



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



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	xi
Introduction.....	1

PART ONE

The Witness of John the Baptist and the Calling of the First Disciples: *Biblical Principles of Evangelism*

1. A Witness to the Light: John 1:6–9.....	7
2. The Word and the Voice: John 1:19–28	20
3. Behold, the Lamb! John 1:29–34	32
4. Bringing Them to Jesus: John 1:35–42	45

PART TWO

Jesus' Witness to Nicodemus: *The Theology of the Gospel*

5. Born Again: John 3:1–8.....	58
6. The Answer: John 3:9–21	71
7. The Gospel of Love: John 3:16.....	83
8. The Gospel of Faith: John 3:16–18.....	95

PART THREE

Jesus' Witness to the Samaritan Woman: *Jesus' Practice of Evangelism*

9. Jesus the Evangelist: John 4:1–10.....	108
10. Living Water: John 4:10–15.....	120
11. Dealing with Sin: John 4:16–19	132
12. The Cry of New Life: John 4:27–30	144
13. The Savior of the World: John 4:27–42	157
Appendix: The Sovereignty of God in Evangelism.....	168
Index of Scripture	187
Index of Subjects and Names	191

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

do this he marshals an impressive array of witnesses. Through them, he seeks to multiply witnesses to Jesus—those who come to believe.

Witnesses are essential in establishing any claim to fact. When a news station wants to report an amazing event, it interviews eyewitnesses. We accept the reports of credible witnesses, especially when there are a number of them who agree. The same principle guides our legal system. When credible witnesses testify to an event, we are morally bound to accept what they say as true. In like manner, John's Gospel presents us with such witnesses to Christ. Leon Morris writes, "[John] is insistent that there is good evidence for the things he sets down. Witness establishes truth."¹ This emphasis on the validity of witnesses ought to inform our own presentation of the gospel.

What witnesses does John present? Let me list eight of them:

- First, there is the witness of God the Father. In John 8:18b, Jesus said, "The Father who sent me bears witness about me."
- Jesus, God the Son, also bore witness to Himself. He said, "If I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going" (John 8:14).
- Third is the witness of God the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to send when He returned to heaven: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me" (John 15:26).
- Jesus also pointed to His works: "The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me" (John 10:25b). This is an important emphasis in this Gospel; John records marvelous works Jesus performed to demonstrate His deity.
- Fifth is the witness of Scripture. The most important purpose of the Old Testament was to give prophecies that would be fulfilled in Jesus; to teach God's will in a way that would be completed by Jesus; and by various means to symbolize and anticipate Jesus' coming and the salvation He would bring. Jesus said, "You search

the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39).

- One of the Old Testament’s prophecies concerned a forerunner to the Messiah, whose ministry would resemble that of the prophet Elijah. This is John the Baptist, the sixth of John’s witnesses.
- John’s seventh witness is Jesus’ disciples, including John himself. Jesus told them, “You also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:27).
- The eighth witness is the men and women who personally encountered Jesus. One was the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met by the well. After Jesus had revealed Himself to her, she went throughout her town presenting her witness: “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” (John 4:29). Another was the man who was born blind, to whom Jesus miraculously gave sight. When the religious leaders tried to silence him, he gave this witness: “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25).

This is a most impressive array of witnesses to Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah. Anyone who desires to refute His claims should consider these witnesses and give careful attention to their testimony.

The prologue to this Gospel particularly stresses the witness of John the Baptist. It is appropriate that the name *John* means “the gift of God,” for God gave John the Baptist to Israel as a witness to Christ: “He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him” (John 1:7). John’s importance is proved by his inclusion in all four Gospels. The other three Gospels give more details of his ministry of calling the people of Israel to be baptized to show their repentance and to prepare for the Messiah. But the emphasis in John’s Gospel is on the Baptist’s role as a witness to Jesus. Through this witness, many of John the Baptist’s disciples went on to become Jesus’ disciples. Even after John had been arrested and cruelly put to death, his witness continued to

bear fruit. Late in His ministry, Jesus rested in the place where John had begun his preaching ministry. So clear was John's witness that people there came to see Jesus and many believed, saying, "Everything that John said about this man was true" (John 10:41).

Three Features of a Faithful Christian Witness

John presents the eight witnesses listed above so that readers of his Gospel might believe in Jesus Christ. But another witness is essential to the work of the gospel today. This is *our* witness to the world as Christian people. The work of witnessing that Jesus gave to the first disciples now falls to us. Jesus prayed to the Father, "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). We are essential witnesses to Christ today.

By considering John's descriptions of John the Baptist, we can see three key features of a faithful Christian witness. The first has to do with the *content* of our witness. John 1:7 says that John "came as a witness, to bear witness about the light." A Christian witness is first and foremost *about Christ*.

