

The original message

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Preacher: Dick Lucas

[0 : 00] Well, thank you for your welcome, and thank you for your music. I think your singing is pretty good, really. I've heard lots worse.

Acts chapter 10, as you will imagine by now. Acts chapter 10, and verses 42 and 43. I shall call this the original message.

Because you will hardly find, I think, the Christian gospel message more succinctly put than in these few words.

Acts chapter 10, 42 and 43. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

To him, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

[1 : 10] Now, tonight I want quite consciously to divide my terrel into two halves. The first half will be an exposition, or an explanation if it needs it, of this wonderful summary that I've just read.

That is the preacher's task. And people are not asked, of course. Christian people are not asked whether they agree with it or not.

If it's a word of God, it's here for our acceptance and our submission. It's God's truth. That's the first half of this evening. The second half is not explanation, but application.

Now, that is something that all of us have to take part in. All of us have to work out for ourselves. In the end, each of us, listening to a word like this, has the responsibility to apply that truth in our own lives as far as Monday morning is concerned.

We may apply it wisely and well, I suppose, if we have some experience. On the other hand, if you're a very young Christian, you might find it quite hard to apply.

[2 : 22] But nevertheless, it's our responsibility as Christian people. In the end, it has to be done. Or, if we don't do it, we become what James characteristically condemns in his famous little letter, when he contrasts the hearer and the doer.

The hearer who is not a doer. Well, God forbid that that should be true of us. Though, of course, it sometimes is. Let me explain really what I'm up to.

I have a minister friend, a New Zealander, who once pastored a Baptist church in North London. It wasn't an easy charge, but he was greatly encouraged and cheered one day by the remark of an elderly gentleman who used to come Sunday by Sunday.

This man used to listen most carefully. But on occasion when they met, he said to my friend the pastor, Do you know, I understand what you're getting at by Thursday morning.

Now, that may not seem flattering to you, but the pastor was very pleased. Because what the man meant was that he worked out by Thursday what the significance of the Sunday message was for him personally.

[3 : 33] I would be very flattered if anybody remembered my sermons on Monday or Tuesday morning. But to think that by Thursday people are still working out, what is the meaning of this for me?

How do I turn that into life? Well, that is an encouragement to any preacher. So, I can't do all the application. You know, preachers often ask, why don't you do more application?

I can't do it all. The preacher can't do it all. All the application that is necessary for you personally and your church here in Glasgow. I can suggest applications.

I can say how I think I might apply it, would apply it for myself. But in the end, application is a matter for the hearer as much as for the speaker.

So, for the first half of my time this evening, it's explanation. That's my responsibility. I will do that as best I can. And let me start straight away. After that, I will try to give some applications.

[4 : 32] But as I say, it will be over to you. Now, you know the story. It's already been mentioned. Peter has been called in God's providence to do what is for him a rather surprising thing.

Bring the gospel to a Gentile person. He arrives at the house of a Roman centurion of the Italian regiment. And this God-fearing man has gathered a lot of people in his house to hear Peter, the Christian apostle.

And to hear him describe his remarkable message. And as you were told just now, and I hope you have your Bible open, that talk or sermon, I suppose it was, that speech of Peter's begins in verse 34.

Truly I understand. And so on. I won't read that now. Let's go straight on to verse 41. God raised him on the day and made him appear, not to all the people, but to us.

He's talking there about the apostolic company, who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him as he rose from the dead. Incidentally, if there are any theological students here, you will find verse 41b is quite an offense if you have a liberal or rationalistic professor.

[5 : 50] He will be mightily embarrassed by it. In fact, if you tell him that you stand by it, he may have a heart attack. What it says is that the resurrection was a real one and that Christ was raised in a resurrection body and therefore able to eat and drink with his apostolic disciples after he rose from the dead.

We can't go into that now, but theological students will know what I'm talking about. So he chose certain people as his witnesses. He taught them what he wanted them to preach.

And verse 42 explains precisely that. I'll read it again. He commanded us, notice that it's orders. Peter is under orders. We are under orders. We shall be disobedient in the church if we don't do what he says here.

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead and to him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness in his name.

Now what Peter does here is to provide us with the eternal gospel. He will be disobedient, as I say, if he doesn't do that and so will we be. To go from the sublime to the less sublime, there's a lovely true story about Jack Nicklaus, the great golfer, which I quite like.

[7 : 12] I'm no golfer myself, but I admire these men from afar. He's no longer, of course, the greatest golfer in history since this man Tiger Woods appeared on the scene. But apparently Jack Nicklaus, when he was in his prime, used to go once a year back to his old tutor and teacher, who was a man called Jack Grout.

