

Well, I'd like to spend this time together exploring why we don't preach Christ from every text?

Why don't we preach Christ from every text? And if you're not a preacher, somewhat along the lines with Dr. Plummer's note about next year's topic for your conference, I think you can make ready application to teaching, discipling, counseling, etc. Although I'll be focused primarily on preaching. While the gospel-centered resurgence over the last 25 years or so has given us, I think, a valuable recovery of biblical theology in our preaching, we still often lack a biblical imagination for how to translate our exegetical process into a Christological proclamation. The preaching of Christ in evangelical sermons is usually appropriately valued, but a kind of homiletical dexterity in preaching Christ from the text seems often hard to come by.

In other words, most preachers I know want to preach Jesus, but many of them still struggle with how to preach Jesus in a way that doesn't feel like an added on mini sermon at the end of their sermon. Consequently, the treatment of the Gospel in our sermons may begin to feel perfunctory or boilerplate, and so many just tire of making the effort. So what I'd like to do in this talk is explore three primary reasons preachers don't preach Christ from every text. And then we'll transition under the third point to some hermeneutical tools for expanding our approach to gospel-centered preaching. So why don't we preach Christ from every text?

It is sometimes firstly, because of a lack of vision. Because of a lack of vision.

Some don't preach Christ from every text because they lack the conviction to do so. Perhaps there are some of you who share that view in this room this morning. Whether by ignorance of the view, and I don't mean that in a pejorative sense, they just have not they're not familiar with it, they've never heard of it, or they have and they've rejected it by hermeneutical position. Their hermeneutics are simply different, but by conviction, they just don't think it is necessary to preach Christ from every text.

The reasoning goes something like this. If we are to preach the text as it lies, we shouldn't insert a Christological interpretation where none appears present. Now, I can't, in the span of our time together do a complete justice to the case for a Christological reading and preaching of all of Scripture, much less can I do it in the span of the 10 minutes or so I've devoted to this point. But if this is where you are, you don't just see the necessity of preaching Christ from every text, especially texts in the Old Testament or perhaps even in the New Testament where Christ is not explicitly mentioned, let me see if I can provide a brief rationale that might inspire you at least to investigate the proposition further.

Sort of building on that first point in the what of our first session. The whole Bible is about Jesus. So first of all we should mention again that Jesus understanding of the Scriptures ought to be our understanding of the Scriptures. What Jesus understood the Scriptures to be or understands the Scriptures to be, that should be our understanding of the Scriptures. And at every point, Jesus is preaching from the Old Covenant Scriptures.

He is orienting everything around himself. We do not find moral lessons from the Old Testament in the preaching of Jesus. We find himself as the center of those Scriptures. This is how the early Church Fathers preached the Scriptures. We can of course, quibble about some of their application in their Christological reading, hyper-allegorizing, and so on and so forth.

Charles Spurgeon has some good material on this in his *Lectures to My Students* in the chapters on spiritualizing the text. But the working understanding of the Church Fathers, I think, is instructive, whether you adopt all of their moves or all of their interpretations. If you read, for instance, Irenaeus *On the Apostolic Preaching*, which is essentially the earliest extrabiblical work on the subject of preaching, he lays out the breadth of the apostolic message. And you can see that it is basically a display from Genesis to Revelation of the preaching of Jesus. He goes through the whole Bible and points at covenantal highlights, "that's about Jesus, that's about Jesus, etc." As Paul writes in 2nd Corinthians 1:20, "all of God's promises find their yes and amen in him." We also have, I think, the New Testament model. Sometimes people will say, you know, why does. Or ask, you know, why does the preaching of Paul and the apostles differ so much from the preaching of Jesus?

And the answer is, I think why also, Jesus isn't the best model for us in terms of preaching. We can learn things from Jesus preaching. I don't think he is the best model for us because Jesus preaching is self-revelation. Jesus is doing self-disclosure.

He is himself the message. You and I don't preach like that. And that's why, you know, Paul and the apostles sound different because Jesus is essentially preaching me, me, me. And Paul is preaching him, him, him. And so the apostolic model is our model for preaching, that we would preach Christ.

