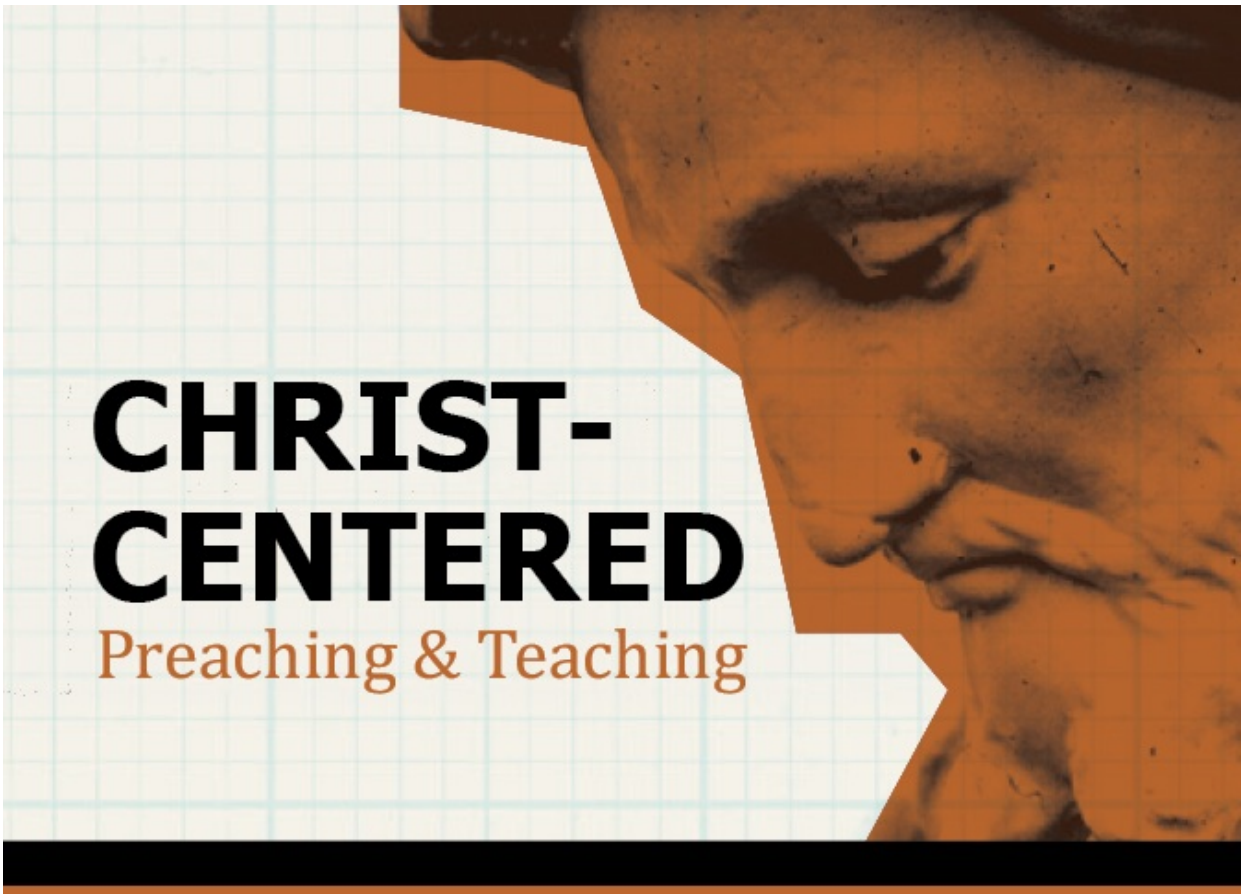

CHRIST-CENTERED

Preaching & Teaching

ED STETZER, EDITOR

Daniel Block

David Murray

Walt Kaiser

Bryan Chapell

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Introduction by Ed Stetzer

This e-book is taken from a series on Christ-centered preaching and teaching that I hosted at my blog. For the series, I brought a number of scholars to the blog to discuss the importance of Christ-centered hermeneutics. In the series, the authors looked at both the strengths and weaknesses of adopting this kind of hermeneutic. Because of the popularity of the series and its usefulness to the local church, we decided to compile the posts into this e-book.

This series was prompted by the question: How should we point to Jesus in our teaching? As general editor of The Gospel Project, a small group curriculum for all ages that promises to show Christ in all the Scripture, this is a question that I've come back to again and again. The team of people working on The Gospel Project believe (as I do) that we should indeed be Christ-centered in our biblical interpretation, but that this Christ-centeredness must be built on balanced

hermeneutical principles.

Here are a few guidelines we try to abide by:

1. Without Jesus, your message is not Christian.

There isn't a session in The Gospel Project without Jesus. Even when we're dealing with Old Testament stories or systematic theology (such as the attributes of God), we inevitably turn attention back to Christ. Why? Because it's what makes our study distinctively Christian. The attributes of God we see in Scripture are embodied in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The stories of the Old Testament have their ultimate fulfillment in Him. There is no Christianity apart from Christ.

2. Authorial intent matters. The canonical context should not supersede the original context.

Charles Spurgeon is quoted as having said we should jump over highways and hedges to get to Jesus, no matter what road we take. We admire Spurgeon's zeal, but we don't believe this to be the best hermeneutical guideline. It's important that we turn people's attention to Jesus, yes. But it's also important how we get to Jesus. The hermeneutics we present in our teaching will be the hermeneutics people adopt in their personal Bible study. It's possible to get to the right place in the wrong way, and though that may be better than failing to get to the right place at all, we shouldn't have to choose between proper hermeneutics and a Christological destination. We can do both.

How does this work out in our study? We are careful to expound on a text in its original context before placing it in canonical context. In other words, we should respect the original author's intent - focusing on the passage at hand as is - before broadening our view to see how the passage fits into the overarching story of God. It's important that we do both: see what the original author is doing, and then look to see how the Spirit more fully invests a passage with layers of application and significance in light of Christ's coming. The canonical context should not supersede the original; neither should the original context be treated in total isolation from the rest of Scripture.

3. Avoid the tendency to moralize or allegorize Old Testament stories.

Much of our work on The Gospel Project is showing how the Bible fits together by highlighting specific New Testament references to Old Testament accounts.

We believe we can accomplish this without falling into the trap of moralism or allegory. Moralizing an account is gleaning principles from a text without showing how these “do’s” and “don’ts” connect back to Christ’s finished work for us. The Bible is shot through with moral teaching (just read the Proverbs), and yet it is important to position this moral teaching within the good news that Christ lived, died, and rose for us. Allegorizing an account is when we press the details of a text to the point we have found a correlation in some higher spiritual truth.

Allegorical excesses were common in the writings of many church fathers, and though we can find allegorical elements in the Scriptures themselves, we do not believe this is the best way to engage in biblical interpretation, since it often bypasses the original author’s intent. We prefer to think of the Old Testament stories as providing hints and tastes and foreshadowing of what is to come - not true stories fulfilled by allegorical significance.

