

Western

A PUBLICATION OF WESTERN SEMINARY

MAGAZINE
SPRING 2014

THE
*CENTRALITY
OF CHRIST*

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Back in 1925, W.H. Griffith-Thomas published a theological classic simply entitled, *Christianity is Christ*. A mere three words, but a masterful summary of the core of the Christian faith. For if we are to be gospel-centered, we will also be Christ-centered (and vice-versa), for the person and work of Christ are at the heart of the gospel. And because we believe that the gospel is at the heart of the Bible, then we need to recognize the centrality of Christ as we read the Word and seek to live it out.

Christopher Wright, however, in his *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (IVP, 2006) asserts that the Western church in particular has failed to recognize appropriately the biblical centrality of both Christ and mission in our reading of Scripture. This neglect in turn leaves us vulnerable to various errors and deficiencies in both our theology and practice.

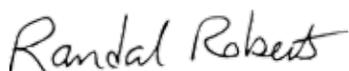
That is why Western's *Toward a Classic Strategy for Evangelical Renewal* (a faculty document that shapes the outcomes we seek to develop in our students) emphasizes both the supremacy of Christ and Christ-centered ministry that produces Christ-centered lives. Each Western Magazine issue is devoted to one of the themes in this document, so it is time for us to address what is arguably the grandest theme of all: honoring the centrality of Christ.

Three feature articles illustrate various expressions of a Christ-centered approach to life and ministry. Dr. Todd Miles begins by helping us read the Bible with a greater focus on Jesus. We also interview Dr. Art Azurdia to learn how that Jesus-focused reading of Scripture in turn shapes Christ-centered preaching. Finally, Dr. Jeff Louie describes how Christ-centeredness guides his classroom teaching.

You will see some overlap in these articles, but that is by design—for repetition of important concepts helps to plant them more deeply in our minds and hearts. You will also see that sometimes we discover, post-seminary, important insights that prompt us to modify our approaches to certain topics, illustrating the importance of being a lifelong learner. Western wants its faculty to model this willingness to change whenever so doing brings one into closer conformity to Scripture. You see that same spirit in a sidebar feature on alumnus Kyle Schwahn who describes his “conversion” to Christ-centered preaching as a result of his time at Western.

This issue also features news items on our Women's Center for Ministry, Sacramento campus relocation, a landmark anniversary for a beloved San Jose adjunct, a new faculty hire, and a strategic new partnership that seeks to help the Church reach more effectively “the missing millennial generation.”

We are grateful for the extraordinary blessings that we have experienced these past few years, and we trust those are indicators that we are focusing on the right things. So we invite you to join us in a fresh focus on Jesus, the Son in Whom the Father also delights.



Dr. Randal Roberts
President

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Western Seminary strives to serve as a catalyst and resource for spiritual transformation by providing, with and for the church, advanced training for strategic ministry roles.

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Contents

4
NOTES

5
SACRAMENTO CAMPUS MOVE

6
WOMEN'S CENTER FOR MINISTRY

7
PASTORAL CARE TO WOMEN

8
RECOGNIZING JESUS

12
RECOMMENDED READS

13
MORE THAN A CATCH PHRASE

14
Q&A WITH ART AZURDIA

17
FOCUSED: TEACHING THE GOSPEL FOR
CONTINUED SPIRITUAL GROWTH



NOTES

NEW FACULTY APPOINTED

Western Seminary is pleased to announce that Patrick Schreiner will be joining the faculty. Beginning in the 2014–15 academic year, Patrick's teaching will focus in the area of New Testament Language and Literature. Though he will be based out of the Portland campus, his teaching will extend to the San Jose, Sacramento, and Online campuses.

Currently a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy at Southern Baptist Seminary, Patrick completed his Master of Divinity at Southern Baptist Seminary and his Bachelor of Arts at Western Kentucky University. "I'm thrilled that Patrick will be joining us, he will be an excellent addition to our faculty team," shares Rob Wiggins, Academic Dean.

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

Donelyn Miller, adjunct faculty member at the San Jose campus, celebrated 20 years of teaching at Western Seminary this last fall. Donelyn teaches Clinical Foundations (originally called Interpersonal Communications when she first started teaching the class in 1993) and Child and Adolescent Therapy courses for the MFT department.

Donelyn has been in the counseling field since 1973, working with juvenile delinquents and their families, licensing and placing children in foster homes, directing a low-cost counseling clinic, and counseling clients of all ages. Along with Dr. Norm Thiesen, Donelyn is one of two of the original professors hired with the launch of the MFT program in San Jose. Thanks for all your work, Donelyn!

REGENERATION PROJECT

Under the direction of alumnus Dr. Dan Kimball, Western Seminary is launching the Regeneration Project, a ministry that will provide theological and apologetic resources for "millennials" and those trying to minister to them. Building off the success of the Regeneration Forum held in the Fall of 2013, the project will include a practical website and blog which will provide positive voices and solutions rather than focusing on negative trends. The project is scheduled to launch mid-2014.

Dan is a pastor at Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz, CA and has authored numerous books, including *Adventures In Churchland* and *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*.

View from the parking lot towards campus



ON THE MOVE

Clockwise, from left: Front lobby and reception area; Staff and students at a sneak peek and prayer night on Jan. 29; Outside sidewalk.



AFTER 22 YEARS AT ARCADE CHURCH, WESTERN SEMINARY SACRAMENTO IS MOVING TO ROCKLIN.

