

Evangelism and the Kingdom of God

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In the New Testament, the term “evangelism” specifically refers to the good news of the kingdom of God. “To evangelize” literally means to proclaim the good news of the coming of God’s reign.

Jesus came “proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness” (Mt. 9:35). In Luke 4:43, Jesus says that his central purpose was to “proclaim the good news of [literally, “evangelize concerning”] the kingdom of God.” Again in Luke 8:1, Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom is described as “evangelizing.” We read in Acts 8:12, translating literally, that Philip “evangelized about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (See also Mt. 4:23, 24:14; Luke 16:16).

Consistently in the New Testament, evangelism is tied to the proclamation of the God’s kingdom and the demonstration of the reality of that kingdom. In the Bible, evangelism is not limited to what might be called *conversion evangelism*—winning converts to Jesus Christ. Biblically speaking, “evangelism” covers much more, because it concerns the comprehensive message of God’s reign.

What, then, does evangelism really mean, biblically speaking? If evangelism means announcing and embodying God’s reign so that God’s will truly is done on earth, then evangelism may be pictured in this way:

KINGDOM EVANGELISM – *Announcing and Embodying the Good News of God’s Reign*

Conversion Evangelism	Discipling Evangelism	Justice Evangelism	Culture Evangelism
We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way (Isa 53:6).	Observe the commands of the Lord, walking in obedience to him and revering him (Dt 8:6)	This is the fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice...to set the oppressed free (Isa 58:6)	My justice will become a light to the nations (Isa 51:4).
Repent and turn to God, so every your sins may be wiped out (Acts 3:19).	...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Mt 28:20).	Seek first God’s kingdom and its righteousness (justice) (Mt. 6:33)	We take captive thought to make it obedient to Christ

(2 Cor 10:5).

In this view, evangelism is all about the kingdom of God. This is what we find in the New Testament. Evangelism means making Jesus Christ and his kingdom known through the church, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Consider these four dimensions of evangelism:

Conversion evangelism is proclaiming and showing by our lives that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord—the one who came into the world to save sinners. The mission of the church is to lift up Jesus Christ so that people may be convicted of their sins, repent and believe in him, and receive the abundant life he offers.

Conversion evangelism is preeminently the work of *the church*, the Christian community, not just of individuals or specialized organizations. As the body of Christ, a faithful church makes Jesus Christ visible in the world. As it shows forth Christ, people are won to faith in him and become part of the community of believers. The church, then, has a central role in evangelism. Its mission is to proclaim him, show forth the reality of Jesus in its community life, and be the community that then welcomes and nurtures “those who [are] being saved” (Acts 2:47).

Many Christians use the term evangelism *only* in the sense of conversion evangelism. But this is too narrow a view. Evangelism means announcing and embodying the full message of the kingdom.

Discipling evangelism means the church making disciples, not just converts or church members. Jesus’ commission is to “make disciples . . . , teaching them to obey everything” that Jesus commanded (Mt. 28:19–20).

The true church is a community of disciples, not just of believers. The church should look like Jesus Christ. Its mission is to visibly represent Jesus and his kingdom in the world. But this will not happen unless churches pay careful attention to disciple-building.

The goal of disciple-making is to form a community that looks and acts like Jesus Christ; that shows forth the character of Jesus in its social context. The church does this by being a reconciled and reconciling community. It does this most effectively when it gives visible witness to reconciliation between rich and poor, women and men, and people of different racial and ethnic identities.

Justice evangelism means living out the righteousness and justice of God’s reign within the church’s social context—locally and globally. Here the church takes seriously the biblical mandate to work for justice in all areas of society, with particular concern for the poor and oppressed. Here the church engages key issues of justice in the world—entrenched poverty, destruction of the environment, ethnic and religious violence, oppression of women and children, abortion, and the culture of warfare and militarism. Evangelism that does not include this justice dimension is not really evangelism in the full biblical sense.

Culture evangelism means shaping the societies and cultures of the world through the truth of the kingdom of God. It means engaging society in all sectors—in the arts, in economics and education, in science and technology, in philosophy and in worldview. This dimension of evangelism calls Christians in all sectors of society to give transforming witness to the truth of the gospel.

The Bible presents a picture of reality—a worldview—that is distinctly different from all the world’s philosophies, religions, and ideologies. Scripture reveals God’s truth, demonstrated supremely in Jesus Christ and in his reign. So culture evangelism is essential if societies are going to be transformed to reflect the reality of the kingdom of God.

These four dimensions of evangelism are, of course, all interrelated. Together they form one picture: the proclamation and living out of the reign of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Holistic, comprehensive, integral mission means combining these four dimensions of evangelism in one within each local church, and in the church more broadly.

An important aspect of this holistic biblical understanding of evangelism is that it engages *everyone* in the Christian community—every believer and disciple. The priesthood of believers and the diversity of spiritual gifts play a key role here. Within the church, the Spirit gifts believers to be witnesses and evangelists in different ways. First Corinthians 12 thus takes on added meaning. We learn practically that there are “different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work” (1 Cor. 12:4–6 TNIV).

The work of the Holy Spirit is to make Jesus Christ and his kingdom known and seen in the world. Holistic mission recognizes this broader biblical understanding of evangelism, and the essential role of God’s particular gifts and callings so that Jesus Christ may be exalted and his kingdom made visible.

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“Kingdom of God” has been interpreted in many different ways. See my book, *Models of the Kingdom*.