We see, I think, in the apostolic model in the New Testament, two irreducible ingredients. I think we have some flexibility in terms of your style, your structure, homiletical outlines, all those sorts of things, where you put illustrations, the. The form of the thing. You know, we can probably all, if we all sat down preachers, we could, you know, try to make a case for the way we do it. But there's really two irreducible ingredients in the New Testament preaching, and that is a biblical text and Christ from it.

Those are the two ingredients we see in the apostolic preaching. We see this from Peter at Pentecost and perhaps the first Christian sermon. We certainly see it from Stephen at his martyrdom, and we see it other places besides in the Book of Acts. Now, the New Testament concept of preaching is inextricable, we should say, from preaching the gospel. In fact, that's what preaching is in the apostolic vocabulary.

Preaching is a preaching of the gospel. I had a pastor friend who once said to me that we should not call what we do on Sunday mornings in the Lord's Day gathering preaching because preaching by biblical definition is necessarily evangelistic. Preaching is preaching of the gospel. And I agreed with his premise that that preaching is necessarily evangelistic. But I disagreed with his conclusion that therefore we shouldn't call what we do in the Lord's Day gathering preaching, if only because Christians need the gospel.

What we're doing on Sunday morning is a kind of re evangelization of the people of God. Not that they got, you know, lost during the week, but that they need again, a reminder, a reframing, a reorienting, a reforming around the good news of Jesus Christ. If the gospel is not just for lost, but for the found, we need to preach the gospel to each other. What we do on Sunday mornings is that re-gospeling of each other, a re-gospeling of the people of God. And if we do not preach Christ in every sermon, we have good reason to ask ourselves if we are actually preaching Christian sermons.

If there's no Christ in our Old Testament sermons, we should ask what could prevent that sermon from being received in a Jewish synagogue or a Mormon tabernacle or a Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall? You may think because you're a Christian preaching to Christians in a Christian church building that your sermon is Christian. But if Christ is not in it, in what sense is it a Christian sermon?

What makes Christian preaching Christian is the preaching of Christ. One of the tenets of the gospel-centered paradigm, of course, is that people cannot be sanctified. They cannot be changed apart from the preaching of the gospel. So to the extent that we want to see worship of Jesus, that's the extent to which we should preach Jesus as the point of our sermons. If Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians 3 that it's by beholding the glory of Jesus that we are changed, it stands to reason that the degree to which you want to see change in your church would be directly connected to the degree to which you expose them to the glory of Christ.

You want minimal change? Show them minimal glory. You want maximal change? Give them maximum glory. You're probably familiar with the Old Testament I'm sorry, the old illustration from Charles Spurgeon in which he tells this story. He says a young man had been preaching in the presence of a venerable divine, and after he had done, he went to the old minister and said, what did you think of my sermon? It was a very poor sermon indeed, said he. A poor sermon?

Said the young man. It took me a long time to study it. Ay, no doubt of that. Did you not think my explanation of the text a very good one? Oh, yes, said the old preacher, very good indeed.

Well, then, why do you say it is a poor sermon? Didn't you think the metaphors were appropriate and the arguments conclusive? Yes, they were very good as far as that goes. But still it was a very poor sermon. Will you tell me why you think it was a poor sermon?

Because, said he, there was no Christ in it. Well, said the young man, Christ was not in the text. We are not to be preaching Christ always. We must preach what is in the text. So the old man said, don't you know, young man, that from every town and every little village and every little hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London?

Yes, said the young man. Ah, said the old divine. And so from every text in Scripture, there is a road to the metropolis of the Scriptures. That is Christ. And my dear brother, your business and when you get to a text is to say, now what is the road to Christ?

And then preach a sermon running along the road towards the great metropolis Christ. And said he, I've never yet found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one that has not a road to Christ in it, I will make one.

I will go over hedge and ditch. But I would get at my master, for this sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savor of Christ in it.

In his *Lectures to My Students*, Spurgeon discusses that spiritualization of the text in preaching. He covers some inappropriate ways to spiritualize a text. But he also covers some biblical ways to spiritualize the text. And this is because Spurgeon is affirming what I think we all ought to affirm, which is that our preaching cannot do what we actually want it to do without the preaching of the gospel of Jesus. I think every text has a road.

