

CHRIST THE STARTING-POINT

1. SPIRITUAL HEARTBURN

LUKE 24:25-32

INTRODUCTION

It may seem strange to begin a series of lectures on “Preaching Christ from the Old Testament” with a lecture based on a New Testament text. However, starting with the New Testament is the most important step of all if we are to rightly preach Christ from the Old Testament. Failure to do so is the reason for so many Christ-less Old Testament sermons today.

Many view Christ simply as the “End-point” of the Old Testament. He is that, as we shall see in the next module. However, He is also the “Starting-point” of the Old Testament, as we shall demonstrate in this module, beginning with this lecture.

Let us join the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and notice three points:

- I. The disciples **ignorance** of the Scriptures
- II. Christ’s **interpretation** of the Scriptures
- III. The disciple’s **insight** into the Scriptures

I. FOOLISH IGNORANCE

You will be familiar with the backdrop to this encounter on the Emmaus road. Christ was crucified on Friday. On the Sunday following, two of his wider circle of disciples decided to leave Jerusalem and travel to Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they talked of “all these things which had happened” (v.14), and “reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them” (v15). However, they were prevented by God from recognising him at that time (v16). Jesus noted their depressed postures and unhappy faces and asked them the cause of their sadness (v17). They proceeded to give an account of Christ’s life and character (v.19), his sufferings and death (v.20), their consequent disappointment with him (v.21), and, due to a lack of bodily sightings, their scepticism regarding reports of a resurrection (v21).

Having patiently listened to their story until this point, Christ then intervened with a rebuke of their foolish ignorance and unbelief: “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Lk.24:25-26). Christ told them that their account of Christ’s life and death exactly matched the predictions of the Old Testament prophets. They had believed **some** of the prophets’ writings – the parts which spoke of Messiah’s glory. But they had not believed **all** that the prophets had spoken – especially the parts which spoke of the Messiah’s sufferings and death. He therefore rebuked them for foolish ignorance.

The word Jesus used of the two on the Emmaus road is *anoetos*. In five of its six N.T. occurrences it is used of believers. Unlike the “fool” of the O.T., whose problem is moral, this word describes an individual who sees things from a distorted perspective. He or she has not adopted the divine viewpoint. Jesus then proceeded to display the divine viewpoint on His own death by going back to the O.T. Scriptures, to demonstrate that the Messiah “had to” suffer such things and only then enter His glory.¹

¹ L Richards, *The Bible reader's companion* (Victor Books, Electronic Edition).

How foolish – to believe only part of what God revealed through the prophets! How ignorant – to be in the dark about the necessity of the Messiah’s sufferings despite all that was made known in the Old Testament! Matthew Henry said:

He does not so much blame them for their slowness to believe the testimony of the women and of the angels, but for that which was the cause thereof, their slowness to believe the prophets; for, if they had given the prophets of the Old Testament their due weight and consideration, they would have been as sure of Christ’s rising from the dead that morning (being the third day after his death) as they were of the rising of the sun.²

They looked for another glorious Exodus redemption, but they ignored the bleeding Passover Lamb which preceded it. They looked for the final and glorious Davidic King, but they ignored the murderous persecution of David which preceded this. They looked for the spoil-dividing conquering king of Isaiah 53:12, but had forgotten the sin-bearing suffering Servant which preceded this.

APPLICATION

How many sermons from the Old Testament would justly receive Christ’s rebuke even to this day! How many preachers and academics are still displaying their foolish ignorance of the prophets’ Christ-centred message.

If we fail, or refuse, to see Christ’s sufferings and glory predicted in the Old Testament then we are “fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” How many times we have been guilty of this, and consequently how many times we have needlessly discouraged ourselves in our own journey through life.

II. FULL INTERPRETATION

Having rebuked their foolish ignorance, Christ then gave the disciples a full interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures in the light of recent events. Notice that! It is absolutely critical. Christ uses New Testament light to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures. In other words, contrary to many of the humanistic theories of modern hermeneutics and homiletics, Christ “reads Himself back into the Old Testament”. He uses New Testament events to preach from the Old Testament. We shall look at this in more detail a little later.

This sermon might be entitled, “The Things Concerning Himself”. It had two main points – Christ’s sufferings and Christ’s glory. Before looking in more detail at these two points notice that there were three stages – “beginning at Moses”, He goes on to “all the prophets”, and then expands into “all the scriptures” (v27).

The Jewish Scriptures consisted of three parts: the Law of Moses (Genesis–Deuteronomy); the Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel–2 Kings, and the prophets [except for Daniel]); and the Writings (all the other books in the OT) Some have remarked on the absence of the “Writings” here. However, Luke simply says that Jesus **began** with Moses and all the prophets. Also, he goes on to say “he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk.24:27). Indeed, just a few verses later (v44), Luke specifically mentions another similar incident where Christ interprets the Old Testament Scriptures with the benefit of New Testament light, and there some of the Writings are specifically included.

