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HIM THEY PROCLAIMED
THE WORD AND PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE PREACHING IN ACTS

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“The exalted Christ thus applies himself and his benefits to the elect through his Spirit working in human hearts by and with his Word, especially in its public reading, its preaching, its sealing by the sacraments, and as it is received in faith by prayer.”

OPC Directory for the Public Worship of God¹

¹ “The Directory for the Public Worship of God: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church,” n.d., <https://opc.org/BCO/DPW.html>.

HIM THEY PROCLAIMED

It has often been charged that Jesus Christ is absent from the book of Acts.² Such a charge, which comes with great confusion to protestant ears, lies in the presence of the ascension narrative in Acts at the very beginning of the book. There are many routes one can take to argue robustly against such a claim. Yet, as it seems, one particular route is uniquely emphatic within Acts as it concerns the presence of Christ, namely, the presence of the *preached Word of God*. It is this route that I am concerned with in this paper.

In considering the preached Word in Acts to be a means of displaying the Christology of Acts, one might be inclined to write off such a connection at all. Yet they are deeply connected, and this connection is demonstrated even at the word level. That is, the preaching in Acts is referred to consistently as *the word of God* which itself is a term used in Luke's Gospel exclusively with respect to Christ. How can Luke make such a move? Is it a low Christology or perhaps even an overly exalted homiletic? Neither is the case.

In this paper I will argue that the preaching in Acts is often described as the 'word of God' because the content of the preached word necessarily involves the presentation of Christ's person and work, and Christ is present by the preaching. I will do so by examining the redemptive-historical development of the 'word of God' in Luke's Gospel and Acts. To this end I will first examine the usage of 'word of God' in Luke's Gospel; secondly, I will examine the significance of the redemptive-historical shift in the resurrection and ascension of Christ as Luke's Gospel and Acts testify; and lastly, I will examine the 'word of God' as the preached word in Acts being a result of these last two aspects.

² C.F.D. Moule, "The Christology of Acts," in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980). 179-180

A Preliminary Matter of Method and Presuppositions

If one is to gain a greater understanding of the adoption of the term ‘word of God’ for the preaching in Acts, it must first be acknowledged what role the term plays in Luke’s Gospel. Though it is the case that Luke and Acts are two distinct works of Luke separated, amongst other things, by genre, there is a significant amount of organic connection between the two in various ways.³ One of these organic connections is in the term ‘word of God’. One of the *means* by which they are connected is that they share the quality of being special-revelatory moments along the line of the history of special revelation. Geerhardus Vos writes that a proper appreciation of special revelation is to acknowledge it as not completed in one singular revelatory act but, rather, being unfolded in a long series of successive special-revelatory acts of God.⁴ Though particular attention here is being drawn to Luke’s corpus, I will approach this paper with that same philosophy and structure it with that *line* in mind.

‘Word of God’ in Luke’s Gospel

There are two Greek nouns that are rendered into the English term “word” in the ‘word of God’ constructions within Luke. Those two nouns are *rhēma* and *logos*. It should be stated from the outset that where both of these nouns are indeed present within Luke there is no reason to discern any significant difference in meaning between the two. They are allotted equal footing in Luke’s Gospel, and I will proceed with that presupposition.

Additionally presupposed is that Luke’s usage of the term carries with it the semantic significance of the Old Testament’s usage of the term. Though Luke himself was likely a Gentile,

³ Robert Cara, “Luke,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*, ed. Michael J. Kruger (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016). Cara takes the Luke *and* Acts view within the Luke-Acts vs. Luke *and* Acts discussion. I find this to be a good a profitable view.

⁴ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975). 5. Vos also is keen to note that God’s acts of special revelation are inseparably tied to God’s activity of redemption.

we have good reason to believe that he was well acquainted with the Greek Old Testament and Paul's theology of it.⁵ Though entertaining a detailed analysis of the Old Testament's usage of the term is outside the purview of this paper, one vitally important aspect should be mentioned: that the Old Testament presents the encountering of the word of God to be an encounter with God himself.⁶ Jonathan Griffiths, to exemplify this point, writes, "At the very center of the place of meeting between God and his people... was the Ark of the Covenant, containing God's covenant word to his people on the tablets of the law."⁷ The 'word of God' statements in Luke carry with them this same assumption that an encounter with the word of God is an encounter with God himself.⁸

This is displayed in that it is overwhelmingly the case that the 'word of God' statements in Luke explicitly refer to Jesus' own words (Luke 5:1, 8:11, 8:21, 11:28, 22:61).⁹ There is but one instance where Jesus is not explicitly the referent and that is with John the Baptist's preaching in Luke 3:2.¹⁰ I will examine one of these statements, Luke 5:1, as being representative of Luke's overall usage of the 'word of God' term with respect to Jesus.

