

SECTION 4: PUTTING IT TOGETHER FOR THE CHURCH

Lesson 12: Preaching (59)

Introduction: What does Biblical Theology have to do with the Church?

We've spent the last eleven lessons looking at how we construct a biblical theology – the whole story of the whole Bible – and then how we draw lessons, theology that is biblical, from that story. This week and next we want to talk about how Biblical theology is put to work in the local church. Next week we're going to consider everything from counseling to world missions and a number of stops in between. But this week we want to think about *the main use for Biblical Theology in the church, and that's preaching and teaching the Bible*. In just a minute we're going to work through several case studies, but let me start by asking you to pick one of the four texts that are listed on pages 60-63 of your workbook (Levitical food & cleanliness laws; Joshua's conquest of Canaan; Psalms 1 & 2, and Mark 1:14-15). Now take one minute, and write down what you think the main point of that text is, and how you would teach it or preach it in light of the entire canon of Scripture, that is to say, how would you approach this text in a way that's sensitive to biblical theology as we've been talking about it? What would you emphasize? What would you avoid? How would you demonstrate the truth of the main point and apply it to us today?

A Quick Review of where we've been

For the last five lessons, we've been telling the whole story of the whole Bible, each time picking up a different theme and telling the story from that angle. *We've looked at Creation, Fall, Love, Sacrifice and Promise*. These aren't the only themes we could have used. For example, we could have told the story of the Bible through the theme of the Son/ Seed, or we could have told the story through the theme of the Temple or the Priesthood, or the King. There are lots of themes, lots of threads that are woven through the entire tapestry of Scripture that allow you to tell the whole story. *The five themes we covered were chosen specifically because taken together, they allowed us to consider the story of salvation from a number of different perspectives*.

Having told the story, and noted the structure and patterns in the story, you remember that each week we also tried to apply the story to our lives. Using systematic theology we asked the question, what does this story teach me about God, about myself, about the church. How does it apply to life right now. So in each of the last five lessons there have been two steps. First, biblical theology – getting the whole story right. Second, systematic theology – applying the story to our lives.

How do we get there (Biblical Theology) from here (Biblical text)?

In fact, as we noted back in our second lesson, faithful Biblical theology begins, not with a theme, not with a grand story-line, but with a text. Which is exactly where you start in your own personal Bible study, and it's where every faithful preacher and teacher starts each time they prepare a sermon or a Bible study. You start with a text, and you ask yourself, what's the point of this text?

But now we see that the question, what's the point, is a bigger question than it at first appears. Using the tools of exegesis, we come to understand what the point of the text is in its immediate context. But then, using the tools of Biblical theology, we ask ourselves, what's the point of the text at this stage of redemptive history, this epoch of God's saving work? And what's the point of the text in light of the whole canon of scripture; that is to say in light of Christ's work on the cross and his promised return?

Now it's precisely at this point that biblical theological themes become apparent, as we ask how the specific event or teaching relates to the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ, his saving work, and his promised Kingdom. *Once we identify the key themes or threads that are running through our particular text, and once we're clear where in redemptive history our text falls, then we're in a position to trace the theme through, and so teach or preach on our text, not as if it's a pearl on string, unrelated to the rest of Scripture, but as it really is, one section of an entire tapestry that is inextricably and organically connected to the whole.*

Finally, having placed and explained our text in its redemptive-historical context, we then ask the question, "what's the point of the text for Christians and the church today?" And we answer that question using the tools of systematic theology. That's how we get from Biblical text, to Biblical storyline, to Biblical Christian living. What I want to do with the remainder of our time is to walk us through that process with the four different texts we started with at the top.

FOUR CASE STUDIES

Levitical Food & Cleanliness Laws (60)

- First, what's **the point** of these laws? That God's people are called to be holy and set apart. There's no such thing as "belonging before believing," as some churches teach today.
- In the redemption history or **Bible storyline** box, it's important to look backward to Exodus 19 where God promised to make these people a "holy nation," a set-apart nation. Of course, these laws don't directly apply to the church today because God's holiness code has become internal, not external: "it's not what goes into a man that makes him unclean, but what comes out of him."
- What does this mean for non-Christians and the reigning **worldviews** of the day? God cares about every aspect of their lives: who they sleep with, how they treat their spouse and children, the ambitions of their hearts, what they do with their money. We are not as autonomous as we think we are. Also, his holiness leads to judgment of all that's not holy.
- What does this mean for us **societally**? God was doing something unique in the political nation of Israel, and we are *not* the New Israel. But surely God still cares about how the people of every nation live.
- What do we learn about **Christ**? Christ fulfilled these laws. He was perfectly holy. Wonderfully, in fulfilling the law, Christ has set aside the particularities of Sinai and offered us a new covenant.
- What can we say for the individual **Christian**? Christ has made us clean! Yet like the nation of Israel, the New Testament calls us to live distinct and holy lives that commend the character of God to unbelievers. And every area of our lives counts—whether eating or drinking we should give glory to God.
- What should be said for the **church** as a whole? The church is precisely what God means to use to grow us toward holiness. We encourage and rebuke one another toward Christ-likeness. We build into one another's lives. We practice membership and discipline. We snatch one another from the fire, as Jude puts it. Holiness has a corporate character.

