

# Studying the Scriptures and Finding Jesus

by Albert Mohler

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of biblical preaching and the danger of missing the point of Scripture, highlighting the need for a serious study of Scripture and the refusal to see the witnesses to Christ.*

**Duration:** 56:09

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 4:33, Luke 24:25-27, Luke 24:30-32, John 5:37

**Topics:** "Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having witnesses to the preaching of the good news. He mentions theologians like Gerhardes Vos, Richard Gaffin, and Edmund Clowney who have taught the significance of a redemptive historical hermeneutic in understanding the Bible. The speaker also acknowledges the challenges faced in the 21st century, with the resurgence of Protestant liberalism and the rejection of essential doctrines and the gospel metanarrative. Despite these challenges, the speaker finds hope in the presence of a new generation committed to the gospel and driven by a missional vision. The sermon focuses on John chapter 5, where Jesus presents four witnesses, including John the Baptist, to testify to His identity and message.

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## Transcript

Let's pray together. Father, we thank You for bringing us to this place. We thank You for all the provisions and providences that stand behind and underneath and around us.

Father, we thank You for the vision that has brought us here. And we pray that the words we have just sung will be the solitary passion of our hearts to see the earth filled with Your glory. Amen.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. All right, it's fair now to admit it, we're glad we're here.

And one of the issues with a conference like this is you look forward to it for a long time and then all of a sudden, it's here, we're in this room, and I'm thankful to God to be with you. I want to express appreciation to Don Carson and Tim Keller for their vision for the Gospel Coalition, not only for this meeting but for all that the movement represents. I'm honored to be a part of the council and to be with such Gospel-centered colleagues.

And I'm particularly thrilled that we are gathered here today with the theme of this conference as Preaching Jesus and the Gospel from the Old Testament. This ought to thrill us for any number of reasons, and at least one impish reason ought to be to lead so many people who might for the first time see a theme like that and scratch their heads and wonder what in the world we're talking about. And then we're chastened by the fact that far too many members of our own churches might wonder what we're talking about.

We meet with a sense of urgency and hope. We recognize that even as we're meeting together, something has gone wrong. Drew Dike in his new book *Generation X Christians* writes of leavers, and these specifically are young people who have left evangelical churches.

He provides a typology. There are the post-moderns who think that our message is just too narrow. There are the recoilers who've had some bad experience and thus have written off the church.

There are the modernists who have bought into an anti-supernatural worldview, and they simply want nothing to do with biblical truth. There are the neo-pagans who are playing around with various sorts of spirituality. There are the spiritual rebels who insist on their own autonomy, and then there are the drifters who simply have drifted away from the church.

The church has always had those who have simply disappeared from us, but it's interesting that in this day, we as evangelicals recognize that a frighteningly large number of young people are leaving. And we have to ask some fundamental questions, most importantly the question of why. Christian Smith and his team, and the two books now published, *Soul Searching* and *Souls in Transition*, have described the spirituality of young people in America looking at a larger sample, but particularly also with a focus upon evangelicals, speaking of adolescents and now young adults, speaks of these emerging adults as they're now defined, and going back to their very first study, doing this massive investigation and research project on what these young people actually believe, they came down to define that actual belief system in terms of three words which should be classic now in our imagination, and they are moralistic therapeutic deism.

These young people basically believe that God wants His creatures to behave, that He wants them to feel good about themselves, and that He does exist but doesn't intend to be involved in individual lives. Kinda Creasy-Dean, doing further research out of this same project in her book, which is entitled *Almost Christian*, suggests that many of these young people really aren't Christians at all, not by any normative biblical or theological definition. They are Christian-ish, and that is a severe indictment as we recognize that Christian-ish describes more than this younger generation.

We wonder how did this happen? How do we do this to ourselves? And very quickly, when you actually look at what these young people believe, you encounter the fact that they have evidently never actually been taught the gospel of Jesus Christ. The absence of biblical preaching, the absence of gospel preaching explains how we have created a generation in so many of our own churches of moralizing, therapeutic, practical deists. No wonder they leave.

