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A Template for a Soul-Winner and Soul-Winning Sermon from Apostle Peter's Life and Preaching in Acts 2:14-41

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Abstract

One of the primary purposes of preaching is soul-winning. This paper examines Apostle Peter's life and preaching on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, where at least three thousand souls were won and added to the Church. Consequently, a template is developed from Peter for a soul-winner and soul-winning sermon. This template involves the preacher's personal life and the preacher's sermon. Beyond the initial crowd's bewilderment at hearing the disciples speaking in their various languages was the response of three thousand men to Peter's preaching. When the people heard his sermon, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' To win souls, every preacher needs the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to elicit the audience's response to the invitation to salvation. Response to the invitation is evidence of a soul-winning sermon.

Introduction

The experience of Christ's disciples in Acts 2 took place on the Day of Pentecost while they gathered in Jerusalem. According to Jewish tradition, Pentecost is celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover (Lev. 23:15-16, Deut. 16:9-12). Originally it was the Festival of the Firstfruits of the grain harvest (Exod. 23:16, Lev. 23:17-22, Numb. 28:26-31); it was also known as the Feast of Weeks because it is observed a day after the seven weeks of harvest that began with the offering of the first barley sheaf during the Passover celebration. By the

time of the first century A.D., however, it was considered the anniversary of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai and was a time for the annual renewal of the Mosaic covenant; it is therefore considered one of the three great pilgrim festivals of Judaism along with Passover and Tabernacles (Longenecker 2017:719-720). The Holy Spirit came so dramatically upon the early believers in Jerusalem during the Pentecost. Meanwhile, Pentecost was for Judaism the day of the giving of the Law, and, for Christianity, it is the day of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

During the apostles' era, Pentecost was a grand harvest celebration. The streets of Jerusalem were usually filled with thousands of pilgrims who came from the diaspora to celebrate the goodness of God and the bringing in of the wheat harvest (Pritchard 2021). However, Pentecost has a dual dimension to the Church. It is the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the advocate and comforter promised by Jesus to be given by the Father to his disciples for their empowerment, and it also marks the beginning of the Church's post-resurrection existence and mission to all nations (Straine 2022). The acclaimed author of Acts is Luke. His character is to locate events in history; therefore, Luke located the disciples' experience in Acts 2 in history, and that is why he specified the exact day when the Day of Pentecost came (Kisau 2006:2855).

The immediate effects of the Pentecostal experience can be seen in both the disciples and the audience. Among the effects of Pentecost on the disciples were what seemed to be the tongue of fire that fell upon each of them in the upper room, being filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in other tongues as enabled by the Spirit, and Peter's courage to stand up with other apostles, raise his voice, and address the crowd. That day happened to be the disciples' first public address to the crowd after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Peter's public address on the Day of Pentecost marked the beginning of the apostles' preaching. Pentecost brought to the disciples the heavenly illumination. They became filled with an intense longing to continue the work Jesus began. The disciples became strengthened by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit received, and they went forth with zeal to extend the triumphs of the cross (White 2015:30).

More so, the effects of Pentecost on Christ's disciples brought remarkable impacts on the audience and spectators.

When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? ...We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our tongues!' Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?' (Acts 2:6-12 NIV)

Beyond the initial crowd's bewilderment at hearing the disciples speaking in their various languages was the response of three thousand men to Peter's preaching. When the people listened to his sermon, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Those who repented of their sin were saved and added to the Church. Undoubtedly, the population of the new converts added to the believers at the Pentecost outnumbered the earlier gathered believers on the day.

The gospel was new to Jews and Gentiles alike, so the obvious goal of preaching was the salvation of the lost. This is undoubtedly why the New Testament examples of preaching emphasise the winning of the lost. However, later, when the Church was more mature and some New Testament literature was available, Paul exhorted Timothy, as a pastor:

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. (2 Timothy 4:2 NIV)

This is the New Testament order from which present-day preaching has developed. Thus, today's preaching includes not only the gospel proclamation for the lost to be saved but also the preaching of the Word for believers to be encouraged and strengthened in the faith (Pettry 2009:91).