Conclusion

Much of the discussion on Christ-centered preaching is about hermeneutics and the problems we encounter when we embrace one method to the exclusion of everything else. We’ve personally benefited from each of the scholars who have joined this conversation. We all desire to be focused on Christ and to interpret His Word responsibly and accurately. May God help us to that end!

Daniel Block on Christ-centered Hermeneutics

Encountering Christ-centered Preaching

I cannot remember a time in my life when Christ-centered preaching was not high on the agenda. Growing up in the home of a Mennonite Brethren minister in rural northern Saskatchewan, visiting preachers were regular overnight guests in our house. I remember well my father’s conversations with some of them, focused particularly on preaching Christ.

My earliest concrete memory of the application of the concern involved a preacher we had at our church for our annual winter Bibelwoche (Bible week). The guest preacher spoke every night on Elijah and Elisha. I shall never forget my mother’s response after one of these sessions in which he had waxed particularly allegorical and Christological: “I can’t believe how he is able to get all that out of the text?” For her this was a great gift; decades later, for me it

became a great concern.

Is this exegesis [getting a message out of a text] or eisegesis [getting the text to say what you want it to say]? Even so, I am deeply grateful for my mother's piety and her spiritual concern for me and my ministry. Indeed one question she raised to me directly still rings in my ears.

Almost two decades after I had been teaching courses on the Old Testament at Providence College outside Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Bethel Seminary in Saint Paul, and preaching in many churches, she asked me, "But do you love Jesus? And do you preach Jesus?" These questions have colored my life and ministry for more than forty years.

Actually, many if not most preachers in North America think little about Christ-centered preaching. Those who preach topical sermons tend to address felt needs and view their role as providing practical guidance for everyday life. They view their role as that of a motivational speaker or pulpit psychologist or economist, delivering modern versions of the message of ancient fertility religions. More serious expositors do not think enough about the question for more positive reasons; because they preach primarily, if not exclusively, from the New Testament their preaching is almost by definition Christ-centered.

However, the question concerns those who seek to give their congregation access to the entire Scriptures, including the First Testament. But not knowing what to do with much of it, they imagine "finding Christ in every text" to be the key to transformative preaching from the only Bible Jesus and the apostles had.

The Potential Benefits and Pitfalls of Christ-centered Preaching

The benefits of Christ-centered preaching are obvious:

- Christ-centered preaching has a long history, beginning with the apostles, the church fathers, the reformers (especially Luther), and extending to more a recent revival Christ-centered preaching in some circles.
- It preserves focus and unity in our preaching.
- It satisfies our pietistic impulses to highlight personal spiritual relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
- It fulfills what many consider to be the Pauline mandate of preaching—to preach nothing but Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

- It seeks to find and highlight the unity of the biblical message and to focus on the redemptive, historical and theological themes of the Bible. The Scriptures describe the grand mission of God which finds its climax and fulfillment in Christ. Why would one not desire Christ-centered preaching?

However, preoccupation with Christ-centered preaching poses several serious dangers.

Christocentric preaching often morphs into a Christocentric hermeneutic, which demands that we find Christ in every text.

On the surface it may appear spiritually edifying, but it is exegetically fraudulent to try to extract from every biblical text some truth about Christ. The Scriptures consist of many different genres and address many different concerns. Not all speak of Christ. We would improve our hermeneutic if we interpreted the Old Testament Christotelically rather than Christocentrically. While it is hermeneutically irresponsible to say that all Old Testament texts have a Christocentric meaning or point to Christ, it is true that all play a significant role in God's great redemptive plan that leads to and climaxes in Christ. This means that as a Christian interpreter my wrestling with an Old Testament text must begin with trying to grasp the sense the original readers/hearers should have got, and authoritative preaching of that text depends upon having grasped that intended sense first.

Christ-centered preaching may obscure the intent of the original author and in so doing may actually reflect a low view of Scripture.

It will not do to cite Luke's statement in Luke 24:27 that Jesus explained to the Emmaus disciples "what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself" (NIV). This is not a declaration that Jesus went through the Scriptures and showed how each text spoke of Him, but that He explained to them all those texts that spoke of Him. Few proverbs in the Book of Proverbs speak of Jesus; the author's intent in gathering these collections was to help a righteous person make his way through life [the proverbs are addressed to a young man].

Rather than clarifying many First Testament texts, Christ-centered preaching may rob them of both their literary quality and their spiritual force.

When we bury texts under layers of fanciful allegorical and Christological speculations, people may actually learn more about the creative genius of the

preacher than the divinely intended message of the biblical authors.

Christ-centered Preaching and Other Hermeneutical Approaches

I wish that when I encounter Christ in the Scriptures, whether the First Testament or the New Testament, I would be able to communicate all that those texts say about Christ. He does indeed represent the heart of biblical revelation, and a clear vision of Christ should be the long range goal of all our teaching and preaching. But to me, Christocentrism is primarily a communication issue rather than a hermeneutical issue. Authoritative interpretation will focus first on the message of any given text, and once this is established reflect on its place and significance in the broader revelatory scheme that climaxes in Jesus. Not all First Testament texts point to Christ, but all texts reveal something about God or humanity or the universe that is necessary ultimately to understand the work of Christ.

We should also realize that not everything about the New Testament's message of Jesus is Christological. In its narrowest sense the word "Christ" reflects a particular office and role played by Jesus: He is the Messiah, the long awaited Son of David, the king of Israel and ultimately cosmic King of kings. But this is only one of the two primary points the New Testament makes about Jesus. The other concern is that Jesus is YHWH, the God of Israel incarnate in the flesh, as reflected in Paul's application of Joel 2:32 to Jesus: "Whoever will call upon the name of Yahweh will be saved" (Romans 10:13) and other texts. Technically the issue here is not "messianic," but incarnational: Jesus is "God with us." The response to the last question will show that this distinction is fundamental and not merely semantic.

The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament

We may legitimately resort to allegory for rhetorical purposes—as Paul did in Galatians 4:21-31, but this should not be confused with exegetical interpretation. Paul's allegory bypasses a grammatical historical reading of the Exodus and Sinai narratives. To true believers in ancient Israel, Sinai was not a symbol of bondage, but of freedom. However, if Judaizers insist on adherence to the law as the way to saving favor with God, the law is transformed into a despotic oppressor rather than the graciously revealed will of the Redeemer. As a hermeneutical principle, we should allegorize biblical texts only when they invite us to do so, but such invitations are rare.

Typology is a slightly different matter—though only slightly so. As a

hermeneutical principle, typology assumes correspondence between earlier and later phenomena—whether events, persons, or objects— and imagines that the earlier (the type) point to or anticipate the latter (antitype). In principle, searching for these links is not objectionable. However, because of the widespread abuse of the method, I rarely use the word “type” or “typology.” I prefer to speak of “correspondences” between phenomena, or “analogies.”