Now, you might have heard Spurgeon is misquoted sometimes on this point as saying that we make a beeline from the text to Scripture. First of all, he didn't say that. Secondly, I don't even think it's a good summary of what he is endorsing. A beeline would imply that you're kind of jumping over something. You're kind of making a direct route.

And in some ways, in application, it could be you're jumping over the text to get to some kind of Christological reading. What he's describing is finding the road. So the grammatical historical method is going to get you along that road. It's just not going to get you all the way. So we want to go along the road, but we want to find, find at the end of the road the metropolis of the Scriptures.

Who is Christ? I think every text has one. Spurgeon says it, you know, if you find a text that doesn't have a road that you make one, I, you know, with my students will say to them, you know, if the given time you have allotted to study the text, maybe you've got a week, maybe more. But most, you know, practicing preachers have a week to kind of look at that text and sometimes only a few hours in that week, depending on the rest of their duties. If you just cannot find that road, I would prefer that you make one too.

I would rather walk out on Sunday morning going, I have no idea how he got there, but I'm glad he did. I'm glad he got there. I would rather you awkwardly preach Jesus than not to preach him at all. I don't care how stylish, smooth, poetic, eloquent it is. If you don't preach Jesus, I can't be changed.

Now, maybe you don't find that short rationale convincing. There are a lot of books and resources, lectures and otherwise, that sort of speak to the need for biblical theology. But I do think the tide is turning. As I mentioned in the first session, I think the recovery of biblical theology, the shift in, in preaching practice and just the abundance of gospel-centered resources available has resulted in many more evangelical churches where there's definitely a vision for preaching Christ from every text. So why do some even with the vision for it, still find it so difficult.

It may be because, secondly, a lack of vibrancy. A lack of vibrancy.

The number one question that I receive, as I've done, you know, preaching training for a number of years, I hosted a cohort for preachers online. And the number one question that I would get arising from that cohort is how do I do this without it sounding one note like it just feels like I'm doing a formula every week? Or it's the same kind of thing. I'm saying the same thing. And my response is not usually to begin with, you know, kind of hermeneutical method, which we'll, we'll get to in a moment.

What I really want to ask is a spiritual question. Is Jesus? One note to you.

If, if you are not personally bowled over by the good news of the glory of Jesus Christ, you will always struggle to see how the Gospel enlivens or enhances or empowers your preaching. Your grasp of it or its grasp of you will be directly reflected in your delivery of those sermons. So sometimes it's not that we lack the know how, it's that we lack personal communion with Jesus. Now, I don't mean that non-gospel-centered preachers aren't Christians. I just suspect that many who lack the aroma of Christ in their preaching actually lack the aroma of Christ in their spiritual lives.

They have probably gotten so accustomed to the routine of ministry that the Scriptures and the Christ within them have become more a matter of feeding others rather than feeding of self. And the Bible has become something that we deal out rather than first, something that is dwelling in.

This is directly connected to the spiritual dryness, departure, danger in. In the book *Lest We Drift*. At the very first Gospel Coalition conference in 2007, Tim Keller gave a seminal talk, what is gospel-centered Ministry? A message that I go back to probably every year and revisit. It contains that now classic Jesus is the true and better application.

I think it predates that talk. That's the first time I ever heard Jesus is the true and better Moses, et cetera. And at the end of that homiletical run, Keller said something that. I mean, it struck me the first time I heard it, even though I had no idea what he was talking about. Later, reading his preaching book, he dives more deeply into this concept.

But at the end of that little run in his message, he says, that's not typology, that's an instinct. And I remember thinking, well, no, it's typology. What you just did. What do you mean? I mean, who am I to disagree with Dr. Keller?

But no, you're doing typology. What does he mean by that's not typology, that's an instinct. I think what he meant was that Christ centered preachers almost cannot help but preach Christ.