What's to keep them? We understand at the same time that we meet even as there is much to encourage us. The very fact that this room is filled with so many people representing not just one, but two or three different generations of those who are committed to the gospel, a young generation in particular of those who are confessional and convictional, representing a wave of energy for planting gospel churches, for reforming and recovering congregations, a missional generation driven by a missiological vision. This is real reason for hope, genuine reason for encouragement.

You have no idea what an encouragement it is and ought to be to stand in a place as I now stand and look out at you. This is a miracle, a real reason for hope. We meet with the context of very real challenges.

Even as we are now in the first years of the 21st century with Protestant liberalism now something like two centuries old, we recognize that it's back. It comes back again and again and again. Open denials of inerrancy, open refutations of essential doctrines, and now even the metanarrative of the gospel being rejected in a call for a new kind of Christianity, a Christianity that doesn't begin with creation and then move to fall and then to redemption and to consummation and new creation, but rather tells an entirely different story, that story supposedly being captive to Greco-Roman philosophy and not to the Scripture.

But of course in order to change the metanarrative you have to deny a great deal of Scripture, and thus the relevance and even the urgency of our conference theme. I want to invite you to turn with me to the text, John chapter 5, beginning in verse 31, and as we read this text together we will understand immediately why it is chosen as the first text for the plenary session of a conference on this theme. John chapter 5, beginning in verse 31.

If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he is born witness to the truth, not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.

He was a burning and a shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.

And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

I do not receive glory from people, but I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him.

How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you, Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.

But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? Thanks be to God for his word. Thanks be to God for this text. Thanks be to God for the opportunity we have to consider it and to look to it.

The background of this text, of course, even in John chapter 5 is the Christological declaration and revelation that has taken place already. It begins with the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda. You have Christ asking the question, do you want to be healed? And then his command, get up, take up your bed, and walk.

And at once the man was healed. Then Jesus declares his own authority in verses 19 and following, having already demonstrated it through this work. John tells us, so Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he is doing, and greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

He does not come into judgment, but is passed from death to life. Truly truly I say to you, an hour is coming and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.

And he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. Jesus here in this text offers a straightforward promise.

Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. The crucial issue of hearing and believing is absolutely central to this text. He speaks to those who will refuse to hear.

He says those who hear will live, and then he declares there will be a day when even the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. Hearing and believing lead to eternal life. Now, our specific text, beginning in verse 31, begins as Jesus is speaking of the attestation of his ministry, the witnesses to his ministry.

As he begins, he acknowledges the fact that there must be witnesses, a reality that is confirmed in the Old Testament, in the Scriptures. It must be attested. The prophet's word is to be tested.

There must be witnesses. And here, Jesus sets out for those who have seen his works and have heard his words and have rejected him, refusing to believe and to receive him. He sets out these witnesses.

Like an attorney setting forth to make his case, he brings forth these four witnesses to make clear that they are not without adequate witnesses. As a matter of fact, they have more than adequate witnesses. They simply refuse to see what is put before them.

They refuse to hear the very witnesses whom the Father has sent. First he mentions John the Baptist. He describes John as a burning and a shining light.

In John chapter 5, he speaks of John the Baptist in these most positive of terms. He speaks of those who sent for him. Not only did they hear John the Baptist, they sent for him.

They wanted to hear from him. They demanded to hear from him. And he bore witness to the truth.

Now, in verse 34, Jesus makes clear that he did not receive his self-identity from John, but rather what John represented was the gift of the Father to the people that they would know the identity of the Son. John, a burning and a shining light. Of course, in the prologue to John's gospel, we remember those words, he came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through him.

He was not the light, but he came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. The background to this is almost assuredly Psalm 132, verses 13 through 17, where the psalmist writes, for the Lord has chosen Zion.

He has desired it for his dwelling place. This is my resting place forever. Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.

I will abundantly bless her provisions. I will satisfy her poor with bread. Her priests, I will clothe with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy.

There I will make a horn to sprout for David. I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. Jesus said the Father prepared the lamp.

You saw the lamp, you sought him out. You even enjoyed him for a moment, but you did not receive his witness. You refused to understand, even as the Scriptures had explained his role, even as you should have been expecting the one who was not the light, but would point to the light, the true light that saves.