Just because an earlier person or event corresponds in some respect to a later person or event, does not mean the former anticipates, let alone predicts the latter. Often the account of the earlier phenomenon simply provides the vocabulary for describing the later phenomenon. For this reason understanding the earlier is necessary for grasping the significance of the later, but this does not mean the earlier points to the later.

Sometimes Christological typologizing may actually reflect a low Christology. Although Joshua shares his name with Jesus (both mean “YHWH saves”), this is insufficient ground for viewing Joshua as a type of Christ. Actually Joshua’s name was never intended to describe his role or reflect his mission. He was indeed Israel’s general in their battle against the Amalekites in Exodus 17:8-16, and in the offensive charge against the Canaanites in the Book of Joshua, but neither of these represents the paradigmatic “saving” event; that is reserved for the Exodus from Egypt. Joshua had no hand in that whatsoever.

In fact, his name says nothing about his role. To think otherwise is to obscure the direct hand of YHWH in Israel’s salvation and to obscure the etiology of the name. According to Numbers 13:16, Moses renamed Hoshea ben Nun (“He has saved”) as Jehoshua (“YHWH has saved”) not because of Joshua’s military accomplishments, but in fulfillment of YHWH’s intention in the signs and wonders of Egypt and the Exodus itself: “Then you will know that I am YHWH” (Exodus 10:2).

Joshua’s name is not a commentary on the man, but on the God of Israel. Accordingly, the angel’s word to Joseph, “You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins,” alludes not to the man Joshua, but to YHWH who “saved” Israel from the “sins” of Pharaoh. This is Exodus language. If we preach Joshua as a type of Christ, we minimize the role and work of Jesus and obscure the message of the Book of Joshua. Jesus is not a second Joshua; Joshua was His agent! Jesus is YHWH who commissioned Joshua to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land and hand the land into their hands.

David Murray on Christ-centered Hermeneutics

I'm greatly encouraged and deeply grateful for the increasing popularity of Christ-centered preaching from the Old Testament. Which Christian doesn't rejoice in more people hearing more of Christ? But why the recent upsurge of interest? Some contributory factors are:

- **An increased understanding of the sovereignty of God.** If God is supremely and perfectly sovereign, the Old Testament era was not a mistake (Plan A) that God put right with the coming of Jesus (Plan B). No, it was part of His one perfect plan of salvation (Plan Grace) that He began publicly unfolding in Genesis 3.
- **The desire to honor the whole of God's Word.** There's no point in defending the inspiration and inerrancy of the whole Bible in principle if in practice we only use a small percentage of it. We want to avoid what may look like a practical denial of the divine inspiration of the Bible.
- **The powerlessness of mere moralism.** Preachers and hearers have realized that the "Be David" and "Don't be Saul" sermons from the Old Testament leave people without hope or help. Without Christ, no matter how hard we try, we will never be David and we'll default to Saul.
- **The popularity of biblical theology.** Many gifted theologians have demonstrated the way multiple biblical themes can be traced all the way through Genesis to Revelation, proving the unity of God's saving plan in both Testaments.
- **Willingness to use the New Testament to interpret the Old.** Preachers have taken more seriously Jesus' and the Apostles' view of the Old Testament, especially their presentation of it as Christ-promising, Christ-revealing, and Christ-testifying Scripture.
- **Christian hunger.** God's people have recognized that they can't understand many parts of the New Testament without knowing the Old Testament better. But they also long for Old Testament instruction that will increase their knowledge of Christ.

All these factors have given preachers increasing desire, confidence, and enjoyment in preaching Christ from the Old Testament. There are, however, inevitable weaknesses in any new movement, and one of them is the tendency to

use the same interpretative method in every Old Testament sermon.

More Interpretive Methods

I think this tendency is what makes some scholars such as Daniel Block recoil somewhat from Christ-centered interpretation. None of us would have much confidence in a carpenter who only brought a hammer to the building site each day. Neither would we be very pleased with the resulting house! Similarly, when constructing a Christ-centered sermon from an Old Testament text, we must bring more than one tool to the task.

If we only use typology, or contrast, or redemptive-historical progression for every Old Testament passage, we will not build theologically sound or aesthetically attractive sermons. Although, as Daniel says, Christ is not in every text of Scripture, I firmly believe that Christ is in every passage of Scripture; but He's not in every passage in the same way. The big question then is: "In what way?".

Unless we answer that question and find the right way, we will fail to do justice to the diversity of biblical literature and the intention of the divine author. We will also produce skeptical and even ridiculing hearers.

At least, that was how I responded to some of my first encounters, a few decades ago, with sermons on Christ in the Old Testament. Stretching the one method of typology to cover every kind of Old Testament Scripture, the preacher often ended up using bizarre mental gymnastics that not only tied my brain in knots but left me with less faith than I had before the sermon.

When I started training for the ministry, my theological educators reacted against this excess by going to the other extreme of virtually denying any Christ-centered faith in Old Testament believers and any Christ-centered purpose in the Old Testament authors. As a result, I spent my early ministry floundering around in the Old Testament, sometimes going weeks without a mention of Jesus, and other times trying to squeeze Him in where He didn't really belong.

It was only when I started listening regularly to my father-in-law's powerful Christ-centered Old Testament sermons that I really began to believe that there were legitimate, persuasive, and edifying ways to preach Christ from the Old Testament, and that there were methods of interpretation that could be learned by everybody, not just pastors, scholars, and creative types!

Books started winging their way across the Atlantic to my Scottish island parish,

as I was introduced to authors such as Ed Clowney, Sidney Greidanus, Richard Pratt, Graeme Goldsworthy, Vern Poythress, Bryan Chappell, Walt Kaiser, and Christopher Wright. Each had their own unique emphasis, their own special expertise, in teaching the Old Testament in a Christ-centered way. Some of them still had the tendency to say of their own approach, "This way is the only way" but I increasingly saw the vital necessity of flexibility in interpreting each Old Testament genre and passage, the need to have a variety of interpretive keys at my disposal if I was to accurately unlock the Christ-centered message that God had packed into that book or passage.

We need to expand our range of God-given hermeneutical tools and know which one to use for each job if we are to construct Christ-centered sermons according to God's design.

More Christ-centeredness

In his two posts (see the links above), Daniel Block suggested that we need to be less Christocentric and more Christotelic in our Old Testament interpretation. By this he means that we need to shift our emphasis from seeking Christ in the Old Testament and more towards seeing Christ as the end, as the destination, as the climax of the Old Testament, which each Old Testament text plays a preparatory part in. I agree with him that the Christotelic method is a valid way to interpret the Old Testament in a Christ-centered way. However, this again falls into the trap of limiting ourselves to one method.

This also crystallizes what is one of the main weaknesses of some Christ-centered Old Testament preaching. It's not Christ-centered enough. By that I mean that it's too focused on getting from the Old Testament text to the New Testament fulfillment as quickly as possible, with not enough time spent on seeing Christ in that particular Old Testament passage. It tends to view Old Testament passages as stepping-stones which we skip quickly over until we get to the New Testament side where we find Christ in all His beauty and glory.