After 22 years of being blessed by our gracious hosts at Arcade Church, we have sensed God leading our campus to a new home just under 20 miles northwest, where Highway 65 and Sunset Boulevard meet. With record class enrollment, expanding programs and staff, exciting new initiatives, potential partnerships, and an “only God could do this” opportunity, we have signed a letter of intent to move to a commercial building recently purchased by Creekside Church in Placer County. The address is 290 Technology Way, Rocklin, CA 95765.

While we considered multiple locations in the Sacramento region, this new, 5,000 ft., all-in-one facility fits our needs better than we could have imagined. It is located in an area where a large majority of our students live and is also in close proximity to William Jessup University and a new Sacramento State campus. We are confident this change will enhance the student experience, ultimately expanding Kingdom impact in the region and beyond. For more information regarding the details of the move, please visit: www.westernseminary.edu/saonthemove.

I CAN'T BE MORE EXCITED! IT'S A GREAT LOCATION, EASY TO ACCESS, CENTRAL TO MANY SURROUNDING CHURCHES, AND CLOSE TO OTHER UNIVERSITIES.

-Current Student and Pastor

WOMEN'S CENTER FOR MINISTRY

What an incredible
day! Lots of learning
& worshipful times.
Worship, dance, speakers;
all were excellent. This
was one of the best
women's events I've ever
been to. Praise God!

– 2013 Ignite Participant

REGISTRATION

For registration information, please
call 503.517.1931 or email Kenine
Stein at kstein@westernseminary.edu.

IGNITE

*The Art of Embracing
Our Sacred Design*

March 15, 2014
9 AM–4:15 PM

Anthem Center
3300 NE 172nd,
Portland OR 97230

IGNITE: THE ART OF EMBRACING OUR SACRED DESIGN

The Women's Center for Ministry would like to extend a warm welcome to attend our annual conference, Ignite. The day-long event will feature practical, in-depth, break-out sessions, including several from Western Alumni: Bethany Allen, Carolyn Mata, Marcia Moores, Daisy Santos, and Taylor Turkington. Sessions will include: A Single Woman's Identity, Staying Grounded Through Life's Transitions, Creativity and God's Redemptive Purpose for our Emotions, and many more.

We are particularly excited about this year's speakers and worship leaders; they are all from the greater Portland/Vancouver area and represent the diversity found therein. We're thrilled to be able to showcase this outstanding group of local women, all of whom are well-equipped to lead and instruct! Finally, we are delighted to welcome back Joy of Dance, the Battle Ground, WA based worship dance team, to help lead us into worship. They ushered us into a memorable time of worship last year; we can't wait to see what this year will hold.

By offering training and resources, the Women's Center for Ministry exists to serve all women, encouraging them to grow in areas of giftedness and passion. It is our hope that Ignite will be a place of connection, growth, and information, accessible to all women.

–Dr. Phyllis Bennett



Dr. Phyllis Bennett is the Director of the Women's Center for Ministry at Western Seminary. She has served for more than twenty years on the staff of three churches, beginning as Women's Associate to the Youth Pastor and most recently as Director of Women's Ministries. Phyllis speaks frequently at Women's events around the United States.



PASTORAL CARE TO WOMEN

This past summer saw the development of a more pronounced distinction between Western's Women's Center for Ministry and the Pastoral Care to Women track. Under the direction of Dr. Bev Hislop, the Pastoral Care to Women track provides seven courses to enhance the competency and effective ministry to women, including *Women in Leadership*, *Develop Life-Changing Messages*, and *A Pastoral Understanding of Women*.

Recently, a hybrid version was added to the Women in Pain courses allowing students to complete both courses with two days in class and the rest of the hours online. Pastoral Care to Women courses are valuable training options for both men and women who are looking to strengthen their ministry effectiveness through a more in-depth understanding of the struggles that many women encounter. Issues such as depression, addiction, infertility, and abortion recovery, just to name a few, are often treated superficially or avoided altogether. Pastoral Care to Women courses delve deeply into these issues and provide instruction on how to fully come alongside women who are experiencing emotional and/or physical pain and minister to them through the healing power of the gospel.

Western's Pastoral Care to Women track is offered as a concentration of the Master of Divinity degree, the Master of Arts In Ministry And Leadership degree, as well as the Graduate Studies Diploma/Certificate programs.