The above notwithstanding, the church should intensify efforts towards the primary purpose of preaching as soul-winning as in the days of the apostles beginning from the Day of Pentecost to save the unbelievers, non-Christians, professing-to-be-but-not-Christians, unsaved-church-goers, and other categories of sinners. There is a primacy of soul-winning in preaching.

Taking a cue from Acts 2, this writer attempts to develop a template for a soul-winner and soul-winning sermon from Apostle Peter's life and preaching. How paramount is the preacher's empowerment by the Holy Spirit, knowledge of the audience, and communication skills to a soul-winning? What about the salient aspects of the sermon can appeal to a sinner, cut their heart to repentance, and cause them to be saved? And what is the importance of invitation to soul-winning in preaching? This paper addresses these questions.

Clarification of terms

An attempt is made in this paper to identify the distinction between sermons and preaching as well as expound the meaning of soul-winning in Christian terminology.

Sermon:

As identified in the work of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' *Preaching and Preachers* (2011:95), the sermon is simply the message. The synonym for the sermon is the message, the content of what is being delivered. Hence, according to Lloyd-Jones (2011:95), there are two elements in preaching which are sermon and delivery, what is commonly called *preaching*. There is the *sermon*, a content or message the preacher has prepared; then there is the *act* of delivering this sermon. A sermon is what the preacher has received from God and is put in a logical structure based on a given or chosen text from the scripture. Preaching is 'standing in the place of God and speaking out the sermons that He wrote and spoke Himself in Scripture' (Emslie 2013:2). The content prepared and delivered is the sermon.

Every sermon has a purpose to achieve and the purpose is determined by different factors such as the type of audience, occasions, place, time, and text, among others. One effective means of incorporating the purpose into the sermon lies in writing out a conclusion with the purpose in mind (Robinson 2014:112). A soul-winning preacher should tactically include the invitations in their sermon outline.

Preaching:

What is preaching? While D. M. Lloyd-Jones (2011:90) was trying to answer *what is preaching?*, he painted a picture of a church setting where 'a man is

standing in a pulpit and speaking, and people are sitting in pews or seats and listening'. He inquired further,

What is happening? Why does that man stand in that pulpit?
What is his object? Why do these other people come to listen?
What is this man meant to be doing? What is he trying to do?
What ought he to be doing?

From the foregone, Lloyd-Jones (2011:90) believes that any true definition of preaching must be 'that man is there to deliver the message of God, a message from God to those people'.

As a means of divine communication, 'God uses preaching to communicate with men and women' (Janvier 2002:7). Meanwhile, a question can be raised concerning George Janvier's (2002:7) definition of preaching where he states that 'preaching is not a speech but an encounter with God': what is a speech?

A speech is the act of delivering a formal spoken communication to an audience or communication by word of mouth. (Advanced English Dictionary)

Preachers often communicate by word of mouth while speaking God's word to their audience, and God's word spoken by the preacher brings the hearers an encounter with God that transforms their lives. Hence, George Janvier's definition can be revised to 'Preaching is a divinely inspired speech that brings an encounter with God'. For Alan of Lille (2010:16-17), 'Preaching is an open and public instruction in faith and behaviour, whose purpose is the forming of men'. Alan's definition gives us the nature of preaching as open and public, and the purpose of preaching as the spiritual formation of men. Therefore, preaching is primarily to save and to form a man in Christliness.