But is Christ not also in the stepping-stones? What about the original characters in the original passage? Noah, Moses, Ruth, David, etc? Did they have any saving faith, any Messiah-centered faith? And what about the original readers, the Israelites? Did they have any saving faith in the promised Messiah? What did they find in these passages to create, cultivate, and nourish saving faith? Remember they didn't have the benefit of a completed Old Testament or any of the New.

All of which raises perhaps the biggest question of all: How were Old Testament believers saved? All evangelicals believe that Old Testament believers were saved, the question is "How?" Within Evangelicalism there appears to be two main schools of thought:

- They were saved by grace through faith in the promised Messiah.
- They were saved by grace, through faith in God (general theism), plus their own effort and some sacrifices.

If it's the latter, then the Old Testament believers were a bunch of mixed up legalists and ritualists that God nevertheless accepted because, well, at least they made an effort. If that's the case, then we will want to get to the New Testament as quickly as we can to contrast the "darkness" and need of the Old Testament with the brightness and supply of the New. In other words, we will definitely want to take the Christotelic approach.

But if it's the former, and I believe it is, if they were saved by grace through faith in the promised Messiah, then we don't need to skip as fast as we can to the New Testament. We can linger in the Old Testament passage and ask, "What did this event, sacrifice, item, person, vision, etc., teach them about God?" And especially, "What did it teach them about the coming Redeemer?" These were the two questions that each believing Israelite asked as they experienced God's providence and read His Word. What does this tell me about God? What does this tell me about the promised Messiah?

And these are the two questions that will produce more and better Christ-centered Old Testament preaching and teaching. They also force us to get into the original setting with the original readers and to stay there with them to figure out their faith, their experience of God, their spirituality, their relationship to God's promises, etc. We don't just use them as stepping-stones to the New Testament. Like the author of Hebrews 11, we see them as brothers and sisters in Christ and learn from their faith in Christ.

Typology

Consider, for example, how the Israelites interacted with the Old Testament types, the visual theology or "picture-ology" of the Old Testament. My quick definition of a type? A type is a real person, place, object, or event that God ordained to act as a predictive pattern or resemblance of Christ's person and work (or of opposition to it). Vern Poythress explains the believing Israelite's

experience of the types:

> As they looked ahead through the shadows, longing for something better, they took hold on the promises of God that He would send the Messiah….In pictorial form God was saying, as it were, "Look at My provisions for you. This is how I redeem you and bring you to My presence. But look again, and you will see that it is all an earthly symbol of something better. Do not rely on it as if it were the end. Trust Me to save you fully when I fully accomplish My plans." Israelites had genuine communion with God when they responded to what He was saying in the tabernacle. They trusted in the Messiah, without knowing all the details of how fulfillment would finally come. And so they were saved, and they received forgiveness, even before the Messiah came. The animal sacrifices in themselves did not bring forgiveness (Hebrews 10:1-4), but Christ did as He met with them through the symbolism of the sacrifices.

That's why we have to anchor ourselves in the original setting and ask, "What was the type designed to teach the original audience?" Remember the original audience did not have the benefit of the later fulfillment to help them. However they did have the help of previous revelation and of the earlier promises of God that the types built upon and expanded. They also had the help of the Eastern mind-set which was much better attuned to learning through symbols than our empirical Western minds. And, of course, they had the help of the Holy Spirit to open their minds and hearts, though not to the same degree as we do in the New Testament.

That fundamental Christ-centered unity with the Old Testament believers is why Jesus says that we will feast at the same heavenly table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matthew 8:11), all of us praising the same Savior, and none of us polishing our medals.

Walt Kaiser on Christ-centered Hermeneutics

Encountering Christ-centered Preaching

I believe the first time I encountered the problem that Christ-centered preaching attempts to solve was in Dr. Sidney Greidanus' work entitled *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts*. In his account of the issue, the problem arose in the 1930s in the Gereformeerde Kerken in Holland as

objections were raised to the manner in which preaching was being practiced in the Church at that time. As he saw it,

> Simply put, their complaint was that the preachers, in preaching historical texts, would display the persons mentioned in the texts [of Scripture] as models to be imitated, as examples to be followed -- hence the term "exemplary preaching." (*Sola Scriptura*, pp. 8-9)

Greidanus suspected the influence of 19th century Liberalism with its emphasis on personality, for had not Schleiermacher's school of thought depicted history as the religious consciousness in individual persons? Thus, the personality idea was used as a bridge to get to relevant preaching. In the view of many, then, Liberal theology and exemplary preaching went hand in hand!

In the decade before Greidanus' book appeared, I too was trying to lead future pastors into preaching the whole Bible, for it was clear that even though 76% of the Bible comes in the earlier testament, there were precious few sermons that dared choose a text from the Old Testament, not to mention the task of clearly bringing out the authoritative point being made by the Spirit of God in that text. Thus, the twentieth century Church was being raised on a canon within a canon: the New Testament as the arbiter of the entire Bible.

Out of this maze of issues, my quest for finding for myself and my students a way to preach the Old Testament text in particular began and has continued over a half century later.

In the meantime, some of the more noticeable suggestions for solving this problem continued to come forth. Greidanus' solution was for preachers to "interpret the Old Testament in the light of its fulfillment in the New Testament" (*The Modern Preacher and the Ancient text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, p. 119). But this reduced the available texts from the Old Testament to those the New Testament chose to use. Moreover, the specific details of the earlier texts were often jettisoned in the rush to show how the testaments agreed in their witness to the coming Messiah or His birth, death and resurrection.

Others championed a Christocentric interpretation (also known to some as the "Redemptive-Historical" method of interpreting), in which the interpretation of all biblical texts should be done in such a way that the main theme should be explicitly and directly related to Jesus Christ. But in this method the emphasis falls on a whole-Bible-focus on God's work in redemption across the whole canon. While this is beautiful and praiseworthy, it had the potential for

substituting the specificity and particularity of individual passages for what was the final work of God in Christ, by always going for the one "big idea" that embraced the whole canon. Much of Christocentric preaching tended to depend on a strong biblical theology, but a biblical theology that often wove together some twenty major biblical themes such as kingdom, temple, sacrifice, and the like, and one which then allowed the preacher to leap from anywhere in the biblical text to a call for a trust in the Lord Jesus who is the Author of so great a salvation, as recorded of course from one end of Scripture to the other. Graeme Goldsworthy reports that "[t]he riches in Christ are inexhaustible and biblical theology is the way to uncover them." (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching*, p. 30).

