



Jesus

the EVANGELIST

Learning to share
the gospel from the
book *of* John

RICHARD D. PHILLIPS

“Richard D. Phillips’ *Jesus the Evangelist* is exactly what a paranoid and paralyzed church needs to hear in order to do the essential work of witnessing for Jesus Christ! In a day when so-called ‘practical’ books are synonymous with fluffy books, here’s a solid, readable work for the ‘average Christian.’ Phillips’ study of John 1, 3, and 4 takes us beyond clever techniques to biblical faithfulness, and beyond entertaining communication to sound theology in evangelism. He does a masterful job of helping us learn from God’s Word principles for evangelism, the theology of the gospel, and Jesus’ own practice in evangelism. Consequently, the reader is moved beyond apathy to action, to proclaiming the good news that Jesus the Son of God has come into the world to take away the sins of all those who repent and believe on Him. Readers of this volume will learn how to evangelize the real people around them from the only real Savior, Jesus Christ. Every pastor should buy two boxes of *Jesus the Evangelist* and give them away to members.”

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First Baptist Church of Grand Cayman

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—DR. THOMAS K. ASCOL, SENIOR PASTOR
Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Fla.
and Executive Director, Founders Ministries

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Reformation Trust
PUBLISHING

A DIVISION OF LIGONIER MINISTRIES · ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Jesus the Evangelist

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Published by Reformation Trust Publishing

a division of Ligonier Ministries

400 Technology Park, Lake Mary, FL 32746

www.ligonier.org www.reformationtrust.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Cover design: Geoff Stevens

Interior design and typeset: Katherine Lloyd, Sisters, Ore.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Phillips, Richard D. (Richard Davis), 1960-

Jesus the evangelist : learning to share the gospel from the book of John /
Richard D. Phillips.

p. cm.

Includes indexes.

ISBN 1-56769-088-2

1. Bible. N.T. John I-IV—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Witness bearing
(Christianity) 3. Evangelistic work. I. Title.

BS2615.6.W54P45 2007

226.5'06-dc22

2007015925

To
MRS. TONI BARNHILL
Proverbs 31:25

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PREFACE

This book arose from my study of the Gospel of John for a series of expository sermons. Right from the start, I was interested in John's strong emphasis on the theme of gospel witness, and my sermons frequently stressed the privilege and obligation of evangelism. I was also struck by the fact that so much of the material unique to the book of John involves Jesus' personal evangelism. It occurred to me that the material on evangelism in the fourth Gospel is so strong and informative that a book putting some of it together would be a real benefit to the church. The result is *Jesus the Evangelist*, which I hope will both motivate and instruct the practice of evangelism among Christians.

I have two main audiences in mind. The first is composed of the many committed and biblically motivated Christians who do little in the way of evangelism. One often hears that Christians interested in theology show little zeal for sharing the gospel. While I believe this to be completely illogical, I have found in practice that there is something to the charge. This book, then, is intended to enhance the zeal of such believers by showing John's clear mandate for evangelism and to embolden their witness with biblical instruction and encouragement.

My other audience is made up of zealous witnesses who would profit from strong biblical reflection on Jesus' own approach to evangelism. Much of what passes for evangelism today is nothing of the sort. The sad result is that many purported converts have not truly come to faith in Jesus. One is saved by believing the gospel, and to believe the gospel one must hear it. This means that Christian witnesses must know and communicate the gospel and its biblical content. In my view, our generation could profit from a strong dose of biblical reform, so that converts are not merely added to the rolls of our churches but actually

receive eternal life through a living faith in the Jesus of the Bible.

If either of these goals is advanced by this book, I will be greatly recompensed for my labor in writing it. May God bless these studies of His Word to motivate His people in their witnessing and to inform their witness so that the gospel is heard with clarity, truth, and conviction.

This book is dedicated to Toni Barnhill, with thanks to God for her fervent support of my ministry and especially for her transforming ministry of the gospel in the lives of so many women. I also am grateful to the members of the session and congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Coral Springs/Margate, Fla., for their prayers, their love, and their support of my writing ministry. I also wish to thank my many friends at Ligonier Ministries and Reformation Trust, with appreciation for their work in publishing this book. I also give thanks to God for the loving companionship of my wife, Sharon, and the sacrificial support she and our children give to my labor as a minister of the gospel. I am especially grateful to Sharon for contributing the discussion questions for this book, a task at which she is considerably more gifted than I. Lastly, I give praise to God for the precious gift of His only Son, sent that we might have the priceless gift of eternal life through faith in Him.

INTRODUCTION

It says much about the importance of the gospel to Christianity that you cannot be a Christian without it.