The disciples gathered in one place, probably a place other than the upper room where the apostles were staying (Kisau 2006:2855-2856). The most likely place is the temple courts, where the disciples would have gone to pray and join other people in the celebration of Pentecost (Kisau 2006:2855-2856). That gives us insight into why a large crowd of Jews and men from all nations could hear Peter preach. David Pawson (2012:855) affirms the temple was the place where the disciples met on the Day of Pentecost; the Holy Spirit came on 120 disciples in the temple as they gathered for morning prayers at nine o'clock on

Solomon's porch. From Peter's actions in Acts 2:14 NIV, 'Then Peter *stood up* with the Eleven, *raised his voice and addressed the crowd*' (emphasis added), a definition of preaching can be derived: preaching as standing up, raising one's voice, and addressing the crowd by narrating, expounding, interpreting, and applying God's actions in the past and present for the salvation of the listeners.

From the Acts 2:14 definition above some salient matters emanate which have to do with posture, emotion, audience, and goal of preaching. The posture seen in the text was 'stood up'. Although in contemporary times we see preachers sitting to preach on television and other electronic media, the conventional posture in preaching is standing up and Apostle Peter exhibited this. It is also natural in preaching for a preacher's voice to be raised and well projected to reach the audience but if not there will be a disconnection and loss of concentration by the crowd. One-on-one discourse is different from preaching because the tone required in preaching is usually louder depending on the size of the audience and available electronic sound system. For Peter, there was no electronic sound system but a natural voice aided by the direction of waves and the audience heard his raised voice. Having stood up, raised his voice, and addressed the audience, there was something germane for Peter to still achieve through his preaching, which was a response that leads to salvation. Salvation here refers to each listener's understanding of man's fallen state or inherent sinful nature, conviction of sin, repentance from sin, confession of sin, and confession of faith in Christ Jesus as the Saviour and Lord of their life. Preaching consists of a message delivered by one person to a group or congregation to win the lost and develop spiritual life in believers (Pettry 2009:97).

In his classification of preaching, Jay Adams (1982:6) classifies preaching into two: evangelistic preaching (heralding, announcing the good news) and pastoral or edification preaching (teaching). A soul-winning sermon well delivered is evangelistic preaching. It is the proclamation of Jesus's redemptive work for the salvation of the hearers.

Soul-winning:

Soul-winning is the result of witnessing Christ to the unsaved soul as portrayed by these scriptures, 'the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which

was lost' (Luke 19:10), and 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1 Tim. 1:15). Soul-winning is reconciling lost souls into the right relationship with God through Christ. When Jesus taught men and women, he intended to bring them into the right relationship with God. When he healed the sick, it was to prepare their hearts for the experience of his forgiveness and pardon. So it was when he fed the crowds. The motive behind it all was to win them to himself, as saviour and shepherd (Olford 2007:22). 'He that wins souls is wise' (Prov. 11:30). The worth of a soul is seen in Jesus's statement in the gospels,

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?
(Matt. 16:26, Mark 8:36-37 KJV)

Mahood (2012:22) emphasises that gaining the whole world is nothing compared in value to a man's soul. The soul is precious; it is of infinite worth.

One of the main obstacles to witnessing is fear. Stephen Olford (2007:17) testified to this as a young Christian:

There was a time in my life when the thought of talking to people, publicly or privately, paralysed me with fear.

A soul-winner must overcome personal fear by holding on to Christ's promised power, programme, and presence as assured in Matthew 28:18-20. Soul-winning is a priority and perennial work for every Christian (Olford 2007:42-43). As the master soul-winner, the Lord Jesus could declare 'the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost' (Luke 19:10 KJV). A soul-winner must not be mechanical in their approach to soul winning but must allow the Holy Spirit to lead (VanBuskirk 2005:4).

Preaching does something for the soul of man, for the whole of the person; it deals with him vitally and radically. (Lloyd-Jones 2011:91)

Preaching is a means to soul-winning, preaching transforms lives, and preachers must recognise it as their chief business. Soul-winning is described by Spurgeon (2016:4) as 'the chief business of the Christian minister'.