But despite our approval of the fact that Christ is indeed the center of the Bible and that the redemptive emphasis is strong in the Scriptures, it is difficult, yea impossible, to lay the claim that our Lord Jesus must be found in every text of Scripture, indeed, on every page! There are five possible biblical passages that are often used to support the claims of Christocentric preaching, but in each case there is a tendency by those who adopt this view to say what Al Mohler concluded about this whole approach to preaching:

> "Every single text of Scripture points to Christ….From Moses to the prophets, He is the focus of every single word of the Bible. Every verse of Scripture finds its fulfillment in Him, and every story in the Bible ends with Him." (*He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World*, p.96, as cited by Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text: A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*, p. 248]).

The passages that are assumed to teach that every single text points to Jesus are Luke 24:13-27, 44-48; 1 Corinthians 1:22-23; 2:2, and 2 Corinthians 4:5 –

- And [Jesus] beginning with Moses and all the prophets, ... explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:27
- And [Jesus] said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you; Everything must be fulfilled about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Luke 24:44
- Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. 1 Corinthians 1: 22-23

- For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 2 Corinthians 4:5

Ralph Dale Davis, whose works on the Historical books in particular I have appreciated for the breath of their theology and their adherence to the authorial teaching in each, correctly argued that not every verse, every word, or every story in the earlier testament focused on Christ alone. Instead he argued:

> [T]he whole Old Testament bears witness to Christ; and, the Old Testament does not bear witness only to Christ ….. I think Jesus is teaching that all parts of the Old Testament testify to the Messiah in His suffering and glory, but I do not think Jesus is saying every Old Testament passage/text bears witness to Him…. [Jesus] did not say that every passage spoke of Him (v 44). Therefore, I do not feel compelled to make every Old Testament (narrative) passage point to Christ in some way because I do not think Christ Himself requires it. (*The Word Became Flesh: How to Preach from Old Testament Narrative*, pp. 134-35.).

It is not as if the Christocentric method was the sole method known to the Evangelical Church throughout history, for it has made its presence felt more firmly in recent times. One could, however, see aspects of such an emphasis coming perhaps from Luther's emphasis on Romans 10:4 ("Christ is the end of the law"), for he also taught that every word in the Bible points to Christ. But Calvin's method was more Theocentric than it was specifically Christocentric. And it cannot go without notice that we are even given a clear warrant for a biblical form of using biblical characters as examples, where the text requires it. Is that not what Romans 15:4 admonished?

> "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Likewise, I Corinthians 10:6 taught:

> "Now these occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did."

What was Hebrews 11 all about if it did not exhort us to imitate in those limited ways specified just what Scripture highlighted. What was James 5:17 about if it referred to Elijah as "a man with a nature like ours," yet he prayed and the

heavens responded. Was that not an encouragement for us also to pray as Elijah did since we too are flesh and blood as he was? This is not to yield to the point that Liberal theology was making early in the twentieth century, but it was to say that the authors who wrote Scripture heard the word that our Lord wanted His people in all ages to respond to. To privilege the New Testament text as the interpreter of the Old Testament is to substitute another method in place of the revelatory work of God down through the ages. Moralizing and moralistic preachers are still to be avoided, as are sermons the merely urge us to be or to do such and such without any biblical warrant from the text.

This leads, of course, to what is the proper use the Old Testament by the New? Should pastors today engage in allegorizing, psychologizing, historicizing, moralizing, or analogical matching of biblical texts with modern issues that moves from the "then" of the Bible to the "now" of contemporary times?

What about typology? Isn't this a legitimate form of interpreting the Bible?

One of my teachers, Dr. Robert D. Culver asserted in class one day, with a twinkle in his eyes: "Some of the pegs and ropes of the Tabernacle were actually meant to hold up the tent!" The point being, not everything in the tabernacle was meant to be a type no more than the scarlet cord of Rahab was meant to depict the blood of Christ. But the important part of the definition of a type is that it must be "divinely designated" as a type, otherwise we have no divine authority for suggesting it is a type. So there are types in the Bible, but not as many as some think!

There is a whole lot more that needs to be said, but let us make one more final thought. The Redemptive-Historical method of interpreting Scripture tends to focus on soteriological matters, which in itself is good. But it often neglects, by so doing, the larger plan of God announced early in the Bible and carried throughout as the "Doctrine of the Promise" (See my work entitled *The Promise-Plan of God: a Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* and my *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan and Purpose*.)

This discussion begun in Romans will take us not only to the area of eschatology, which is found in over 25% of the verses of the entire Bible, but to the critical matter that the Apostle Paul focused on in the Book of Romans. Soteriology is not correctly understood in all it aspects and dimensions until the issue of the Jewish People and the Christian Church is answered in the plan of

God. Paul's Romans 1:16 leads directly to Romans 9-11. The salvation our Savior brought to all the nations must not be thought of as if "God's word failed" for the Jewish people (Rom 9:6), but Israel did not stumble so as to fall beyond recovery (Romans 11:11); for "God's gifts and His call are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). This too is an endemic part of the Redemptive-Historical plan of God. That will enlarge the picture of our redemption in Christ!

So how shall we interpret the Old Testament? Let us with the help of the Holy Spirit listen carefully to every text in all its particularity and specificity to hear what God was calling that generation and ours as well to be and to do to the honor and glory of His Holy Name! Surely the whole text must be born in mind as we seek to faithfully repeat for our generation what God has said in the past that still remains true in our time as well. (See my *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*).

Bryan Chapell on Christ-centered Hermeneutics

First Encounters with Christ-centered Preaching

I first encountered Christ-centered preaching, when a substitute preaching professor gave me my first "C" on a sermon in seminary. After crying myself to sleep, I summoned the courage to ask him, "Why?" and was told, "I don't hear the gospel when you preach." That did not compute. I simply concluded that the professor was eccentric, and was grateful when the regular professor returned to give me the better grades I thought I deserved.

I fell in love with Christ-centered preaching years later, as it rescued me from pastoral despair caused by witnessing the powerlessness of my preaching to help struggling people apply Scripture to their lives. God graciously then exposed me to the book also cited by Walt Kaiser (in his previous post in this web conversation) as his earliest exposure to Christ-centered preaching: *Sola Scriptura* by Sidney Greidanus.

A Pastoral Path

I mention my path because it is somewhat different from the ones previously described by the wonderful theologians who have already contributed to this conversation. Their starting point for examining Christ-centered preaching was primarily exegetical and hermeneutical – seeking faithfully to analyze and interpret texts; mine was pastoral.

I always believed (and still do) that I was preaching the content of specific biblical texts, but my commitment to expounding duty and doctrine seemed often to burden God's people rather than to equip them for lives reflecting the power and priorities of their Savior. Words that spoke powerfully to me of the way out of this dilemma were in Christ's simple but profound admonition: "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Exegesis or Eisegesis?

Christ's words helped me understand that the demands of duty and doctrine were futile without the enabling of the Savior. Then, my question, of course, was how to make sure my preaching included Christ without excluding what the biblical text actually said. That concern is obviously the primary one typically (and often legitimately) leveled at some versions of what is labeled "Christ-centered preaching."

Daniel Block states the concern well in the opening post of this conversation: "Is this exegesis [getting a message out of a text] or eisegesis [getting the text to say what you want it to say]?"