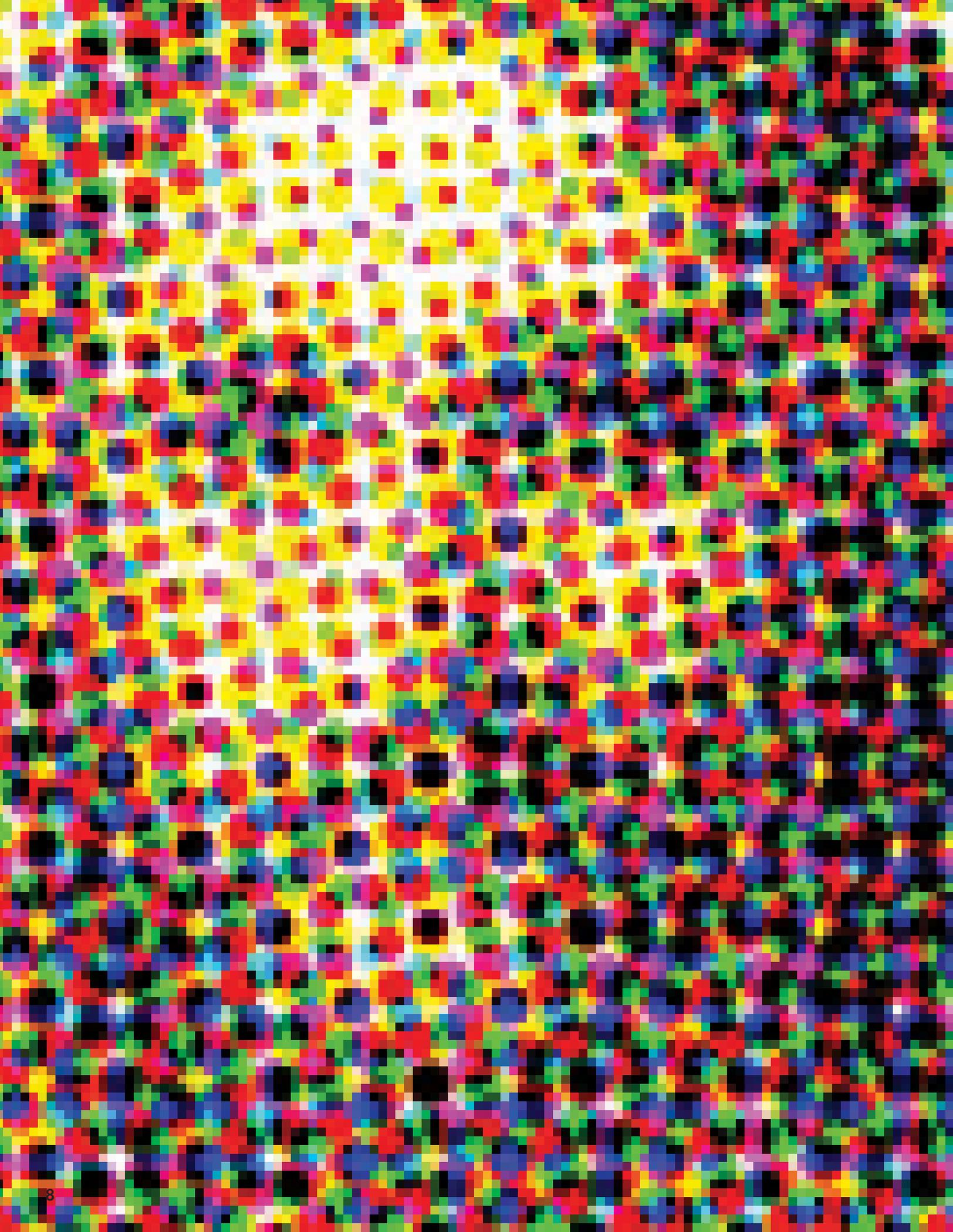


READY TO ENROLL?

For registration information, please call 503.517.1931 or email Kenine Stein at kstein@westernseminary.edu.

Dr. Bev Hislop is the Professor of Pastoral Care at Western Seminary. She has founded and directed numerous women's ministry groups and organizations, including Western Seminary's Women's Center for Ministry. Bev has also authored several books, including "Shepherding a Woman's Heart" and "Shepherding Women in Pain."





RECOGNIZING JESUS

BY DR. TODD MILES

We learn at an early age, that if you want to get the correct answer in Sunday School, just say “Jesus.” It really doesn’t matter what the question is. As we grow older we laugh at this axiom’s overstatement. We roll our eyes at its simplicity. But at the same time, the more we read the Bible, the more we recognize that if the question is about the Bible, “Jesus” is a pretty good answer. And we have it on good authority, for Jesus himself instructed us in the greatest Bible interpretation lesson ever taught, recorded for us in Luke 24.

THE BIBLE IS ALL ABOUT JESUS

Following His resurrection from the dead, Jesus, in *incognito* fashion, joined a couple of His disciples as they walked from Jerusalem to the nearby village of Emmaus. The disciples, quite naturally, were trying to make sense of “the things that had happened” so recently (24:18). “What things?” Jesus coyly asked. The disciples then recounted the events of the past few days, including their hope that Jesus of Nazareth was the Redeemer of Israel, though His death (in their view) had dampened their expectations. As for reports of His resurrection, well, they didn’t know what to make of that.

To their surprise, their new traveling companion called them “foolish” (24:25). The word sounds harsh, but Jesus was not calling them moronic. They were “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had written.” They did not understand the

redemptive purposes of God. Jesus told them that all the events of recent days had been necessary. The Christ had to suffer “these things.” Notice verse 27: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

Beginning with Moses. All the Prophets. All the Scriptures. *The Bible is all about Jesus.*

Jesus proved that His death and resurrection were necessary and He did so by working through what we know as the Old Testament. When the three arrived in Emmaus, the two disciples persuaded their guest to stay with them. When they sat down to eat, Jesus said the blessing and broke the bread. It was at that moment that the eyes of the disciples “were opened” and they recognized Jesus.

A short time later, Jesus was in Jerusalem with His disciples. He reminded His overjoyed and stunned followers that everything written about Him in “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” must be fulfilled (24:44). In Jesus’ day, the people called their Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, the *Tanach*, a shorthand way of referring to the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Jesus claimed that the entirety of the Hebrew Bible anticipated His mission.