Jesus points to John the Baptist, the burning and the shining light, and says, he was ignited. It's as if the Father ignited him to give off the light, to announce the coming of the Son of Man, and you would not see it. There's a necessary Old Testament background to understanding John as witness, but the very people who should have recognized John the Baptist as the lamp prepared for God's anointed, they failed to recognize him, and worse.

Jesus even makes clear that John's witness was for the benefit of the people. The point is that the witness testified, and they would not receive his testimony. Of course, it's not just John the Baptist.

Jesus says, secondly, that his own works testify of him. His own works are, in effect, witnesses, the miracles, the signs, these things that happened right before the eyes of those who said, give us a sign. They refused to see them for what they were.

These acts and signs were intended to underline and reveal Christ's identity, and thus his authority to authenticate his message. They would not hear. They were to bear witness that Jesus is the Christ, the very Son of God, the Davidic King, the Lord's anointed.

Note that in the very next chapter, in John chapter 6, we find that miracle which most of us learned among the very first of the miracles of which we ever heard, the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 of this vast multitude. And what Jesus has to say about his works here in John chapter 5, well, it's illustrated just one chapter later. After the feeding of the 5,000, those who come to find Jesus and cross the lake in order to find him, they address him by saying, then what sign do you do that we may see and believe you? What work will you perform? This is the day after the feeding of the 5,000.

After that miracle, after that sign, after that work, they refused to see it. They asked Jesus what sign he would give, what work he would perform, as if nothing had ever happened. As if there had been no man healed of the pool of Bethesda, about which they complained because it was done on the Sabbath.

Jesus said, my works are witnesses, but they are not the final witness. There is a third. The Father himself bears witness.

Here in this text, Jesus speaks of the Father, the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his Word abiding in you. There are several indictments and rebukes found within the passages we've been reading, but here is one of the most stark and direct.

He tells them that they do not have God's Word within them, that they have actually never heard. Now contrast that with Deuteronomy chapter 4, where Moses is speaking to the children of Israel, and he reminds them that they have not seen, but they have heard the voice of the Lord. God's people are identified by the very fact that they are those who have heard.

Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire and survived? But now Jesus speaks to them and says, you've actually never heard. They wouldn't even hear when Jesus spoke in the baptism of Jesus. This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

And remember those next three words, listen to him. This text also surely refers to the Father's internal testimony, the abiding Word in the believer, even as the abiding Word is confirmed in the very next verse. So the first witness is John the Baptist, a burning and a shining light.

The second witness are the works of Jesus himself. The third is the Father's witness to the Son. And the fourth, climactically, in Jesus' progression of argument, is the Scriptures, Moses.

The text is hauntingly clear. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me. Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

It is they that testify about me. You search the Scriptures. By the way, that's a very good thing.

Jesus here certainly does not counsel not searching the Scriptures. Searching the Scriptures is what we do. Searching the Scriptures is what we are taught to do.

It is what we rightly do. But the horrible recognition in this text, the humbling realization that should come to us, is that it is perfectly possible, and in this text actualized, that people can study the Scriptures and devote their lives to searching out the Scriptures and can spend all of their days studying the law and miss the point and not be saved. You search the Scriptures, a very good thing, but it is they that bear witness of me.

Speaking of the entirety of the Scriptures, it is they, speaking specifically of the Old Testament, it is they that bear testimony of me. You cannot read those words without reading of me. You cannot read the law without reading me.

You cannot read the history without reading me. You cannot read the Psalms without reading me. You cannot read the prophets without reading me.

These are they that testify of me. This climactic confirming witness, the final witness is Scripture. Scripture.

These are they that testify of me. A people who are trained in the Scriptures should have been ready for Christ. They should have been anticipating Him.

They should have been looking for Him. They should have been driven by the very Scriptures to look for, to await, to anticipate, and to be ready for the coming of Christ. They should have been not only ready for Christ, they should have been looking for Him and yearning for Him.