Overview of Apostle Peter's call and encounters with Jesus Christ

Apostle Peter was a fisherman before he became a preacher but was called by Jesus Christ to be a disciple. In his life and walk with Christ, Peter had critical encounters with Christ. Among those encounters, six are identified to be transformative experiences that shaped him for preaching. Peter's first critical encounter was Christ's call to him at the Sea of Galilee, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men' (Matt. 4:19 KJV), and from that day he became Christ's disciple with his brother Andrew. The second critical encounter was Christ's foot-washing of his disciples in John 13, where Peter initially refused to be washed and was categorically told, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me' (13:8 NIV). The third critical encounter happened on a mountain where Jesus took Peter, James and John.

There Jesus was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus (Matt. 17:2-3 NIV)

and a voice came from heaven to them 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!' The fourth critical encounter was Christ's prediction of Peter's denial and his repentance which led to him weeping after the cockcrow (Luke 22:61-62). The fifth critical encounter occurred after Peter's return to fishing at the Sea of Galilee, where he was first called. He returned alongside other disciples, abandoning his call to be a fisher of men. However, after Christ's resurrection, he appeared to him and re-commissioned him to feed his sheep (John 21). We might understand this episode of the resurrected Jesus appearing to the disciples when they were fishing as a new call to discipleship (Lewis 2014:254). The sixth critical encounter was the Acts 2 experience that brought about the infilling of the Holy Spirit and divine empowerment for soul-winning preaching.

A gospel preacher needs to have critical encounters with Christ that will involve accepting the salvation offered by Jesus Christ, answering a call to be a disciple and a call to win souls, becoming a fisher of men, prompting

repentance of sin, being washed daily by Christ, reaffirming commitment to follow, and ensuring constant empowerment to preach the gospel.

Features of a template for a soul-winner and soul-winning sermon from Apostle Peter's life and preaching in Acts 2

Apostle Peter as a pioneer preacher on the Day of Pentecost provided us with a template to guide Christian preachers in every generation. The template contains three main features which concern the preacher, the sermon content, and the audience's response to the invitation.

The Preacher's Life Template

Under the preacher's life template, three things are paramount. They are the preacher's empowerment by the Holy Spirit, the preacher's knowledge of his audience, and the preacher's communication skills.

The preacher's empowerment by the Holy Spirit

The empowerment of the Holy Spirit was very critical in the ministry of Apostle Peter and the other early apostles; they needed to wait in Jerusalem as instructed by Jesus to receive the power of the Holy Spirit before they could commence witnessing Jesus Christ. Greg Heisler's (2018:32) conviction about the relationship between a preacher and the Holy Spirit explains the importance of a preacher's empowerment by the Holy Spirit:

My conviction is that the Spirit of God and the Word of God come together in the heart and mind of the preacher to produce substantive and compelling sermons that transform the lives of listeners. A preacher's head, heart, and affections must unite together in the Holy Spirit to produce powerful preaching that informs the mind, inflames the heart, moves the will, and transforms the life. The Word of God is the substance of our message. The Spirit of God is the fire of our message. He ignites us as we prepare and deliver it, and he ignites our listeners as they hear it.

The preacher's knowledge of the audience

Apostle Peter was aware that the audience was mainly Jewish and therefore alluded to the Hebrew Prophet Joel and King David. In that context, devout Jews carefully listened to what he had to say about these personalities. Peter quoted from the Hebrew scriptures and insisted that the Pentecost event was the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy.

Peter presents evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah. He made references to the Hebrew Prophet Joel and King David. Speaking of the prophetic language, Bruce Watley (2012:72) suggests, and one can agree with him, that the audience Apostle Peter preached to on the Day of Pentecost would have been familiar with the prophetic words of Joel and David because those texts he cited would have been read in temple worship. In this context, devout Jews would have carefully listened to what Peter had to say about them. Peter appeals to the Hebrew scriptures as the word of God. He insists that this Pentecost event is a fulfilment of prophecy. Peter also asserts that Jesus is referred to in the Hebrew scriptures as the coming Messiah (Kroll 2012).

