

Evangelism &  
Apologetics for the  
21st Century



**CONFIDENT WITNESS**

Edited by

**DAVID S. DOCKERY**

“Witnessing for Christ with compassion and joy, without fear and guilt—that is the theme of this wonderful book. Christians generally know that Christ commissioned his disciples to baptize people throughout the world in the triune name and to teach them to follow him. The writers of this book recognize that sometimes we feel inadequate for that mission. In winsome, readable prose, they provide wise counsel on how those hesitant to witness for Christ might do so. This is a book for all of us to contemplate in our endeavor to witness for Christ with confidence, compassion, and joy.”

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“David Dockery has assembled an A-team of scholars and practitioners to contribute to this work. They know the Christian college setting well and speak powerfully into that unique context. Colleges shape leaders for society and the church, and I am grateful students will have this excellent resource from which to glean much wisdom in evangelism and apologetics.”

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“David Dockery has collected a rich and diverse trove of perspectives and wisdom on the nature and value of apologetics to equip and encourage a new generation.”

**Cherie Harder**, President, The Trinity Forum

“Jesus’s final marching orders to his earliest followers were to make disciples of people in all nations. This Great Commission remains the heart of the church’s mission. *Confident Witness* brings together scholar-practitioners, in a variety of academic disciplines and with a wealth of ministry experiences, who together offer a holistic case for a renewed commitment to the advance of the gospel. Readers will see the importance of cultivating postures, embracing practices, and building institutions that reinforce our obedience to the Great Commission in an increasingly post-Christian West—for the glory of God and the advance of his kingdom among all nations.”

**Nathan A. Finn**, Executive Director, Institute for Transformational Leadership; Professor of Faith and Culture, North Greenville University

“We have assigned chapters from *Confident Witness* to our undergraduate evangelism class at Wheaton. The result has been a most animated discussion of key issues and ideas in evangelism. This book is field-tested by students and receives an A+. It is a fantastic introduction, both in scope and in detail.”

**Greg Anderson**, Graduate School Chaplain, Wheaton College

“Beginning with the bedrock of biblical principles and historical observations, and moving to contemporary application, this extensive work presents a unified approach to evangelism and apologetics. Enriched by diverse voices and perspectives of scholars, it conveys indispensable insight tailored to Christian college students, serving as a cornerstone resource for those navigating the intersection of faith and academia. *Confident Witness* is a timely addition to the shelves of any student serious about gospel engagement.”

**Carl J. Bradford**, Dean, Texas Baptist College, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Confident Witness*



# Confident Witness

*Evangelism and Apologetics for the 21st Century*

Edited by David S. Dockery

 **CROSSWAY**<sup>®</sup>  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*Confident Witness: Evangelism and Apologetics for the 21st Century*

© 2024 by David S. Dockery

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover design: Jordan Singer

First printing 2024

Printed in the United States of America

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Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-9011-5

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-9014-6

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-9012-2

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Dockery, David S., editor.

Title: Confident witness : evangelism and apologetics for the 21st century / edited by David S. Dockery.

Description: Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, 2024. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023046939 (print) | LCCN 2023046940 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433590115 (trade paperback)

| ISBN 9781433590122 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433590146 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Apologetics. | Evangelistic work. | Bible. New Testament—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: LCC BT1103 .C6448 2024 (print) | LCC BT1103 (ebook) | DDC 239—dc23/eng/20240329

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023046939>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023046940>

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Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	26	25	24				
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

*With immense gratitude*  
*to*  
*the Mathena family*  
*and*  
*the Witness to Win Foundation*





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# Introduction

David S. Dockery

EVANGELISM IS SHARING the good news of Jesus Christ with men and women, boys and girls, who do not yet know him as Lord and Savior. Evangelism is a work of God as he leads and gifts his people by his Spirit to share the gospel message with others. Those who respond to this good news do so as the Spirit of God enables them and changes their hearts to believe in Jesus Christ, granting them the gift of salvation.