And we also should look to the Old Testament and find a constant, continual, cumulative, consistent testimony of Christ. We do not look back to the Old Testament merely to find the background to Christ and His ministry, nor even only for references and anticipations of Christ. We are to look to the Old Testament

and find Christ.

Not here and there, everywhere. Christ validates a serious study, the searching of the Scriptures, but we are clearly warned that the most serious student of the Scriptures can miss the entire point. Jesus is not speaking here to Scripture illiterates.

He is not speaking here to people who take the study of the Scriptures with a lack of seriousness. He's not speaking to those who do not devote themselves to scholarship. He is not speaking to those who take the Word of God frivolously.

He is speaking to those who read the Word of God and study it and devote themselves to it and miss the entire point. Now, Jesus doesn't say this is an intellectual problem. It's not a lack of knowledge.

When He rebukes those in this passage who refuse to see, well, He offers a rebuke that makes very clear that the problem is not merely intellectual, it's moral, it's theological, it's spiritual. It is a refusal to see. In verse 40, He speaks to those who refuse to come to Me.

In verse 43, He says, you do not receive Me. In verse 44, He says, you do not seek the glory that comes from the only God. This is an indictment.

It is an accusation. Christ incites Moses and He says that Moses will be their accuser. The very one they cite as their authority, the one to whom they ascribe Torah, it is He who will be their accuser.

Moses is described as the one on whom you have set your hope. But Jesus makes clear in this passage that Moses had set his hope upon Christ. If you do not believe on the authority of his writings, that is the writings of Moses, how will you believe My words? In other words, Jesus is accusing them of refusing to hear what Moses is telling them.

Jesus is here indicting them for their absolute refusal to hear and to believe what the Scriptures have told them, taught them to be ready to see and to believe. When Jesus speaks to these four witnesses, it is not that the witnesses were lacking. It is not that the witnesses were hidden.

The witnesses were right before them. But the witnesses came, and the witnesses testified, and they would not see, and they would not hear, and they would not believe. In John chapter 9, after Jesus has healed the man who was blind from birth, when the Pharisees accuse Him, and He is present for His second interrogation in verses 28 through 29, the Pharisees say to the man who is now healed, you are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from. And again, they simply validate exactly what Jesus said of them in John chapter 5. You think you have set your hope upon Moses, but Moses set his hope upon Me. It is Moses who wrote of Me.

You claim to be those who are the sons of Moses, but you betray the fact that you are not. When they ask the question, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from, and they ask this man where Jesus has come from, they betray not an ignorance, but a willful rejection, a willful blindness, a willful deafness. We often hear of New Testament Christianity, and we understand what is meant by that, but we need to be very clear that we are called to biblical Christianity.

Christ Himself declares there is Old Testament Christianity, that the gospel is found in the Old Testament, that He is present in the Old Testament. Not when speaking of Moses just in a text like Deuteronomy 18.18, but in all that Moses wrote, in all that the prophets have said, in all the Scriptures. In John's gospel, it's not just they claim, of course, to be the sons of Moses, they claim also to be the sons of Abraham, to be Abraham's children.

In John chapter 8, verses 53 through 58, Jesus is asked, are you greater than our father Abraham who died and the prophets died? Who do you make yourself out to be? Jesus answered, if I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my father who glorifies me, of whom you say, he is our God. But you have not known him.

Just like he says in John chapter 5, you have not heard his voice. His word does not abide in you. Here he says, you do not know him.

I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I keep his word.

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad. So the Jews said to him, you are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

So they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. Before Abraham was, I am.

Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus offers the rebuke to those who should know, who should see, who should hear, who should believe, and simply will not. These words, especially from John 5, rebuke those who will not hear the Scriptures, who will not believe, and who will not be saved. But in all honesty, we have to admit that these words are also a clear rebuke to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ in our generation for our neglect and misuse of the Old Testament, in our own way committing the same insult to both Christ and to the Scriptures.

For many, the Old Testament is simply a problem. It's not new to describe it that way. Throughout the Christian church, there have been those who have struggled to understand what to do with the Old Testament.

