

# The Core

When I was in seminary, I got very excited about new theological ideas and terms. Don't judge me. This is something that easily happens to seminary students and other people who have no life. One of my favorite terms was the Greek word, *kerygma*. It means "preaching": that is, the content of the message that is proclaimed. I did a whole study on the *kerygma* of the Early Church, as revealed in the sermons recorded in the Book of Acts.

So, of course, I told Rebecca all about it. Finally one day, when I'd been graciously bestowing on her all that I was learning about the apostolic *kerygma*, she said, "You know what that is, don't you? That's that stuff that collects in the back of your throat." So, anyway, I don't say *kerygma* much any more.

But I did learn a few things from studying the preaching in the Book of Acts. I learned, for instance, that it's all right to shape your sermon for your audience. Let me show you what I mean. Here are some of the sermons in Acts.

**Acts 2:14-36.** Peter's sermon to the Jews who had gathered for the Feast of Pentecost. For that crowd, Peter quoted the Hebrew Bible and showed how Jesus fulfilled prophecy.

**Acts 3:12-26.** Peter's sermon to the Jerusalemites outside the temple, who were gawking at the lame man that Peter and John had just healed. To these good church-goers, Peter spoke of Jesus as Israel's messiah and reminded them God had chosen Israel so that they could be a blessing to others.

**Acts 7:1-53.** Stephen's sermon before the high priests, in which he summarizes all the history of the Jews, leading up to Christ, whom they had had killed.

**Acts 10:34-43.** Peter's sermon to a Roman soldier, Cornelius, and his gentile household, in which Peter barely mentions the Old Testament at all but instead talks about the works of compassion that Jesus had done and about the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 17:22-31.** Paul's sermon to the Greek philosophers on Athens' Mars Hill, where he doesn't mention the Hebrew Bible at all but in-stead comments on Greek religion and quotes Greek poetry.

As you see, there's quite a range of styles and outlines in the early Christian preaching. But there is one thing – and *only* one thing – that is found in every sermon preached in Acts. It is the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Even in Athens, where Paul adapted everything else, he left the Resurrection in. This is even more significant when you realize that the point where the preacher mentions the Resurrection is usually the point at which the crowd starts throwing things at the speaker. Even with that, this was the one non-negotiable element of the apostles' preaching: Jesus rose from the dead.

This is Easter. Without Easter, we are not Christians. We are Jews or abstract philosophers or nice moral people or something else, but we are not followers of Christ. This is who we are. Christ is Risen.

And you ought to do something about that *kerygma*.