⁵ Cara, "Luke."

⁶ Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark International, 2011). 23.

⁷ Jonathan Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 42 (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2017). 13.

⁸ Vos, *Biblical Theology*. 187. Geerhardus Vos demonstrates this in the word-centered ministry of the prophets. He writes, "Jehovah's approach to Israel is eminently the approach of speech; God gives himself in the word of his mouth".

⁹ See also Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 1: Prolegomena*, trans. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003). 195. for his comments on Jesus Christ as "the center of revelation" (*centrum van openbaring*). This fact certainly must be appreciated with respect to the 'word of God' statements in Luke's Gospel and the consequential statements in Acts.

¹⁰ Though Jesus is not the explicit referent in this instance of the term, the content of John's preaching is made evident to be Jesus considering his message is characterized as being of repentance and forgiveness in the fulfillment of Isa 40:3-5 which prophesies a preacher who proclaim "Prepare the way of the Lord,". See James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015). 91. James R. Edwards comment as he writes, "In John's appearance at the Jordan and Jesus' ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem, the word of God enters the public domain; hence the witness to God's word is public witness... to proclaim the name of Christ".

Luke 5:1

In this text, one of the six ‘word of God’ statements in Luke, we find exemplified the nature of Luke’s usage of the term with respect to Jesus. In Luke 5:1 we are presented with a situation in which Jesus often found himself over the course of his earthly ministry; being pressed by a crowd. Though only a short while into his ministry, his reputation had certainly amassed to the point where great numbers of people were coming to him.

This is due in no small part to the fact that his ministry from very early on involved miraculous healings. In fact, Luke reports twenty-one miracles in total in his Gospel.¹¹ However, Luke does not draw attention to that fact in our text when he describes the reason these crowds were pressing in on him by the Lake of Gennesaret. Rather, Luke records that the reason these crowds pressed Jesus was because they wanted “to hear the word of God.”

Just as much as Jesus had gained a reputation for his healings, he was gaining a reputation for his teaching and Luke places the weight of this in its redemptive-historical context. Though it is certainly not a theme unique to Luke, it remains that Luke presents Jesus’ work as preacher in its redemptive-historical significance. This orientation is made clear from the very beginning of his ministry where he begins to fulfill the prophecy of Isa 61 as the *proclaimer* of good news and the Year of Jubilee (Luke 4:18-19).¹² Jesus establishes himself from the very beginning of his ministry as being the great preacher of good news for whom Israel had been longing. Immediately after, in the account of Jesus healing the demoniac, Luke records that the people were astonished

¹¹ Benjamin L. Gladd, *From the Manger to the Throne: A Theology of Luke* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022). Introduction.

¹² Gladd, *From the Manger to the Throne*. Ch7 Gladd is keen to note that only Luke records what the Isa 61 text says. He rightly summarizes Jesus’ actions of fulfilling the instituting the Year of Jubilee noting the elements of tabernacle antitype as he writes, “God atones for the sins of his people and cleanses his tabernacle so that he may dwell with humanity and the created order.”

because his word possessed authority.¹³ This left them startlingly asking, “what is this word?” (Luke 4:36).¹⁴ It is likely the case that this crowd in Luke 5:1, many of whom would have been present for the Isa 61 fulfillment and the subsequent healing, has Jesus’ self-declaration as the great preacher of Israel in mind as they press in on him to hear and encounter the word of God.