Salvation is a free gift of God, and it cannot be earned by our good behavior (Rom. 3:22–24). Salvation is not the culmination of humanity’s quest for God; it is a response to God’s initiating love for us. The apostle John writes, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9–10). God’s grace brings us to him and

strengthens us to continue and complete the spiritual pilgrimage (Eph. 1:4–7; Phil. 1:6). In no way does this deny human involvement in salvation, but it does affirm God as taking the initiative.

When men and women receive the grace of God, it is a testimony to the transforming power of grace itself. When humans reject God's grace, it is a sign of the hardness and sinfulness of human hearts (Rom. 1:18–3:20, 23; Eph. 2:1–3). Salvation comes to us through God's agents of grace who share the good news of the gospel with those who are alienated from God, lost in their sins. This spiritual transformation comes to the ill-deserving not because of their own efforts but because of the loving favor of God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

Salvation is of God, yet humans must respond to God's grace. As the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British Christian leaders Andrew Fuller and William Carey made clear, God uses the means of evangelism and the responses of men and women to the gospel message to bring about his desired plan. Only persons who receive divine grace can make a favorable response to God's salvific invitation, but only those who do respond to this good news are transformed by grace.

Thus, we want to affirm the priority of God's initiating grace without neglecting in any way the importance of believers' sharing the good news with others and the responsibility of men and women to believe the gospel message (Rom. 10:9–17; Eph. 2:8–9). When God extends his grace to us, he is the active agent, but he always extends his grace through various means, including the preaching of the gospel, the sharing of personal testimony, the written word of God, the invitation to respond to grace, the prayers of God's people, and the faith of the respondent.

The Bible maintains that faith is the means by which we receive God's salvation, which was purchased for us by the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16). Faith includes a full commitment of the whole person to Jesus Christ, a commitment involving knowledge, trust, and submission. Faith is not merely an intellectual assent or only an emotional response but a complete spiritual change of our lives brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelism involves guiding unbelievers to place their faith in Jesus Christ. Though faith is more than doctrinal assent, it must include adherence to Jesus Christ as fully God and fully human (John 1:1, 14, 18), as the one who knew no sin yet became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). Unbelievers respond to this evangelistic message by placing their faith in Jesus Christ, acknowledging him as Savior from their sin and Lord of their lives (Rom. 10:9).

God uses our acts of personal kindness and friendship as forms of pre-evangelism, but we must not think that evangelism can take place without a verbal communication of the gospel, either spoken or written. Believers are exhorted to be ready to give an answer for the hope within them (1 Pet. 3:15), doing so with gentleness and respect. The book you hold in your hands is an attempt to help people understand better the meaning of the gospel and the need for taking this gospel message to others, whether across the street or around the world. It is written particularly for college students and for those who serve on college campuses, serving as a reminder of the importance of evangelism and apologetics (making a reasoned defense of Christianity), especially in our pluralistic and secular contexts, in which an implicit form of universalism seems to be prevalent.

Evangelism involves the declaration of God's good news that through faith in Jesus Christ, our sins can be forgiven (Rom.

3:21–26). This message emphasizes complete and total forgiveness (Heb. 10:10–17), as portrayed in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). The means of this forgiveness include our faith and repentance, resulting in the conversion of sinners. Such forgiveness is found only in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no hope.

The work of evangelism must be understood within God’s overall redemptive work, for God is not merely saving individuals; he is saving a people for himself, the redemption of those from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). As a number of contributors to this volume will note, our evangelistic efforts must reflect an awareness of our context, a lesson provided for us by the apostles in the book of Acts.

The opening chapters in this volume make a concerted effort at closing the gap between theology and evangelism, in keeping with the observations of Michael Green in his *Evangelism in the Early Church* that early church evangelists were theologians and early church theologians were evangelists. Faithful messengers of the gospel will want to be sure their communication faithfully represents the theological truths taught in Holy Scripture. We thus gladly and joyfully acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, our prophet, priest, and king, who has completely revealed God, has reconciled women and men to God, and now sits enthroned as ruler of God’s kingdom and head of his church. *Confident Witness: Evangelism and Apologetics for the 21st Century* is a testimony to this good news and our shared thanksgiving for what Jesus Christ has done for us. Moreover, it is an expression of our desire to take the gospel to the nations (Matt. 28:19–20) with all boldness and without hindrance (Acts 28:31).