The next verse is pivotal. “Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (24:45). What does this mean? First, let me tell you what it does *not* mean: it does not mean that the disciples present were sprinkled with a kind of

angelic dust that granted them complete understanding of all the Scriptures, precluding any need for further study. Nor does it mean that Jesus granted them the keys for unlocking Gnostic and encoded information to which no one else had been or would ever again be privy. Jesus Himself explains what He meant in His next sentence: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” Jesus has just provided a nice, tidy statement of the gospel message that He entrusted to His disciples. Whenever Jesus used the term, “It is written” (the Greek term is *gegraptai*), that is code in the New Testament for “I am about to quote from the Word of God.” Every time, without exception, the Greek word *gegraptai* is used, we are to be prepared for an authoritative citation of some sort of divine writing. But you will search the Old Testament in vain if you want to find the verse that Jesus explicitly quoted. We can only conclude that Jesus believed that His statement of the gospel was the implicit teaching of the entire Old Testament.

So we return to our question, “What does ‘He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures’ mean?” It is surely not coincidental that Luke uses the verb “to open” (Greek: *dianoigō*) three times in the latter part of this chapter (24:31, 32, and 45). In verse 31, the Emmaus disciples’ “eyes were opened.” The result is that they recognized Jesus. In verse 32, the Emmaus disciples had the Scriptures “opened” to them so that they understood all that Moses and the Prophets had to say about Jesus. In verse 45, the minds of the Jerusalem disciples were “opened.” I suspect that the ultimate meaning is the same in each case. Just as the Emmaus disciples were able to recognize Jesus when their eyes were opened, so the Jerusalem disciples were able to recognize Jesus throughout the Scriptures when their minds were opened. *The Bible is all about Jesus.*

Lest you think that Luke was on a strange hermeneutical mission and his

account of Jesus’ interaction with His disciples was an isolated event, consider the following evidence from John.

In Jesus’ discussion with the Jewish leader Nicodemus (John 3:1-15), Jesus castigates His interlocutor, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” The “things” to which Jesus referred were the promise of regeneration, entrance into the Kingdom, and the hope of



eternal life, all centered around belief in Him. For Jesus, these were the most fundamental teachings of the Old Testament, a sort of “Jewish Hope 101.” And He was dumbfounded that Nicodemus did not understand them.

Following Jesus’ healing of the invalid at the pools of Bethesda, Jesus rebuked the Jewish leaders: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me” (John 5:39). The problem with the Jewish investigation was not that they had the wrong goal or were looking in the wrong place. They wanted eternal life and they looked to the Scriptures to find it. That is precisely the right goal and exactly the correct place to look. The problem was that even as they searched the Scriptures they did not see the focal point of those Scriptures, Jesus.

We could multiply the evidence by recounting how Jesus thrust Himself into the center of the Jewish pilgrim feasts and was the inaugurator of a new and better covenant than that which Moses had mediated (e.g., John 7; Matt 26:26-29), how Jesus was greater than the Prophets (Matt 17:1-13) and the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt 12:8), or how the greatest Patriarch rejoiced to see Jesus’ day (John 8:56). These people, events, and days are not trivial. They make up the structure and substance of the Old Testament’s redemptive drama. And Jesus saw Himself as fulfilling it all. *The Bible is all about Jesus.*

HOW THE BIBLE IS ALL ABOUT JESUS

All this begs the question, “But how is the Bible all about Jesus?” Or to put it another way, “When Jesus opened the eyes of His disciples to allow them to recognize Him in Scripture, what did they then do when they interpreted the Bible?” This question has bothered theologians and Bible interpreters for years. They usually phrase it in terms of the New Testament use of the Old Testament. But what they, and we, really want to know is if we can and are supposed to interpret the Bible the way that the New Testament authors did. This is a difficult issue, because while we do not have an explicit hermeneutics (Bible interpretation) lesson in the Gospels or the writings of the apostles, we do have an implicit lesson. We have their writings and we see clearly that they did see Jesus all through the Old Testament.

I am not arguing for wild allegory or strange numerology. Some biblical texts give straightforward prophecies of the Messiah and the Messianic age. Jesus and the Gospel writers were fond of citing these (e.g., Matt 1:22; 26:56; Mark 14:49; Luke 4:21; John 13:18; etc.). In other places, people and events of the Old Testament function as types of Jesus and His mission. For example, the Apostles and Gospel writers saw Jesus as being the true Israel, David, Moses, etc. The author of Hebrews understood the Old Testament sacrificial system as pointing ahead to

FOR ME, I THINK THAT THE EASIEST WAY TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE BIBLE IS ALL ABOUT JESUS, IS TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE BIBLE IS A (TRUE) STORY AND JESUS IS THE STAR OF THAT STORY.

Christ's redemptive death and resurrection (Heb 9-11).

For me, I think that the easiest way to understand how the Bible is all about Jesus, is to recognize that the Bible is a (true) story and Jesus is the star of that story.

The Bible tells the story of redemptive history: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation. Like any good story, it begins in the beginning, involves a dramatic conflict, and has a wonderful climax at the end. We are introduced to our sovereign, loving, and holy God, who created the world and created His image bearers to rule over all that He made. The story tragically turns when God's human vice-regents listen to the serpent, commit an act of diabolical treason, and are summarily punished, cursed with death, division, and decay.

We are faced with the fact that sin has entered the created cosmos through human agency and because of that, a human solution is required. Here's the rub: humans are singularly incapable of solving the problem. But this is where grace and the centrality of Jesus enter the story at the same time. In the midst of the cursing, pain, and tears, God, in mercy, promises that He will do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He will send Someone to crush the serpent. It will be a human, which we would expect; it will be by divine bidding, which we certainly need; and we find out later that it will be a divine Son, which is better than we could have dreamed. God does for us what we could not do for ourselves (salvation is of the Lord), but

He does so as a human (the incarnate Jesus Christ), bringing the right and just solution to a problem caused by humans. Too good to be true? No, it is so good it has to be true.