For this crowd, to hear Jesus’ teaching is to hear the very words of God. For them to have an encounter with Jesus is to have an encounter with the word of God. In continuation with the Old Testament’s portrayal of the word of God as divine encounter, one might say that to encounter the word of God is to encounter Jesus himself.¹⁵ This notion is pervasive throughout Luke’s Gospel and permeates the ‘word of God’ statements in it.¹⁶

The Redemptive-Historical Shift in the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ

It cannot be overstated just how significant the resurrection and ascension are in the course of redemptive history.¹⁷ G.E. Ladd displays this significance well as he writes, “The coming of Jesus of Nazareth was the climax of the series of redemptive events; and *his resurrection* is the

¹³ The LXX employs εὐαγγελίσασθαι for “to bring/proclaim good news”.

¹⁴ Though the modifier “of God” is not used in either of the two instances of λόγος in this pericope, we cannot ignore that the “of God” modifier is Luke’s favorite modifier for λόγος. In the startling number of ‘word of God’ statements attributed to Jesus, the “of God” modifier should be in the back of the readers mind in this pericope. See Patrick Schreiner, *The Mission of the Triune God: A Theology of Acts*, New Testament Theology (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022). 45.

¹⁵ This certainly presents a further element of the redemptive-historical connection between the word of God in the Old Testament in the sense of Christ as the anti-typical tabernacle. Amongst the other statements that can be made about the essential elements of the tabernacle two certainly stand in the forefront, namely, God’s *word* and his *presence*. We have already briefly seen how the presence of the law in the tabernacle displayed these two elements as essentially connected. Here Christ is positioned as the antitype in both of these elements. See Vos, *Biblical Theology*. 148-155

¹⁶ Though it is not one of the ‘word of God’ statements in Luke, one cannot ignore the Road to Emmaus pericope of Luke 24. In this text we see Jesus’ own declarations of what the entirety of the Scriptures teach, namely, that the Christ should suffer and enter into glory (Luke 24:26-27). Luke’s knowledge of this fact should be assumed to have impacted his usage of ‘word of God’ in the statements throughout his corpus.

¹⁷ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2011). 227-228.

event that validates all that came before.”¹⁸ It is this shift that begets the subsequent special revelation of Acts and all the Scripture that follows and that subsequent special revelation cannot be fully appreciated until this shift is witnessed.¹⁹ In this section, I will examine how Luke displays this shift in his Gospel and in Acts.

In being a Gospel, it should come with no shock that Luke’s Gospel is oriented towards Christ’s death and resurrection. Though an explicit mention of Jesus’ death does not come until 9:22 (compared to John’s early statement from Jesus in John 2:19), there are several elements present early in Luke’s Gospel that display a redemptive-historical shift is on the horizon.²⁰ I will return here to the Year of Jubilee fulfillment as an exemplary element considering its overt connection to Jesus Christ as presenting the ‘word of God’.

Though it is uncertain if it was ever experienced by Israel, the Year of Jubilee was to be a ritual time of celebration and release from indebtedness and is begotten by the Day of Atonement (Lev 16, 23:26-32, 25). This Day of Atonement stands at the center of Leviticus and the center of the Pentateuch as a whole.²¹ No real jubilee as such can take place if unatoned sin looms in the background.²² Gladd notes three essential elements of the Day of the Lord that find their fulfillment in Christ’s work as demonstrated in Luke’s Gospel: 1) a cleansing from sin, 2) a resulting sabbath

¹⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1993). 354 Though Ladd only mentions the resurrection in this statement. He goes on to display how the resurrection and ascension cannot be fully discussed and appreciated apart from one another.

¹⁹ Or, to use Vos’ language, it is the special-revelatory fact of the resurrection that begets the subsequent special-revelatory interpretation of that fact. See Vos, *Biblical Theology*. 7.

²⁰ In addition to the Year of Jubilee fulfillment in Luke 4 which I will address, one should consider the foretelling of Jesus’ birth as the institution of an everlasting kingdom (Luke 1:32-33), the presentation of John the Baptist as an eschatological Elijah who preparing a people for the Lord’s coming (Luke 1:17), the Magnificat as the antitypical song of Hannah (Luke 1:47-55). See Vos, *Biblical Theology*. 306 for his comments on the Magnificat to this end.

²¹ L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 37 (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2015). 167.