Robert Sloan, president of Houston Christian University, expands on these themes in his chapter, “What Is Evangelism?”

Chris Morgan, dean at California Baptist University, and Erik Thoennes, professor of theology at Biola University, provide thoughtful chapters on the scriptural and theological foundation for evangelism. David Gustafson, from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, offers an insightful look at “Evangelism in the History of the Church.”

David Kotter, dean at Colorado Christian University, traces the New Testament practices of evangelism and apologetics for our readers. Jim Denison and Mark Legg, of the Denison Forum, combine to make us aware of the challenges and opportunities associated with evangelism in a post-Christian context. Travis Dickinson, professor of philosophy at Dallas Baptist University, offers an illuminating look at the role of apologetics in evangelism, while Hal Poe, the Charles Colson University Professor of Faith and Culture at Union University, provides lessons from the life of C. S. Lewis regarding similar themes.

Anna Daub, who serves at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, turns our attention toward global evangelism. Tim McKnight, from Anderson University in South Carolina, offers readers a look at the faithful work of cultivating, planting, and reaping. Susan Booth, of Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College, reminds us of the essential ministry of the Holy Spirit and the need for prayerfulness in our gospel proclamation. Daniel DeWitt, currently serving at Southwest Baptist University in Missouri, shows us the importance of both evangelistic and discipleship efforts. Finally, Freddy Cardoza, dean at Grace College and Seminary, connects the dots for us with a summary chapter, “Christian Higher Education, the Church, Evangelism, and Discipleship.”

It is our prayer that these combined efforts will provide a symphonic look at the gospel and our calling to be faithful gospel



messengers in our various places of service, particularly with application for the context of Christian college and university campuses.

All of the contributors to this volume join me in expressing our heartfelt gratitude to the Mathena family and the Witness to Win Foundation for their generous encouragement for this project. We certainly want to offer our thanks for the support from Justin Taylor, Jill Carter, Thom Notaro, and the rest of the Crossway team for this project. Wang Yong Lee, Kylie Frueh, and Andy Jennings offered valuable editorial assistance at each step of the way. For all who have participated in this effort and for all who have offered prayers and support for this book, we are truly thankful. We pray that the Lord will use this publication for the good of many and that this book will bring glory to our great and gracious triune God.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What is evangelism?
2. How does God use human instruments as the means for advancing and proclaiming the gospel?
3. What is the relationship between divine grace and human faith in salvation?

### **Resources for Further Study**

Dockery, David S. "Theology for Evangelism and Missions." In *A Handbook of Theology*, edited by Daniel L. Akin, David S. Dockery, and Nathan A. Finn, 509–20. Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2023.

## INTRODUCTION

Green, Michael. *Evangelism in the Early Church*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.

Packer, J. I. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Rev. ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.



## What Is Evangelism?

Robert B. Sloan

EVANGELISM IS THE WORK of God's people in response to Christ's command, with the aid and presence of the Spirit, to announce to all peoples the good news of what God has done in Christ to restore the world (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:44–49; Acts 1:6–9; 2:4–11). It is an act of loving obedience done in the hopeful prospect of evoking in those who hear the message a sincere repentance from the idolatry and worldly wisdom that inflame the pursuit of power, pleasure, money, and fame and replacing them with a life of Spirit-enabled obedience to God. Evangelism is thus the enthusiastic (it is, after all, *good* news) proclamation of what God has done, and conversion is the desired response to the new covenant established by the once-crucified and now-raised-and-enthroned (with bodily immortality) Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Evangelism and its intended goal of conversion are rightly distinguished, but, taken together, they are a significant, penultimate

step in God's plan to judge and restore the world. He has already begun through Christ to defeat the dark powers and gather the nations in submission to himself as the one true God. To complete this inaugurated restoration, he has commissioned his followers to announce his kingship to all the nations and teach them to live in obedience to him—note the parallel between the commissioning of Adam and Eve to extend the frontiers of God's kingship through ruling the earth and Jesus's commissioning of his followers, given his possession of all power in heaven and on earth, after his resurrection (Matt. 28:18). This inaugurated restoration will be completed when God renews all creation at the return of Christ the Lord. But his followers already have significant responsibilities consisting in no small part in the proclamation of the gospel with respect to God's merciful work of bringing the nations into submission to himself (Matt. 24:14; Rom. 11:25–32; 2 Pet. 3:9–13).

