

# The Evangelist

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A few years ago Carolyn was talking with a Bible school student in Nigeria. He explained that he had an evangelist's call and that the Lord had given him the mission of evangelizing a series of villages in his region. He told her in great detail how he was going to go back to his village, establish a church there, raise up some elders, leave the church in good hands, and then go on to the next village and do the same thing. He said that with the Lord's help, he was going to buy a bicycle so he could ride from village to village to check up on the churches he had established. He planned to be in a larger town during the rainy season so he could call by telephone and talk to the church leaders because the roads were impassable during the rains.

After hearing this Carolyn asked the young man if he understood the call of the apostle. He said that he did not, that he was only familiar with the pastor's and the evangelist's call. Carolyn then explained to him that the vision or mission the Lord had given him fit exactly that of an apostle, not an evangelist.

This young man's lack of understanding is common, particularly in the developing nations of the world. When God calls people to ministry, often they do not fully understand what their calling is. It is common in many parts of the world that when a person does not pastor a church, he or she takes the title "evangelist." In so doing the term evangelist loses its true meaning and becomes a general term describing non-pasturing ministers of the gospel.

In this teaching we will examine what and who an evangelist is, and what he or she is not.

## The Universal Ministry of Reconciliation

First let us recognize that in one sense we all are called to evangelism. For the Scripture says,

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." (2 Cor 5:18,19 NIV)

God sent His only son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile the world to Himself. As believers, we too must be committed to reconciling all people to Christ. This is the personal responsibility of evangelism that falls on every believer. We all are called to witness and lead lost people to salvation through Jesus. But this is not to say we are all called evangelists.

## The Evangelist, One of the Five-Fold Ministries

Paul writes, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers . . ." (Eph 4:11 NIV) Some call these the "five-fold public ministries." Other ministries found in the Bible fall into a category generally known as helps or support ministries. (See Rom 12:6, and 1 Cor 12:28.)

The New Testament Greek word for evangelist is **ε\_αγγελιστ\_ς** or, *euaggelistas*. It appears many times in its verb form, *euaggelion*. It only appears three times in the

noun form, meaning "evangelist." (See Acts 21:8, Eph 4:11, and 2 Tim 4:5.)

## The Good News In the Old Testament

The Greek word *euaggelion* in its verb form means "to preach the good news" or "to preach the gospel." The most literal translation is "to announce the glad tidings." The Hebrew equivalent used in the Old Testament also means "to announce the good news," but in a much boarder sense than we think of today.

The noted theologian, Gerhard Friedrich, analyzed both the Greek word *euaggelion* and its Hebrew equivalent in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> In his explanation Mr. Friedrich referenced Psalm 40:10 and 68:11,

"I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly." (40:10 NIV)

"The Lord announced the word, and great was the company of those who proclaimed it." (68:11 NIV)

Friedrich continues, "Most significant for an understanding of the New Testament concept of *euaggelion* is... Isaiah and the literature influenced by it. Psalm 40:10 and 68:11 speak only of the isolated acts of Yahweh which are to be declared. . . Isaiah, however expects the great victory of Yahweh, His accession, His kingly rule, the dawn of the new age. . . .

"He is the herald who precedes the people on their return from Babylon to Zion. All Jerusalem stands on the towers and walls expecting the train of returning exiles. They see the messenger . . . on top of the hill, 'Peace and salvation. Yahweh is King,' he cries to them. . . He proclaims the victory of Yahweh over the whole world. Yahweh is now returning to Zion to rule. The messenger publishes it, and the new age begins. He does not declare that the rule of God will soon commence; he proclaims it, he publishes it, and it comes into effect. Salvation comes with the word of proclamation. By the fact that he declares the restoration of Israel, the new creation of the world, the inauguration of the eschatological age, he brings them to pass. **For the word is not just breath and sound; it is effective power. Yahweh puts His words on lips of His messengers. He it is who speaks through them.** [emphasis added]

"The close connection between this whole circle of thought and the New Testament is evident. The eschatological expectation, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. . .the introduction of the Gentiles into salvation history . . ."