Joshua's Conquest of Canaan (61)

- **The point?** God is faithful to judge by a man of his own appointing by (i) the defeat of his enemies and (ii) the deliverance of his people.
- **Bible storyline:** Look backward to God's promise of rest to Abraham. Then look forward to the New Testament, where we learn that the promise of the land is understood typologically and also escalated into a final fulfillment. Hebrews explains that the promise of rest given under Joshua was never intended to be the final rest for the people of God (Heb 3:7-4:13). We're not waiting

for an earthly city but a heavenly city (Heb 11:10, 14-16; 13:14), which has been won for us through the conquest of God's anointed Son—Christ. Hence, no crusades. No earthly kingdom.

- **Non-Christian/Worldview:** God intends for his judgment of Canaan as a warning for an even greater judgment to come. History is not cyclical or meaningless. It has an appointed end. Truth is not relative.
- **Society:** God will give a people or a nation over to its sin in judgment—Romans 1. Mercy has a time-limit
- **Christ:** Joshua points us to Jesus Christ who came to defeat and destroy all rebellion against his Father in heaven. In his first coming, he came to do it through the cross. In his second coming, he will come to do it from his throne.
- **Individual Christians:** Kill sin in your life, or it will kill you. The holy war of the New Testament occurs in our hearts.
- **Church as a whole:** How critical good leaders and faithful teaching of God's Word is in our churches, lest we be enticed by the gods of the culture and fall away.

Psalm 1 & 2 (62)

- **The point of Psalm 1?** There are two ways to live, and the way of faithfulness to God's word is the way of blessing.
- **The point of Psalm 2?** Despite the nations arrogant rejection of God, He will establish his Kingdom through his Son, who will in turn rescue God's people and judge his enemies
- **Taken together?** The Psalter begins with the parallel statements that blessing comes through God's word and through God's Son.
- **Bible Storyline:** Looking backward we see that from the beginning, God's Son has been called to obey God's word and so find blessing. But again and again, the son has disobeyed and therefore known God's judgment—Adam, Israel, David, Solomon. Jesus is the true Son, who walks faithfully in God's Word, and so is confirmed publicly as the Son who establishes God's Kingdom. We are brought into that Kingdom as the inheritance of the Son. But we are also made sons ourselves, not finally through our own law-keeping, but through union with the Son, who not only rescues us from wrath, but fits us to walk in God's law.
- **Worldview:** Universal application of God's law—there really are only two ways to live. The exclusivity of Christ as the sole way into the Kingdom of God and escape from the judgment to come.
- **Society:** blessed to the extent that it reflects God's word now; but one day the nations will become the Kingdom of our Lord as he subjects creation to final judgment
- **Christ:** The one blessed man, and the one and only Son.
- **Christian:** repentance and faith should issue forth in walking in the truth.
- **Church:** community of those who have found refuge in Christ.

Mark 1:14-15 (63)

- **The Point?** The kingdom has begun for all who repent and believe.
- **The Bible Storyline:** The kingdom is begun in Genesis 1 but frustrated by sin in Gen 3, pictured in the nation of Israel, promised in the prophets, finds its inauguration in the preaching of Jesus and the response of all nations in repentance and faith. That kingdom is today hidden and spiritual. But will one day be consummated in a new heavens and new earth.
- **Worldview/ Non-Christian:** Exclusivity of Christ; challenges all utopian efforts. Imperative to repent and believe.
- **Society:** sharp distinction between church and state, kingdoms of this world and kingdom of God; in the meantime, earthly political authority is legitimate, but temporary.

- **Christ:** the object of repentance and faith, the one who announces the Kingdom, secures our inclusion through his death and inaugurates it through his resurrection. Less about a place than submission to his rule.
- **Christian & the church:** having believed, we have been entrusted with the same message of reconciliation with God through repentance and faith in Christ. We live in hope for the consummation of the Kingdom.

Conclusion

Understanding Biblical theology:

1. *Allows us to preach Christ from the whole Bible and every part of the Bible*
2. *Turns the whole Bible into Christian Scripture.*
3. *Prevents us from moralizing the Old Testament*
4. *Connects any passage to what God has done and what he will do*
5. *Teaches world view and challenges reigning stories.*
6. *Focuses the main point in light of the grand storyline of the Bible. Therefore keeps us off hobby-horses, idiosyncrasies, and tangents.*

Next time, we'll take up the impact of Biblical theology on other aspects of our life together as a church.