The smoking gun for those with "eisegesis" concerns is the host of allegorical and imaginative word-play sermons (in our time and in previous eras) that manipulate the text into some mention of Christ where such a referent was clearly not the intention of the original author. When the red of Rahab's cloth liquefies into the blood of Christ, and the wood of Noah's ark morphs into the tree of the cross, and the tent pegs of the tabernacle transform into nails in the hands of the One who tabernacled among us – then such exegesis really knows no boundaries and ultimately renders the Bible devoid of determined meaning.

Redemptive Context

The alternative to trying to make every biblical text mention Jesus is identifying the redemptive context of each text; i.e., where and how does this text function in the unfolding revelation of God's redemptive nature and plan. That plan was announced at the dawn of human history (Genesis 3:15), as God promised to provide a divine way out of the human dilemma created by the fall. All human history and biblical commentary unfolding beyond that point must be interpreted in the light of this promised provision of heavenly origin (as the Savior and Scripture teach us to do; e.g. Matthew 17:1-5; Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Acts 10:43; Romans 3:21-22).

There is not only one way of doing this. David Murray (in an earlier post in this conversation) rightly identifies a weakness in some forms of Christ-centered preaching: "… the tendency to use the same interpretative method in every Old Testament sermon." And he realistically adds, "Unless we … find the right way, we will fail to do justice to the diversity of biblical literature and the intention of the divine author. We will also produce skeptical and even ridiculing hearers."

Gospel Windows

Better theologians than I can speak to the diversity of legitimate approaches and themes of redemptive interpretation but, as one with more limited skills who is primarily concerned for preachers in local ministry, I have suggested some straightforward approaches in the book *Christ-centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*.

Here's the essence of what's said there: Many texts clearly describe, prophesy, or typify (set a pattern for) the ministry of Jesus. Straightforward identification of obvious gospel truths is sufficient for redemptive understanding of these texts. However, there are many more texts that prepare for, or reflect upon, Christ's ministry by disclosing aspects of the grace of God that find their completed expression in Jesus.

These "gospel windows" that reveal God's gracious nature and provision may be identified and/or described through a variety of means—for example, identifying how God's Word predicts, prepares for, reflects, or results from the person and/or work of Christ. These four categories of gospel disclosure are not meant to be exhaustive or kept rigidly separate, but they do help us explain how all Scripture bears witness to who Christ is and/or what he must do (Kaiser's earlier post nicely quotes Ralph Davis's regarding all Scripture "bearing witness to" Christ, rather than always mentioning Him directly; John 5:39).

Redemptive Reading Glasses

Finally, the most basic and common way to see redemptive truth(s) in any text is by asking two questions that are fair to ask of any text: 1) What does this text reflect about the nature of God who provides redemption? and/or, 2) What does this text reflect about the nature of humanity that requires redemption? Or, more simply, what does this text reveal about God, and what does it reveal about me?

These simple questions are the lenses to "reading glasses" through which any preacher (without exegetical or allegorical acrobatics) can look at any text to see

what the Bible is revealing of God's nature and/or human nature. Inevitably these lenses enable us to see that God is holy and we are not, or that God is sovereign and we are vulnerable, or that God is merciful and we require His mercy.

Such reading glasses always make us aware of our need of God's grace to compensate for our sin and inability. Christ may not be specifically mentioned in the text, but the reflection of God's nature and ours makes the necessity of the proclamation of His grace apparent (Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 2:2; Galatians 3:24). In this regard, I am very close in understanding Daniel Block when he comments in an earlier post, "Not all First Testament texts point to Christ, but all texts reveal something about God or humanity or the universe that is necessary ultimately to understand the work of Christ." I would only add the word "directly" in front of his word "point" to express my view more clearly, but our thinking converges in our desire to be fair to Scripture and true to the gospel.

No Grace Surprises

Using these redemptive reading glasses throughout the Old and New Testament will enable us to see that grace does not spring up like a surprise jack-in-the-box after Christ's nativity. God's people have been prepared for millennia to understand and receive the grace of Christ on their behalf. The Bible is Christ-centered not because Jesus is mentioned everywhere but because all points to the grace of God that is fully revealed and provided in Him.

As God gives strength to the weak, rest to the weary, deliverance to the disobedient, faithfulness to the unfaithful, food to the hungry, and salvation to sinners – we learn His redemptive nature. As heroes fail, patriarchs lie, kings fall, prophets cower, disciples doubt, and covenant people become idolaters – we learn humanity's redemptive need. The lenses that grant us these perspectives prevent us from preaching characters in the Bible only as moral heroes to emulate, rather as flawed men and women who themselves needed the grace of God. These lenses also prevent us from preaching the commands of God in isolation from the grace that enables their performance, or without provision for our imperfections.

Pastoring by Grace

This brings us full circle to the ultimate – pastoral – reason Christ-centered preaching is so compelling. David Murray (in his earlier post) states with accuracy and profundity that reasons this approach to preaching has flourished

include: “the powerlessness of mere moralism” and “Christian hunger” for instruction that increases knowledge of Christ. Moral instruction alone either promotes pride (“I’ve done it”) or despair (“I can’t”) – the signs of spiritual poverty.

In contrast to preaching the demands of duty and doctrine alone, relishing the gracious provision God consistently makes throughout Scripture for people like us, despite our sin and inability, stimulates true humility, gratitude, sacrifice, obedience, and praise in us. We live to honor God in response to the love He has shown us, more than we live to benefit earthly priorities of selfish gain. Heaven’s priorities become our own because expressing love for the One who first loved us becomes our greatest delight and deepest satisfaction. Gratitude to Him becomes the basis of Christian ethics and compassion as we love what and whom He loves – the unlovely, the oppressed, those different, and all created.

Living in Grace

Christo-centrality is not just a way of looking at Scripture; it is a way of living in loving response to our God’s provision of Christ. We pursue holiness to walk in the pleasing presence and peace of the Heavenly Father who has been so gracious to us, rather than to bribe a divine ogre in the sky to be favorable toward us [for fuller discussion of this fruit of a Christ-centered approach to Scripture see *Holiness by Grace: Delighting in the Joy that is Our Strength* and Jerry Bridges, *Discipline of Grace*].

Since God’s love for us is the soil in which love for God grows, identifying His grace in all the Scriptures is not simply an interpretive scheme; Christ-centered preaching is supremely pastoral and practical. Regular exaltation of the gospel is what ignites love for God in the hearts of believers that is our first command and greatest compulsion (2 Corinthians 5:14; Titus 2:11-12).

We identify the saving grace pervading Scripture in order to fan into flame our zeal for the Savior. Our goal is not merely good interpretation but stimulation of a profound love for God that bears holy fruit, as pleasing the One we love above all brings our most profound and compelling joy (Nehemiah 8:10).