The first thing we notice when we read the above passage is that as Friedrich describes them, God's words and deeds were proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets, not evangelists! In other words, in the Old Testament period, when God was teaching the Israelites about Himself, He used prophets. In fact, there really were no evangelists as we think of them today in the Old Testament period. God used His prophets to help train the Israelites to become a holy people set apart. He never directed them to evangelize the surrounding tribes and nations!

## The New Testament Good News

Now that we have looked at the power of the declaration of the good news in the Old Testament Hebrew form, let us again examine the Greek word found in the New Testament, *euaggelion*. It is only after Jesus' death and resurrection that the Great Commission was given to all believers to go into all the world and make disciples of Christ. It is in this context that we begin to see the noun form of *euaggelion*, *euangelistas*. In its simplest terms, beginning in the New Testament period, the evangelist is one who proclaims the good news of the Kingdom of God to those in need of salvation.

Here is what Mr. Friedrich had to say about the first century church evangelists: ". . . The number of evangelists must have been greater than one might suppose from the number of occurrences in the New Testament. The New Testament evangelist is not one who declares oracles as among the Greeks. He is . . . the one who proclaims the glad tidings, [the good news]. *Euangelistas* originally denotes a function rather than an office, and there can have been little difference between an apostle and an evangelist, all the apostles being evangelists. On the other hand, not all evangelists were apostles, for direct calling by the risen Lord was an essential aspect of the apostolate. In all three New Testament passages the evangelists are subordinate to the apostles."<sup>2</sup>

From an analysis of the Greek text it is clear that the evangelists primary function is to proclaim the "good news" of salvation through Christ Jesus to the lost. Let's now examine the call of the evangelist and make some observations about the person of the evangelist.

## The Evangelist's Burden

The called evangelist seems to have an intense understanding of the ultimate fate of the unsaved. He is often gripped with a vision or sense of the harvest field and the lost souls in it. His heart aches for the lost. His continual prayer is for the lost. He longs to see their salvation.

Since his vision for the lost is so intense, once a person receives salvation, the evangelist often forgets about him or her. It is his compelling vision of the harvest field that drives him.

This is the characteristic that separates the evangelist from the apostle. When the evangelist makes converts he wants to quickly move on. The apostle stays and works to form a functioning church before he moves on to a new field. Remember the story of the young man in Africa that Carolyn talked to? Remember how he wanted to establish a church in each village and how he understood the need to stay in contact with each church and help them grow? That's how Carolyn knew he was not truly an evangelist. (Although as an apostle, evangelism would be one of the things he would need to do.) The heart of the evangelist is not with the already established church. This is not to say that one is right and the other is wrong. It is merely a major difference between the two ministries.

## Boldness When Moving in the Gift

The evangelist moves with great boldness when he or she is moving in the gift. There is power and authority in his words. There is a fearlessness when he or she is proclaiming the good

news of salvation. Now this does not necessarily mean that the evangelist has a naturally bold personality. I have known many rather mild mannered, al-most meek evangelists. But when they are stirred by the Holy Spirit to speak God's truths to the lost, the meekness disappears and a directness and intensity flows. The boldness and authority is simply there, even when he is speaking in a rather quiet voice to a small group or even to one person.

## Signs and Wonders Accompanying the Call

Very often signs and wonders accompany the ministry of the evangelist. Let's turn again to the expertise of Mr. Friedrich. He says, "[the evangelist] is not just speaking and preaching; it is proclamation with full authority and power. Signs and wonders accompany the evangelical message. They belong together, for the Word is powerful and effective. The proclamation of the age of grace, the rule of God, creates a healthy state in every respect. Bodily disorders are healed and man's relation to God is set right. Joy reigns where this Word is proclaimed. It brings salvation...It effects regeneration. It is not the word of man, but the living, eternal Word of God. The Holy Spirit, who was sought for the day of salvation, attests Himself now in the time of fulfillment when the glad tidings are proclaimed."<sup>3</sup>

There was an evangelist named Kathryn Kuhlman in America during the 1960's. I will describe what I saw at one of her services. There were more than 7,000 people at the meeting. Someone began to lead in worship choruses. After nearly an hour, Ms. Kuhlman appeared wearing a long flowing gown like one would expect a celebrity to wear. She began quite informally talking about Jesus. She read a verse of Scripture and talked more about her lovely, lovely Jesus.