²² Gladd, *From the Manger to the Throne*. Ch7. Gladd comments as such when he writes, “On the basis of the high priest’s work on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 25:9), the entire year is deemed ‘holy.’ The land must lie fallow (Lev. 25:11–12).”

rest, and 3) a movement from expiation, to consecration, to fellowship with God.²³ That being the case, the very fact that Christ, the one whom the people in Luke 5:1 encounter for the word of God, fulfills this Day of the Lord (as he claims in Luke 4:21 and demonstrates in his death, resurrection, and ascension) and thus secures a true and better Year of Jubilee necessarily positions Christ's work as *the redemption* which by necessity institutes a new age: a redemptive-historical shift.²⁴ This is further testified in the very structure of Luke's Gospel and Acts wherein Luke's Gospel ends with a brief portrayal of the ascension and then Acts begins with an expanded one. This redemptive-historical shift is the great link between Luke and Acts and propels all that takes place in Acts.²⁵

Looking then to Acts' portrayal of this shift we see further evidence at Pentecost.²⁶ As a result of the resurrection and ascension, the Spirit is poured out and people consequently begin to prophesy and Peter begins the apostolic preaching ministry (Acts 2:1-4, 16-21). This event, as a fulfillment of the end-time messianic prophecy of Joel 2:28-32, further indicates a redemptive-historical shift has taken place. This relationship between the pouring out of the Spirit and the

²³ Gladd, *From the Manger to the Throne*. Ch7 Gladd makes a significant observation in this last element which he expounds saying, "[Lev 26:11-12] is connected to a larger swath of texts that speak to God's ultimate goal in redemption: *to dwell* consummately with humanity and creation in an environment free from the possibility of rebellion, wherein he receives all the glory." Thus, aspects of consummate divine encounter and dwelling would have been on the mind of those hearing Jesus' fulfillment declaration in Luke 4:17-21. If it is the case that the words Jesus read are fulfilled by him, then it would be reasonable to conclude that the consummate telos of those words (God dwelling with redeemed humanity) would be fulfilled by him as well. This dwelling inaugurated by Jesus was enjoyed by the people as they heard his word.

²⁴ The true weight of this fact comes from the reality that the Jewish/Old Testament resurrection hope is qualified as an end-time hope. Thus, the Old Testament positions Jesus' resurrection to be one that necessarily brings about a change of age. See Beale's comments in Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*. 227-234. See also Richard P. Belcher, *Prophet, Priest, and King: The Roles of Christ in the Bible and Our Roles Today* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 2016).

²⁵ Brandon D. Crowe, *The Hope of Israel: The Resurrection of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2020). 5.

²⁶ The apostle's final question to Jesus during his ascension is additionally indicative of a redemptive-historical shift as their question, which arose from their limited understanding, concerned a kingdom of eschatological sort. See Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*. 238-239.

subsequent prophesying and preaching must be properly appreciated. The promised Spirit of the resurrected Christ has now been poured out and it is this fact that propels the preaching in Acts. I will further explore this relationship in the next section.

The Word of God as the Preached Word in Acts

As mentioned in the introduction, some charge Acts with presenting an absentee Christology, considering its extensive portrayal of the ascension. And yet, curiously enough, though this very Jesus Christ is understood as risen and ascended in Acts, these ‘word of God’ phrases which were so tightly bound to his presence in Luke’s Gospel find themselves to be quite pervasive in the book. Acts records thirty instances of the phrases ‘word of God’ in eighteen pericopes and in each case it is either directly related to the preaching of the apostles and others or by contextual implication can be understood as referring to the preaching.²⁷ This naturally invites great curiosity. What is it about these sermons that deemed them worthy of such a title? What is the nature of this move and how does the redemptive-historical shift which links Luke and Acts together impact it?

There is a strong connection between the ‘word of God’ phrases — as tethered to Jesus Christ in Luke’s Gospel (along with the whole-Bible implications of the word as associated with the presence of God that those Lukan instances assume) — and the redemptive-historical shift of the resurrection, ascension, and outpouring of the Spirit. In light of this connection, in this final section I will argue that Luke now sees the ‘word of God’ with respect to the preaching in Acts because Christ is now present in Acts by the preached word of God, and his person and work are the theme of the preaching. Though some may charge Acts with an absentee Christology, we will see it is the case that Christ is ever present in Acts by the preached ‘word of God’. As Patrick

²⁷ Robert Cara, “Acts (Word of God)” (Reformed Theological Seminary, January 2023).