What language did Peter speak in preaching on the Day of Pentecost? There are arguments for Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, or tongue. But it was humanly impossible for any human being to preach in all the languages mentioned in Acts 2:5-12. There must have been a miracle of hearing for everyone to hear Peter in their language (Webb 2021). So, any language is possible, but if the goal of Peter's preaching was for the audience to understand the sermon and respond appropriately, no human language would have been more effective than Greek (Hold To The Rod 2021). Barrett (1994:131) asserts that 'The use of the LXX text of the Old Testament points to a Greek rather than a Semitic environment'.

The preacher's communication skills

Peter started by addressing the crowd as 'Fellow Jews'. He gave them a pleasant identity as brothers. Peter's speech in verses 14-36 was a proactive response to a mocker's speech in verse 13 that gave an incorrect interpretation of the disciples' experience (Talbert 2005:27). The mockers accused them of being drunk as early as the morning. Still, Peter explained 'These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!' (Acts 2:15).

Correcting the wrong notion of being drunk early in the day, he gave a correct explanation of the event in line with Joel's prophecy. He went further to affirm that David's prophetic utterances are fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

The Sermon Template

Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost was no doubt effective. The evidence is in the audience's response that led to the conversion of three thousand souls won and added to the Church. The Holy Spirit used Apostle Peter as an instrument to win many souls through his preaching, and that was 'an adaptation of means to the end' (Spurgeon 2016:87). The sermon is a medium for the conversion of souls as demonstrated in Acts 2:14-50. It is pertinent to examine the content of Peter's sermon that won souls. Peter's sermon content contains explanations and applications of past events and prophecies.

Explanation of God's plan, prophecies and fulfilment (Acts 2:14-21, 33)

Prophet Joel made a significant contribution to the New Testament regarding the concept of the Day of the Lord and provided several eschatological statements (Joel 2:1), words (Joel 1:15), and imagery (Joel 2:30-31) (Savelle 2006:3). In the context of Acts 2, Peter refers to the Book of Joel as proof that the Day of the Lord has come in his sermon at Pentecost (Watley 2012:68). The outpouring of the Spirit evidenced by the disciples' speaking in tongues was the fulfilment of God's plan as foretold by Joel to pour his Spirit on all people in the last days. This outpouring would be on sons and daughters, young men and old men, and male and female servants.

Explanation of the event from Jewish Scripture and connection to their history (Acts 2:16-22, 29-30)

Peter identified the event with the prophecies of a Jewish patriarch and king, David, and a prophet, Joel. He gave recitations from Psalm 16:8-11, Joel 2:28-32, and Psalm 110:1. Peter recited Psalm 16:8-11 to explain Christ's resurrection, Joel 2:28 to explain the outpouring of the Spirit, and Psalm 110:1 to explain Christ's ascension (Watley 2012:69-73). In Acts 2:30, Peter traced a historical connection between David and Jesus. He pointed out that Jesus is David's descendant whom God promised to place on his throne. 'This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham' (Matt. 1:1).

Explanation of Christ's finished work (Acts 2:29-36)

When the apostles were preaching and witnessing, they frequently quoted from the Book of Psalms as undeniable proof that Jesus was the Messiah written about in the Old Testament (Watley 2012:67-80). For example, in the book of Acts 2, Peter refers to Psalm 16:8-11 as proof that Jesus had to die and be raised from the dead. Although Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried, he did not remain in the tomb. Jesus rose and he was exalted, seated on the right hand of God as he had brought all powers under subjection to God. The preacher testified that the same Jesus is made both Lord and Christ. The title 'Lord' came to have particular relevance to the Church's witness to Gentiles, while 'Messiah' was more relevant to the Jewish world (Longenecker 2017:730). Therefore, for both the Jews and the Gentiles, Jesus had completed the work of human redemption and salvation from sin and death.