² M Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Hendricksen-Peabody, Electronic Edition).

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me (Lk.24:44)

But let us return to the two main points of this sermon where Christ preaches “the things concerning Himself” from the Old Testament – His sufferings and His glory. How we would love to have had this sermon preserved for us in Scripture! Which particular Scriptures did he apply to himself? What types did he expound? We aren’t told. Space is left for faith to be exercised. Some Old Testament scholars tell us that we may only preach Old Testament “types” which are specifically identified as such by the New Testament. This severe, rationalistic, man-made restriction would doubtless also have been applied to this incident if some of the details of Christ’s sermon had been revealed to us. We would have been told by the scholars that we may not preach Christ from Old Testament prophecies unless the New Testament specifically identifies them as such. So, in the wisdom of God, the specifics of Christ’s sermon here are left unrevealed so that God’s people have to exercise faith as they search the Old Testament Scriptures for prophetic references to Christ’s sufferings and glory.

1. Christ’s sufferings

A temporal redemption of the Jews by a conqueror appears to have been the redemption they looked for. A spiritual redemption by a sacrificial death was an idea which their minds could not thoroughly take in.³

We shall be looking at various prophecies of Christ’s sufferings in the course of the following lectures, and so we shall not dwell for long here on specific Old Testament verses which refer to them. However, if there was one supreme characteristic of the Old Testament, it was blood – specifically sacrificial blood. The Covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses were all inaugurated with sacrificial blood. The Covenant with David was inaugurated with warnings of blood-shed for covenant-breakers (2 Sam.7:14). The religious rituals and ceremonies of the Old Testament were saturated in sacrificial blood. The Tabernacle and the Temple were drenched in sacrificial blood. If the Old Testament Scriptures were prophetic – and they were – who could possibly imagine that the embodiment of the fulfilment would be bloodless?

Another major theme of the Old Testament was the pattern of “suffering before triumph” in the major characters of the Old Testament – Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Jonah. Who could see such repeated patterns in the lives of godly Old Testament saints, at least some of whom were set forth as types of the Messiah, and fail to conclude that the Messiah’s life would follow a similar pattern.

How many Psalms – the very warp and woof of Israel’s spiritual life – set forth the cycle of weeping enduring for a night before joy rises in the morning (eg: Psalms 52-60; 22; 69)

No wonder Christ asks, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Lk.24:26).

2. Christ’s glory

Christ did not have to convince the disciples that the Messiah would be glorified. However, they differed from him in their view of what constituted “glory”. Significantly, Christ speaks of entering into “his glory”, thus implying that **his** glory was quite different to their view of glory, and indeed the usual idea of glory. There is no question that the glory of the

³ J C Ryle, *Commentary on Luke, Vol 2* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 500.

Messiah was presented in the Old Testament using the emblems and symbols of earthly glory – crowns, sceptres, robes, thrones, courtiers, servants, praise, military power, etc. However, none of these things were present when Christ walked along the Emmaus road, and yet Christ suggests in verse 26 that he has already entered into “his glory”. So much of Christ’s sermon here must have involved explaining the spiritual realities behind the earthly symbolism in order to show that His kingdom was not “of this world”, that his glory was primarily spiritual, that his throne was “within them”, and that his mightiest weapons were the Word and the Holy Spirit.

APPLICATION

Are you prepared to follow the earthly pattern of suffering in order to advance the glorious kingdom of Christ within you?

III. FAITH’S INSIGHT

Probably never had a journey passed so quickly! When it looked as if their travelling companion was about to part from them on the outskirts of Emmaus, we are not surprised to read that the disciples constrained him to stay with them and continue the *Bible Study*. Having succeeded in persuading him, they sat down to a meal. Then, as Jesus “took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them...their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight” (v30-31). Then turning to one another, they reflect on their recent journey and say, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? Let us look at the three stages of this “spiritual heartburn”.

1. He opened the scriptures

What does Christ find as he opens the door of Genesis, then Exodus, then Leviticus, etc! He finds himself! Matthew Henry said, “Jesus Christ is himself the best expositor of scripture, particularly the scriptures concerning himself.”⁴ If he tells us he is to be found from the very first book of Scripture, then let us find him there. To deny his presence is to call Jesus Christ a liar, and to pretend to be a better exegete of Scripture than the one who inspired it!

⁴ M Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, (Hendricksen-Peabody, Electronic Edition).

DISCUSSION: CHRIST'S VIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

In this Emmaus encounter, we are given one of the most fundamental principles of Old Testament interpretation – BC and AD events find their meaning in Christ.

