

Ensuring our preaching is Christian



It's fair to say that many 'Christian' sermons could happily be preached by a Jew or Muslim in a synagogue or mosque! That's because a lot of preaching, especially from the Old Testament, is just moralizing or character studies, often disconnected from the Bible's main message – Jesus. Here is where we see the importance for our Bible reading and preaching of understanding that the Bible is 66 books yet ONE book telling ONE story: how God

in Christ reigns and reconciles his people to himself. To be sure, there's numerous human authors, genres, and historical settings, yet it all serves to cumulatively advance God's story – the coming of his Kingdom, in Eden, through Israel and ultimately through his Son.

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Jesus himself understood this and taught this.

He said that **all** the Scriptures are about **him** – principally his death and resurrection as Messiah and his resultant universal mission to proclaim his Lordship and make disciples (Jn 5:39-47; 8:56; 12:41; Lk 24:25-27, 44-47). All the great themes and concepts, offices and ministries, of the Old Testament – covenant, Kingdom, Messiah, temple, priesthood, substitutionary sacrifice, prophet, salvation and judgment, curse and blessing, exodus and exile, laws and ceremonies, sin and justification – foreshadow and lead to their ultimate and final fulfillment in Jesus Christ. We should think of it like this: The Old Testament **anticipates** and **promises** Jesus, and the New Testament witnesses to his coming, his salvation, his Lordship and Judgeship, and to the significance of these realities for the seen and unseen world, for the local church, and for you and me, both now and into eternity.

[Alongside recognizing the Bible's theological unity and purpose around Jesus](#), it is equally important to recognise the **supremacy** and **finality** of God's revelation to us in Jesus. The New Testament documents assert with one clear voice that Jesus is the promised One, God's Word in human form; that Jesus is God-revealing-God and God reconciling us to God (Jn 1:1-18; 1 Tim 2:5); that Jesus' death for sins was 'once for all' (1 Pet 3:18; Heb 10:10). The logical and theological consequence being that God's **ultimate, definitive, final** and **sufficient** revelation of himself comes through Jesus; and this is plainly asserted by the New Testament:

*'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'
(Heb 1:2; cf. Col 1:15-22; 2:9).*

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God's **last word** to us is Jesus and his New Covenant and eternal Kingdom; and the divinely authorised and inspired witness to Jesus – the New Testament – is God's final and definitive Word about God's final and definitive Word – Jesus. That is why Jude, the half brother of Jesus, could appeal to Christians to 'contend for *the faith* that was *once for all* delivered to the saints' (v.3; italics mine). The New Testament is the preservation or inscripturation of that revelation in and about Jesus. By this word about his Word, God *continues* to speak, and to save, sustain, guide and rule his church (Col 3:16; 1 Cor 1:18; 15:1-2; 2 Tim 3:10-17).

The implications of these findings for preachers are highly significant:

- Our preaching will always deal with the text in its immediate historical and literary context AND within its overall framework of Christ and his Kingdom. It might come as a surprise to some to hear that the Bible is not primarily about us and our needs but about Jesus and his Kingdom. Reading and preaching the Bible this way will honour the divine intention of the Bible, glorify God in Christ, and grow and sustain his church upon the right foundation.
- All **biblical** preaching is **Christ-centred** and **Christ-exalting**. Both the Old and New Testament inform and enrich our understanding of the person and work of Christ and of our life together in him. Therefore we read the Old Testament through the lens of the New and we read the New Testament with the help of the Old, and as God's final and definitive word.
- Any claim of a subsequent authoritative revelation of God that supplements or replaces that revelation in Jesus, be that claim be made by other religions or even Christians, is by necessity ruled out. God has acted and spoken exclusively, decisively and finally in his Son. The New Testament urges us to hear and heed **that** revelation and salvation, and to **grow** in our understanding and appropriation of it. Therefore our preaching and teaching must expound and apply **the Bible** and its main message.

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