Explanation of people's sin (Acts 2:23, 36-38)

The preacher, in his sermon, pointed out to his audience their sin,

This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; *and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.* (Acts 2:23 NIV emphasis added)

It was a sin for them to connive with wicked men to demand a notorious criminal, Barabbas, be released while they shouted against the innocent, Jesus, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' (Luke 23:13-25). Through his sermon, the audience felt guilty for their sin, and they humbled themselves and asked, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'

Explanation of the audience's need for repentance, forgiveness, and salvation (Acts 2:38, 40)

In response to the audience's curiosity, 'Brothers, what shall we do?', Peter called them to repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Of the eight characteristics of sermons likely to convert people, Charles Spurgeon (2016:88) mentioned first and foremost, 'they are sermons which are distinctly aimed at the conversions of the hearers'. Peter's aim of preaching on the Day of Pentecost is seen in his call to repentance of the audience's sins. He was really after their conversion, and it

happened that many were converted. In many other words, Peter warned them and pleaded with them to be saved from a corrupt generation.

The sermon conclusion, the invitation, and the audience's response (Acts 2:39-41)

For a sermon to win souls, the preacher must end the preaching with persuasion and an invitation to salvation. Peter appealed to his hearers by letting them know that if they repented from their sins they would be forgiven, they would be baptised, and they would receive the Holy Spirit.

Sermon conclusion and the invitation

Every soul-winning preacher should preach to persuade the unbelievers, to make them Christian converts; the preacher should make the altar call while preaching and allow the audience to respond to the invitation to salvation. Greg Heisler explains that Peter's preaching laid a Biblical foundation for the audience's response. Before the Day of Pentecost, there had never been a massive response to the invitation to salvation.

I believe a biblical foundation for the call to commitment or public invitation is found in Acts 2:37-38, where at the end of the message people were coming to the apostles and asking, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' They heard the gospel, and they were ready to respond. We must preach with conviction, believing the Spirit is actively working in the hearts and minds of our listeners and moving them to respond appropriately to the Spirit's truth. (Heisler 2018:174-175)

A soul-winning sermon is incomplete without the invitation. The invitation is also known as the *altar call* for the audience to respond to a sermon. Whenever the gospel is preached, the audience is to be allowed to make a response whether to give their life to Jesus Christ as the Saviour and the Lord of their lives or to rededicate their lives. Ramesh Richard narrated how he preached at a Fiji Telecom breakfast where he failed to give an invitation to his audience to embrace the Lord Jesus. However, when another pastor was to say the benediction, the pastor did not hesitate, 'he decided to turn the moment into a time of response' (Richard 2015:205). At that time, some

people responded to the invitation and gave their lives to Christ. Ramesh Richard (2015:205) gave his testimony below:

The pastor taught me a deep lesson in evangelistic preaching: 'Cast the net if you are doing evangelistic fishing. You never know when you'll catch some. It's better to cast the net and not catch any than not to cast the net and not catch any!' With permission and preparation, I include at least an implicit invitation with explicit response options to trust the Lord Christ at the end of every evangelistic sermon I give.

Importance of the invitation to soul-winning

The invitation to salvation during preaching gives opportunities to the listeners to respond to the sermon preached. The invitation is very germane for many reasons. The invitation allows a sinner to publicly denounce a sinful lifestyle. It offers the privilege of confessing faith in Christ Jesus. For example, Zacchaeus, the tax collector in Luke 19:8, openly confessed his sin and decided to make restitution with those he had defrauded; in Acts 2:38 the audience responded to the call made by Peter to 'repent, be baptised and receive the Holy Spirit'.

Making the invitation helps to identify the new converts for proper discipleship and follow-up. Zacchaeus's open response helped to identify him among the crowd and allowed Jesus to follow him to his house. Those whose identities are not known because they refused to respond openly cannot be disciplined or monitored, and they may end up returning to their old life.

It helps to integrate the new converts into the church family as in Acts 2:41, and it helps to keep a proper record of the success of preaching regarding soul-winning. In Acts 2, the number of those converts was known and recorded because they could be counted. The record of souls won can help the church in research, analysis, budgeting, and preparation for further soul-winning activities. The record will also help to have reliable data, not speculations.