Some of the sources of the problem are ideological and theological. The first of these is seen in, for instance, the habit of labeling the Old Testament as the Hebrew Scriptures. Now, even in a context of political correctness in the academy, to refer to the Scriptures as the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures, the Christian cannot accept that.

For what it insinuates, it insinuates that the Old Testament is someone else's book, that it's foreign territory to the church. Second, of course, historically is the Marcionite impulse to reject the Old Testament as revealing a different deity. And it is frightening to see how many, for instance, evangelical children and young people just assume that this is indeed the pattern.

They pick that up in one way or the other, and they simply are little tiny Marcionites. And you wonder where do they come from, and then you talk to their parents. There are Marcionites throughout our pews and in far too many pulpits, many of them absolutely unknowing.

They are practical Marcionites, if not card-carrying Marcionites... Marcionites. They reflect a second pattern of ideological and theological dismissal of the Old Testament. Third, we encounter those who argue that the Old Testament is to be read only on its own terms.

Those who suggest even within the Christian church and even within some evangelical institutions and evangelical faculties and those who hold evangelical pulpits will suggest that we need to read the Old Testament simply on its own terms, without any reference to the New Testament. It basically comes down to the suggestion that Christians need to do synagogue readings when we come to the Old Testament. Fourth, classical dispensationalism was right to see epics in development, but wrong to deny continuity.

Fifth, there is now the moral argument against the Old Testament. This is kind of an updated Marcionite temptation. It's not particularly new, but it's particularly focused in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In his Lyman Beecher lectures on preaching, given at Yale back in the early part of the twentieth century, Harry Emerson Fosdick, in his book that came out of the lectures entitled *The Modern Use of the Bible*, spoke of the Old Testament in general in a very specific text, spoke of the task of preaching them as, quote, intellectually ruinous and morally debilitating. He said modern people rightly recoil from these Old Testament texts, and it would be an insult to modern morality to try to preach them or even to try to rescue them in some way, to try to harmonize them, to try to... to try to come to terms with them. Just write it off as the musings of an ancient nomadic people and be done with it.

More recently, Kenton Sparks, in his denial of biblical inerrancy, speaks of the Old Testament and of, quote, biblical texts that strike us as downright sinister or evil. Brian McLaren has recently described the story of Noah, for instance, as profoundly disturbing and an example of accounts in the Old Testament that fall short of human conceptions of morality. But these ideological and theological dismissals of the Old Testament are not the main problem in our midst.

In our midst, in our circles, in our pulpits, in our Sunday school classes, in our Bible study groups, the biggest problem is the ignorance and neglect of the Old Testament. Let's admit it. A good many evangelical preachers and Bible teachers simply have no idea what to do with the Old Testament.

Leslie Pohl's Hartley, in his novel of 1953, *The Go-Between*, no one really remembers the novel. They just remember its opening line. The opening line is this, the past is a foreign country.

They do things differently there. Well, to many Christians and to many pastors, to many preachers, and all too many Christians, the Old Testament is a... it's a foreign book. They do things differently there, and they certainly do.

Burning bushes and staffs that turn into snakes, arks and animals in a menagerie afloat, dead animals and hewn bullocks, rams and thickets, slavery in Egypt, bronze serpents, manna in the morning, pillars of fire and columns of smoke, convoluted history of conquests and kings, intrigue, adultery, murder, incest, and frankly, a preoccupation with bodily fluids. Bears who eat boys, boys who kill giants, prophets who taunt idolaters, prophets who throw fits, and prophets who sit by gates and weep. Poetry that reads like praise and poetry that reads like existentialist philosophy.

Persian writing on walls, foreign kings who roam like wild beasts and a prostitute who hides spies. Spies who lose heart, women who summon courage, donkeys that talk, and a strong man who commits suicide. Stuttering leaders, naked patriarchs, and majestic praise.

Predictive prophecy, lamentation, law, statue, and ordinance in all of its glory. And all of it revealing Christ, every bit of it. They do things differently there, and that's the point, isn't it? These things are all anticipating Christ, all looking forward to Christ, all rightly making us yearn for Christ.

They should all help us to recognize the Christ. These are they that testify of me. So what do preachers nevertheless do? Well, in the first place, many of them simply avoid it at all costs.

