

April 27, 2014

Beginning With Moses

Luke 24:13 – 35

This morning we are beginning a new preaching series called *Seeing and Savoring the Gospel in the Old Testament*. For too many people the Old Testament seems like a collection of books that are not really relevant to the proclamation of the gospel. They tend to see the Old Testament as a conglomeration of laws and commandments, rituals, ceremonies, moralistic stories, and historical accounts that seem to be somewhat irrelevant with the coming of the New Testament. Oh, for certain, the Old Testament is a good source from which to pull out life principles, moral teaching, and stories to inspire us to godly living. But by and large people don't see the Old Testament having much to do with the gospel so clearly proclaimed in the New Testament. But the word gospel goes all the way back to the Old English word *godspel*, which meant, the '*Good-story*'. **The gospel is the good-story of God's work to rescue and redeem hostile rebels from their sin and guilt and ruin**, and runs from Genesis right through to Revelation.

What the Bible shows us from start to finish, is a staggering panorama of prose, poetry, and narrative, written over a span of 1,600 years by at least forty different authors that has only one leading character – **God**; only one historical perspective – world **redemption**; only one focal figure – **Jesus Christ**, Son of God. One solid body of harmonious teaching about God and His eternal purpose. We should not make the mistake of thinking the Old and New testaments are somehow unlinked and separate. It is one story – God's story, and the intent of the story is not to talk about us but to talk about God. The Bible reveals who God is and what He is up to in history. It is not there to point out what we must do, but to **reveal what God in Christ has done for us**. So when we talk about seeing and savoring the gospel in the Old Testament, we are saying, 'Let's take a good look at the gospel, the good story – the good story of God and see what He is up to in history.'

We are going to study through the Old Testament for a number of reasons. The first of which is a sense that many people find the Old Testament **difficult** if not downright intimidating to read and understand. Many start out on their Bible reading plan with great enthusiasm in Genesis and Exodus, and then die in Leviticus. Too many tedious details. Another reason is that some use the Old Testament merely as **moral instruction**, telling us to 'Be like Daniel, don't be like Jonah'. And they turn the focus from God to me. Still another reason is to debunk the idea that the Old Testament is a collection of stories we use to **allegorize** or spiritualize our Christian walk. I can't tell you the number of times I've heard the story of David and Goliath reduced to instructions on how to beat the giants in your life with God's help. Isn't there **some** application about giant killing here? Yes, of course. But that was not the intent of the writer or the text.

Let me digress just a little. In the story of David and Goliath, what the Bible is saying to us; what God was saying to Israel is that He is sovereign over everything – over any giant warrior or enemy army. He is the One in whom we must trust to save us; and He uses the weak who trust in Him to shame the strong who trust in themselves. In choosing David, a man after His own heart, as Israel's champion, He prepares the way for our great deliverer and champion, Jesus. Furthermore, He chooses the unlikely over the obvious to triumph. God chose the younger Jacob over Esau, the younger Joseph over his older brothers, the younger Moses over Aaron. And then He chooses the runt of the litter, the little shepherd boy David over the kingly-looking Saul. And, ultimately, He chooses the lowly manger over the royal palace, humility over pomp and circumstance, the foal of an ass over a knight in shining armor, and the cross over the crown.

We must understand the Old Testament in terms of who God is and what He is up to in history, not reduce it to moral platitudes or spiritual self-help programs. We must not reduce the Bible to basic instructions before leaving earth. Furthermore, it is important to realize the **Old Testament** was *the* authority used exclusively by the early church, all the New Testament writers, and by Jesus Himself. The first sermon of the church preached by Peter on Pentecost was taken entirely from the Old Testament. He quotes Joel 2, Psalm 16, 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 110 as his texts and proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ from them. Peter appeals to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when he preaches to the crowd gathered at the temple after the lame man is healed and again goes to the Old Testament for his source. Stephen confounds the Jews with his preaching from the Old Testament in chapter 7 and Paul consistently uses the Old Testament to proclaim the gospel, as do all the writers of the New Testament.

And the reason is obvious – that's all they had. The Bible was the Old Testament – they were busy writing the New Testament at that point – but the Old Testament was the foundation. Which means that the Old Testament really is the **starting point**. We shouldn't think that we should go to the New Testament first to form our understanding of the Bible, and then interpret the Old in light of the New. That's backwards. The New Testament believers tested what the apostles and others taught and preached against what was written in the Old Testament. The Jews had been taught biblically in passages like Deuteronomy 13 and 18 to test new teachings or claims to divine authority by what God had already revealed in his Word – in the Old Testament. So, interpreting the Bible from the New back to the Old will probably produce a message that is also backward.