And having sought out his old teacher, he would put a golf stick in his hand and he would say to him, Jack, teach me to play golf.

Astonishing humility, but astonishing wisdom to go back year by year to the basics to find out if in that year something had gone wrong. So here Peter is giving the basics to Christian preachers.

And I must say, I wish that every preacher in this country would go back to the Apostle Peter once a year and say, tell me, have I slipped away? Have I wandered from your message? Give it to me again.

There are three things that I want to say about this message. I want you to ponder them and to look at this verse as I give them to you. First, this original Christian message is supremely and comprehensively a message about Jesus.

[8 : 24] You'll notice that it is absolutely centered on him. Follow it with me. Jesus commanded us to preach, that is the apostolic company, to preach to the people and to testify that he, Jesus, is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and dead at the end of time.

I can't actually get my head around the immensity of that statement. The idea that everybody who has ever lived, everybody who has ever seen, all the people we've seen in Glasgow this morning, all are going to stand before this man on the last day and he is appointed by God to judge them, to judge them perfectly, knowing everything about them, their past, their motives, everything.

It is an immense claim that can only speak of deity. Secondly, he is the theme of the Old Testament prophets.

Look at verse 42 again. We are appointed to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead at the end of time. But as we go back to the Old Testament, to him, all the Old Testament prophets bear witness.

So he is the theme of the Old Testament that you hold in your hands. He is the one the prophets are talking about as they look forward to the coming of Christ. Then notice that everyone who believes not in God, that would be a vague statement, wouldn't it today?

[9 : 50] Because the letters G-O-D really spell nothing nowadays. People import into those letters exactly what they want. The God of the Hindu, the God of the Buddhist, the God of Islam, they are all totally different in conception.

So we have to tie it down. We are not to believe in a vague God. We are to believe in God's only Son. So Jesus is at the end of time. He is the theme of the Old Testament.

We are called upon to believe in Him. And when we do believe in Him, we receive forgiveness of sins from Almighty God, but notice, through His name. That is, through His mediation.

Could you put Jesus more at the center of the message? It is comprehensively about Him. This means that God, the Holy Trinity, reveals Himself to us by the words and the works of Jesus.

So that, as we saw this morning, He who has the Son has the Father, and He who denies the Son denies the Father. So, the Father has put everything into the hands of His Son, and He who has seen the Son has seen the Father.

[10 : 59] He has heard the Son has heard the Father. So the Father, in a sense, withdraws and puts all His authority into the Son who speaks to us. And then, God, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, comes and takes that which the Father has placed in His Son and makes it clear to us today in the 21st century, teaches us, glorifies Jesus, and makes Him real to us.

So, the risen Jesus then tells His apostles to preach Himself. After all, that is what He did in His own earthly ministry. You've only got to read the Gospels to find Christ energetically pointing to Himself. Remember those great I Ams in John's Gospel. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth, the life. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me shall not walk in darkness.

As He energetically preached Himself, so He calls His apostles to do the same into all the world.

And that's what Peter did on the day of Pentecost. I looked back to check this out this afternoon.

The very first word of the sermon on the day of Pentecost was this. Men of Israel, listen to this Jesus of Nazareth, a man accredited by God.

[12 : 14] He starts his sermon with the name of Jesus, listen to Him. I then turn to the end of the Pentecostal sermon to see if Jesus was still the center of attention.

Listen to these words. At the end of the sermon, quote, Let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

So, down the ages, the living church, not always the dying and dead church, but the living church has followed this command. We are under these orders to preach Christ.

I was thinking, as I said that, of the numerous entries that you find in Wesley's journal. What a man he was. Through all weathers, preaching in every town and village he could, starting at five in the clock in the morning.

And he puts down in his journal when he gets back to bed that night, very late, I offered Christ to the people. Well, you can't put more succinctly what is Christian evangelistic preaching.

[13 : 16] And every Christian here who is a real believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is like Thomas when he'd shed his stubborn unbelief. And you say in your heart, do not even this evening about Jesus.

He is my Lord and my God. So, that is the first thing we learn from this amazing, concentrated little summary. We're told we're to preach the person of Jesus Christ.

All he was, all he said, all he did, all he is today, and all he will be at his return. Secondly, what do we see?

Ponder again. Look again at these two verses. The original message is to be centered in Christ. Secondly, the original message is to be a biblical message.

You'll notice that verse 42 refers to the apostolic company. They are the us in verse 42. He commanded us, his apostles, to preach to the people and to testify that he is the judge of all mankind.