I've actually heard some preachers state as a matter of principle that they preach from the New Testament because it's the Christian book. As I said, practical Marcionites, and how they are robbing their people of the knowledge of Christ from the Scriptures. How impoverished is that preaching? How undernourished are those congregations? Fosdick said back in his Beecher lectures that speaking of the Old Testament, all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot pull many preachers back to preach the Old Testament.

Secondly, there are many evangelicals who will actually preach an Old Testament text. They will get to it. They will teach it.

They will read it, and they'll say to... they'll say a few words about it, but mostly is background as if there's... if this is a different story before you get to our story, the real story. You kind of need to know this story because it's the background to our story, you know. What Christ is saying in John chapter 5 and what the Lord reveals consistently in the Old Testament is not that the Old Testament is the story we have to know before we know the real story.

It's all one story, and the gospel is in all of it. And of course, the third way preachers deal with the Old Testament customarily is to moralize, and we know we ought not to do that. It's bad to moralize, but it's second nature to us.

God made us moral creatures. We moralize when we don't want to moralize. We'll moralize about moralizing.

And by the way, the only alternative to a moralizing creature is a sociopath, but for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The problem starts really early. We're raised to hear the Scripture, especially the Old Testament, in terms of moralizing.

That's how we are taught it from the very beginning. You look at the Bible story books. Most of the Bible story books, not all of them, thanks be to God, but you look at many of them.

No, most of them written for children, and they are just dripping with morality tales. It's as if the Old Testament is our Jewish Christian form of Aesop's fables. Do this, don't do that.

So it starts at the parent's knee, and then it's ratified in Sunday school and Vacation Bible School and all the children's programs of the church where all of our stuff, and we've updated it from flannel graph to PowerPoint, but it's still moralizing. And then we arrive, of course, at the period of adolescence, that period that Christian Smith and his colleagues were studying when they discovered that basic belief system as being moralistic, therapeutic deism, and we said, well, that's what they got from us. That's not what they got just from the preaching of the Old Testament, by the way.

That's what they got from virtually all the preaching they heard was moralizing. And if there is any period of life that tends toward moralizing in the most eccentric ways and intensive ways, it is adolescence. And that's... that's what most Christian youth ministries do in some of our churches.

They just kind of update and add new subjects to the moralizing. That's just not what the text is about. That's not exactly true, is it? More precisely, we should say, that is not the redemptive purpose of the text, how it testifies of Christ.

There are moral lessons there, and we're actually wrong to ignore the moral lessons that are there. Even in the New Testament, there are citations of the Old Testament in terms of moral lessons we should learn. That is not wrong.

It's just wrong to think that that's the main point, and it is tragic to end there. Those rebuked by Jesus in John chapter 5 would have agreed with every moralistic point made by any Christian preacher, and they would have agreed probably with a great deal we wouldn't even think to make. It is not wrong to see David as a boy who demonstrates courage because of his faith in God.

He thus kills a giant when others cower. The problem is in missing the greater point, the redemptive content, that David is God's anointed, the king whose dynasty will never end, who points directly to King Jesus seated on David's throne, the one who is prophet and priest and king. Moralism is the default for preachers.

It comes second nature to us, but it horribly misinforms the congregation. It horribly malforms their understanding of the gospel because it tells them what they basically really want to hear, which is by moral improvement they can please God. It makes the issue behavior, which is familiar and safe territory because we think it's under our control, but of course moralizing cannot save.

We must do better than this. We must do better than all of this if we are to escape the rebuke of Christ. If you believed Moses, Christ said, you would have believed Me.

You look at the history of the Christian church and the history of biblical interpretation, and the Old Testament has been a difficult challenge for the church, not only in recent centuries but going all the way back. You read the fathers, and you come to understand that one of their ways of dealing with the Old Testament, and it's certainly by their reflex of allegorization, is just, well, it's just kind of a literary and imaginative form of the moralizing, only they added a good deal to it that most of us would now find not only antiquarian but hardly having to do with the text. They knew they had to do something with the Old Testament, and there are some faithful examples even among the patristic fathers of those who dealt with the Old Testament, with the Old Testament Scriptures in terms of redemptive history, in terms of redemptive content.