To not view the Old Testament as the prior, authoritative revelation of God is to reject the Bible's own basis for determining who is and who is not the Messiah. Jesus exposed the failure of His Jewish audiences to recognize their Messiah in their failure to believe what Moses wrote. In John 5:46–47 Jesus declared, "*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?*" **The New Testament Scriptures base their claim to being authoritative on the Old Testament.** That is why Matthew 1 begins with a genealogy of Jesus that stretches from Genesis to the New Testament; that is why the gospel writers are always saying things like 'This took place to fulfill what was spoken through this or that prophet'; and that is why the teachings of Peter and Paul and all the other writers of the New Testament constantly appeal to the Old Testament for their authority.

The primary reason though, for studying through the Old Testament, was that Jesus Himself took this as His **starting point** for explaining who He was. Let's look at the passage we read this morning in Luke. The chapter begins with some women who go to the tomb where they had buried Jesus but they didn't find His body. Instead they meet two guys in dazzling apparel who remind them of what Jesus had said: '*Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.*' *And they remembered His words...*' Luke 24:6-8 And then they run to tell the disciples, and none of them believed the women.

Then Luke tells us this little story about two of Jesus' followers walking to the village of Emmaus, probably heading home from Jerusalem after what was for them a disastrous Passover. They had just witnessed the hope of Israel being tried, convicted, whipped and crucified before their eyes. *But we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel* was their complaint. They thought they had understood who Jesus was and what He came to do – but all that had been destroyed by the events that weekend. He wasn't who they thought He was – He didn't do what they thought He would – they had misunderstood everything. And Luke says, *While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.*

And Jesus uses this encounter as a teachable moment. 'What are you talking about?' He says, obviously knowing full well what they had been talking about – remember He is God. And then it all poured out. How they were pinning their hopes on Jesus – '...but now He's dead and buried for three days'; and how some emotional women were claiming that He was alive – and '...yes the tomb was empty, but you know women...and in any case we haven't seen Him – so that pretty much proves He's dead.' And Jesus says, "*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.* In other words, they should have believed the Old Testament. Which of course was not a distinction they would have made since the New Testament had not been written. But the point He was making was two-fold.

The first thing is that they believed some of what the Old Testament said, but not **all** of it. Notice Jesus says, *slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!* In other words, they believed some parts and not others. They had read the Scriptures concerning the Messiah, they had seen His miracles and heard Him even quote parts of Scripture that concerned His predicted suffering and death, and no doubt they had even acknowledged that Jesus was the promised Messiah. And yet it appears they only concentrated on the good bits of the Old Testament that promised a time of blessing, prosperity and deliverance when the Messiah came, and overlooked or ignored the bits that spoke about a suffering Servant who must lose His life to gain it. They skipped the part about death and burial and even rising again.

That is exactly what we do so much of the time. We like the good bits and we either ignore or misinterpret the stuff that doesn't look so pleasant. We take some of the Bible but not all of the Bible. That is why it is crucial to understand the Old Testament. Without the Old, the New does not make sense. We need to **believe all that the prophets have spoken**. If these guys had believed all that the prophets had spoken they would have known that the one whom God had promised to send to them would save them through suffering because that theme is woven throughout the Old Testament. They would have understood that His crucifixion didn't nullify His Messiahship, but rather confirmed it. They would have known that each part of the Old Testament anticipates Christ's suffering and glory in its own way. From the promise of the Seed of the woman whose heel will be bruised to Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant who would be wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities to Malachi's Messenger who suddenly appears in the temple, the revelation of Jesus the Messiah runs right through the Scriptures these guys should have known.

And so Jesus, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, begins to unveil the central focus of the Bible – Himself. "Moses and all the Prophets" is shorthand for the whole of the Old Testament. Do you see what Jesus was telling them? He is saying, from Genesis to Malachi, all of it ultimately points to Him. Genesis points to Him; Exodus points to Him; Isaiah points to Him – even Leviticus points to Him. Just like the road to Emmaus led these two to Jesus that day, the revelation of the whole Bible leads the reader down a road that ultimately leads to the person and work of Christ. Without the Old Testament foundation of creation, fall, curse, law, sacrifice, temple, priesthood and salvation – the cross, the resurrection and glorification of Jesus Christ would make very little sense. So the other thing Jesus was saying, besides believe all of it, was that all of the **Old Testament was meant to reveal the work and person of Christ**.