Let it be a settled principle in our minds, in reading the Bible, that Christ is the central sun of the whole book. So long as we keep Him in view, we shall never greatly err, in our search for spiritual knowledge. Once losing sight of Christ, we shall find the whole Bible dark and full of difficulty. The key of Bible knowledge is Jesus Christ.⁵

While we come to understand the New Testament in the light of what goes before it in the Old Testament, it is God's fullest revelation and final word in Christ that gives meaning to all things. Thus Christ, and therefore the New Testament, interprets the Old Testament.⁶

The New Testament teaches us to examine the Old Testament through Christian eyes, to study it in the light of the Gospel.

We do not start at Genesis 1 and work our way forward until we discover where it is all leading. Rather we first come to Christ, and he directs us to study the Old Testament in the light of the gospel. The gospel will interpret the Old Testament by showing us its goal and meaning. The Old Testament will increase our understanding of the gospel by showing us what Christ fulfills.⁷

From our starting point with Christ we find ourselves moving backward and forward between the two Testaments. Our understanding of the gospel is enhanced by our understanding of its Old Testament roots, and at the same time the gospel shows us the true meaning of the Old Testament. Such an interrelationship between the two Testaments would be difficult to represent in the actual writing of a biblical theology. Nevertheless, we must try to do so by highlighting Christ as both our starting point and the goal to which we move. Christ is the place we start because he shows us what the unfolding message of the Old Testament is really concerned with.⁸

⁵ J C Ryle, *Commentary on Luke, Vol 2* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 501.

⁶ G Goldsworthy, *According to Plan* (Illinois: IVP, 1991), 52.

⁷ *Ibid*, 54-55.

⁸ *Ibid*, 76.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

- Christ is present and is to be looked for in every book of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi.
- Old Testament texts must be interpreted by the definitive event of the Gospel.
- Christ is the starting-point for Old Testament interpretation.

APPLICATION

How much we need Christ to interpret the Scriptures for us by His Spirit. As we approach this series of lectures on "Preaching Christ from the Old Testament" may He be our teacher and guide, exploding false pre-conceptions and expounding His truth to us

2. He opened their eyes

The two disciples were not blind. They saw Christ with their physical eyes. This opening, then, is not a giving of physical sight. Rather it is the giving of spiritual sight. In addition to opening up the Scriptures to them, Christ opened the temporarily shut eyes of their faith.

This opening seems to be associated with the breaking of bread and giving of thanks. Although these two "outer circle" disciples were not in the upper room when the Lord's supper was instituted, perhaps the other "inner circle" disciples had told them of it in the interim and they suddenly realised that they too were sitting at the Lord's table as he broke bread. Perhaps they simply recognised his table manner with which they would have been familiar. Perhaps, most likely, they saw the scars of the nails in his hands as he broke bread. We don't know for sure. All we know is that they now saw their dining companion in a completely new light, and this was the doing of the Lord

APPLICATION

Something more is required than the opening up of the Scriptures. A man can hear or preach sermons all day, every day and yet never "see" Christ by faith. You can explain the Bible all day long but unless people's eyes are opened the exercise is doomed to fail. May God open our eyes as we study these lectures so that we "know him"!

3. He opened their hearts

They didn't see him for long, before he vanished. But, it was long enough to change their whole view of the world and their recent past. As they reflected on the spiritual privileges they had enjoyed over recent hours, they began to recognise that the faith that had finally flourished at the table had its beginning on the road. These strange feelings, that unusual warmth, the spiritual excitement they felt as he opened the Scriptures on the road was faith being fed and nourished and revived from its stupor.

The problem was dullness of heart; the need was for a Christ-centred study of the Old Testament Scriptures.⁹

They don't compare notes now but compare hearts as they review Christ's sermon on the road. Their cold hearts had been warmed. Their dark hearts had been enlightened. Their dull hearts had begun to glow again.

Their plans to settle down for the night were then torn up. They must tell others. Not tomorrow but tonight. They care not about the darkness, the danger, the distance. Forthwith they speed back to Jerusalem, hearts burning, tongues proclaiming, "The Lord is risen indeed and hath appeared to Simon" (Lk.24:34).

APPLICATION

This is the common experience of Christians. We "see" Christ for a moment, before he vanishes out of sight again. We often only seem to catch glimpses.

However, as with the disciples, if we do catch of glimpse of Christ two desires are born in our souls. Firstly, there is the desire for fellowship with other Christians in order to share our spiritual heartburn. Secondly, there is the desire to witness whatever the dangers or difficulties in our way

Here is the antidote to our cold hearts, pulpits and pews. There is nothing more enlightening to the eyes and warming to the heart than Christ-centred preaching of the Old Testament.

⁹ M Barrett, *Beginning at Moses* (Greenville: Ambassador- Emerald, 2001), vii.