But it is clear that the Christian church was already struggling with what to do with the Old Testament. If you fast forward to the Reformation, you encounter, of course, Martin Luther who saw in the Scriptures in between the two Testaments this radical dichotomy between law and gospel, and yet it is Luther also who came to understand that even as the law cannot save, along with the Apostle Paul, he came to understand that there is grace in the law. But Luther's not sure what to do with this.

Luther's not even consistent with what to do with this, and Luther in his personal life as well as his teaching is not fully consistent with this. Luther early in his ministry says, whatever you do, don't teach and preach the law. Then he has children, and note where his catechism for children begins.

Hear now, children, the law of God. There's grace in that too. John Calvin represents such a... such a fountain of health on this.

His Institutes of the Christian Religion methodologically, theoretically, just with grandeur set this out. It's hard in our contemporary context to imagine better than what he teaches us. The title of book two of the Institutes is, The Knowledge of God, the Redeemer in Christ, First Disclosed to the Fathers Under the Law, and Then to Us in the Gospel.

Could it be better stated than that? That the knowledge of God, the Redeemer in Christ, that God, known to us as the Redeemer in Christ, who is first disclosed to the fathers, how under the law, not some other God, not the God who is not yet our Redeemer in Christ, but rather the God who is our Redeemer in Christ, first disclosed to the fathers under the law, and then to us in the gospel. The title of chapter seven of book two, the title is, The Law Was Given Not to Restrain the Folk of the Old Testament... of the Old Covenant Under Itself, But to Foster Hope of Salvation in Christ Until His Coming. So the purpose of the law was to foster hope.

Chapter nine, the title, Christ, Although He Was Known to the Jews Under the Law, Was at Length Clearly Revealed Only in the Gospel. It is not that we do not need the gospel. It is by the gospel that we are saved.

But we should know our need for the gospel, and the promise of the gospel, and that Christ promised us in the gospel, even by reading the law. As Paul writes in Romans chapter seven, without the law, he would not have known he was a coveter. And until that knowledge came, he did not know he needed a Savior.

There's grace in the knowledge of our sin, and there is grace in our knowledge of the need for a Savior. And there's grace in the fact that a Savior was all along promised and revealed, even under the law. In speaking of how we should be trained by the New Testament to read the Old Testament, Calvin points to 1 Peter chapter one, verses 10 through 12.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace of God that was to be yours, searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. Verse 12, very crucial. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preach the good news to you by the Holy Spirits and from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

How impoverished we would be if we did not have witnesses such as Gerhardus Voss and Richard Gaffin and Edmund Clowney and those who have taught not only a new generation but now successive generations of the importance of seeing a redemptive historical hermeneutic and applying it to all of the Scriptures. How healthy it is that in more recent years, there has been a renaissance, a recovery of... even a celebration of how to preach the Bible as a whole, to understand the metanarrative and to find great joy in preaching it and even greater joy in seeing people come to understand it. So thankful for works by such influential figures who have literally changed categories for us, like Graham Goldsworthy and Sidney Gridanus and Brian Chappell.

We need to let the New Testament teach us. Even as Calvin argued from 1 Peter, we need to let the New Testament teach us how to read the Old Testament. Where better to look than to the book of Hebrews, which begins by telling us long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, a continuous pattern of divine revelation, all redemptive, all pointing to the climactic revelation in Christ. He has now spoken to us by His Son. Well then what about Moses? Moses was the one on whom they had set their hope, Jesus tells them in John chapter 5. Hebrews chapter 3 verse 5, we read, now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant.

Moses should be greatly respected. Moses is central, even essential in the Testament of the Old. It is also true that Moses plays such an important part in salvation history.

But he is a servant in God's house. Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant to testify to the things that were to be spoken later. But Christ is faithful over God's house as a Son, the distinction between the servant and the Son.