*At the Gospel Coalition Conference in 2011, Pastor Tim Keller related a story about the time when he was a seminary student, gathered with some other students in R.C. Sproul's living room talking about the Old Testament. And one of the foremost Old Testament scholars, J. Alec Motyre happened to be there as well. And R.C. invited Motyre to talk about the connection between the Old and New Testament. So Motyre posed this question: What would an Israelite who had come out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea say about that experience? And this was his answer: *I was a stranger in a strange land, a slave to an evil ruler, under the sentence of death, but I took shelter under the blood of the Lamb. And our Mediator, our Savior, led us out and we have crossed over from death to life and now we are on our way to the promised land but we're not there yet. But the One who mediated for us and saved us has given us His law to make us a community and He's given us the tabernacle, because you have to live by grace and forgiveness. And His presence is in our midst and He's going to be with us until we get home.* And Motyre said, 'That's almost exactly what a Christian would say.' The message of the Old and the New is the same.*

We have a pretty good understanding that the New Testament is about Christ, but we often fail to apply that understanding to the rest of the Bible. But **every part of the Bible finds its center in Jesus**. The one big story of the Bible is the story of God progressively revealing His plan to redeem sinners through the gospel, and at the center of the gospel is Jesus. Graeme Goldsworthy, one of the foremost experts on biblical theology wrote: *'Because the New Testament declares the Old Testament to be incomplete without Christ we must understand the Old Testament in light of its goal which is Christ. Jesus is indispensable to a true understanding of the Old Testament as well as the New.'*

We don't know what passages Jesus used to teach these two discouraged believers, but I'm pretty sure He didn't tell them the story of David and encourage them to overcome the giant of depression with the help of God. He didn't start with His birth, or take them back to the feeding of the five thousand or the raising of Lazarus, or the betrayal by Judas. Jesus began by opening up Genesis and Exodus and Psalms and Isaiah and Malachi and showing them, 'This is who I am...this is why I came...this is the curse I bore...I am the blessing that was promised...I am the sacrifice God provided'. He didn't take the Old Testament and use it to point out how these two could live the life of faith – He took them to the center and showed them Himself.

Perhaps He told them again the story of Noah. But I doubt that He ended it with saying that this shows them how they should obey God even when it means going against the popular view. He probably would have told them that Noah, whose name means 'rest' was a picture of how they needed to rest in Christ, trust in Him, just like Noah and his family rested in the ark and were saved from judgment.

Or maybe He told them again the story of Abraham offering up his only son Isaac and linking that to His Father offering up His only Son as the perfect sacrifice for sin on the cross; and not turning it into a moralistic principle about being willing to give up what is most precious to you for God. He must have told them again the story of the Exodus, and instead of telling them that this primarily referred to their exodus from the slavery of sin to the freedom of righteousness, He would have told them how this story pointed to His own exodus as the account in Luke reveals when He was on the mount of transfiguration talking with Moses and Elijah.

The Old Testament is full of types and figures and shadows as the New Testament tells us, but they are types and figures and shadows of Christ. Of course there are moral principles and godly examples and life lessons and faith-building stories for us in the Old Testament. But we don't want to reduce it to observations about the godly and the godless and then try to be more like David and less like Saul. Saul was certainly not a godly example, but on the other hand David was an adulterous murderer.

And none of the characters in the Old Testament are good enough or perfectly pleasing enough to God to imitate. The kings aren't good enough, the prophets aren't clear enough, the judges aren't strong enough, the priests aren't pure enough. What the Old Testament makes clear through all these characters is that our need for a better law keeper, a better priest, a better prophet, a better king is overwhelming and deep. And that is what we see in the Old Testament in Jesus. This is what Jesus was telling Cleopas and his companion – 'I'm the better prophet, I'm the better priest, I'm the better king, I'm the better Savior, and the Scriptures are talking about Me'.