The work of evangelism has often been severely reduced to an appeal to individuals to acknowledge sin, repent, and believe in Jesus. Those acts of personal response are necessary and significant moments in the process of conversion, but the work of evangelism and the response to it cannot be limited to these elements. The mission charge of Jesus in Matthew 28:19–20 is grounded in his newly established authority over heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18) as accomplished through his death and resurrection. The commission thus assumes the proclamation of the gospel as the basis for making disciples and baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and it seamlessly connects those initial elements of conversion with the need to teach them “to observe all that I have commanded you” (28:20).

Evangelism therefore is a summons to lifelong obedience to the will of God in alignment with his purposes revealed through Jesus

Christ, and it involves participation in God's plans for heaven and earth and all their inhabitants.

The word *evangelism* is closely related as an *activity* (especially verbal acts of preaching, teaching, arguing for, and writing) to the word *gospel* (*euangelion*), which describes the *content* of the message proclaimed and communicated in the work of evangelism. The word *gospel*, and thus the activity of evangelism, is rightly focused on the death, burial, resurrection, and enthronement of Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah/Christ. But as powerful and necessary as those focal points are, Paul reminds us—as did all of the earliest Christian preaching—that those significant events with respect to Jesus were “in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4; cf. Acts 2:16; 3:18–26; 4:10–11, 23–28; 8:26–35; 13:17–41; 17:11; 26:22–23). That is, they fulfilled a longer story. Evangelism, therefore, in telling the story of Jesus, is announcing a message that is part of the comprehensive story of Scripture—the most dramatic and climactic part thus far, to be sure.

The story of Jesus thus has a backstory—in many instances focused upon the covenant promises God made to Abraham—pregnant with the hints of the forthcoming fulfillment of the hopes for restoration within each scriptural scene and subplot of the longer story (see below). The gospel events, focused on Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and enthronement (ascension) are the surprising fulfillment of the biblical narrative. And while there is a backstory to the historical moments of Jesus—often signaled by brief allusions to Abraham—the gospel also reflects God's deeper, cosmos-wide purposes (Eph. 1:8–10) not only behind those events but also proceeding from them and beyond them. Those purposes are carried forward by the Spirit, involve human agency, and include—through the preaching of the gospel and the witness of the

church—the reconciliation of the earth’s peoples to one another and to God (both reflected in the church as the body of Christ; see esp. Eph. 2:11–3:13), other restorative works of mercy that are signs of the new creation, and the further administration of God’s purposes beyond the return of Christ (1 Cor. 6:2–3; Rev. 7:13–15).

The gospel, therefore, is the story of Jesus’s saving deeds, as embedded within the biblical narrative, and the very telling of it as evangelism is a furthering of God’s purposes for the world with respect to his heaven-and-earth-embracing, restorative work in Christ.

Depending on the context and the audience, evangelism does not always tell the full scriptural story or elaborate the long account of God’s actions and purposes in history. But that longer narrative is always assumed, and it is the basis upon which individual responses of repentance, confession, and faith occur. And it provides, again depending upon the audience, the context and place in the experience of the new convert(s) where discipleship—following Jesus after confessing him as Lord—begins. Evangelism as a witness to the gospel morphs into gospel-shaped discipleship, which repeatedly sheds the “old self” and its practices and “puts on” the “new self,” which by the Spirit is being transformed into the likeness of Christ (Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:5–14; cf. Rom. 6:5–6; 2 Cor. 4:16).

No doubt the very writing of the Gospels themselves—which took place decades after the earliest Christian preaching of the gospel by the apostles—is partly, if not largely, accounted for by the needs of discipleship. The Gospels told the early followers of Jesus not only how the Jewish Scriptures pointed to Jesus as their fulfillment but also what the life and teachings of Jesus would mean to them and what following him would look like in worship, holiness, and witness in their work as Christ’s commissioned agents in the inaugurated transformation of the world.