Gospel means “good news,” which is what the Christian faith proclaims to the world: the good news of salvation through God’s gift of His only Son. I became a Christian because someone told me the gospel. (Actually, a number of people were involved in bringing the gospel to me, and me to it.) This activity—bringing the gospel to people—is called evangelism, so named because the Latin word for “gospel” is *evangelium*, which has come into the English language as *evangel*. One does not become a Christian by being born into a certain family, by undergoing a certain ritual, or by joining a certain organization. Christians are those who believe the gospel. Whether it is by a parent in the home, a minister in the church, or a friend in private conversation, we must be evangelized to be saved by Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, according to the four Gospels of the New Testament, the Christian faith is designed to be shared with others. The evangel is evangelistic! A true Christian church is not only evangelical, in that it holds to the biblical gospel, but it is evangelistic—it zealously spreads and shares that gospel. This means that to be a Christian is to be called as an evangelist.

But for many, this is where the difficulty sets in. As in other areas of Christianity, such as worship, preaching, and Christian discipleship, a great deal of confusion and chaos has lately surrounded the matter of evangelism. Well-intentioned Christians find themselves plagued with questions. What does it mean to be an evangelist? What does the gospel message consist of? How do I begin to talk to someone about Jesus and His offer of salvation through faith in Him? What kind of person

do I need to be in order to be an evangelist? And how does evangelism work—how does someone come to believe the gospel once he or she has heard it?

I would like to make the radical suggestion that the place to find answers to such questions is the Bible. Numerous training programs and aids are available to the budding evangelist today; some are fairly good and some are not. But the Christian who wishes to serve God through the spread of His gospel, and whose love for others motivates him or her to share the gospel with those who are perishing in unbelief, would be wise to begin with a study of evangelism in the Scriptures. And there is no better place to start than with the accounts of the ministry of Jesus Himself, for Jesus was an evangelist. The Bible says that Jesus went about among the people “proclaiming the gospel” (Matt. 4:23). Just as Jesus is our primary model for faith, obedience, prayer, and good works, Jesus the Evangelist should be our model for the sharing of His gospel.

While Jesus’ ministry is documented and explained in many places in the Bible, the Gospel of John provides an ideal point of focus. Evangelism is the purpose of John’s Gospel; as John said, “These [accounts of Jesus’ ministry] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

Furthermore, John’s book is distinctive in that it includes material focusing on Jesus’ evangelistic ministry, accounts that are missing from the other Gospels. Primary among these are Jesus’ powerful interaction with Nicodemus the Pharisee in John 3 and His conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. These two chapters are veritable gold mines of evangelistic instruction, revealing much of Jesus’ message and method. John 1, in which Jesus’ disciples are called and gathered, also provides essential insights into evangelism through the ministries of John the Baptist and of Jesus Himself.

The purpose of this book, then, is to study these key chapters from John’s Gospel—chapters 1, 3, and 4—to learn evangelism from the Master

INTRODUCTION

Himself. It is my hope that studying the biblical approach to evangelism afresh will help bring much-needed reform to our gospel witness.

This book is organized into three parts, corresponding to the three important chapters of John's Gospel that I have mentioned. Part 1, which covers John 1, is a study of the man who came "to bear witness about the light" (John 1:7)—John the Baptist. What did John the Baptist's witness consist of and what was important about it? This section of the book also covers the accounts of the calling of Jesus' disciples through the witness of Jesus and the disciple Andrew. The focus in these chapters is on *biblical principles for evangelism*. Why is our witness so essential? What is and what is not a good Christian witness? What are the ways in which the gospel may be witnessed? These are among the main questions answered from this part of John's Gospel.

Part 2 focuses on Jesus' remarkable encounter with Nicodemus, recounted in John 3. As Jesus interacted with this religious unbeliever—so typical of many today—He systematically presented the *theology of the gospel*. The importance of this cannot be overstated, since there must be accurate content in our gospel witness. Among the important topics that Jesus covered were the necessity of the new birth, as well as its source; God's love for the world in Christ; faith as the way of receiving God's gift; and salvation as deliverance from eternal condemnation and to eternal life. Understanding these themes as Jesus presented them is indispensable to making a clear and accurate presentation of the gospel.

Part 3 centers on Jesus' meeting in John 4 with the woman by the well in Samaria—a person very unlike Nicodemus but typical of many people today. Here we observe Jesus' *practice of evangelism* in His witness to an individual. Jesus dealt with barriers to the gospel and acted to make a personal connection. He presented His salvation offer in a way that intersected with the woman's sense of need. We witness the change that occurred in her life as her heart opened to Jesus' message. We even see the Samaritan woman responding to her belief in Jesus by sharing the gospel with others in her life.

The book concludes with an appendix dealing with a matter that

troubles many people, but that ought to embolden our witness of the gospel greatly: the sovereignty of God in evangelism. I have also included discussion questions for group study, which I hope will promote personal understanding and application.

All Christians are called to evangelism. Jesus the Evangelist is our model. If we want to experience the power of God in our gospel witness, we must follow biblical principles of evangelism; we must present the true gospel in clear, scriptural terms; and we must follow Jesus' example in the practice of evangelizing actual people. Let us seek God's blessing for the salvation of many by preparing ourselves to be faithful witnesses to the gospel of God's grace.