I had intended to take notes on her sermon but it was impossible to follow anything she said. By this time I was thinking I had wasted my time by coming. Then she began to speak words of knowledge about various healings that were occurring all over the auditorium. I was watching a small girl sitting close to me with a deformed leg. Suddenly her withered leg grew out and become whole right before my eyes, less than two meters away! This miraculous physical healing completely erased all of my doubts!

The healings, testimonies and words of knowledge continued for about two hours. She then began to give an altar call for salvation. More than 2,000 people responded to the salvation appeal! By this time I decided she could say, do, and dress any way she wanted as long as Jesus worked through her!

In Scripture we see Philip the evangelist at work in Acts 8:13 demonstrating the miraculous. "Simon [the sorcerer] himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw." (NIV)

I believe the miracles which accompany the evangelist flow from God's love and compassion for people's suffering. But they also have a broader purpose. Miracles draw people. Even mature Christians are drawn to a minis-try where miracles occur. Miracles build up the faith of us all, believers and unbelievers alike! And they certainly set up the unsaved to hear the message of salvation.

## **The Salvation Message**

Let me make another observation about the message of the evangelist. It seems to me that regardless of the Scripture he chooses as his text, the evangelist has the God-given ability to turn it into a salvation message! He can find salvation in almost any Scripture in the Bible. He can get people saved preaching from Leviticus or the "begats"!

## **Personal and/or Corporate Evangelism**

I believe that there are two kinds of evangelists. There are those who are able to speak to the multitudes. They are happiest when they are preaching to large crowds. This is usually the picture we have in our minds when we hear the word "evangelist."

But there are also what I call the personal evangelists. Years ago there was a man in my church who was a personal evangelist. I used to go with him as he did door-to-door evangelism. I have never seen anyone more effective than this man in personal evangelism. He would knock on the door of a total stranger and in a matter of minutes have that person (and often several people) on his or her knees tearfully asking Jesus to come into his heart! In two hours he would gain access into several homes leaving a wake of newly saved people in the kingdom of God. Yet this man, with this powerful gift of personal evangelism, could hardly preach a sermon to a congregation!

Both corporate and individual evangelism work with a high degree of effectiveness. And of course, there are some evangelists who are comfortable proclaiming the salvation message in both settings.

## **Early Ministry Success**

I have observed that the evangelist, much more than the pastor, teacher, apostle, or prophet, can become effective in his ministry call quickly. I once knew a very powerful evangelist who got saved one day and was out preaching salvation in the park the next day. He had been born again less than one day. He obviously didn't know the Bible. Yet people were getting saved!

We have already noted that it is because God's truths are being proclaimed by the evangelist that he usually moves in great power and miracles. This power is from God. It is not something the evangelist can create. The person proclaiming the salvation message is simply an agent used by God. The whole purpose of the message is so that those hearing it will become saved.

This early success can be a great trap for the evangelist. It takes the Lord, by His Holy Spirit, years if not decades, to make a mature believer. It takes the Lord, by His Holy Spirit, years to raise up mature apostles, prophets, pastors or teachers. And evangelists are no different.

The evangelist makes a mistake when he or she arro-

gantly assumes that the presence of God's power is also God's approval of his ministry and his person. Just because an evangelist experiences many salvations through his ministry does not necessarily mean he is a mature Christian.

## **Pride and Inflated Ego**

The very power mentioned above, if it is accompanied by a lack of character and Christian maturity, will almost without exception lead to pride and an inflated ego in the evangelist. I know of one evangelist who had great pride. On one occasion a fellow minister went to him to admonish him about his sin. The evangelist replied, "Do you know who you're talking to? I'm God's man of power! Don't you speak to me that way!" This evangelist was full of pride and rejected the admonition. In less than one year he fell into public disgrace because of the very sin God tried to warn him about.