They would have to make themselves avoid preaching the gospel. If anything, that temptation is to make the beeline to jump over the immediate exposition of the text to, you know, as Spurgeon famously said, make the road. In other words, if we are regularly communing with Christ, reading the Scriptures in a devotional sense, in a daily and disciplined way, the instinct is there to preach Christ. If you're abiding in Jesus, if he is your reason for getting out of bed in the morning, or at least the reason you find after you get out of bed in the morning to go on with the day, if he is your hope, if he is your joy, if you love Jesus, how could you not preach Jesus?

Why would you go to the sermon and think, well, if I get to it, if I can see the way, if I find out there's time? No, you would want people to share in the joy of the Jesus that you know, the friend of sinners. It is a spiritual impulse that supernaturally finds its way into our sermon preparation. How could a gospel-centered preacher not preach a gospel-centered sermon? It's just a theory, but perhaps the reason so many preachers who read all of the gospel books and gospel blog posts and listen to all the gospel podcasts and follow all the gospel Twitter accounts, they still struggle to preach gospel sermons.

And it's because they are not in regular communion with the Christ who is the center. Gospel centrality is a paradigm, but they haven't taken it personally. I think this is the answer for why so many have moved on from the gospel-centered movement, so to speak. It's not the only reason, but I think one of the reasons is it was just the latest thing. It was a ministry philosophy, it had resources behind it.

There were conferences, there was a tribe. There's a good number of men of my generation and women too. But we grew up in kind of the attractational seeker sensitive thing. And this was a way out. But we weren't really one to the substance of it.

We just were one to a new tribe and a new movement. And that's just a preface to then whatever the next new tribe and new movement will be. And our sermons then would not carry a savor of Christ because our devotional life does not carry a savor of Christ. We are animated by things other than the glory of Jesus. If we're not regularly communing with Jesus Christ, investing in our friendship with Jesus Christ, nurturing our intimacy with him personally and spiritually, we will stifle the spiritual instinct to preach Jesus Christ.

Christopher Ash's little book, *the Priority of Preaching*. He tells the story of W.E. Sangster, who was interviewing a candidate for the ministry, and that nervous young man explained he was quite shy, not the sort of person ever to set the River Thames on fire. My dear young brother, responded Sangster, I'm not interested to know if you could set the Thames on fire. What I want to know is this.

If I picked you up by the scruff of your neck and threw you into the Thames, would it sizzle?

So never mind your eloquence. Are you yourself on fire? We are often more worried about bringing the heat than we are about being spiritually hot. But if we have the vision and we have a vibrant Christian communion, why then do we still struggle with preaching Christ from every text? It could be thirdly and finally because of a lack of versatility.

A lack of versatility. How do we do it without sounding one note? It could be that we lack versatility in our approach to Christ centered preaching. We want to find the road from every text to Jesus, but we don't often see how not every road looks the same. So I'd like to finish by giving you some options, some questions to ask of the text, some methods that we might use to find that road naturally from the text to Jesus. We should start by asking what I call Christward questions of the text.

For instance, we could ask what allusions to this text are found in the New Testament? Here in the Old Testament, what does the New Testament directly say? Use those cross references. Use your commentaries. Where do you see a reference to that text?

There's your cheat code. Whatever the Holy Spirit inspired that text means this. That's what it means.

Further, you may ask a question. What does this promise? What does this text promise that Jesus ultimately fulfills? What is this promise that Jesus ultimately fulfills? You might ask, what problem does this pose that Jesus ultimately solves?

What problem does this pose that Jesus ultimately solves? What question does this ask that Jesus ultimately answers?

You might want to make image connections, language connections to the Gospels. What connections are here to moments from the four Gospels? Where do we see a reflected moment in the ministry of Jesus?

Here are some sort of basic nuts and bolts, gospel-centered reading. Where are the imperatives law in the text and where are the indicatives gospel in the text, distinguishing law and gospel?

Now, those are some questions here. I want to give you some interpretive tools that we might use, and these I'm going to. I'm borrowing from Sidney Greidanis mainly and Graham Goldsworthy also. So some hermeneutical sort of moves to preach Christ from the text, particularly the Old Testament text number one, by way of redemptive historical progression. By way of redemptive historical progression.