What this says to us is that **we need to ransack the Scriptures to see Jesus**. These guys had read the Scriptures, but they didn't see Jesus. They couldn't see Him even when they were two feet away. You might say that God prevented them from seeing Jesus, and He probably did. They had never made the connection between what they read and who they saw. They probably had read the Scriptures to find out how they should please God, and what they must do for God, but never to see Jesus. And God is not going to reveal His Son apart from the word – He is the Word of God. Jesus didn't wind His way through the Old Testament to point out to these guys what they must do for God, or hold up godly examples for them to follow – He did it to show them what God had done for them in Christ. He revealed Himself in the word.

And what happened? What happened is that their hearts started burning. After their eyes were opened to see Jesus, *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?"* Do you want to read the Old Testament for inspirational encouragement or do you want your heart to burn with the revelation of Jesus? Do you want stories that merely give you role models to imitate or do you want to know the only one worth imitating? Do you want spiritual principles to follow or to follow the one from whom they flow? Are you content with unrelated vignettes of ancient historical characters or would you like to understand the big picture of who Jesus is, what He has done and is doing in the world? Do you want your heart to burn with insight and understanding that this is not just a story outside of us but a story of what God is accomplishing in us through Christ?

This is what I am praying to happen as we go through the Old Testament and see it through gospel eyes. To have our hearts ignited into flame by His word and see the Jesus revealed there. But this is not a given. These guys no doubt knew the Old Testament better than we in many ways. But still they failed to see Jesus. And even as their hearts burned with what He was telling them on that road, and they came near to where they would get off, Luke tells us that Jesus *'...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."* They still didn't recognize Him but they knew that somehow being with Him was better than being by themselves. The word seemed to come alive as He spoke with them in a way it never came alive before. **'Stay with us'** they prayed. And I have a feeling that had they not begged Him to stay He would have gone on and they would have missed Jesus.

But they didn't and He didn't. He stayed with them and then as they ate with Him Luke says: *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.* They had discovered the reality of Jesus which made His physical presence unnecessary. And they were so energized that in spite of the lateness of the hour, they left right away to tell their friends they saw Jesus. They had persuaded Jesus to stay with them in Emmaus because it was too late to travel. Normally, in these times, people didn't travel after dark because the camels and donkeys didn't have headlights and there were no streetlights. But as soon as they recognized Jesus they ran out of town all the way back to Jerusalem – at least seven miles away – in the dark.

I would say their hearts were still burning, **and** they had seen Jesus! And when our hearts are burning with the truth of the gospel and we have seen Jesus, what we don't do is go to our room and go to sleep. We have to tell somebody. Which is exactly what they did. *And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread.* When we see Jesus, we cannot keep silent. And unless we see Jesus in His word, it is all just inspirational stories and moral platitudes and sometimes weird history and strange characters.

If you've never met Jesus and had your heart burning with His word, you need to meet Him today. He is not just some historical figure of an ancient text. He is the God of the Bible and the Savior of mankind. He is the goal of the Bible – the goal of the Old Testament and the New Testament. He is the point of the good-story of God's work to rescue and redeem hostile rebels like us from our sin and guilt and ruin. Whether you know it or not you need this Savior. All of life is a loss unless you too meet Him on the road. Perhaps you do know Him, but you haven't seen Him in the word like this – your heart doesn't burn like this – you need to stop reading the Bible merely as an exercise in godliness and stop mining it for moral principles and inspirational stories and start seeing Jesus in its pages.

So we are going to journey through the good-story of God, the Old Testament. We are going to begin with Moses and move through the Law and the prophets and see what they reveal to us about Jesus. We are going to ransack this word until, as Peter says, *'...the day dawns and the morning star shines in our hearts'* – and we see Jesus. We are going to say, as those two on the road to Emmaus said, **'Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent'**. Stay with us and break the bread of Your word to us so that we see Jesus.

Our gracious Father and God,

Your main plan and the goal of Your will is to make Your Son glorious and beloved in all the earth as it is in heaven where He is now ascended; and where one day we will see Him face to face and love and worship and glorify Him forever. Holy Spirit, let us be convinced of the guilt and pollution of our sin and keenly feel our deep need of the Savior revealed in the Scriptures, and run to the cross where His blood flowed down to cover all our transgressions. Help us to see Jesus in Your word – to receive Him, love Him, bless Him with our lives and with our lips. Set our hearts afire with the flame of Your word and let it compel us to take the good story of God into the world until the whole world is filled with the glory of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea. Cause our hearts to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people we pray in the exalted and glorious name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.