In light of what we are saying you may ask, "How can this be? How can someone so full of sin have a valid evangelistic ministry in which many people get saved?" That's a good question. I believe the answer lies in part in God's faithfulness to the hungry heart of the hearer of the message. God can use any vessel He chooses to reach those who will listen.

Years ago there was an American evangelist who had a powerful ministry. He was also an alcoholic. I have heard stories that at times he would get into the pulpit drunk and yet many people would get saved during the meeting! Why? God honors the heart of the hungry. It is God's will that none are lost. So when one hears the message and is saved, God rejoices regardless of the vessel delivering it.

Of course, that alcoholic evangelist will have to personally stand before God's judgment, just as we all will. God was not ignoring his sin. There will be a judgment. But we must never question the salvation of anyone just because the person delivering the message is a tainted vessel. (And we do well to remember that all of us sin daily so we're all tainted vessels to some degree.)

## **The Evangelist Often Gets Out From Under Authority**

Since most evangelists desire to follow the harvest, they are continually traveling. Usually a local church, or a group of churches, sends out the evangelist. The sending church or churches are their spiritual covering. It is crucial that the evangelist return periodically to report back on his ministry. All of us must have spiritual authority figures over us. We must never place ourselves outside that authority and accountability, and the evangelist is no exception!

## **The Evangelist May Leave Converts Unchurched**

The evangelist's burden is for the lost. He gives the

altar call, prays the people to salvation and leaves the next day! He therefore often leaves the newly saved behind without a local church to nurture them. I have seen this many times.

One of the best movements I've observed in recent years in the ministry of evangelism is the teamwork with local churches in an effort to get the names of the newly saved so followup can be done. The goal is to get the new convert into a local church immediately. There should always be a system in place to capture the newly saved and funnel them into local churches for growth and nurturing. None of us, including the evangelist, are doing our jobs completely unless this is done.

### **The Evangelist Makes A Poor Pastor**

Although many would deny it, evangelists don't make great pastors. For one thing they continually preach salvation messages to the already saved. Their burden is simply not for the already saved functioning within an existing church. This is not to say that God will not, from time to time, place an evangelist in the pastorate. But it is the exception rather than the rule.

### **The Hearers of the Good News**

As every Christian knows, including the evangelist, not all who hear the good news of salvation are going to respond favorably. And even among those who respond many will fall away. I recently heard Billy Graham say that fifty percent of all new converts fall away within five years. This reality obviously grieved him.

Jesus addressed this in the parable of the sower. (See Mark 4:3-8.) He told of the four responses by those who receive the good news. Some listen, but the enemy steals the message; some get saved but fall away because of persecution; and some get choked and bare little fruit because of the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things. But some who hear and are born again grow and produce a crop of thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown!

### **Conclusion**

Let me conclude by briefly referring to the Reverend Billy Graham. He is the most well known evangelist in the world today. He began his ministry in 1943. By the late 1940's he had gained national fame throughout the United States. His ministry then became worldwide.

In the last six decades literally millions of people have come to Christ through the evangelistic ministry of Billy Graham. Today his organization, in addition to holding crusades worldwide, produces Christian movies and literature for world distribution. He has a weekly broadcast called the "Hour of Decision" that began in 1950. In 1966 he inspired the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin. His organization continues to host periodic conferences on world evangelism. His quest for lost souls seems to know no bounds.

For many years now Billy Graham's ministry has been sending a team ahead to a crusade region one year in advance of the crusade. That team works with the local churches to train them to assure good followup on those who come to Christ during the crusade. As I've already said, this is so crucial and effective.

Billy Graham personally is hosted by kings, presidents, and world leaders in every nation he travels to. Yet his personal humility can be felt and observed by all. To me, Billy Graham is the model of a fully mature Christian moving in unparalleled power as an evangelist. He personally, and his ministry, has stood the test of time. He is a world statesman for Christ! He is truly the model for every evangelist!

1. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Volume II, Pages 708,9.

2. Ibid, Page 737.

3. Ibid, Page 720.

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