Schreiner acknowledges, “the word is tightly connected to *the Word*... The word is a divine actor in Acts and the Scriptures as a whole.”²⁸

The Outpouring of the Spirit and the Proclamations of Acts

As briefly acknowledged, there is a significant connection to be appreciated between the outpouring of the Spirit and the subsequent proclamations of Acts. The connection is made known by Jesus himself in his final statement of Luke’s Gospel. He says to his disciples that it is written that the Christ must suffer and be raised *and* that proclamation for repentance and forgiveness of sin be made in his name (Luke 24:47). Then, as a further seal of the validity of their being these very proclaimers, he says that he is sending “the promise of [the] Father upon you” (Luke 24:49).²⁹ In these declarations Jesus tells them that they will proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sin in his name and by the power of *his own sent Spirit*.³⁰ This connection and sequence is demonstrated *exactly* in the Pentecost event and throughout the book of Acts.

With respect to the Pentecost event this connection is most obvious. The Spirit of Christ is poured out and prophesying and preaching consequently take place. Yet, this connection should not be limited to the Pentecost event. Throughout Acts we find periodical fillings of the Holy

²⁸ Schreiner, *The Mission of the Triune God*. 44. Emphasis original.

²⁹ It would be dishonest to not acknowledge Jesus’ other charge found in verse 48, namely, that the disciples are ‘witnesses’. Witness in the New Testament very clearly refers to a literal eyewitness of Jesus and his death and resurrection. Some may be inclined to establish therefore that Jesus promises are thus limited to the office of apostle (an office limited to eye-witnesses). Yet, it is also the case that the forthcoming outpouring of the Spirit comes to many more people than just the apostles and so we should not limit Jesus’ charge then to the apostolic office. See Leon Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries v. 3 (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 2008). 265 for his comments on the general sense of Jesus’ statement. See also Herman Ridderbos, *The Authority of the New Testament Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 1963). 15. for his comments on the apostolic sense of Jesus’ statement.

³⁰ Richard B. Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time: An Introduction to the Biblical Theology of Acts and Paul* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022). Though Luke does not make the notion of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ as plainly as other New Testament writers, that fact should not be forgotten in considering the sending of the Spirit. Richard B. Gaffin writes that in Peter’s Pentecost sermon “climactic point is Jesus’s own reception of the Spirit from the Father in his ascension and his consequent action in pouring out the Spirit on the church, confirming that as crucified and now exalted, he is “both Lord and Christ” in

Spirit. These are not additional Pentecost-esque events.³¹ Rather, they are special gracious acts of God whereby he enables his servants, who have already received the Spirit, in the *filling* of the Spirit for a particular task which is, in this instance, proclamation (Acts 4:31, 13:9-11). The Spirit of Christ — himself sent by virtue of the redemptive-historical shift inaugurated by the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ — *compels* the sermons.³² As Schreiner summarizes as he notes the trinitarian theology at play within the proclamations, “The word progresses according to the plan of the Father, testifying to the exalted Son, and in the power of the Spirit.”³³

Seeing this connection is significant to the end of discerning the sense of ‘word of God’ with respect to the preaching. Riding the shift and thrust, as it were, of redemptive history, the ‘word of God’ will be going out by the Spirit-endowed means of gospel proclamation. This observation provides us with a greater redemptive-historical appreciation for the phrase ‘word of God’ being used for the preaching in Acts.

Christ’s Word and Presence in the Proclamations of Acts

Now that we have seen the nature of ‘word of God’ in Luke having a Christological meaning and have examined the redemptive-historical shift of Christ’s work along with its Spirit-wrought relationship and impact on the subsequent preaching in Acts, we are now prepared to consider, and *must* consider, why at last it is that this preaching inaugurated by the redemptive-historical shift is afforded this status of ‘word of God’. In other words, we now know how we got here, but why is it so? The status of ‘word of God’ is used because, in the preaching in Acts, we find maintained both the emphasis of the word of God in Luke’s Gospel (the word of God as the

³¹ Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time*. 67. Gaffin writes, “Pentecost ought not to be seen as the model for a recurring periodic or episodic event. Pentecost is not a paradigm event. That is, it is not the first in a series of baptisms of the Spirit that need to be repeated or can be replicated.”

³² Schreiner, *The Mission of the Triune God*. 45.