Meanwhile, it is possible that sometimes someone may listen to a soul-winning sermon and be converted in the audience but may not respond openly to the invitation due to many reasons such as physical inability to come out, distance barrier if the sermon is transmitted live on a radio or television, or fear of being

noticed if the convert is from another religion. Such converts can act Nicodemusly by finding a Christian to share their conversion experience with and for spiritual nurturing unto maturity in the faith.

Response to the invitation: Evidence of Apostle Peter's soul-winning sermon (Acts 2:41 NIV)

The evidence of Apostle Peter's soul-winning sermon is the response of his audience to the sermon preached as recorded in Acts 2:41. The evidence is the acceptance of his message that led to the conviction and conversion of his hearers, baptism of the new converts, and addition of about three thousand to the church.

- i. Their conviction and conversion, v. 41a: 'accepted his message'
- ii. Their baptism, v. 41a: 'were baptised'
- iii. Their addition to church membership, v. 41b: 'about three thousand were added to their number that day'

D. M. Lloyd-Jones (2011:88) asserted that 'when there is true preaching people will come and listen to it'. The crowd listened to Apostle Peter's preaching, and their response was proof that Apostle Peter's sermon was a sermon that won souls. The number of those converts was unprecedented.

Conclusion

Preaching was a key means of populating the church during the early apostles' days. Souls were won by preaching (Acts 2:41) and preserved by teaching (Acts 2:42). If preaching is to please God and save men, it must be identical in content and spirit with the apostolic days' preaching (Edward 2017:12). There are many approaches the church is adopting today for soul-winning; such are free medical service, free food items distribution, free orphanage home, vocational empowerment programmes, educational seminars or workshops, community hymn singing during Christmas, and other Christian-oriented programmes. For effective soul-winning, none of these approaches should be

devoid of preaching a sermon that wins the soul in line with the apostle's template.

Until Christ's second coming, preachers are to zealously continue preaching a sermon that wins souls (Buttrick 1987:496). Preaching the sermon that wins souls requires the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, every preacher willing to win souls for God must have a Pentecost experience: 'receiving cloven tongues like as of fire [...] filled with the Holy Ghost' (Acts 2:3-4). The preachers are the messengers of God. Since the preachers are just the messengers not the originators of the message or the focus of the message, they should take time to receive the sermon and preach with boldness as led by the Holy Spirit for the harvest of souls.

A sermon that will win souls must explain to listeners God's plan of salvation that the Old Testament prophets foretold and that was fulfilled in Jesus, who is both Lord and Messiah. It must also identify and call the listeners to their sins. Adamic inherited sin must be explained alongside personal sins against God and humanity. While the listeners are convinced of their sins, the preacher must endeavour to lead them to repentance and confession and give an invitation to the audience to respond to a call to salvation by faith in Christ Jesus's finished work, by believing in his crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and the Second Coming. The new converts should also be encouraged to be baptised by immersion in water and receive the Holy Spirit.

The effect of the sermon that wins souls must begin with the audience experiencing the metaphor of being cut to the heart as in Acts 2:37 NIV,

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?

The sermon that wins souls must, first of all, penetrate an individual's heart and cause a spiritual circumcision that will bring about Christ's new life in the converts. Any sermon that cannot touch, cut, or penetrate the heart of the audience cannot win a soul nor produce any response to the invitation.

The template for a soul-winner and soul-winning sermon from Apostle Peter's life and preaching in Acts 2:14-41 consists of three main aspects: the preacher, the sermon, and the invitation. If the preacher does not have the requisite

encounters, knowledge, and skills, he cannot win a soul. If the sermon lacks the basic elements which can capture a sinner, the sermon will not convert a soul. And if the invitation to salvation is not offered to the audience while preaching, there may not be a response and the right decision will not be made to accept Jesus's finished work of salvation. When a preacher is rightly equipped, preached a soul-winning sermon, and gave an invitation to salvation, souls will be won and sinners will be converted to Christ's disciples.

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