We tell people what the early church enshrined in the Apostles' Creed: that Jesus is God's only Son and our Lord; that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary; that He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; that He experienced death for three days and then rose from the grave; that He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; and that from there He will come to judge the living and the dead. These claims make up a Christian witness.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it this way:

We are meant to talk to people about the Lord Jesus Christ and to tell them he is the Son of God and that he has come into this world in order to save men and women. . . . We are meant to tell men exactly why the world is as it is; we are meant to tell them

about sin in the human heart and that nobody and nothing can deal with it save the Son of God. . . . We are very ready to talk about our doctors, and to praise the man who cured us when so many failed; we talk about some business which is better than others, or about films and plays and actors and actresses, and a thousand and one other things. We are always glorifying people, the world is full of it, and the Christian is meant to be praising and glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ.²

John the Baptist set an ideal example of this. His message was not about his experiences or what he felt about God, but about Jesus. When he saw Jesus, he declared, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). We, too, need to declare that Jesus saves people from their sins. On the next day, “John bore witness” to Christ again, saying, “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him” (John 1:32). We, too, must testify that Jesus is the One who came to do God’s will by God’s power. John the Baptist said, “I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34), and we must, too.

Second, what we read about John the Baptist should inform the *manner* of our witness. John 1:8a says, “He was not the light.” It is important for us to lead lives that commend our witness to Christ, but our testimony can never be based on what good people we are or what we ourselves have to offer non-Christians. When John began his extraordinary ministry, the priests and Levites came out from Jerusalem to inquire about him. “John answered them, ‘I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie’” (John 1:26–27). With these words, John deliberately directed them away from himself and what he was doing to Jesus Christ and what He would do.

When many Christians give their witness, they talk about themselves. This is why we speak of “giving our testimonies,” that is, telling people about our conversions and how Christ has helped us. There certainly is

a place for testimonies, but they should never form the heart of our witness. I remember seeing an ad in a secular newsmagazine that featured a handsome, smiling young man. It began by talking about his previous problems: He had been into drugs and had been lost and depressed, but now he was clean and fulfilled. The ad was like many Christian testimonies—except that it was on behalf of one of the more bizarre cults spreading today. It is true that cults can help a person get off drugs, but that does not make their beliefs true. So it is with faith in Christ; its usefulness does not prove that it is true. Moreover, it is easy for people to brush testimonies aside, saying, “I’m glad it worked for him, but that has no relevance to me.” Our witness must center not on our experience but on the facts of Christ’s coming to this world.

It is especially important that we never think that what we are doing for Christ is of ultimate importance. James Montgomery Boice warns us, “Whenever a Christian layman, minister, writer, teacher, or whoever it might be, gets to thinking that there is something important about him, he or she will always cease to be effective as Christ’s witness.”³ We also must never permit people to glorify us for what God has done in our lives. If people notice that you have changed, you should praise God and tell them that it was Jesus’ work, for they will gain what you have, not by admiring you, but only by believing on Jesus. In some cases, redirecting praise in this manner will result in people who previously admired you becoming hostile; the world hated Christ, and it will often hate a faithful witness to Him. But we must accept this risk so as to bear testimony not to ourselves but to Christ.

In John 5:35a, Jesus said that John the Baptist “was a burning and shining lamp.” Some Bible versions say that John was a “light,” but the Greek word Jesus used (*luxnos*) means a candle or a lamp. A lamp does not shine on its own. Its light has to be kindled from another source, and it needs a supply of oil or it will go out. The same is true of us. In our witness, we are to shine not our own light but Christ’s light. Just as a lamp requires oil, we depend on our fellowship with Christ and the Holy Spirit’s enlivening ministry through God’s Word in order that

Christ's light may shine through us. To use a different metaphor, we are like the moon reflecting the light of the sun. On our own, we are in darkness, but a great light has shined and is shining on us, and we are to reflect it into the world.

Third, John the Baptist shows the *goal* of a faithful Christian witness. John "came as a witness . . . that all might believe through him" (John 1:7). Our goal is for others to believe through our witness. Boice writes, "It is possible for a person to become so mechanical in his witness that he can go through all the motions of witnessing without actually looking and praying for the response to Christ in faith by the other person. If we could remember this, we would find witnessing exciting, and we would learn that winning the argument often becomes far less important than winning the person to the Lord."⁴ Since our goal is to persuade unbelievers and win over sinners, we should be eager to display the grace of the gospel in our lives; we should labor earnestly in prayer before and after our witness; and we should persist in telling others about Jesus even in the face of hardship and persecution. If we will commit to this pattern of faithful witness, as modeled by John the Baptist, we will find that God will cause people to believe through us. We will have the great joy of being used by the Lord for the salvation of others.

The True Light

If there is a single summary statement that should focus our witness to Jesus, it is in John 1:9: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." The word *true* carries the idea of "genuine" or "real." There may be other lights in the world: ideas, products, or activities that satisfy us partially and for a time. But Jesus is the true light. No other light can show us the truth about God, about ourselves, and about life, death, and eternity. No other light can inspire us to become what we truly were meant to be or convey the power necessary to change our hearts. And no other light can guide us "in paths of righteousness" (Ps. 23:3), so that our souls arrive safely in heaven.