Appendix A: What Should We Do With Samson? by Ed Stetzer

Note: Much of this section comes from a recent discussion panel sponsored by

The Gospel Project. The panelists included Trevin Wax (Managing Editor, The Gospel Project), Jon Akin (Pastor of Fairview Church, Lebanon TN), and Eric Hankins (Pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford MS).

Much of the popularity and passion for this discussion has centered on the question: what is the biblical and theological basis for Christ-centered hermeneutics? The issue of context is important here, especially for understanding the meaning of a biblical passage.

What is the biblical and theological basis for Christ-centered hermeneutics?

Some who advocate for a Christ-centered approach to interpreting Scripture talk about the concept of redemptive-historical, or Christocentric interpretation. Which, according to Sidney Greidanus, asks the question: What does this passage mean, not just in the immediate context, but in the context of the whole Bible, and specifically in light of Christ (*See Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 230-236)?

The supporters of the Christ-centered method would not belittle the historical grammatical work in studying a biblical passage; they view it simply as one step in the process of biblical interpretation. A great illustration of the philosophy behind Christ-centered hermeneutics came from Jonathan Akin during our discussion panel, relating to the children's book series *Encyclopedia Brown*.

> "These stories focus on a fifth grader who had his own detective agency and solved mysteries. After you read the story, he solves the case at the end, but the question is always how did he do it? You've got to flip to the back of the book to see how he figured it out. And I was never smart enough to figure out ahead of time myself, so I'd flip to the back and read it. I would then go to the beginning and read the story again. The clues were so clear once I knew the end of the story!"

With that illustration in mind, the question came out as to how one should approach the story of Samson? Obviously, Samson is not about hair, but what is it about?

Akin explained his approach to Samson:

> "When you start reading stories like Samson you will see, this is the savior of Israel who is being betrayed for silver by one who is close to him with a kiss. Then he's arrested, mocked, and gains a greater victory through his death than he did in his life. You should read that and say,

> ‘That sounds familiar.’
>
> One of the problems with the other hermeneutic methods is either Samson’s a bad figure (‘don’t be like him’) or he’s a good figure (‘be like him’). Maybe he’s just an example of what lust will do to you, or some other moral lesson? When you look at this story, however, you see a man whose birth was foretold by an angel. His parents weren’t naturally able to have children.
>
> All of this is happening in Judges where you have the Exodus being replayed typologically over and over again. They’re crying out to God. God hears their cries, sends a deliverer to rescue them. What you’re seeing in Judges is that God can deliver through Gideon and an army of 300 people. That is incredible. By the end of the book, however, He’s delivering through one man. He’s delivering His people through one Spirit-anointed savior.
>
> So, you’re going to preach that God raised up this man who is a deliverer, but he fails. He is sinful. He doesn’t live out the Genesis 3 kind of hope. He is not the one who is going to completely push back death and completely push back sin and Satan. While Samson was a type, there has to be an escalation to a better.”

Generally speaking, we’d all agree with the fact that there is a continual picture of the failure of leaders that points to a leader who would not fail. The difference is in the details. Could it just be that there were a lot of kisses and a lot of silver in the times of the Bible’s writing? Are there hermeneutical grounds to make the typological connection that each of these things in the story are hints, like a detective novel pointing to what happens later to Jesus?

Typology is just one of several useful hermeneutical tools that you ought to have in the bag. After Akin described his method for approaching the story of Samson, Eric Hankins jumped in and argued that typology is just one of several useful hermeneutical tools that you ought to have in the bag.

> “But, one can’t find typology everywhere. The principles we can draw show the main reason why those earlier saviors wind up as they do. It is because we are sinners in desperate need of God’s grace.”

All in all, most would agree that the trajectory of Old Testament stories aim us toward Jesus. Goldsworthy has referred to the stories of the judges as ‘mini-

salvations'. And the flaws of the judges only underscore, as Michael Williams has said:

> "…the fact that it was ultimately God who was doing the delivering. And the depressing cycle of rebellion and rescue in the Book of Judges only underscores the fact that there needs to be an ultimate divine rescue from the source of that rebellion" (*Reading the Bible Through the Jesus Lens*, 38).

Another interesting take on Samson comes from Bartholomew and Goheen, who argue:

> "Samson is himself an image of what his nation has become: set apart for service to God, yet fatally attracted to paganism…Yet God uses Samson's life and death to deliver Israel" (*The True Story of the Whole World*, 68-69).

Finally, Ed Clowney's approach would be closest to the hermeneutic Akin argued for. In his little book *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*, he wrote:

> "As we have seen, the appointed roles of God's servants point forward to their fulfillment in God's final servant Jesus Christ. They have a symbolic function, providing a key to the way in which the historical narratives of the Old Testament demonstrate types of the work of Christ…[Samson] is to show how God can bring judgment on the foes of His people through one man, equipped by the Holy Spirit…Like Samson, Jesus was bound by the leaders of His own people and handed over to the Gentile oppressors. Like Samson, too, Jesus was mocked as helpless; not blinded, to be sure, but blindfolded; he was made the sport of His captors. Jesus willingly gave up His life. In His death He wrought a deliverance that exceeded the deliverances of His life (135-142)."

A powerful comparison for sure, but is it hermeneutically warranted?

Conclusion

In the end, I would argue that we must look at the immediate and canonical context of a passage to preach it in a hermeneutically responsible way. I also think we can pull principles from Old Testament stories and characters, but that is only one dimension of the story. Consider Trevin Wax's words here:

> “You cannot just take these heroes of the faith and only use the moral examples and the principles from these stories. They are telling this bigger story. The reason why it’s important is because we want people in our churches to be formed by a biblical perspective on the world. They’re not going to be formed by the story—the grand narrative that the Bible tells: creation, fall, redemption, restoration—unless we are constantly giving them that.
>
> If not, they’re only going to remember the principles that we pull from a hero. They’re going to go to the Bible the way we’ve conditioned them to go to the Bible. If we establish the wrong pattern, they’ll be looking for five steps to this or three steps to that kind of approach to Christianity. They’ll go to the Bible looking for themselves rather than looking for Christ.”

Appendix B: What should we do with David and Goliath?
by Ed Stetzer

Note: Much of this section comes from a recent discussion panel sponsored by The Gospel Project. The panelists included Trevin Wax (Managing Editor, The Gospel Project), Jon Akin (Pastor of Fairview Church, Lebanon TN), and Eric Hankins (Pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford MS).

I have been somewhat surprised and enthused by the amount of discussion on Christ-centered hermeneutics in recent years. Certainly, this is an important issue. However, I underestimated the amount of interest and passion that hermeneutics would stir up.

Why is there resurgence in a discussion primarily about hermeneutics? Perhaps, some of the popularity of the Christ-centered hermeneutic comes from a generation of Christians that have grown up with teaching that promotes moralism and legalism, and they long for a more biblically grounded understanding of Scripture.