The rest of the story travels over hundreds of years, but at every step we must ask ourselves, where is the Serpent-Crusher? We are introduced to a variety of characters along the way, some better than others, but each hopelessly and fatally flawed. As we meet them, our anticipation for the Champion grows. Each character and event moves the story one step closer to the Hero's arrival. They prepare the way for God's Savior and prepare God's people to accept their King. When Jesus finally does show up, in a plot-twisting humble manner, it is only then that we can make sense of what has gone on before, in light of His coming. Jesus, the true King and Second Adam, lives a perfect life, inaugurates the Kingdom and then offers Himself on behalf of His people. He absorbs the wrath of God and then conquers sin and death by rising from the dead. He gives His followers marching orders before ascending to the right hand of the Father, leaving the promise

that He will return to make everything right. The rest of the Bible reflects on how God's people are to live out the mission that Jesus gave us (plus some hopeful details about the very End of the Story).

The Bible is all about Jesus because Jesus is the Star of the redemptive story, the Hinge on which human history turns, and Fulfillment of every legitimate hope that humanity has ever had. Jesus understood the Bible this way. He taught His disciples to read the Bible this way. And He invites us to do the same.

The Bible is truly and wonderfully all about Jesus. 

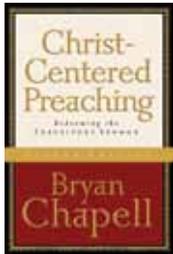
ⁱSee my investigation of the New Testament use of the Greek word *gegraptai* in Todd L. Miles, *A God of Many Understandings? The Gospel and a Theology of Religions* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 263, n87.



Dr. Todd Miles is the Director of the Master of Theology Program and Associate Professor of Theology at Western Seminary, where he teaches Systematic Theology, Hermeneutics, and Ethics. Todd serves as an elder at Hinson Memorial Baptist Church in Portland.

RECOMMENDED READS

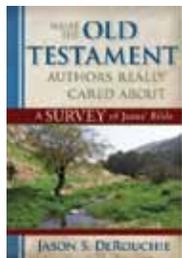
Dr. Roberts shares a few good titles that delve into the centrality of Christ—in all of life.



Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon
Second Edition

By Bryan Chapell (Baker Academic, 2005)

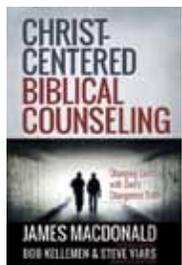
A very helpful volume not just on preaching Christ from all of Scripture, but also for homiletics in general. You may also want to check out his parallel works, *Christ-Centered Sermons* (Baker 2013) and *Christ-Centered Worship* (Baker, 2009).



*What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About:
A Survey of Jesus' Bible*

By Jason DeRouchie (Kregel, 2013)

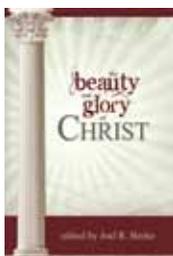
Jason Meyer, John Piper's successor as pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church, writes: "This book sets new standards for an Old Testament survey. The Christ-centered emphasis is a breath of fresh air. The canonical theology is deep and rich. It is exegetically faithful. The user-friendly features are not just easy to follow; they flat-out arrest your attention at times. In a crowded field of competitors, it is a standout."



Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling

Edited by James MacDonald, et al.
(Harvest House, 2013)

John Piper, Mark Dever and Elyse Fitzpatrick are among the contributors to the 28 chapters that blend theological wisdom and practical expertise. The first half of the book emphasizes a practical theology of biblical counseling; the second half a practical methodology of biblical counseling.



The Beauty and Glory of Christ

Edited by Joel Beeke (Reformation Heritage, 2013)

Welsh pastor Geoff Thomas' endorsement: "Can there be a more delightful theme than this? Drawn upon the insights of a dozen mature preachers who have spent their days seeking to magnify the Lord Jesus Christ, displaying the beauty of His character, the accessibility of His life, the compelling cogency of His preaching, the winsomeness of His personality, His extraordinary courage facing His enemies, His bravery under their torture and mockery and His submission to the will of God, then who cannot but be challenged and strengthened reading these chapters? To know Christ as He was and is, to grow in affection for Him, to appropriate Him in His offices as teacher, Lamb of God, and protecting Shepherd of His people—this is the essence of Christian living and the condition of Christian usefulness. Reading these chapters one's response is, 'O that my soul could love and praise Him more; His beauties trace, His majesty adore.'"

MORE THAN A CATCH PHRASE

Alumnus Kyle Schwahn on finding Jesus at the center



About half-way through my time at Western, I was in my church on a Sunday morning (where I serve as preaching pastor), preaching a sermon on 1 Timothy regarding deacons. I used all the right tools, just as I had been instructed. I knew the grammar and morphology. I knew the wider context of the book. I preached a clear and

campus for two in-ministry intensives. Those five days changed my life and my ministry forever. Short of my conversion, there has not been a more powerful moment that God has used in my life, heart, and thinking. In that week, I was undone. I began to see the centrality of Christ in all of Scripture and I began to see the centrality of

consumed with Paul's words: "Him we proclaim, warning everyone, teaching everyone, with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." The means to transformation in people, the means to maturity and fullness of life in Christ, the means to the deep joy that only God Himself can give, would all come through the proclamation of the crucified, risen, reigning, one day returning, Lord Jesus Christ. It is what transformed me and it is what God has ordained to transform us all.

