

## THE HEART OF THE GOOD NEWS

*The heart of the good news . . . not example.* Many religions stress the character of their founder—his character or personality, his good works and achievements—as the chief example of exemplary living. It is true that Jesus left for his disciples the greatest example of how to live, since he taught and kept the most exacting standards. But this is not what the apostles preached about him. The longest account of the ministry of Jesus to be found in any of the sermons of the apostles in the book of Acts is where Peter speaks to Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, and his family. Peter told him, “You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” After he gave Cornelius this very brief survey of the life of Jesus, Peter immediately goes on to talk about the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” Peter did not tell Cornelius, “Here is a great man; follow his example by doing good.” Peter rather tells Cornelius about the Jesus of Nazareth who died, was buried, and rose again, and that “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” [Acts 10.37-43; New International Version].

*The heart of the good news . . . not mythology.* In their message of salvation (i.e., good news), the apostles did not present a mythical hero from the past but a contemporary Jew who was known to many of their listeners. There was something quite different in the life of Jesus of

Nazareth than the ravaging of Hades by an Orpheus, the manipulations of a Zeus, or the conquests of a Hercules. The gods and goddesses of the Greeks and Romans were fabled figures of the distant past. But of Jesus, the apostle John could say, “That which . . . we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and . . . we proclaim to you what we have seen and heard.” Or, “the Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory.” The proclamation about Jesus was not another myth among the many of that day. In fact, the testimony of the apostles about Jesus was recognized, and very often rejected, for its offensive otherness. The philosophers at Athens, who knew about the gods and goddesses, responded to Paul’s preaching in this way, “‘He seems to be advocating foreign gods.’ They said this because Paul was preaching about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.’” [1 John 1.1-3; 1.14; Acts 17.18-20; NIV].

*The heart of the good news was the message about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.* The good news related God’s action through Jesus for sinful human beings. God had done something significant. He conclusively dealt with sin, and he decisively had conquered death. Through these achievements, he now was offering both forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit to all who would believe on him. [See Acts 2.23ff.; 3.13ff.; 4.10ff.; 4.33; and 5.30ff.].