Interestingly enough, I have found that while many pastors argue for the importance of Christ-centeredness, there is disagreement on what it should look like. Charles Spurgeon aptly illustrates what seems to be a popular caricature of Christ-centered hermeneutics, making a bee-line to the cross:

> “I have never yet found a text that has not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one that has not a road to Christ in it, I will make one; I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savor of Christ in it.”

What is the biblical and theological basis for this type of Christ-centered hermeneutics? Much of the discussion centers on answering this question.

Not too long ago I moderated a panel discussion sponsored by The Gospel Project on this very issue. The panelists included Trevin Wax (Managing Editor, The Gospel Project), Jon Akin (Pastor of Fairview Church, Lebanon TN), and Eric Hankins (Pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford MS).

What should we do with David and Goliath?

At the very beginning of the discussion Akin argued that the main points of most Old Testament stories understood in a moralistic framework end up as something like “Be brave like David”, referring to his encounter with Goliath. Akin echoed the argument Sidney Greidanus made in his book Preaching Christ from the Old Testament.

> “…we may not isolate this narrative from the flow of redemptive history and hold David up to the congregation as a hero whose courage we should imitate in fighting our individual Goliaths. Instead, we should endeavor to discover the meaning of this narrative in the context of the whole of redemptive history.” (238)

For Greidanus, and many in the Christ-centered movement, the story of David and Goliath is about much more than Israel’s story, and David, God’s anointed king, delivering Israel and securing her safety in the Promised Land. At a higher level, this is a story about the Lord defeating the enemy of His people through His servant David.

However, perhaps there is a call to be brave in the narrative? Or does the call to be brave require that people read themselves into the narrative? How do we teach or preach a story like that in a way that’s helpful? In our panel discussion Trevin Wax commented on this very point:

> “I think you can pull courageous principles for living from David and Goliath. I think you can find moral example in David. But there is something else there. Going back to the context of the story, you have the people of Israel being oppressed. You have the enemy of God that’s

there and the king is AWOL. He's not where he's supposed to be. Then, you have David who has been anointed king, but he's still under the radar. He comes and slays this giant. God uses this very ordinary person that no one would expect. So, with David and Goliath, you see that God keeps His covenant promises to His people by raising up an unlikely savior.

I think we need to use that as a picture to show this is the way God works. That helps people understand this is the way God works. When you are preaching the New Testament you can say, look God did this in the Old Testament, too.

David is a picture of Christ in the future, but you wouldn't want to press it to the point that people would leave with the idea that the story is only about Jesus or that the story doesn't have its immediate context."

With that, I turned to Jonathan Akin and asked where he would go with the story of David and Goliath, and how he would preach it?

"If somebody were to ask me is David and Goliath about the courage to face your enemies, I would say yes. Now, the problem is that I think a strict approach to historical grammatical method in homiletics flattens the text. I'm going to argue that misses something. You cannot jump from David to your church member. There's one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, so this text applies to me in Christ or outside of Christ. But, it's mediated through Christ. So, how do you preach that?"

Akin then told the story of David and Goliath from a Christ-centered perspective:

"You have the anointed one of God who receives the Spirit, goes out into the wilderness where an enemy is presenting himself before the people of God, 40 days and 40 nights. He crushes the enemy's head. In the Hebrew text it describes the enemy as wearing snake armor. That sure sounds familiar doesn't it?

Jesus is baptized and receives the Holy Spirit. Out in the wilderness, the serpent is presenting himself 40 days and 40 nights. Then, Jesus withstands the temptation to bypass the cross and in doing that crushes the serpent's head. In Revelation 12, how do we overcome the evil one?

> Through the blood of the Lamb. That's the instrumentality by which the evil one is defeated.
>
> So, the way I would preach David and Goliath is to start with, first and foremost, we are not David. We are the Israelites who are cowering in fear in the corner because we can't face the giant on our own. We can't beat our enemies on our own. So, we need a David to stand in our place and to defeat our enemies. But then what happens after that? David slings the rock that crushed the enemy's head. Then, David takes his sword and cuts his head off. Their enemies run. The Israelite army pursues.
>
> That's how I would preach that. You can face your enemies and you have the courage to face your enemies, but you only do that once you recognize, as Jerry Vines says, we don't fight for victory in the Christian life we fight from victory. So, it's a picture of sanctification, but a sanctification that is based on what Jesus has done in saving us."

At this point Eric Hankins spoke up and acknowledged that he was uncomfortable with Jonathan's hermeneutic because he thought it drifted from typology to allegory. And we've all heard of the expression: "one man's typology is another man's allegory." So, I asked Eric to clarify.

> "In the reading I did in preparation for today, a lot of the scholars speak of the historical rootedness of typology. That it is history. It's not symbolism. It's not allegory. It's looking for historical patterns that can be gleaned from the Old Testament text. I'm more comfortable saying the plot of the David and Goliath story is about a savior who stands before the enemy and acts and saves. I'm less comfortable with the snakeskin and the head. I think we should be very careful about moving into the specifics so that this is this and that is that. Then it becomes allegorical."

Jonathan Akin quickly responded by stating that everything he said was rooted in history, and then stated "I think you cross into allegory when you start saying the five stones represent this and that."

Conclusion

Now, I think all of us would agree that the story of David and Goliath is not about David and his rocks. When we pay attention to the details and the context

of David and Goliath, we see that this is not primarily a morality tale about courage in the face of one's giants.

At the same time, we want to avoid turning it into an allegory, in which every detail represents a spiritual truth. Out of curiosity, I wanted to see how other writers, teachers, and preachers handled this text from a Christ-centered perspective. While there was a lot of similarity, interestingly enough, the focal points were different.

> Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens*: For Williams, the narrative fits within the theme of God exalts the weak and humbles the proud. The account of young David and Goliath shows us how God can turn the humble trust of a shepherd boy into victory over a giant ego. (45-46)
>
> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*: Goldsworthy paints a picture of David standing alone as the one in the place of many, and through him God works salvation for Israel. He writes, "It is a saving event in which the chosen mediator wins the victory, while the ordinary people stand by until they can share in the fruits of the saviors' victory. Preparation is thus made for the gospel events in which God's Christ (Anointed One) wins the victory over sin and death on behalf of his people." (86)

Peter Leithart, *A House for My Name*: Leithart focuses on the grammatical historical details to connect the narrative with the larger story of Scripture. He writes, "Goliath wears 'scale armor,' dressing himself like a serpent (1 Samuel 17:5)… David faces his serpent and passes his test by crushing Goliath's head (17:49). David is the head crusher…and once the head is broken, the Israelite army wins a great victory." (142)

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CHRIST-CENTERED

Preaching & Teaching

ED STETZER is the President of LifeWay Research, an author, speaker, pastor, church planter, and Christian missiologist.

DANIEL BLOCK is the Gunther H. Knoedler Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College.

DAVID MURRAY is Professor of Old Testament & Practical Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

WALT KAISER is President Emeritus and Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

BRYAN CHAPELL is President Emeritus of Covenant Seminary and pastor of Grace Presbyterian in Peoria FL.

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