The earliest apostolic preaching of the gospel as recounted in Acts indicates clearly that the given audience—especially whether mostly Jews, God fearers, or Gentiles—often influenced greatly the level of detail and the rhetorical content and flow involved in the telling of the story of Jesus. Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill (17:16–31) started with his noticing the pagan inscriptions, proceeded with a citation from a pagan poet, and finally appealed to the one true God who had created all things and would one day judge the world through a man whom he raised from the dead—namely, Jesus. In many instances, where the Jewish audience possessed sufficient knowledge of the Scriptures, it was not always necessary to provide details of scriptural texts, though the allusions to the Scriptures are many.

So it is in modern-day evangelism. Every act of sharing the gospel need not involve complicated detail, but the longer story of Scripture is the proper frame of reference that needs to inform the work of evangelism (teaching and proclaiming the gospel) and nurture the response of faith to it. Certainly, we spend the rest of our lives as followers of Christ understanding the implications of the scriptural narrative, but the longer story itself must always be understood as the at least implicit background to an appeal for faith in Jesus. To believe in Jesus is to be taken up into the story of how God in history is rescuing and restoring our broken world and thus to become fellow workers under God (2 Cor. 6:1) and coheirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

The story that evangelism either tells or assumes begins with God’s good creation, the commissioning of the man and the woman to do his work in the world as his priest-kings, and their subsequent rebellion, which left them and God’s creation under a curse of corruption and mortality.

The narrative of Scripture in Genesis then progresses from bad to worse and includes murder, a great flood, and eventually the



scattering of the nations because of their presumptive attempt to break through—from the ground up—into the heavenly spheres. The peoples of the earth were then dispersed and placed under the control of various heavenly gods (Deut. 32:8—if we translate v. 8c as “according to the number of the people of Israel”), but—as other portions of Scripture show—those gods failed in their task of ruling the nations (Ps. 82). Thus, the nations were given over to false gods, but the Lord chose Israel for himself to be his instrument of reconciliation for the world (Deut. 32:9; cf. 4:19–20).

God’s choice of Israel as his people and his national agent of restoration begins, after the scattering of the nations in Genesis 10–11, with the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12, 13, 15). Through Abraham and his “seed,” God promised to establish a nation that would bless (and thus be God’s agent to regather) all the nations of the earth. The story of that “seed of Abraham” begins with Abraham’s son Isaac, continues with Jacob and the nation of Israel itself, and ultimately culminates in Christ (Gal. 3:15–29).

The Lord confirmed the Abrahamic covenants at Mount Sinai after rescuing the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery, thus constituting them as his nation and people. There he provided for them, through the giving of the law, certain covenantal standards that allowed them to stay in fellowship with him. It was understood that they would sin, but the sacrificial system and the other laws of God given to them were his gracious way of providing for their forgiveness and thus the maintenance of his covenant relationship with them.

But there were no sacrifices or atoning provisions in the sacrificial system for idolatry. When the covenant was established on Mount Sinai, it was sealed with blessings and curses. If Israel remained faithful to the Lord as their God, they would survive and prosper.

But if Israel should go the way of the other nations and worship their gods, they would endure the stipulated curses, be sent into exile, and thus, as part of the Lord's punitive discipline, fall under the dominion of the false gods (Deut. 4:15–19; 28:64; 32:8; 2 Sam. 7:23; 2 Kings 17:7–41; Jer. 16:13; Acts 7:42; cf. Ex. 12:12; Num. 33:4). There was, however, a promise of God—even with the violation of the covenant through idolatry and subsequent exile—that the Lord in his faithfulness would remember his promises to Abraham. If the children of Israel would repent and return to the Lord, confessing truly, as the Shema mandated, that the Lord alone is their God, then he would establish a new covenant with them, restore them from captivity, and give them new hearts that would enable them to obey his will and his law (see Lev. 26:14–45; Deut. 30:1–20; Jer. 31:27–34; Ezek. 36:16–28).