What about Joshua? What about even the Sabbath? Chapter 4 verses 8 through 10, we are told, for if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from His works as God did from His. What should we have learned from the Sabbath as an institution? What should we have learned from the Sabbath as a command? We should have learned that we need, we must have an eternal Sabbath, where we rest not only from our earthly labors, where we rest from our attempts at self-righteousness, to prove ourselves just before holy God.

What about Abraham? Chapter 6, beginning of verse 13, for when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, surely I will bless you and multiply you. And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of His purpose, He guaranteed it with an oath so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hopes that are before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. I can't wait to hear Don Carson speak about Melchizedek.

What should we have seen when we heard of Melchizedek? The private book of Hebrews tells us we should have seen that if he gave an offering, Abraham gave an offering to Melchizedek, then there is something greater to which Melchizedek is pointing. And then, of course, we are pointed there in verse 26, for it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need like those high priests to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

For the law appoints men and their weaknesses as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a son who has been made perfect forever. We should have been looking for the son. Chapter 8, verses 1 through 7, now the point in which we are saying is this.

We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.

They serve a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God saying, see that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain. But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

Verse 7, for if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. We should have been able to look to the tabernacle and see not only the holy place, but the most holy place. And we should have been able to see what was going on in the tabernacle and later in the temple and say, there has to be something that will... that will eliminate this veil.

Someone is going to have to do something to achieve peace with God. And of course, God will have to do that thing, as He did in Christ. In chapter 9, verse 11, we read, but when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with human hands, that is not of this creation, He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and cows, but by the means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. So Christ has appeared, the high priest of the good things that have come. And He entered the tabernacle not made with human hands, and He entered it once for all.

In other words, looking to the sacrificial system of old, we should have seen that succession of Levitical priests. We should have seen them coming one after another, one after another, generation after generation after generation, performing sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice, and realize this doesn't... this doesn't point to eternal life. This doesn't eventuate in eternal life.

This does not secure an eternal redemption. Christ as our great high priest accomplishes this by being the mediator of a new covenant. In my own Pelagian stage, and this is where just about every adolescent is at some point in adolescence, in my own Pelagian stage, I had a hard time sleeping at night over the issue of confession of sin.

Because I had the recognition of myself as a sinner by God's grace that was greater than I'd ever had at any other point in my life, and I had been instructed by Scripture in such a way that I was rightly taken into the knowledge of my sin, and that sin was ever before me. And so you pray a prayer of confession, and you know exactly where I'm headed with this, and then you think, how, OK, what if I die now before I get to confess again? I'm going to fall short of the glory of God before I get up off of my knees. I'm a dead man.

What's going to happen if... if the priests aren't allowed into the temple? What's going to happen when the temple is no more? All these things are pointing to a fulfillment that can only be accomplished by God in Christ. We should have seen it. Even the furnishings in the tabernacle point to Christ.

In Luke chapter 24, as Jesus is walking on the road to Emmaus with the men, He offers a rebuke to them. In verse 5, He said, O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself, so they drew near to the village to which they were going.

He acted as if He were going farther, but they urged Him strongly, saying, Stay with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent. So He went in to stay with them. When He was at table with them, He took the bread and blessed, and broke it and gave it to them.

And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him, and He vanished from their sight. Then said to each other, they said to each other, Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures? First the rebuke, O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Then the cure, and beginning with Moses and the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

And then the blessing, Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, when He opened to us the Scriptures? We preach Christ from all the Scriptures, and find Christ in the gospel in the Old Testament as well as in the New. We allow the New Testament to train us how to read the Old, and we put the Bible back into the hands of believers intact and whole with Christ and the gospel of our redemption at the center. And we pray to see what Luke recounts for us, we pray to see it happen again and again and again.

Preachers, we pray to see this happen every time the Word of God is preached. Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, we should pray for this to happen in our midst every time we open the Word. To see Christ, people ask, Did not our hearts burn within us? All it takes is to open up the book.

Let's pray. With thankful hearts, O Lord, we hear and receive Your Word. With eager eyes, we read the sacred page.

With hungry ears, we hear our Lord Jesus Christ in every text. May the hearts of Your people burn with the glory of Christ revealed on every page. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray.

May our hearts burn within us, Amen.

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