[14 : 22] This means that the New Testament message, and the apostles are the source of that, has as its main message to us today, the judgment at the end of time by Jesus Christ.

Verse 43, on the other hand, refers to the prophets. He's talking there about the Old Testament prophets, and he says that the prophets bore witness to him as a savior.

So, the apostolic testimony, which you find in your New Testament, centers upon the judgment at the end of time. That is not, I want to say tonight, a message of gloom and doom, though it will be, of course, for those who are enemies of Christ.

The message of judgment is not something that we should grow sad about. It's something we should be glad about, because it's a glorious message that all that is rotten, evil, and foul in this world of ours will be destroyed forever, condemned, utterly.

Just turn with me for a moment. It will show me that you're still with me if I see some signs of life.

Turn, if you will, to Revelation 19, 1, 2, 3.

[15:38] I'm not going to tell you the page number. If you can't find the book of Revelation, there is no hope for you. Revelation 19, 1, 2, 3. After this, I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven.

What a choir this must be. Crying out, Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for His judgments are just and true.

He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality and has avenged on her the blood of His servants. Once more, they cried out, Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. Now you notice that this great heavenly chorus choir is rejoicing in the judgment. From time to time, I've asked the music director at a church where I'm preaching if he would set this to music one day.

I've said that verse 3 would make an excellent chorus and I wouldn't really mind how often it was repeated. Sometimes choruses do go on forever, don't they? So far, I haven't had a final musical director who will do it for me.

[16:44] But why not? Why shouldn't we rejoice in judgment knowing that at the end every bill will be paid, every evil will be destroyed, every thing will be put right that is wrong in the world today and has been since the beginning.

Turn to chapter 20 on the next page in verse 8. This gives some idea of what it will mean. I seem to have got the wrong verse here.

I meant chapter 21. I should have been more careful in my preparation, but perhaps it's because I can't read my own writing and that happens when you're old. You wait until you get there. Chapter 21, verse 8.

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, think of those men who crashed into the Twin Towers in New York, as for the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

Plain speaking, isn't it? But there's nothing for the Christian to fear, for there's no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. What about the Old Testament message?

[18:03] Well, look again back at Acts 10, verse 43. It's perhaps not altogether what we expected. It is the message of a Savior who's to come.

Strange, isn't it, how ignorant people whom we have to face so often when we commend Christianity in the world, ignorant people talk to us as though the God of the Old Testament is an ogre, and we're only to pay attention to the New Testament because that is a God of love.

And when I turn here and I look at this summary, I see that the New Testament summary is a God who's going to judge all men through his Son, which is a solemn message. And I see in verse 43 that God is a God of love who has promised to send a Savior.

to rescue us from their judgment. You will see that the whole Bible, therefore, is a word of prophecy. The Old Testament looks forward, the New Testament looks forward.

The prophets look forward to Christ's first coming, of which we know well now. The prophets look forward to Christ's, I'm sorry, I said it again, the prophets look forward to Christ's first coming, but the apostles look forward to Christ's second coming and his return in great power and glory.

[19:16] In other words, take the Bible in your hand, read it, believe it, and understand it, and you have a key to the future. And without those keys, we obviously flounder, we can't understand the world, why God has put us in it, what his purpose is for us and for all mankind.

So the second thing I notice as I ponder over this little summary is that it is to be a biblical message, a whole biblical message, Old and New Testament, prophet and apostle.

And they look forward to Christ, his first coming and his second coming. Incidentally, isn't it gracious that the Christ who is going to come to judge one day has come beforehand into the world at the

farthest place to do what?

Why? To prepare us for that judgment. Because he knows that without his saving work, we would tremble before that judgment throne. What a gracious God.

What a wonderful program. Now we look again at the summary and we see thirdly that it was not only a Christ-centered message and a whole Bible message, it is a universal message, a message for the whole world.

[20 : 30] And you'll see that in both verses. Who is to be judged on the last day? The answer is the living and the dead, all who have ever lived. Therefore, everybody needs to hear this message.

For it concerns everybody. They may not go to church, they may not read their Bible, they may never pray, but this is a message for them. The living and the dead will stand before the throne. Then look at verse 43. Who may believe in him and receive forgiveness of sins through his name? There's a little word there that is very precious, isn't it? The word everyone. And that's why this chapter is often called the Gentile Pentecost.

So as I say, it's a wonderful thought, isn't it? that the Lord Jesus Christ, who will come to judge the living and the dead, has come in order to save us, to prepare us, to rescue us, so that there is no condemnation for us.