As I mentioned above, the great need of this world, according to John's Gospel, is that man should believe in Jesus Christ, the true light. Thus, God sent not management consultants, not psychologists, not soldiers, politicians, or stockbrokers, but witnesses to the light, so that people might believe. Believing in Christ is the world's great need, and our great obligation is to tell all people that they need to do so.

What should we tell people about Jesus today? We should tell them that their sins must be forgiven or punished by the holy God. Without the cleansing blood of a true Savior, what will they do with their sins when they die and stand before God's throne? Many expect God to admit them into heaven apart from faith in Christ because of their supposedly good lives. But have they inquired about God's actual standards? Are they willing to stake so great an issue on conventional wisdom and a fantasy spread by the world, even in the face of God's own revealed Word? The great need of men and women is to find the way God has given for forgiveness and eternal life, and our privilege is to show them the way, Jesus Christ.

I have a friend whose dying father told his Christian children that he did not think he needed Jesus because of the outstanding life he had lived. The children sent for their pastor, who came and admitted that the man had lived a virtuous life, at least as we measure such things. But then the pastor asked him, "Do you mean to tell me that you have never sinned?" The father admitted that he had committed sins, many of them, in fact. The pastor replied, "Well, what are we going to do about those sins?" With tears, the man opened his heart to Jesus, believed, and was saved.

Many people are not interested in heaven, caring only about their present happiness. But have they compared the lights of their liking to the true light of God's Son? There is no light other than Jesus that can lead to true joy now or to eternal life in days to come: not money, adventure, or success; not the pride of morality; not the pleasure of sin. The only true light is Jesus Christ, and God in His grace sent Him

into this world to be our Savior. What will happen to those who reject Him? How will God respond if they do not receive His Son, bowing the knee and opening their hearts to believe and be saved? As John declared, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36).⁵

Christians have an equal need to believe on Jesus and His gospel. Faith in Christ is once for all in its *effects*, eternally reconciling a believer to God. But faith in Christ is not a once-for-all *event*. The greatest need of Christians is to exercise their faith in Christ—to make their belief not a mere assent but a living practice and habit.

Let me provide some practical examples. What if you are taken gravely ill? You might say that your greatest need would be to receive expert medical care. That is valuable, to be sure. But the greatest need of a gravely ill Christian is to know that God holds his or her life safe for all eternity, and to experience God’s loving care and the peace that only He can give. These things come only through the exercise of faith in Christ. Likewise, what is the greatest need of a Christian who gains success and worldly blessing? It is an active belief in Christ and His Word to protect him from pride and the snares of the world. A Christian facing poverty most needs, not money, but the realization that God hears his or her prayers and takes care of His own. A Christian who is lonely needs first of all the companionship of Christ. A Christian beset by temptation needs a shield of protection. A Christian who is weary needs strength and refreshment. All of these come from one and the same source: belief in Jesus Christ, in His promises, in the teachings of His Word, and in the God and Father who rules over all and who, because of His great love for us, sent the true light into the world.

Let those who wish to witness Christ to the world therefore tend to their own faith in Jesus Christ above all else. It is often the simple exercise of faith in all of life’s circumstances that bears the strongest witness. Devote yourself to God’s Word, the bread that feeds our faith.

Guard your faith against the many false lights in this world. Commit to a life of prayer, worship, and discipleship to Jesus, all of which depend on faith. As our faith bears its witness to the reality of Jesus, we will surely find others coming to us, as they did to John the Baptist, so that we can tell them what we know and believe.

NOTES

- ¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, revised (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 66.
- ² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Safe in the World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1988), 88.
- ³ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 1:53.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:54.
- ⁵ Biblical scholars disagree as to whether the words in verses 31–36 were spoken by John the Baptist or were composed by the apostle John.

Questions for discussion and reflection:

1. Today, absolute truth is “out” and relativism is “in.” Many even deny that Jesus was God. What portraits of Christ from the Old Testament does John use to support claims about Jesus’ deity?
2. John held the office of prophet. What evidence supports John’s claims to be a true prophet, one whose message we can accept as true? Consider other people who claim to be prophets, including such people as Mohammed and Joseph Smith. Could they support their claims the way John the Baptist could?
3. Turning on a light in a dark room suddenly exposes its contents. What was and still is exposed when the light of Jesus shines in the heart of mankind?
4. What witness did Jesus bear about Himself? Commit these truths to memory and pray for the Holy Spirit to prepare you to share them with colleagues, relatives, and friends.
5. If the content of our witness is Christ, the manner is godly living, and the goal is to exhort belief, in what activities should a Christian engage to prepare to be a living witness?
6. Being enlightened by the light of Jesus is not a once-for-all event. By what means is God currently working in your life to bring about spiritual growth and to challenge you to a more authentic faith?
7. It is a privilege to intercede for one another in prayer. Who are some brothers and sisters for whom you can commit to pray, that they will be faithful witnesses to the light of Jesus Christ?

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