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PAUL'S PREACHING MINISTRY: EVANGELISTIC AND PASTORAL PREACHING IN ACTS

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For more than a century, biblical scholars have noted two alternative portraits of Paul in the New Testament. On the one hand, we know the Paul of the popular imagination portrayed in Acts. He is a traveler and missionary who preaches evangelistic sermons with equal eloquence before Jewish synagogues and Athenian philosophers. His role as a spokesman is so significant that the people of Lystra call him Hermes, the spokesman for the gods (Acts 14:12). With his education in both Tarsus and Jerusalem (Acts 22:3), he addresses crowds in either Greek or Aramaic, and he is an equally capable speaker before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem or Roman magistrates. On the other hand, we know the alternative portrait of Paul from the letters. Whereas Acts presents Paul as a spokesman and never mentions Paul as letter writer, in the epistles both he and his opponents agree that he is one who is "unskilled in speaking" (2 Cor 11:6). Paul does not deny the opponents' charge that "his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account" (2 Cor 10:10).

The Portrait of Paul in Acts

Paul as Evangelistic Preacher

Despite the differences between Acts and the epistles, both witnesses indicate that Paul's aim is to lay the foundation rather than build onto the work of others (cf. Rom 15:20). Moreover, a careful analysis of Acts reveals that Luke shares Paul's understanding of the missionary task. Like Paul, Luke depicts missionary preaching as both initial proclamation and pastoral instruction. In this article I shall examine Luke's portrait of Paul as missionary, giving special attention to his instruction to the churches.

Acts schematizes Paul's work into three missionary journeys and a final trip to Rome devoted to the preaching of Christ. Paul's preaching ministry is, for Luke, the continuation of the witnessing (Acts 1:8) by the

disciples of Jesus and undoubtedly Luke's ideal of the preaching ministry.¹ In most instances Luke chooses to summarize Paul's preaching in a few words. He "proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews" (Acts 13:5). In many instances Luke says simply that Paul preached the word of God. In Acts 13:46 he says, "To you it was necessary that the word of God be spoken." Later in the same missionary journey Luke says (Acts 14:25) that "they had spoken the word in Perga." According to Acts 15:36 Paul returned to the places where he had previously proclaimed the word (κατηγγείλαμεν τὸν λόγον). As he progressed on the second journey (16:6), Paul was forbidden to "speak the word in Asia" (λαλήσαι τὸν λόγον). At his encounter with the jailer in 16:32, he "spoke the word" (ἐλάλησεν τὸν λόγον). Thus "speaking the word" is Luke's common shorthand for Paul's evangelistic preaching.

In many instances Luke summarizes Paul's message with the expression "speak the word." In other instances he summarizes the content of this *word*. The portrayal of Paul as preacher continues as Luke follows Paul's path in Europe. In Thessalonica, according to Acts 17:2, Paul "reasoned with them from the Scriptures (διελέξατο αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν), explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead." Similarly, at Athens in Acts 17:17, Paul "reasoned" (διελέγετο) in the synagogue and in the marketplace. At Corinth Paul "reasoned (διελέγετο) in the synagogue" (18:4), and later he was "occupied with preaching, testifying (διαμαρτυρόμενος) to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus" (18:5). At the end of Acts, Luke's summary statement is that Paul concluded his ministry, "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning Jesus Christ with all boldness" (28:31). The *word* which Paul preached, therefore, was the message that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel who was raised from the dead, a message that was established on the basis of Scripture. Luke employs a variety of verbs to describe this activity. Paul *proclaims* (καταγγέλει),² *speaks* (λαλεῖ), *testifies* (διαμαρτύρεται),³ and *reasons* (διαλέγεται) with his listeners. This portrayal is consistent with Paul's own memory of his preaching (1 Cor 15:3).

Although Acts makes only minimal summaries of Paul's evangelistic preaching in most instances, it records two fully developed sermons which

¹ On Acts as preaching, see William Willimon, "'Eyewitnesses and Ministers of the Word': Preaching in Acts," *Interpretation* 42 (1988) 158-70.

² Καταγγέλειν is employed in Acts for the preaching of the prophets (3:24), of Peter and John (4:2), and of Paul (13:5, 38; 15:36; 16:17, 21; 17:3, 13, 23).

