

Jesus the Evangelist

By Harold Klassen

What does the phrase, "Jesus the Evangelist," make you think about? If you said Jesus' encounter with the women at the well or Nicodemus, you might be surprised to know that neither John—who records both of those stories (John 3 & 4)—nor Mark, ever refers to Jesus evangelizing. In fact, John only refers to evangelizing twice in his 5 books and both times, angels were doing the evangelizing.

Revelations 10:7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

Revelations 14:6 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people.

Evangelism in the Gospels

On the other hand, Matthew records one instance of Jesus Himself talking of His evangelizing.

Matthew 11:4-5 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."

In the Greek... 'the poor are evangelized.'

Luke speaks of evangelizing ten times in his gospel and fourteen times in Acts. It is, however, interesting to note that in the Gospel of Luke two references speak of angels evangelizing (Luke 1:19, 2:10), one talks about John the Baptist (Luke 3:18), six speak of Jesus (Luke 4:18, 43; 7:22; 8:1; 16:16; 20:1), and one speaks of Jesus' disciples (Luke 9:6)

Luke 1:19 The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Luke 3:18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,

Luke 4:43 But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

Luke 7:22 So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

Luke 8:1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him,

Luke 9:6 So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.

Luke 16:16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

Luke 20:1 One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him.

Not only do these verses talk of some interesting evangelists—the angels—they also raise some important questions about what is involved in evangelism. In common usage, evangelizing refers to telling people who are lost how they can be saved. The essence of this evangelizing involves presenting the message of Christ's substitutionary death for our sin and His resurrection to give us spiritual life. Unfortunately, this common definition of evangelizing cannot be equated with the Bible's use of the Greek word, euaggelizo, which is transliterated to evangelize.

All of the Gospel references precede the death and resurrection of Jesus. He never spoke of this aspect of His ministry in public, although near the end, He began to talk about it with His disciples (Matt. 16:21) in private. Evangelizing must involve telling, bringing, proclaiming, announcing or preaching more than the condensed version of the gospel or good news that we often associate with it.

When Jesus began His public ministry in Nazareth, He read Isaiah's prophecy (61:1) and told the people in the synagogue that He had come to fulfill the prophecy. The Spirit of God had anointed Him to "evangelize" the poor as well as "proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus' whole prophesied ministry was a ministry of evangelism. We talk of Him as a great Teacher and that is how He is known throughout the Gospels, but Jesus identifies Himself as an evangelist. When we look at Him, we say He is teaching, but He says, "I am evangelizing!" I've never heard the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) described as an evangelistic sermon. However, immediately following Luke's record of this message (Luke 6) Jesus sends John's disciples back to John in prison to tell him that they have heard Jesus evangelizing! His physical miracles and His message were indisputable evidence that He was the promised Messiah.

Jesus' Gospel

What was the good news or gospel that Jesus proclaimed?

1. God is come
2. God cares
3. God will act

God is come

Gabriel told Mary the good news and the angel told the shepherds that God had come. That is good news. We are not left alone to try to free ourselves from our prisons, to cure our own blindness, or to release ourselves from all that binds us. We know that our situation is hopeless, but the heavenly Father has sent Jesus to do what we cannot do. We are not alone and never will be for Jesus promised that He would be with us to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). We no longer have to wait and hope for some human deliverer because God in Christ has come and He will never leave.

He came into this world and lived among us to demonstrate that it is possible to live a godly life even in this sin-corrupted, groaning world. We don't have to escape this world to live godly lives. Jesus came to give us hope here and now as well as then and there. God has come to prove that this physical world is not something evil but a distortion of the perfect world that He created. No one can reject any aspect of human life because Jesus came as a man and experienced it all—"yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Jesus' life—submissive to His parents, in "favour with God and men" (Luke 2:51-52), as a carpenter (Mark 6:3)—is an unmistakable declaration that all that is involved with the Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1:28) is valid and still possible for God-in-a-man.

God cares

But there is more to the good news that Jesus brings. God did not come to pour out His wrath on our sin even though we deserve it. Jesus came to bring salvation, not condemnation (John 3:17). The people of the Old Testament knew of God's holiness and righteousness, but they had only a limited understanding of His grace and love. Jesus came to introduce us to our heavenly Father who from before the world was created chose us to be His children.

Ephesians 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

Our circumstances may scream, "Nobody loves me; everybody hates me," but Jesus comes to say "I love you! You are not forgotten even though sin's distortion, corruption, pollution, oppression seems to never end." Like the children of Israel in Egypt, God has heard your cry and He is concerned (Exodus 2:23-25). Jesus came to proclaim God's favor—and that's good news. Although we cannot understand what is happening to us or the timing of God's deliverance, Jesus assures us that God cares. Throughout the Old Testament God demonstrated His care for His people as a nation, but Jesus came to demonstrate that God cares about everyone personally. Jesus didn't heal all the sick in Israel en-mass; He healed individuals one at a time. "God cares for me" is good news.

