matters (and so, similar to the Jerusalem speech), show how he speaks to suit a situation but remains on message.  
His final talk is given to the Jews in Rome (28:17-31).