³ For διαμαρτύρασθαι as Christian proclamation in Acts, cf. 2:40; 8:25; 10:42; 18:5; 20:21, 23, 24; 23:11; 28:23. Cf. also μαρτυρεῖν in 10:22, 43; 13:22; 14:3; 15:8; 16:2; 22:5, 12; 23:11; 26:5.

serve as Lucan examples of the apostolic preaching in separate circumstances. The sermon to the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia is a "word of exhortation" (Acts 13:15) and an example of Paul's presentation to a Jewish audience (13:16–41). Here Luke presents in expanded form the message that Paul proclaims to Jewish audiences everywhere, for he argues from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ who was promised in Israel's Scripture. In the sermon at the Areopagus in Acts 17:22–31, Paul confronts the cultural elite of Athens with the Christian message.

Although both sermons reflect Luke's editorial hand, we can conclude that they reflect the nature of early Christian proclamation, including Paul's own missionary preaching. Lawrence Wills has shown that the "word of exhortation" is a homily that "exhibits an identifiable three-part pattern which can be found in many early Christian and Hellenistic writings."⁴ The sermon's rehearsal of salvation history in part 1 (13:16–37) provides authoritative exempla that state the basis for the conclusion that is drawn in part 2 (13:38–39, "Let it be known to you, therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness is proclaimed to you"). In part 3 the sermon concludes with the exhortation (13:40–41), which contains an "unmistakable hortatory tone."⁵ Paul's challenge to his readers ("Beware, therefore, lest this come upon you . . .") is a call for decision. Thus, in this synopsis of a fully-developed sermon, Luke offers his own ideal of preaching. The numerous parallels between Peter's speech in Acts 2 and Paul's speech in Acts 13 reflect Luke's editorial hand and his view of Christian evangelistic preaching. The parallels in the letters of Paul demonstrate that Paul's own preaching conforms to the pattern of early Christian proclamation that Luke describes. Luke gives us an example of the evangelistic preaching of Christ that relies on the proofs from Scripture. This portrayal is in agreement with Paul's claim that Christ's death was "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3). In addition, he demonstrates that early Christian preaching contains the hortatory dimension that calls for a decision, a dimension that is also reflected in the letters of Paul.

The sermon at the Areopagus also contains the triadic arrangement that moves from exempla in the form of a theological argument (17:22–28), including the quotation of ancient authorities, to a conclusion (v. 29, "Being then, God's offspring") that is followed by an exhortation to repent.⁶ Here, as in the earlier sermons, Luke presents a Christian

⁴ Lawrence Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *HTR* 77 (1984) 229.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

preaching that consists of the proclamation of Christ and the summons to respond in faith and repentance.⁷

The normal response to the preaching is that listeners are called to decision; they either believe or refuse to believe. We may note the response in Acts 17:32–34. In other instances the preaching of the word resulted in division. The proconsul in Paphos “believed, when he saw what had occurred, and he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (13:12). In Antioch of Pisidia, Jews did not believe, but “the Gentiles were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (13:48). At Iconium a great company believed, both of Jews and Greeks (14:2), but others did not believe. Hence the city was divided (14:4). Lydia and her household were baptized (16:15). The jailer was baptized (16:33) and believed (16:34). The Bereans “received the word” (17:11; cf. 8:14). At Corinth, the preaching of Christ was again divisive. Crispus and many other Corinthians who heard “believed and were baptized” (18:18). Thus Luke portrays Christian speech as divisive. It results both in the formation of believing communities and in the hostility of the populace. This portrayal is consistent with Paul’s own memory of his preaching.

For centuries, preachers have followed this model of preaching—whether consciously or unconsciously. Evangelistic preaching moves from declaration of the Christian story to the summons to the listeners. Preachers declare the good news of Christ in the hope of effecting change in the audience. The tradition of the altar call or invitation is not only the quaint residue of the revivalist past; it is a practice that reflects the common conviction that preaching elicits a call for listeners to reorient their lives.

Paul’s Work with the Churches

Although Luke portrays Paul primarily as a traveling missionary, he occasionally indicates the nature of Paul’s pastoral ministry with the churches. He reports that Paul remained in Corinth for eighteen months shaping a church (Acts 18:11). In addition, he occasionally reports Paul’s follow-up work with his churches. Luke concludes the narrative of Paul’s first missionary journey by describing his work of “strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (14:22,

⁷ C. Clifton Black notes that the pattern of argumentation identified by Wills is consistent with the Greek tradition of deliberative rhetoric that had been adapted in the Jewish synagogue. “The Rhetorical Form of the Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Sermon: A Response to Lawrence Wills,” *HTR* 81 (1988) 1–18.