If you are to speak like this, of course, to unbelievers, they will often reply, and I'm sure they've talked to you like this as they talk to me.

[21 : 39] Maybe someone will say to me after this service, well, you know, I don't like this idea of judgment. I don't like this talk about the wrath and indignation of God. I believe, they say, in a God of love, as though that had never occurred to us.

To which the preacher must surely reply, I too believe, with all my heart, in a God of love. The Bible says, directly and simply, God is love.

But the opposite of love is not anger or wrath. It is, and I didn't know quite how to put this, but I put it in one word. The opposite of love is carelessness. If I love someone, I care greatly for them.

If, and perish the thought, if some wretch were to pass drugs on to one of the young people who I know and care for, if someone was to infect them with HIV, I should be rightly indignant and angry. And the more I love them and the more I care for them, the more angry I am going to be. If God is a God of immeasurable love, he must therefore be a God of great indignation if that love is ignored.

[22 : 54] God cares more than we can ever know, more than we can ever say. There is no carelessness in Almighty God. Therefore, those who ruin his world and ruin human lives will meet his fierce, holy indignation.

Indeed, the Bible says terrifying and terrible things about that day. Things about wickedness, that those who willfully ignore God's word, God's son, God's promises, and God's love, they will tremble on the day of judgment.

If God is a God of love, he cares. And if he cares, he will be angry when men trample on his plans, trample on his people, and trample above all on his son.

Now we are in a position, therefore, though my words are very inadequate in this short time, to look at this original message and understand it. It is a message that is centered wholly upon Jesus Christ.

It is a message that is to be wholly biblical, Old and New Testament, prophet and apostle. It is a message that is suited for everyone in the whole wide world, whatever their race or color or religion.

[24 : 10] it is a message for all mankind. A message of a righteous judge, but first, the message of a loving Savior. Now, in a sense, that is my part of this evening.

Now, I am going to say more by way of application. But it is time now for application, and I dare to hope that you may have thought out your own applications of this message by next Thursday morning.

If you don't work out the application of these words in some measure, over yourself, then you will have been a hearer tonight, but not a doer next week or in the weeks to come. You really must not leave all the application to the preacher.

I am going to make three general applications that occur to me, that speak to me, about the world in which we live today, the society I know, and my responsibilities in it.

They may not be precisely your application, but you must make an application. Here is my application to the first point, that the Christian message is Christ-centered from start to finish, that it exalts Jesus as Lord and Christ.

[25 : 23] Here is my application of that, as far as I am concerned, as a Christian and as a preacher. It is this, that we Christians must challenge the political correctness of our day, and especially with regard to relativism.

That is the claim that there is no absolute difference between the Christian faith on the one hand and all the other faiths that may dwell in our land. The claim that religious studies is a proper substitute for Christian studies in our schools and colleges.

I won't go into all the foolishnesses that we meet so often now today, and soon in a week or two, no doubt, we shall all be driven mad by the idea that we abolish Christmas and talk about Wintervale. You know, you sometimes wonder if some city councils have got their heads screwed on at all. But of course, that's all madness, isn't it? We are a Christian civilization and we should not be ashamed to say so.

One of the most powerful voices today speaking against relativism is this new Pope Benedict. He has a brilliant intellect and I have read with a good deal of pleasure some of the things that he has said in Europe against relativism.

[26 : 40] I can't repeat it all now, but he points out that relativism, one, denies that Jesus is Lord, two, it denies the Christian mandate to proclaim the message in the whole world, and three, and very interestingly because he said this at the gates of Auschwitz, so it may have been Dakar, I can't remember, one of the concentration camps, which of course he knows a good deal about having been a young member of the Nazi youth, he said relativism will inevitably lead in any society in the end to tyranny.

For where there were few living Christians left in a country, there is no one to say we will obey God rather than man. Well, I can't say more about that, but I am glad that some church leader is raising his voice on relativism, and I only wish that church leaders of my own denomination would be so articulate.

We need to pray for them that they will be bold. And that leads me to say that if we are to stand up to political correctness, we have got to be courageous. There is a very powerful Greek word in the New Testament which means boldness in speech.

Literally it means freedom in speech. It is a very significant word. Paul used to ask the Christians to pray that he might be bold as he proclaimed the gospel, that he might be free in his speech. freedom of speech is under attack in our country today. It may be that in the years to come the live churches and the bold Christians will be the only ones left to fight this fight for freedom of speech because it is an essence of Christianity to believe that we should freely proclaim and boldly tell what we know about Jesus Christ.