My story at Western Seminary can be summed up with something that will ever be more than a catch phrase or slogan for me: "gospel-centered transformation." It is not just the mission of this Seminary, though I thank God that it is, it is by His grace the story of my own life and my own ministry, because of this seminary. 

I was repentant of my sometimes Christless preaching, of my moralistic approach to the scriptures, and for me, the Bible was now brand new, my ministry was brand new, and my heart was brand new.

accurate message. However, following one of the services that morning, a young man approached me. This young brother was attending a local Bible college and he was a little sheepish to let me know why he had come up to speak with me. As I asked him what was on his mind, he looked me in the eye and asked "Where was Jesus?" He was referring to my sermon on deacons that had barely given a passing reference to the Lord, except perhaps in the opening and closing prayer. I chatted with him politely, and, as any young pastor would do, discounted him in my mind and thought "Who does this kid think he is?"

About a week later, in God's sovereignty, I was scheduled to come to the Portland

the gospel to all of life and ministry. Following this new awareness, I was repentant of my sometimes Christless preaching, of my moralistic approach to the scriptures, and for me, the Bible was now brand new, my ministry was brand new, and my heart was brand new. I went home the following week and got out three of the sermons I had already written for a series in Nehemiah, and I ripped them up and threw them away. I was different. My view of the scriptures was different and my preaching would, by the grace of God, forever be different.

Now I saw my calling as a preacher of Christ and His gospel, not merely a teacher of the Bible. I began to feel a deep weight in my soul for my life and my ministry, that it might forever be

Kyle Schwahn graduated from Western in 2013 with a Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies. He currently serves as lead preaching pastor of Indian Trail Church in Spokane, WA.



CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING

Q & A WITH DR. ART AZURDIA

WE INTERVIEWED DR. ART AZURDIA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PASTORAL AND CHURCH MINISTRY AND DIRECTOR OF THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM, TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING?

AA: I would define it as faithfulness to the immediate words that are in the passage itself, as well as an understanding of those words as a part of God’s overall story. I think what we always have to do is not ask ourselves “Where is Jesus in this verse?” but “Where does this verse stand in relationship to the Christ event?” Rather than trying to read Jesus into every passage, we ought to instead look for where the little story contributes to the telling of the big story. Where do “Noah and the Ark,” “David and Goliath,” “Rahab and the Spies,” and “Jonah and the Ninevites” fit? How do they contribute to the telling of that one larger story? Christ-centered preaching is more than tacking an invitation on at the end of the sermon; it is preaching that is both evangelical and evangelistic. As Christians, whether we’ve believed for a week or for 20 years, we need to be reminded every single week of how profoundly satisfied God is with us because of what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf. The default position of the human heart is “I’ve got to please God by my morality. God will be happy with me when I am good and unhappy with me when I am bad.” So we have to remind ourselves of the gospel everyday – that God is already fully, and in every way, happy with us because of Jesus Christ. Out of that, I then find a greater compulsion and motivation to obey.

WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL WARRANT FOR THIS FOCUS IN PREACHING?

AA: It’s everywhere, but the most obvious place, and I think the place my attention was drawn to several years ago, was Luke chapter 24. Jesus meets up with His disciples on the day of the resurrection, and explains to them how all of the Old Testament – the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms – were intended to point to Him. When I came to terms with that, I realized I had been taught to think about the Bible in a way that was less than Christian; while I thought about all the bits, pieces, and parts, I didn’t think about how they contributed to the telling of the whole. Once you begin there, you begin to discover over and over that the New Testament Scriptures show that this is how the apostles use the Old Testament. The other place it’s very obvious is in John chapter five. Jesus is very explicit with the Pharisees when He says “Moses wrote of Me.” However, if you look for the name of Jesus in the first five books of the Bible, you’ll never find it. Yet Jesus says “Moses wrote of Me.” This meant I had to start thinking differently about how the Old Testament pointed to Jesus, even though His name wasn’t specifically mentioned.



HOW DID YOU BECOME AWARE OF CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING?

AA: I was taking a class at Westminster Seminary, taught by Ed Clowney, on preaching Christ from the Old Testament. I had to take the class; I probably wouldn't have, given a choice, because I believed that if there was one thing you couldn't do, it was preach Christ from the Old Testament. As I sat through that class, my entire world was turned upside down. It was a combination of finding my heart simultaneously filled with joy, guilt, and sadness. At that point, I had been preaching for about 11 years. I had two masters degrees, was an expositor of the Scriptures, and it dawned on me that I had completely missed the whole point of the first two-thirds of the Bible. So it was an awakening that was both difficult and thrilling.

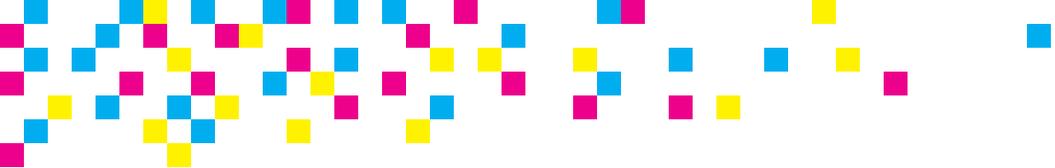
WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST STEPS TOWARDS CHANGING YOUR PREACHING?