Even at Mount Sinai, with the presence of the Lord powerfully evident through sight and sound (Ex. 19), the children of Israel engaged in a shocking incident of disobedience by building a golden calf, thus foreshadowing their forthcoming history of disobedience (Ex. 32). Their subsequent failure to trust the Lord to capture the land of Canaan brought on military disaster and a punitive wandering in the wilderness that itself anticipated their days of exile centuries later. The rest of the history of the Old Testament is the story of their disobedience and eventual succumbing to worship Canaanite gods, thus forsaking the Lord as their God. After repeated warnings by incursions and military defeat at the hands of their neighbors, Israel was finally sent into exile and handed over to the false gods. In 722 BC Syria scattered the northern kingdom, and in 587 BC Babylon overcame Judah, the southern kingdom.

The prophets had promised, however, that if Israel would repent and return to the Lord as their God, the Lord would remember

his promises and restore his people. But if they continued to rebel, he would multiply the plagues and curses upon them. Eventually, after the seventy years of exile predicted by Jeremiah (25:11–12), the Lord led a small remnant of them out of exile and back to the promised land.

But even that small “tent peg” driven into the ground of the promised land was not the real restoration. As Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9 both lament, even though some had geographically returned, they were still slaves in their own land. Indeed, had not Daniel been mysteriously told that the calamitous time of desolation and distress would be multiplied into seventy periods of seven (Dan. 9:2–4, 21–24; cf. Lev. 26:21–28)? And thus the Old Testament story, for all practical purposes, ends. It is replete with promises that one day the Lord God would come (Isa. 26:2; 31:4; 40:3–5, 9–11; 59:15–20; 66:15) and suddenly indwell his temple (Mal. 3:1–3), but by the close of the Old Testament narrative, while there remained a great longing for restoration, as witnessed by the Psalms and the Prophets, the day of restoration had not come. Though fervently longed for, Yahweh’s kingdom, when he would return and reign over all the earth once the required punitive discipline was exhausted, was not yet.

The coming restoration would have many glorious features, according to the prophets. The Lord himself would return to Israel in the temple, and the people’s multiplied punishment, their time under the covenanted curses, would be over and done. An anointed son of David would emerge, and the temple would be restored. The proper priesthood would function, and the Levitical offerings would resume. Elijah would come back, a prophet like Moses would arise, and the last great Jubilee would be announced. The land would be fertile and abundant, families would be large, and joy and flourishing would abound. Indeed, the Spirit of Yahweh

would touch all of his people so that all would function as prophets, seeing visions, dreaming dreams, and prophesying in the name and power of the Lord. Hearts would be transformed to obey the law, and then, most glorious of all, the nations would rally to the banner of Jesse. The kings of the earth would flock to Jerusalem, and Yahweh the Lord would reign over all. The dead would be raised, the earth restored, and the glory of the Lord would again fill the temple. Indeed, his glory would cover the earth like the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14).

But the Old Testament story declares none of these things as fulfilled. The day of restoration remained a fervent but unrealized hope.

By the time of the birth of Jesus, the expectation of a coming restoration had shown itself in various acts of messianic and militaristic zeal. Would-be messiahs had appeared as the heads of revolutionary movements, fanning the flames of hope for Israel, only to be squashed by Roman power.

But still the fervor remained, and it is, therefore, not hard to imagine the excitement that accompanied the appearance of the rugged, locust-eating, strangely garbed prophet in the wilderness, John the Baptist. He preached a baptism of repentance and called for the confession of sins. The fruit of repentance, just as the prophets had said, would have to take place if Israel was to be restored, so he summoned all who would hear—and there were many—to a ritual immersion in water as a sign of repentance, preparing for the coming day of the Lord, when Yahweh would reign and his kingdom be revealed. John, with prophetic insight, even indicated who the coming Messiah was, pointing to Jesus (John 1:29–36), who likewise preached the advent of the reign of God.

The ministry of Jesus, with his power to defeat the demons of the false gods and his miraculous wonders—including feeding

thousands in the wilderness; healing lepers, the lame, and the blind; and even raising the dead—stirred the restoration fervor anew, and on occasion hundreds, if not thousands, followed him, believing that the Messiah had finally come.