ἐπιστηρίζοντες τὰς ψυχὰς . . . καὶ παρακαλοῦντες ἐμμένειν τῇ πίστει). This description of Paul's pastoral work reflects the Lucan ideal of pastoral work among the churches. According to 15:32 Judas and Silas are prophets who encouraged and strengthened the brothers (παρακάλεσαν . . . καὶ ἐπεστήριζαν). In 15:41, Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches (ἐπιστηρίζων τὰς ἐκκλησίας). In 18:23, they went through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples (ἐπιστηρίζων πάντας τοὺς μαθητάς). One may compare 16:5, where these churches were strengthened in the faith (ἐστερεοῦνται τῇ πίστει) and multiplied in number each day.

Luke's portrayal of Paul's pastoral preaching reflects his conviction that evangelistic work is not completed with the conversion of a few individuals and the formation of a church. A community that is surrounded by pagan culture requires constant nurturing. Because the faith of new converts will be constantly challenged, communities need to be strengthened in faith. The portrayal in Acts does not tell us very much about Paul's means of strengthening his churches. Only in Acts 14:22 does Luke provide an insight into the content of Paul's pastoral work. Here Paul declares to his new converts that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Here faith is equivalent to faithfulness in the presence of persecutions (cf. 1 Thess. 3:2).⁸ Paul recognizes the vulnerable situation of a church in the context of a hostile environment, and he knows that his evangelistic work will fail if he does not prepare his listeners for the inevitable challenges to their faith. His evangelistic work remains unfinished business.

Acts provides few insights either into the early Christian service of worship or the sermon to the congregation.⁹ Two scenes in Acts 20, however, are instructive for our understanding of Paul's preaching activity. Here, at the conclusion of his travels, we have examples of Paul's word to the churches. In the first instance, Luke describes a church meeting in Troas, where Paul "dialogued with them until the morrow" (Acts 20:7; cf. 20:9). The term διαλέγομαι, used twice here for Paul's address to the congregation, was used earlier for Paul's "dialogue" with unbelievers (cf. 17:17; 18: 4). Luke makes no radical distinction between Paul's address to converts and his address to his churches. According to

⁸ J. Salzmann, *Lehren und Ermahnen: zum Geschichte des christlichen Wortgottesdienst in den ersten Jahrhunderten* (WUNT 2.59; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994) 43.

⁹ Salzmann, 50. "Luke had no interest in giving Theophilus and his other readers what they knew from their own churches."

20:11, Paul "conversed (ὁμιλήσας) with them a while, until daybreak." Here, in the context of the breaking of bread, Paul continued his ministry of the word.

Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:18–35) is Luke's only example of a sermon to the believing community. This speech, which is intended to prepare the elders of the Ephesian church to act in his absence, is divided into three sections. In the opening section (20:18–27), Paul reminds his readers of his ministry among them. He did not hesitate to declare and to teach (ἀναγγεῖλαι ὑμῖν καὶ διδάξει ὑμᾶς) publicly and from house to house. This declaration in v. 20 anticipates the additional reminiscence in v. 27, according to which Paul "did not hesitate to declare the whole counsel of God" (οὐ γὰρ ὑπεστειλάμην τοῦ μὴ ἀναγγεῖλαι πᾶσαν τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θεοῦ). In verse 21, he recalls a preaching ministry of "testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." This evangelistic activity is also indicated in v. 24, where Paul describes his mission "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (διαμύρτυρασθαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον). The first part of the speech, therefore, is reminiscent of the opening section of the Pauline letters, where Paul frequently recalls his past evangelistic ministry as the basis for further conversation. This evangelistic ministry involved the ministry of the word and his suffering on their behalf (Acts 20:19), both of which serve as the prelude to Paul's future sufferings (20:22–24).

One can scarcely demarcate Paul's evangelistic and pastoral work among the Ephesians. The recollection that he had taught "in public and from house to house" (δημοσίᾳ καὶ κατ' οἴκου) includes both his evangelistic work and his work within the house church. Paul's preaching "in public" includes his activity in the school of Tyrannus.¹⁰ Private homes provided the secluded setting where Paul could engage in both evangelistic and pastoral activity.

The second section of Paul's speech (20:28–31) indicates the hortatory purposes of his reminiscence. Because they have received the full benefit of Paul's example and instruction, he commits his ministry to them. The imperatives "Take heed to yourselves" (προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς, v. 28) and "be alert" (γρηγορεῖτε) indicate the parenetic nature of Paul's speech inasmuch as the demands are based on his example and the content of his teaching. This continuity between Paul's evangelistic and pastoral work is further indicated in his final recollection of his preaching ministry.