PART ONE

The Witness of John the Baptist
and the Calling of the First Disciples:

Biblical Principles of Evangelism

A WITNESS TO THE LIGHT

John 1:6–9

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

—*John 1:6–9*

One of the most glorious works of theology ever penned is the prologue to John's Gospel. Whereas Matthew and Luke present historical accounts of the birth of Jesus, John gives us a theological account of the coming of God's Son. His message is summed up in John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

But while John's prologue is theological in its content, it is historical in its progression, beginning in the infinite depths of eternity past: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1–2). Then comes Christ's role in the work of creation: "All things were made

through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). The first paragraph of John’s prologue concludes with a potent statement of both the person and work of Christ: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4–5).

The second paragraph then begins to tell of the light actually coming into the world, starting with the ministry of John the Baptist, the promised forerunner and witness of the Messiah: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:6–9).

These verses remind us that John’s Gospel does not merely present ideas about God, salvation, or a set of ethical principles. To be sure, Christianity does produce a philosophy and a worldview. But unlike every other religion, its truth is grounded in certain facts of history. The word *gospel* means “good news,” reminding us that Christians have good tidings to tell the world—God’s actions in history to save lost sinners. Something wonderful happened in the coming of Jesus Christ that we want the world to know. The purpose of John’s Gospel, as with the whole New Testament, is to proclaim this good news and tell people how to be saved through faith in Jesus.

The World’s Great Need

If we were to take a poll, asking people to identify the world’s greatest need, the answers would be many. Some would say we must end world hunger. Others would say we need to provide education to all. Still others would suggest an end to all wars or point to the need to care for the environment, calling for an end to pollution. A famous song from the ‘60s said, “All you need is love,” while some today look to boost self-esteem.

Starvation is a terrible problem. Lack of education keeps multitudes in ignorant darkness. War often contributes to these and other

problems. There are legitimate concerns about our stewardship of the planet, and Christians should care about this. God Himself commands us to love one another, and we also should have a proper sense of self-love and dignity. But none of these issues constitutes the greatest need of this world.

What does the Bible say? As John introduces the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, it is clear what he considers to be the great need of our world: belief in Jesus Christ. John wrote his Gospel to show that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

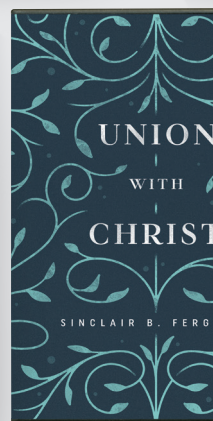
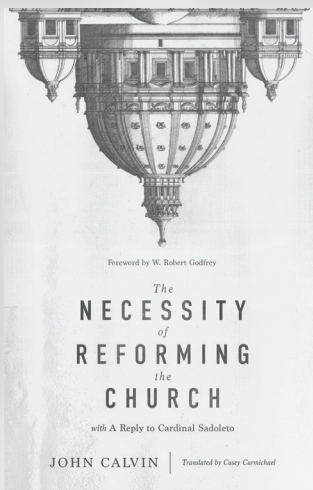
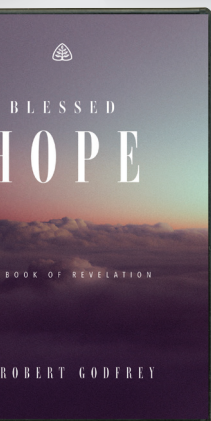
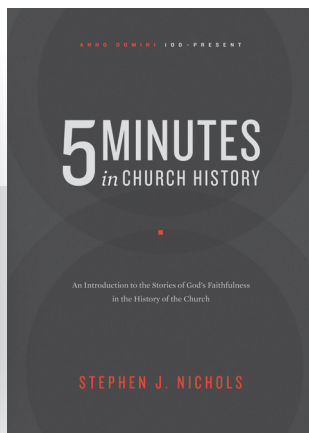
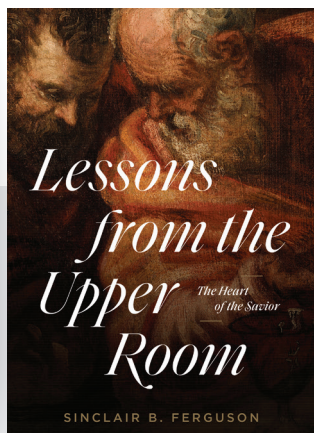
As human beings, we are alienated from God because of our sin. God is holy, and the guilt of our sin has placed us under His just condemnation. Meanwhile, the power of sin works evil in and through our lives, so that John could say in his first epistle that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). If these are our great problems—God’s condemning judgment and the insidious effects of sin—the answer is the Savior whom God sent as a light to this dark world. John’s most famous verse says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The true answer to the world’s true problems is Jesus Christ, an answer we receive through belief in Him.

A Witness to the Light

Since our greatest need is to believe in Christ, what a blessing it is that God has sent us witnesses to Him. Such was John the Baptist: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light” (John 1:6–7a).

The prologue to John is loaded with key terms that introduce the themes of this Gospel. John 1:4–5 reveals three of them: life, light, and darkness. Another of these theme words appears in John 1:7: *witness*. This word appears fourteen times in the Gospel of John. John’s purpose in writing is to prove that Jesus is the Savior and the Son of God, and to

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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