But then the dark undercurrent of opposition that had hounded him all his ministry—resulting in conspiratorial rejection by some Jewish theologians, scribes, and political elites—resulted in a shocking plot, in collaboration with the Roman authorities, to put him to death. And instead of being stoned, he suffered the worst Roman means of execution, crucifixion. Beaten and then crucified as a seditious character, according to the Romans, and as one “leading the people astray” (John 7:12), according to the Jewish authorities, Jesus died, and the popular messianic movement he led appeared to be over.

But on the third day after his execution, he was seen alive again, first of all by certain women at his tomb and then by his closest disciples. On one occasion, more than five hundred saw him at the same time.

As Jesus repeatedly revealed himself to be alive, various details of his appearances showed him to possess a new kind of body that could never perish again. At the conclusion of a forty-day period of repeated appearances, he commissioned his disciples to announce to all the nations the news of his life, death, and resurrection in fulfillment of Scripture, thus setting in motion the proclamation of the good news of the restoration of all things.

Prior to his separation from his disciples, he confessed to having all authority in heaven and on earth; he then departed from his disciples in a dramatic ascension that not only separated him from them physically but also exalted him far above all rule, authority, and power, as well as every name for spiritual entities that is named

(Eph. 1:20–23). Lifted up on high, he was enthroned at the right hand of God the Father, where he will rule until he has put all his enemies under his feet, when the last enemy to be defeated is death (1 Cor. 15:25–26).

At his ascension and exaltation, there was the promise of his return (Acts 1:11), at which time the whole world will see him (Rev. 1:7; 19:11–16), the dead will be raised (1 Cor. 15:50–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–18), and God’s long-awaited judgment—when he sets all things right in heaven and on earth, the great restoration itself—will be completed (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 3:20–21; 2 Thess. 1:5–10; Rev. 20:11–15).

The restoration has begun through the coming of Jesus, culminating in his death, burial, resurrection, and enthronement at the right hand of God. And it is displayed by the pouring out of his Spirit, empowering his followers to announce to the nations that the Jewish Messiah is the rightful King of all the earth, who now reigns and is completing the work of restoration. The powers of darkness and those of the world who listen to them continue their rebellion against the kingdom of God (Eph. 6:10–12), but God’s kingdom will prevail.

The church is the assembly of those who believe the good news of Jesus crucified and risen, and offer God their worship through him. And because he is already enthroned as King over all the earth, his followers strive loyally to do his work. Evangelism is the task of announcing God’s triumphant reign through Jesus and, thus, not only expanding the frontiers of his sovereignty but increasing the worldwide giving of thanks that God is rightly due (2 Cor. 4:15). Serving Christ in all the ways he has commanded us is our responsibility because he already reigns and at some point will exact a reckoning over the stewardship we have been given. He

is the Lord and King whom heaven must receive until the time of the restoration of all things. But the day will come when God will send Jesus the Messiah, and the “times of refreshing”—days of both joy and distress, when all things are put right—will come to fulfillment (Acts 3:19–21).

Evangelism, by announcing the message of God’s reign through Christ, aims to persuade all of us—men and women, young and old—to turn from the corrupt idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son from heaven while doing God’s work in the world resolutely and steadfastly, knowing that our work in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). The word of God is preached, and the Spirit attends the sharing of the gospel (1 Cor. 2:1–5), and when, accompanied by faith in submission to Jesus as King, conversion takes place, the restoration is furthered. For this gospel of the kingdom must first be preached in all the world for a witness; then comes the end, when the return of Jesus will bring all things to fulfillment and God’s purposes regarding restoration will be accomplished (Matt. 24:14). Until then, his people are called to be his agents, his messengers to tell the world that the kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus Christ.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What are the central aims of evangelism?
2. Evangelism has been described as “listening.” Is that an adequate definition of evangelism? What role does listening play in evangelism? What else is necessary?
3. If evangelism involves sharing a message, what is it that the work of evangelism communicates?

4. Giving a personal testimony of your own conversion can be a helpful piece of communication when doing evangelism. What are the pluses and minuses of such an approach?
5. How is sharing the gospel connected to the long story of the Bible?
6. Are evangelism and discipleship distinguishable? What do they have in common?
7. Evangelism involves telling the good news of God as accomplished through Jesus. What role does God's coming judgment play in the work of evangelism?

### Resources for Further Study

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