[28 : 33] So as far as I am concerned, that is one application of the fact that the Christian message is about Christ as Lord. What is your application? The second thing we noticed about the message is that Christianity is a biblical message centered on the prophets and apostles.

Well, my personal application is to be willing to accept an invitation to spend a week teaching at Cornhill, Scotland. I've enjoyed this week enormously and I thank those who have come and have made it so easy for me.

For the precise aim of Cornhill, Scotland like Cornhill, London is to give people one year's concentrated Bible knowledge and Bible experience and that's quite rare today.

It's rare even from those who are trained at some of our theological seminaries. One thing we considered this week was that a thorough knowledge of the Bible this is only just one tiny example shows you what are the supremely important questions to ask.

The questions that we ask about God are not really very important. When I used to take missions at universities I can remember staying up till midnight answering questions and very few of them were important questions.

[30 : 00] Nowadays I wouldn't spend the time doing so because what matters is not what we ask of God but what God asks of us. The questions that he posits are the questions that matter. They're matters of life and death and I'll give you one example.

Will you turn back to Psalm chapter 2? Psalm chapter 2? Now the early church took this particular psalm very seriously.

It is more quoted in the New Testament than any other psalm with the possible exception of Psalm 110. All I want to do now is to ask you to look at the first three verses because it is one of the great Bible questions.

Why do the nations rage and the people's plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed saying, Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

Will you please notice that it is not quite the question that everybody is asking today about war. the question that we all ask, the question that appears in many a leader in the daily paper, the question that is top of the agenda is, why do we go on fighting amongst ourselves?

[31 : 20] Why does nation against nation threaten nuclear destruction? why does God allow this? Why must we terrorize one another? These are very important questions.

The new chief of the army, who incidentally is a dedicated Christian man, touched on it this week very bluntly and as a result hit the headlines. But you notice it is not a question that the Bible asks. The question that the Bible asks goes much further and much deeper. It is not, why do the nations fight one another? No, no. The question in the Bible is this, why do the nations fight against God? Why does this world of ours want to be free of God? Why does the world think it can do better if it shakes off the commandments and the control of Almighty God, who you might think would know better than we do?

Well, let me tell you how good it was to study these things with these twelve good students of the Bible this week, and how good it was on Thursday evening to visit the halls and see those tables set out, and what was the aim of them?

[32 : 33] The study of the scriptures, that we might know the message of the apostles and of the prophets. Would that every church in our land took with complete seriousness this teaching?

You know, then we would be a serious church. The media don't think we're serious in London. They're still calling us the happy-clappy mob, which means that the media think we're idiots. But supposing every church knew the Bible, knew the apostles and prophets, knew the implications and applied it to life, we wouldn't then be put on one side as an idiotic club.

They would have to take us seriously, as they will have to. That's my second application. I want to give myself to understanding and teaching the scriptures.

My third application on this matter of the gospel as a message for all mankind, and I worked at this during the last few days, and what occurred to me in the last few days is this.

[33 : 42] When I said this, I finished. We must not, as Christians, be satisfied with success. Let me give an example.

In the 1950s and 60s, when I was first around in London, there were two congregations, probably one or two more, but two that I knew of, Westminster Chapel under Dr. Lloyd Jones and all souls under John Stott, where there would be over 500 young people and students on Sunday night, eagerly drinking in the word.

Today, if you were to come down to London and we could catch a taxi, I could take you to many, many churches, many more than that, more than half a dozen in central London, where there were more than 500 students gathering together to hear the word of God.

I suppose you could say that that is a measure of success. Churches in London crowded out on Sunday evening with young people eager to hear about Christ and his purposes.

And yet, we have to say, even when we thank God for that success, that the vast majority of young people in London never darken the door of a Christian church.

[34 : 59] How can we reach them, the world around, the world outside, the world that doesn't want to know? I think probably there's only one solution. It's along these lines.

Do you remember at the beginning of Acts 8, it says there was persecution in Jerusalem and the whole church was scattered apart from the apostles? miracles. It's only when the whole church takes the responsibilities that often lie only on the shoulders of the leaders.

It's only when every Christian is equipped to give a reason for the faith that's in them. It's only when every believer in London is a witness that London will hear.

The application to me is a painful one because I've been much of a failure with some of my immediate neighbours. others. They don't want to know. If I'm to apply that after this evening and be a doer and not a hearer, I've got to think of new ways of getting under their skin, new ways of attracting them, new ways of passing on this glorious message that is intended to everyone, even some fairly hard-hearted neighbours of mine in South East One.

Well, start thinking, will you? What's your application? Try to put it down on paper before Thursday morning, or we wasted our time this evening. Let's pray.