God will act

But there is more good news. God is not only here. God does not only care. God will act. He is going to do something about all the consequences of sin. He is not here to help us do something about our sin. He is here to do something about our sin Himself. He knows that without Him we can do nothing, so He is here to do everything. We cannot pay the price of our sin so Jesus paid with His life to redeem us from our slavery to sin and the "prince of this world."

John 12:31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.

John 14:30 I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me,

John 16:11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Ephesians 2:2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

We cannot live godly lives so Jesus rose again from the dead to confirm His power over sin and its wages—death. He now makes His resurrection power available to us so that

in Him, nothing is impossible. We have the power of God within, the power not only to know what we should do, but also to do it.

Luke 1:37 For nothing is impossible with God."

Luke 18:27 Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

Philippians 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

He has sent the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to live within us. Because God is love and God lives within, He can love unconditionally even the most unlovely.

1 John 4:16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

Because the Spirit of God lives within us, we can understand what God has given us, His revelation—His Son, His word, the Bible, and His creation, the universe.

1 Corinthians 2:12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

Our Ministry

Proclaiming bad news does not only include obvious errors or promoting immorality. Any proclamation that leaves God out is bad news. Without Christ there is no good news. Without Him we are both lost and blind. We are without power, understanding and love. Multiplying the number involved simply multiplies the problem and brings us no closer to redemption and freedom.

Paul assures us that God's involvement in His creation is obvious.

Romans 1:18-21 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Ignoring Him or rejecting Him is always bad news. But whenever a Christian brings Christ into any situation, when he allows Him to love through him, and as part of the body of Christ is involved in doing something for others, he is proclaiming good news and evangelism is being done.

Can we ignore the specialized activity of bringing people to new life in Christ? Of course, not! Trying to live the Christian life without Christ is impossible and makes a mockery of His death for us. It is insulting to try to do what only God can do. Those that have become new creations in Christ can demonstrate that Jesus can do all that He has promised and can articulate the good news in language that the poor, oppressed, imprisoned can understand.

However, instead of talking about pre-evangelism, evangelism, and follow-up, why don't we talk about pre-discipleship, conversion (new birth), and discipleship. This would more closely correspond to Jesus' practise and the analogy of physical development. We don't usually refer to all that happens from the cradle to the grave as "follow-up" to a birth. These three elements

of Biblical proclamation of the good news will need different amounts of time and effort, but to maximize the spiritual harvest, none can be neglected.

If everything is evangelism in the Biblical sense, it would seem to be important to distinguish the work of an evangelist from the roles of apostle (missionary), prophet, pastor and teacher. All are to "prepare God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:11), but not everyone has the same function. Unfortunately, the differences between the roles are not clear. Commentators have suggested all sorts of possibilities, but there is limited consensus. We can, however, be certain that not all are evangelists. It would be tempting to take the common usage of evangelism/evangelizing/evangelist and say that evangelists are those who have the privilege of attending when people come to new life in Christ. The danger is continued confusion of Biblical "evangelism" and common-usage "evangelism." Speaking of spiritual mid-wifery might help us avoid the confusion and recognize that the "evangelist" doesn't save anyone—God does. If the picture of physical life helps us understand spiritual life, we can see God is involved in a whole series of choices and relationships stretching back to creation that lead to a couple coming together to conceive a child. The moment when physical life begins as the sperm and egg combine, is usually unknown to the couple, but the moment of birth is a time of great rejoicing. Without pushing the analogy too far it is clear that God has been involved in His redeeming work for a long time before a person is born again and those present at the occasion may have had limited involvement up to that time. Their assistance at the moment of delivery may be critical for the future health of the child, but it is what happens to the newborn in the days, months and years after birth that is of primary concern to everyone.

There has been a lot of discussion about when and where evangelism is appropriate, especially in schools, but proclaiming good news as opposed to bad news is always fitting. In any particular time or place it is impossible to relate all the good news, so we have to be careful about the timing, quantity, and format we use. Different schools may allow different aspects of the good news to be shared, but if teachers are aware of the big picture they can share as much good news as possible and look for opportunities to share more without being discouraged that certain critical aspects are not welcome.

Teachers of all kinds—in the home, church and school—have the privilege/responsibility of being used by Jesus as He continues His ministry of evangelism. Sometimes, like Him, they will need to speak in parables that only a few understand (Matthew 13:10-17). Sometimes they may be able to speak only of the "gifts" and "trusts" we have received, without mentioning the Giver or the One to who we are responsible as stewards. Sometimes they may be able to share more directly out of the overflow of their mind and heart, how all of life and learning is related to God and His word. But whatever they are able to share, it can be part of the good news that Jesus the Evangelist wants everyone, everywhere to hear.

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