³³ Schreiner, *The Mission of the Triune God*. 45.

word of Christ) and the whole-Bible emphasis of the word of God which Luke presupposes in his Gospel (the word of God as divine encounter). I will address these two in turn.

With respect to the maintenance of the Lukan emphasis on the word of God as the word of Christ, we see this in that Christ's person and work is at the center of the preaching.³⁴ Gerald Peterman writes concerning the sermons of Acts that they "broadcast a glorified Savior, a mighty Savior, a victorious Savior."³⁵ This fact can first be demonstrated by examining the content of the preaching in which case it should be acknowledged that Jesus Christ's person, the resurrection fact, and the subsequent call to repentance are found in each one of the sermons.³⁶ The preachers of Acts proclaim Jesus the promised messiah, his kingdom, and his reality as the living God.³⁷ It can also be demonstrated by acknowledging the persistence of various *euaggelizó* verbs to describe the action of the preaching.³⁸ That is, these proclamations are proclamations of the good news. The proclamation of the good news nearly bookends Jesus' ministry according to Luke's Gospel (Luke 4:18, 24:46-47). It is what Jesus says he came to accomplish and extend (and proclaim himself by virtue of his Isa 61 fulfillment), and it is what he commissioned his followers thus to proclaim.

Yet, this should not be taken to mean that the preaching in Acts in being the 'word of God' is merely set in an evangelistic category. Paul himself spent a year and a half in Corinth preaching the word of God (Acts 18:11). It is reasonable to assume that much of Paul's preaching there was to those who were already converted by the means of his initial evangelistic preaching. And yet, Paul himself described the content of his Corinthian preaching ministry to be utterly focused on

³⁴ F F Bruce, "The Significance of the Speeches for Interpreting Acts," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 33.1 (1990): 22.

³⁵ Gerald Peterman, "Proclaiming Christ to Nonbelievers: The Gospel According to the Preaching in Acts," in *Proclaiming Jesus: Essays on the Centrality of Christ in Honor of Joseph M. Stowell*, ed. Thomas H. L. Cornman (Chicago, Ill: Moody Publishers, 2007). 65.

³⁶ See H Jared Bumpers insights to this same end in H Jared Bumpers, "Christ Crucified: The Necessity of Preaching Christ from All of Scripture," *Southeastern Theological Review* 13.2 (2022): 37–44.

³⁷ These summary statements are modified from Schreiner, *The Mission of the Triune God*. 46-47.

³⁸ Acts 6:2, 8:4, 8:12, 8:25, 8:40, 9:27, 9:28, 10:36, 10:42, 11:20, 14:7, 14:21, 15:35, 16:10, 17:18.

Christ's person and work (1 Cor 2:2).³⁹ He makes a strikingly similar move in 1 Thess as he recalls his preaching ministry presented originally in Acts 17. There in Thessalonica he and Silas preached of the necessity for the Christ to suffer and rise (Acts 17:2-3).⁴⁰ As Paul reflects on his preaching ministry there he writes, "when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but *as what it really is, the word of God*," (1 Thess 2:13).⁴¹ In both of these cases it is evidenced that what Jesus Christ declared he would do *through* Paul, "carry [his] name before the gentiles and kings and children of Israel" (Acts 9:15), he was actually doing.

With respect to the maintenance of the whole-Bible emphasis on the word of God being connected with the presence of God, we see this evident also in Paul's reflection on the preaching efforts of him and his colleagues throughout his missionary journeys. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul discusses how Christ brought the Ephesian gentiles near by his blood who themselves were once strangers to the covenants of promise (Eph 2:12-13). The means by which this gospel fact was appropriated for the Ephesians, Paul communicates, was by the preaching.

At this juncture, one should recall Acts 19, which describes Paul's preaching ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-10). And yet, as Paul reflects on this period of time in his letter, he writes of the preaching that, "[Christ] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near." As Paul considers his preaching ministry to the Ephesians, he understands it to be that the risen and ascended Christ himself was present and the ultimate preacher.⁴²

³⁹ This reflection of Paul can also be seen in texts such as 1 Cor 1:23, 2 Cor 4:5, and Phil 1:10-15. It can also be reasoned in Rom 10:14 which can be rendered, "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?". For a defense of this rendering see John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1994). 286.