AA: The first thing I had to do was repent. I say that a little bit tongue-in-cheek, but there was a measure of repentance in that, prior to taking that class, I had just finished preaching a series on the book of Nehemiah. I don't think I mentioned the name of Jesus once (because His name isn't in the text) except in the concluding prayer—to say “In Jesus' name, amen.” I took that class from Dr. Clowney and my world was rocked; I had to go back to my church and talk to them about this and my own awakening. A couple months later, I preached through the whole book of Nehemiah again, but from a Christocentric standpoint. From there, I began to regularly give myself assignments to preach through certain Old Testament books that would force me to preach them Christocentrically. From a New Testament standpoint, the two books that helped me the most were Hebrews, which is built on Old Testament concepts, and Revelation, where nearly every phrase is taken from an Old Testament context.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CHURCH WHEN THE BIBLE ISN'T PREACHED CHRISTOCENTRICALLY?

AA: If it's a church where the Bible and theology are taken seriously, without the centering effect of a Christocentric emphasis, congregations can get bitter. They can get arrogant. It's something similar to what we see in the church of Ephesus in Revelation chapter two, where you find a church that is filled with doctrinal purity, but there is no love. It's Jesus that keeps our hearts soft and tender, filling us with the love, affection, and motivation we need to live the Christian

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life. You take that away and all that we're left with is a cold list of do's and don'ts. If you manage to keep some of those do's and don'ts properly, then you pat yourself on the back for being such a good person and you're guilty of arrogance. If you have a tender conscience and realize you can't ever fully live up to that list, why would you ever get out of the bed in the morning, because all you are is a miserable failure? It's the gospel that gives us strength and joy; when that piece is taken out, at least in churches that are serious about the Bible, it tends to produce hardness, legalism, moralism, and at times, arrogance. In churches where the Bible is rarely used and the church is very much human-centered, you just get deeper and deeper into more contemporary expressions of legalism. Neither of those scenarios are pleasing and both, I think, end up doing damage to God's people.

WHAT ARE SOME ERRORS TO AVOID IN TRYING TO FIND CHRIST IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE?

AA: The most common and feared mistake is what is referred to as allegorizing: trying to read Jesus into places where He was never intended to be seen. When you think of the story of Rahab, which in a powerful way anticipates Jesus Christ, sometimes in the past people who have had good Christian instincts (namely, that the whole Bible points to Jesus) appeal to that story and say "Rahab hung a scarlet thread out of her window. That cord was red. The blood of Jesus is red. That's an indication of Jesus." That's allegorizing and we have no biblical warrant for that at all. I think that it is a danger to which many fine and good people have fallen prey to and we should be careful to avoid it.

HOW DO YOU KEEP FROM DOING THIS UNINTENTIONALLY?

AA: The big thing, and I had to come to terms with this 15 years ago, is I didn't know the big story well enough. I found that while I was pretty good at being able to get at the nuts and bolts of a passage, where I fell short was in my understanding of the larger, overarching story. While there are personal lessons to be learned in stories such as "Rahab and the Spies," I also have to realize that God is communicating something about His dealings with Israel and His purpose to save the human race. All three of those levels are going on and I was taught only to think in terms of that most basic level: David was good here, be like David. David was bad here, don't be like David. We do have a New Testament warrant for using the Old Testament like that; Paul tells us that very thing in Romans and in 1 Corinthians, so we are to learn from these examples. However, there is much more

going on than just life examples, and that is what I needed to learn. Where does this fit in God's dealings with Israel? Where does this fit into the overarching story of the Bible, which begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation? There is an overarching story from one end to the other and I need to know how what I am studying fits into that bigger story. It's not something that a person comes to understand overnight. Only after reading my Bible this way over time did it become instinct; now I can't think of it in any other way.

WHAT READING WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

AA: For a more introductory level, I wholeheartedly recommend *The Unfolding Mystery* by Edmund Clowney (P & R Publishing, 1989) and *According To Plan* by Graeme Goldsworthy (IVP Academic, 2002). For a more advanced level, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* by Sidney Greidanus (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) is outstanding and the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (IVP Academic, 2000) Editors: T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy, is an excellent resource. 

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FOCUSED

TEACHING THE GOSPEL FOR CONTINUED SPIRITUAL GROWTH

BY DR. JEFF LOUIE

When I went to seminary, the emphasis of the school I attended was on exegetical method and an understanding of the biblical text within the context of a particular passage or a given book. While I give thanks for my training, one area that was lacking was an integration of the gospel with what we learned.

When the gospel was discussed, it was tied in mostly with evangelism and not with other aspects of seminary training. While there may have been a broader understanding of the gospel, my perception of its role was that it just served as the initial gate for salvation. This shortcoming has left me with a great burden to make sure that the theological center of Christ and His work is fully integrated into my instruction methods.

THEMES OF THE GOSPEL

Often times, people speak of the gospel without describing it, leaving it vague. Other times, it is thought of as the concept one needs to believe in to have eternal life. In its fullest sense though, the gospel is anything but vague. And while it includes the important benefit of eternal life, to keep it only focused on the afterlife is too limiting.

From a developmental perspective, the gospel is based upon the foundation of the Old Testament, which emphasizes the historical journey and cyclical failure of Israel in addition to the covenantal hope and promise of deliverance for a failed people. But in the midst of the historical narrative lies a theological separation between God and man. This separation begins with the presence of death and develops into the growing revelation of the coming Day of the Lord, with its impending judgment upon the world.

