

Dabney Fall 2003

Biblical Theology #4

Reading the Bible Christocentrically

Jesus Christ is the heart of God's plan for creation and history. There is no "hidden plan" lurking behind Christ; rather, in and through Christ God has revealed his intentions towards the world. In Christ, the Father has *made known* the mystery of his will, which is to gather up all things into a gift for his Son (Eph. 1:3-14).

If Christ is at the center of God's plan for the ages, he must be at the center of the Bible. The entire message of Scripture is about Jesus Christ, his person, his sufferings, and his glory.

But Christ can never be separated from his people. To say the Bible is Christocentric is to say it is ecclesiocentric. Augustine's first rule of biblical interpretation is *totus christus*. Christ-centered and church-centered hermeneutics are one and the same. To find Christ in the pages of Scripture is to find his bride.

To understand why a Christocentric reading of Scripture is so important, we need to understand why a Christocentric view of God is important. It is not enough to read the Bible as a book about God; we must learn to read as a book about God-in-Christ, lest we fall into moralizing and doctrinalizing patterns of interpretation.

Jesus Christ reveals the very character and nature of God. To see Jesus is to see what the Father is like. The life of Jesus unfolds for us the very life of God. In the incarnation and the cross, God is not acting out of character; rather this is what he's really like from the inside.

All this means we must not contemplate God apart from Jesus. But it also means we read the Bible as a book about Jesus – or more pointedly, as God's revelation of himself in and through Jesus. A Christocentric theology feeds into a Christocentric hermeneutics.

The testimony of church history bears this out. The best patristics insisted on a Christocentric, typological reading of Scripture. The medieval theologians found the unity of Scripture in Christ. Luther and Calvin restored and carried on this heritage. Other theological giants have done the same.

We must read the Bible Christocentrically because all of Scripture is held together by its testimony to Christ. The Old Covenant Scriptures foreshadow his coming, often in puzzling and paradoxical ways. The New Covenant records his coming and unpacks its meaning. All the types and shadows of the old aeon converge upon him; from him emerges a new creation and a transformed Israel.

Finding Jesus in the OT is not a matter of picking out isolated prooftexts. When Paul says in 1 Cor. 15 that the death and resurrection of Jesus took place according to the Scriptures, he's not pointing to one or two random passages; rather, he's claiming the entire story of the world up to that moment was driving towards these climatic events.

The NT writers essentially retell the story of the world and Israel in light of Christ. Or to be more exact, they draw out what was implicit but hidden in the Old Covenant Scriptures all along, but only came to full light in Christ.

How does Christ fulfill all that went before? Like a prism breaking light up into a beautiful spectrum of colors, the Old Testament presents Christ to us in a wide range of shapes, hues, and tones. Consider a sampling:

- He is the Word through whom the Father spoke the world into existence
- He is the light shined into the darkness
- He is the one who came walking in the breeze of the day to meet Adam and Eve in Eden. He sacrificed that first animal and clothed them with skins.
- He is the victorious seed promised to Adam and Eve at the gates of the Garden
- He is the New Adam, who now rules over creation and promises to fill it with his images. As the new Adam, he subdues his enemies and protects his bride, the church, from the attacks of the serpent.
- He is the Greater Noah who takes his family onboard the ark of his church in order to save them from the flood of God's wrath
- He is true Tower of Babel, bridging heaven and earth
- He is the Greater Melchizedek, an eternal priest of God Most High, who feeds his people bread and wine and receives their tithes
- He is the promised seed of Abraham, born of the "barren" womb of the virgin by the Spirit's power. Like Isaac, he is sacrificed by his father, and received back from the dead.
- He is the Greater Jacob who claims his birthright and limps to victory
- He is Jacob's ladder, extending into the heavens, on which we ascend into God's sanctuary

- He is the Greater Joseph, who has been humiliated and left for dead by his own brothers, but is then vindicated and exalted. As world ruler, he saves the nations by offering bread and wine from his own table.
- He is the prophet greater than Moses, who leads the exiled people in a greater exodus into a greater promised land
- He is the New Joshua, who leads his people in a new conquest of the earth with the sword of the Spirit
- He is the Temple incarnate, the presence of God dwelling with men
- He is the final sacrifice, who takes away the sin of the world
- He is the Passover Lamb who keeps away the Angel of Death and offers his own flesh as food to his people
- He is the final Judge, a craftier Ehad, a stronger Samson, a greater Gideon
- He is Great David's Greater Son, who defeats giants, remains the secret messiah, and finally takes possession of the kingdom
- He is the one wiser than Solomon, who builds the Lord's true house and delights the bride with his love
- He is the Suffering Servant promised by Isaiah, the one who inaugurates the New Covenant foretold by Jeremiah, and pours out his Spirit as prophesied by Ezekiel
- Like Jeremiah, he is a weeping prophet, who announces judgment on Israel and the temple
- Like Ezekiel, he is the Son of Man, who executes judgment on the temple
- He is the stone cut without hands, seen by Daniel, whose kingdom grows to fill the earth
- He is the Greater Ezra, building a better temple, and the Greater Nehemiah, building a city with heavenly foundations
- He is the one who gives Sabbath rest, he is the Tree of Life, the Rock in the wilderness gushing with living water, the cornerstone on which unbelievers stumble and on which the house of God is erected, etc.

And on and on we could go. All God's promises are yes and Amen in him. Everything written in Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets is fulfilled in him. He is all in all.

Note that reading Christocentrically does not allegorize or de-historicize the text. Rather, as the biblical narrative unfolds, God is gradually maturing his people and preparing them for the coming of his Son. By building certain patterns (or types) and symbols into creation and providence, he paved the way for the revelation of Christ. God's prior work in history serves as the matrix for understanding his work in Christ's career.