So this is thinking eschatologically, right? So if you, even if you're not in an explicitly prophetic passage,

but you're seeing how the text that you're looking at fits into the metanarrative of Scripture, and even the prophetic texts, which very often have a near fulfillment, also have far fulfillment. There's, I think George Eldon Ladd talks about the telescoping effect of Old Testament prophecy. So how does this road eventually culminate in Jesus?

There may be a near fulfillment of that prophecy, but how is Christ the ultimate fulfillment, the climactic fulfillment of this prophecy? Or how does this narrative fit into the metanarrative of the Scriptures? In his preaching Christ from the Old Testament, Greidanus says "The way of redemptive historical progression sees every Old Testament text and its address, sees, in other words, the people that it's being written for and to in the context of God's dynamic history, which progresses steadily and reaches its climax in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and ultimately in the new creation. The whole Old Testament," he says, "throbs with a strong eschatological feel where every passage in some way or in some degree voices or echoes that message."

Secondly, by way of promise fulfillment. By way of promise fulfillment. This is from Edmund Clowney. He says "When the Old Testament is interpreted and the life of its own structure as promised, and when that promise is seen as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, then the significance of the Old Testament can be preached in theological depth and in practical power." Clowney says "preaching that does not center on Christ will always miss the dimension of depth of the Old Testament revelation."

Thirdly, by way of typology. By way of typology. And you might use Keller's language of the true and better here, right, to preach that Daniel was brave, so we should be brave. That is indeed a biblical message.

But it fails at the point of substantially Christian preaching precisely because it does not point us climactically to Jesus as the fulfillment of Daniel's courage. In typological readings, we are asking the question, in what way does Christ fulfill the promise, perfect the virtue, or redeem the deficiency that we see in this biblical figure? Greidanus says that "a true type possesses historicity, theocentricity, significant analogy, and escalation." That would be the better. Jesus is the true and better version of this figure.

You know, quite famously, a number of years ago, probably the most famous sort of preaching excerpt to kind of make its rounds around kind of the young, restless reformed Gospel center thing on this note was Matt Chandler's "you're not David," open to a lot of derision these days. And I think Chandler's point is correct in pointing us to Christ right in the story. One popular way to read the story, or the most popular, perhaps historically, at least, in the churches I grew up in, is that David has to face the giant Goliath in the Valley of Elah. And if you can have courage, despite your small stature, to fight, you know, the giants in your life kind of thing. And that's a valid, that's is a valid application because of Christ, because of the Holy Spirit, right? He's not giving us a spirit of fear. You can face the giants in your life. But I think the core point still holds true, right?

We want to follow the road. When you get to the end of the road, the story is not really about, you know, you finding the courage to defeat the giant. It's you shaking in your boots like the Israelites. You can't defeat that giant. And here comes. I mean, it couldn't be any more clear. A shepherd from Bethlehem who defeats the giant on your behalf, and his victory becomes your victory. That's the way to kind of get down the road.

Fourthly, by way of analogy. By way of analogy. Now, analogy is like typology, but it speaks more to objects rather than to figures or to types. So think Jesus as the true and better tabernacle, Jesus as the temple, the very presence of God, Jesus as Israel. In that Jesus is the true and better run from Keller, he says Jesus is the true and better Moses. But then he also says Jesus is the true and better rock of Moses, who, when struck with the rod of God's justice, pours out living water for us. The image that conjures up for me is Christ on the cross with the spear into his side, making a connection to the rock of Moses being struck.

The clearest of this is, of course, the explicit New Testament references to Christ as our lamb, our Passover lamb, as our atoning sacrifice. But there are other analogical connections we can make as

well. This is where we have to be careful, I think, with that kind of fanciful allegorizing. Spurgeon, again, he mentions that thinking every time we see the color red, we don't immediately have to think of the blood of Christ. Right. Every time you see wood, it's got to be about the cross. Right. But the New Testament is a trustworthy guide in kind of appropriate analogical reading.