From a personal response theme, the gospel is clearly by faith alone, through Christ alone, through grace alone. A transformational aspect follows based upon our regeneration, the indwelling Spirit, and our intentional desire to grow as we fellowship with the living God through our union with Christ.

A program perspective is seen in Christ's teaching, a program that often revolves around the understanding of the Kingdom of God. Satan is decisively defeated at the cross and believers in Christ become citizens of a new Kingdom. There is a task (or program) that includes the expansion of the people of God to the nations of the world, in preparation for the return of our Lord.

Though there are many aspects to the gospel, the above themes are set in motion through the catalytic event of the cross and resurrection of the Son of God. This is critical. For at the heart of the gospel is what Jesus did, what He solely accomplished. This accomplishment begins and continues to empower all the above themes.

THE GOSPEL AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

When I first started teaching systematic theology at Western, I asked D.A. Carson how the gospel could be incorporated into this discipline. He did not give a direct answer, but made the observation that we teach too much systematic theology in seminary. The answer surprised me at the time, but I have since come to realize a shortcoming of systematic theology: this important discipline tends to take verses out of their natural biblical context and out of the redemptive narrative. As a result, the connection between the overarching story of the gospel is lost.

Over the years, I have adapted the primacy of the gospel into systematics by drawing the traditional categories of prolegomena, inspiration, theology proper, the Trinity,

sin, man, Christ, soteriology, and sanctification into the redemptive narrative.

In teaching the attributes of God, I always explain them progressively through the biblical narrative of the Old Testament. This is important, as the Old Testament narrative not only reveals God, but also contains unresolved tension in His dealing with mankind. How does an omnipotent, righteous, just, holy, loving, and merciful God deal with the issue of sin that dominates the Old Testament, not only among the nations, but also among His own people? A gospel perspective of the attributes of God not only describes God, but paves the way for the redemptive work of Christ that will resolve the tension.

When discussing the Trinity, time is spent on showing the critical need of the concept of the Trinity in understanding the fuller ramifications of the gospel. Without the deity of Christ, how could an atonement for the fallen world be possible? Without Jesus being the Son of God whom the Father sacrifices, how can love ever be fully understood as the motivation behind the cross? Without the full deity of the Spirit that abides in the believer, how can we appreciate our giftedness, our intimacy with God, and our ongoing transformation within? The Trinity not only defines Christian orthodoxy, but it is important for a healthy understanding of the gospel.

ADDING AN OLD TESTAMENT SEQUENCE

In addition to teaching systematic theology, I also teach the Old Testament sequence. We survey each book, give dates and historical background, cover major problem passages, and give a brief summary – and I make sure that Christ is seen in each Old Testament book.

How does an omnipotent, righteous, just, holy, loving, and merciful God deal with the issue of sin that dominates the Old Testament, not only among the nations, but also among his own people?

In the Pentateuch, canonical themes of creation, sin, the fall, grace, faith, righteousness, holiness, and sacrifices are covered. A covenantal understanding of the Pentateuch is important, as is the historical development of Israel. But by placing an emphasis on the limitation of the heroes (who can neither sustain their own integrity or pass on their passion to the next generation), and the general failing of Israel and the nations (who demonstrate the chronic deficiency in mankind), the major canonical themes that are foundational to the gospel and work of Christ present in the books of Moses are easily surfaced. It quickly becomes clear that a better deliverer was needed; for, if judgment were to come, who would survive?

Through the wisdom literature, the need for Christ is further demonstrated. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are tied together, yielding the conclusion that though wisdom is beneficial in this life, it does not resolve the dilemma of injustice or the afterlife. Job is presented as being an extremely righteous person (an unusual attribute), who is attacked by Satan to crush his faith, though not allowed to be killed. Though many personal lessons can be applied from Job, the reality is that Job foreshadows Christ, the completely righteous man, who will be attacked by Satan to the point of death.

The Prophets show the major prophetic passages fulfilled by Christ. There is also an awareness that many of the experiences of the individual prophets point to Christ: the suffering of Jeremiah, the “Son of Man” title of Ezekiel with his temple focus, and the odd Gentile journey of Jonah. The servant songs in Isaiah and the continual failure and the growing fear of worldwide judgment found in the Day of the Lord are also studied. The major pieces of the plan of God are present in the Old Testament, but there are a few critical pieces missing. If survival of the Day of the Lord involves righteousness, and the history of the Old Testament continually recycles the theme of human failure, who can survive the judgment of God? The stage is set for Christ

to come as deliverer to reign, but before this can happen, Jesus, the Son of the living God, must atone and redeem.

IN THE CLASSROOM

In an elective course I teach, entitled “Preaching Gospel-Centered Transformation,” I make sure that the student knows that the gospel not only saves, but it is the basis of our ongoing spiritual growth. The gospel not only justifies, it sanctifies. To help students begin to practically incorporate a gospel-centered focus, I assign four sermonic outlines. Three of the four sermons must be from the Old Testament. This forces the student to make ties with canonical themes into the New Testament. Since the Old Testament is foundational, needing the coming and work of Christ to complete and fulfill, it would be amiss to preach the Old Testament as if its principles were complete within itself.

By refocusing traditional seminary education so that the centrality of the gospel can be seen throughout the Bible, it is my prayer and conviction that this path will equip students in a sound manner, allowing them to see Christ’s triumph and redemption throughout biblical revelation. 

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