¹⁰ See Stanley Stowers, "Social Status, Public Speaking and Private Teaching: The Circumstances of Paul's Preaching Activity," *Novum Testamentum* (1984), 61. "Here Luke is actually speaking of the *scholē* of Tyrannus, where "residents of Asia . . . heard the word" (19:10).

"Night and day" he did not cease "admonishing" (νουθετῶν) the church. This term for Paul's pastoral activity is commonly used metaphorically in the Pauline letters for the admonition of a father to his children (1 Cor. 4:14) and for the community's role in admonishing each other (cf. Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:12; 2 Thess. 3:15). In Acts the term refers to Paul's paternal activity of admonishing his church. Luke's portrait, therefore, suggests that Paul's evangelistic and pastoral preaching formed a unit. His activity "from house to house" involved both private instruction and the instruction to the believing community.¹¹

In the third section (20:32-35), one also notes the parenetic movement of Paul's speech. Here Paul moves between the reminiscence of his former pastoral activity and his challenge to his listeners. In his own conduct he provided the model for the conduct he expects of them. By working with his hands and by recalling the words of Jesus, Paul had prepared his listeners by word and example of the expectations that would be laid upon Christian leaders. As they act in his absence, they will discover the all-encompassing quality of Paul's pastoral ministry among them.

Scholars have observed the remarkable continuity between Paul's speech to the elders of Miletus and the content of his letters.¹² This continuity includes not only the verbal connections between the two, but their rhetorical character as well. Like the speech at Miletus, the epistles of Paul are all hortatory addresses to the community and a call for future conduct. Moreover, the use of personal example in hortatory contexts is a common feature of the letters. These similarities indicate significant continuity between the letters of Paul and the portrait of Paul in Acts. Thus while the sermons present the Lucan ideal for preaching, they are not only the Lucan ideal, for the similarities between the Lucan speeches and the Pauline letters suggest that the sermons in Acts reflect the actual speech patterns of Paul. In the two traditions Paul is both an evangelistic and a pastoral preacher.

These reminiscences of Paul's work among the Ephesians do not allow one to distinguish between evangelistic and pastoral activity, for Paul recalls both his evangelistic work with outsiders and his pastoral ministry

¹¹ Salzmann, 44.

¹² See R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (EKK V/2 1986; Zurich: Benziger, 1986), 201. Frequent Paulinisms in the speech have been noted. Cf. Acts 20:17-38; 20:19 (δουλεύων τῷ κυρίῳ, Rom 12:11; cf. 14:18; 16:18; Phil 2:22), 21 (διαμαρτυρούμενος, cf. Rom 1:16; 10:12; 1 Cor 1:24; 10:32; 12:13; Gal 3:28), 24 (εὐαγγέλιον as object of witness, cf. Rom 1:1, 16; 15:16; cf. 2 Cor. 11:7), 28 (διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου, Rom 3:25; 5:9), and 31 (νουθετέω elsewhere in the NT only in Paul).

within the congregation.¹³ He assumes in this instance that his pastoral ministry will be carried on by those who have seen and heard him. The church will face a variety of threats to its existence as its own leaders undermine its identity through their own heretical teachings. Only a continued pastoral ministry will maintain the Pauline churches.

Our survey of Acts has demonstrated that, although Luke presents Paul as the paradigmatic missionary preacher, the apostle also preaches to the congregation, encouraging and admonishing the community to remain faithful in the context of persecutions. His preaching to the congregation recalls the original preaching and encourages the community to remain faithful. These exhortations to the community included parenetic instruction. Paul is both an evangelistic and a pastoral preacher, and Luke's terminology indicates both the overlapping and distinctive qualities of the two forms of address. Luke knows no sharp distinction between evangelistic and pastoral preaching, just as he does not always demarcate between the Christian and the non-Christian audience. Both διδάσκειν and διαλέγεσθαι are used for missionary preaching as well as for the word to the congregation. The "word of exhortation" is an address to the synagogue (Acts 13:15), but παρακαλεῖν is commonly employed for the exhortation to Christians. Ἐπιστηρίζειν is employed for the strengthening of the community. Luke's terminology, therefore, indicates that he conceives the ministry of the word as a continuing task that begins with the original announcement of the saving events of Christ and continues in the task of strengthening, encouraging, and admonishing the church in the context of the various tests which confront it.

¹³ J. Salzmänn, *Lehren und Ermahnen*, 42.