Fifthly, by way of longitudinal themes. By way of longitudinal themes. And this is similar to the redemptive historical sort of progression approach, but it's just tracing themes across the span of the Scriptures. Greidanus says "It's especially the discipline of biblical theology that helps us trace longitudinal themes from the Old Testament to the new. Major Old Testament themes which function," he says, "as highways leading to the person, work and teaching of Christ or the kingdom of God, the providence of God, covenant, the presence of God, the love of God, the grace of God, justice, redemption, law, sin and guilt, offering God's concern for the poor, mediator, the day of the Lord, and so on. These are all themes that trace their way across the entirety of the Scriptures."

And then sixthly, by way of contrast, by way of contrast, what I like to call mirror image. Brian Chappell talks about the fallen condition focus in his book *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Basically looking at the text, especially the bleakest and darkest of texts, and thinking, how is Jesus redeeming contrast to this? Probably the hardest texts to preach Jesus from are the ones that don't seem to have any shred of good news in them. How do I preach Christ from a text from Judges? The mutilation of the concubine or something like that?

Well, you ask the question, how is Jesus the opposite of what we see here? If in the mutilation of the concubine you find this woman sold out by cowards and torn apart the 12 tribes of Israel. We have in Christ a groom who stands in front of his bride, whore that she may be, and surrenders himself to mutilation on her behalf.

What about in the New Testament Letter of Jude? Where is the Gospel in. In the. In the middle of Jude's epistle? Right, because it's there in the beginning. Is there in doxology, the end. Let's say you're in the middle. Those are those hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear. Shepherds feeding themselves, waterless clouds swept along by winds, fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead uprooted, wild waves of the sea casting up the foam of their own shame. Wandering stars for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. Forever, what depths of emptiness are there? Jude is piling on the metaphors. He's not too afraid even to mix those metaphors in order to make it abundantly clear that false teaching smuggles death into a church. And yet even that bleak picture still reveals the reality of the good news of God's glory in Christ's atoning work. Jude shows us the darkest of shadows, but even the shadow tells us something about the light. So in our turning our backs to God's radiance, we put our noses to the ground and we're chasing like sniffing dogs after sense and wisps of promise that don't deliver. If in repentance we would turn our mirrors back to the source of the great light, what would we see in stark contrast to the darkness at each of its points? In Jude stands Christ, the radiance of God's glory in the brightness of his eternal excellence.

Instead of a dangerously hidden reef, we see the visible rock of refuge, the rock higher than ourselves, the stone carved from the mountain that smashes kingdoms, the strong tower and safe refuge, the rock upon which, if we're shipwrecked, it's for our good and security. Instead of self-centered shepherds, we see the good shepherd who cares for the sheep at all times, who feeds the sheep of his own flesh. We see the glory of God not in some thin vaporous mist, the clouds, waterless clouds. But we see the glory of God in the pillar of cloud leading the sons of God through the wilderness, the cloud that is full and brimming with living water. We see the commander of the winds, the sender of the winds, the stopper of the winds.

And instead of fruitless trees, we see the true vine in whom there is life abundant, who was once dead, who is now raised up in glory and vindication. And instead of being swept along by the wild waves of the sea, we see him who walks upon the water, calms the storms. Instead of wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever, we see the bright and morning star, the blazing sun of righteousness, for whom the brightness of brightest glory has been reserved forever. How great is the light that casts the shadow. I hope this will give you some good starting points in developing, maybe some more versatility in your Christ-centered preaching.

And once you begin employing these different approaches over time, you'll notice how it becomes more and more instinctual. It's not typology, it's an instinct. Your vision is for Christ. It becomes more natural, although of course it is supernatural. And of course, if you struggle, ask the Lord for help. The Holy Spirit to illuminate these words that the Holy Spirit has inspired, Breathed out. Say to the Lord, sir, we wish to see Jesus.

And he'll grant you that request. Let me pray for you now.

Father, we do need your help, and in all things. To keep from preaching ourselves, to keep from preaching pragmatism in place of the glory of your son. Bring us back to the freshness of our first love. Woo us again with your compassion. With your kindness. Father, get our attention. Sometimes it is a severe mercy to be disciplined in such a way that we are reminded of the goodness of your good news. May what happens here today be stewarded to the glory of your son and not to any one of us. We pray all these things in his name. Amen.