⁴⁰ Jesus Christ as being the center of Paul's preaching content is seen in the latter verse where he positions Jesus as the content of his *καταγγέλλω* act in his statement, "This Jesus, *whom* I proclaim to you, is the Christ."

⁴¹ It is significant to note that only a few verses prior he distinctly positioned himself and his colleagues as the proclaimers of the word (1 Thess 2:9, cf. 1 Thess 1:4-5, 2:2-4).

⁴² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).140. F.F. Bruce comments as much. He writes, "Here Christ himself is the preacher

This aspect too we can consider from Paul's conversion in Acts 9. As much as Jesus' statement there in Acts 9:15 had implications for Paul's preaching to be the word of Christ by means of content it also had implications for Christ's presence through that very preaching. This is evidenced in that Jesus positions Paul as his "chosen instrument" whom he will use to "carry his name".⁴³ Ultimately, the active agent in the carrying of the name is not Paul but Jesus Christ himself. Jesus was carrying his own name through Paul's preaching.⁴⁴ In this way, it remained ever the case that Christ was performing the Isa 61 ministry of "proclaiming good news to the poor" and thus was present by the preached word. From both of these angles we can finally conclude why it is the case that Luke sees the Spirit-wrought preaching that takes place in Acts as the word of God; because Christ is the *object* of the message and he is *present* by it.

Homiletical Reflections

In closing, it is significant briefly to appreciate how this concept has been addressed and appreciated in the history of reformed Christianity as well as how it is significant for the modern pulpit ministry. William Perkins famously instructed pastors that "Preaching the Word is prophesying in the name and on behalf of Christ."⁴⁵ Chad Van Dixhoorn notes that this very sense

(acting by his Spirit in his messengers): 'he came and proclaimed peace.' The language is borrowed from Isa. 57:19, 'Peace, peace to the far and to the near, says the LORD,'"

⁴³ It is likely that Paul is reflecting on Jesus' words here (which we have good reason to believe he heard repeated from Ananias) when he considers himself to be an *ambassador in chains* for the *mystery of the Gospel* (Eph 6:20). This is as distinguished from saying he is an ambassador of the Gospel. Rather, Paul specifies his ambassador role is for the *mystery of the Gospel*. His only other use of the ambassador verb (πρεσβεύω) in 2 Cor 5:20 makes this connection as well as he positions the function of his ambassadorship as God himself making his appeal through him. In this case, it would be sensible to render the demonstrative pronoun in Eph 6:20 not as "it" (such the ESV renders) but "him" considering the mystery of the gospel in this context (with especially Eph 3:20 in view) can be reasoned to be Christ himself. This connection with the Christological mystery of the Gospel and subsequent personal pronouns as the object of proclamation is found in Col 1:27-28. See Herman Ridderbos' comments on the function of mystery in Paul's thought in Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997). 44-49.

⁴⁴ See also Jesus' reassurance to Paul of his presence in Paul's preaching amidst opposition in Acts 18:9-10. A similar promise can be found in Ex 4:12 when the Lord reassures a nervous Moses by saying, "Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." (cf. Jer 1:9).

⁴⁵ William Perkins, *The Art of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2002). 7.

is found in the preaching of post-reformation Britain. He writes that the congregations had the correct expectation that they will meet with Christ in and by the preaching of the Word.⁴⁶

Yet, this is not something that sprang up and then dissipated. Many ministers have taken up this aspect of their calling with great seriousness and joy. And yet, it is always a necessary reminder for ministers and those pursuing a ministerial call to preach Christ in such a manner so as to become, as Sinclair Ferguson described, *personalists* in preaching. That is, preaching that is not concerned with communication of information as an end to itself, but rather preaching that is concerned with “the introduction and description of a Person”.⁴⁷ In this way, ministers are a means by which Christ himself “opens up the Scriptures” to the burning hearts of congregants.

⁴⁶ Chad Van Dixhoorn, “Preaching Christ in Post-Reformation Britain,” in *The Hope Fulfilled: Essays in Honor of O. Palmer Robertson*, ed. Robert L. Penny (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 2008). 369.

⁴⁷ Sinclair Ferguson, “Preaching the Whole Christ: Him We Proclaim,” 2020, <https://youtu.be/C9yRL4TR7Vk?t=705>.