

PT MEDIA PAPER *Number 2*
**PREACHING
CHRIST FROM
THE OLD
TESTAMENT**

Sinclair B Ferguson

Preaching Christ is *the* great purpose of the Christian expositor.

But how do we preach Christ in all the Scriptures without leap-frogging over historical realities as if the Old Testament Scriptures had no real significance in their own context?

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Developing
a Christ
centred
instinct

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Concerning Preaching,

William J U Philip, PT Media paper no 1.

The discipline of biblical theology has slowly but surely found a place in evangelical preaching.¹ As a result, it has now become a commonplace in the teaching of homiletics to stress that we must preach Christ in all the Scriptures in a manner that takes account of the flow of redemptive history. In particular we must learn to preach Christ from the Old Testament without falling into the old traps of an artificial exegesis.

But how do we legitimately preach the text of the Old Testament as those who stand on this side of Pentecost? What difference does it make to expound Genesis or Psalms as believers in Jesus Christ? Or, to put it in a more graphic way, how can we reconstruct the principles of Jesus' conversation in Luke 24:25-7 and 45, and learn to follow his example of showing how all the Scriptures point to him so that hearts are 'strangely warmed' and begin to burn? In particular, how may we do this without lapsing into what we (sometimes a little too cavalierly) deem to be either patristic allegorising or post-reformation spiritualising? If only we had heard how Jesus did this on the Emmaus Road, in the Upper Room, during the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension, we might grasp the principles by which it is done, so that we too could genuinely preach the text of the Old Testament as Christian preachers and not as rabbis!

Yet we must also preach the Scriptures without denuding them of the genuine historical events they record and the reality of the personal experiences they describe or to which they were originally addressed. How, then, do we preach Christ, and him crucified without leapfrogging over these historical realities as though the Old Testament Scriptures had no real significance for their own historical context?

¹ This is true despite the fact that the great Princeton scholar Geerhardus Vos was already appointed to teach Biblical Theology (in this sense of the discipline) in the last decade of the 19th century and gave his inaugural lecture on that subject in 1894. See R B Gaffin Jr, ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. R B Gaffin, Presbyterian and Reformed, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1980, p. x, 3-24.

In discussing the pre-Christ revelation of God as Trinity B B Warfield describes the Old Testament as a richly furnished but dimly lit room. Only when the light is turned on do the contents become clear. That light has been switched on in Christ and in the New Testament's testimony to him. Now the triune personal being of God becomes clear.² To read the Old Testament with the light switched off would be to deny the historical reality of our own context. On the other hand, we would be denying the historical reality of the text and its context if we were to read and preach it as though that same light had already been switched on within its own pages. Thus our task as Christian preachers must be to take account of both. Fulfilling that task drives us back us into the basic hermeneutical question for the Christian exegete: How do we relate the Old Testament to the New Testament? The longer we labour in ministry, the more we ask that question. The more we know about the answer to it, the more we realise there is so much more left to explore. It is a life long pursuit. Here we can make only a few comments and suggest some principles that are generally applicable and may be specifically helpful to the preacher.

PREACHING CHRIST MUST BECOME INSTINCTIVE, NOT FORMULAIC

Young preachers are often told, 'You must preach Christ from the Old Testament.' But having just finished preaching on (for example) Psalm 121, and realising that we have said little or nothing about Jesus (perhaps not explicitly mentioned his name!), we may be in great agitation, and search desperately for a magic formula which will help us to preach Christ from the Old Testament.

It would be possible, of course, to provide a kind of formula, a kind of homiletical version of Thomas's five ways, such as: Point to Christ by showing: (1) the passage is a direct prophecy of him; or (2) the passage shows why Jesus is needed; or (3) the passage speaks about something

that reminds us of Jesus; or (4) the passage speaks about something that could not be accomplished without Jesus; or (5) the passage shows us an individual/group unlike Jesus.

The point here is not to comment on whether these five ways are helpful or not so much as the inherent danger in the approach. It is likely to produce preaching that is wooden and insensitive to the rich contours of biblical theology. Its artificiality would lie in our going through the motions of exegeting and expounding the Old Testament and then, remembering the formula, tidying our notes in order to align them with it. The net result over an extended period of time might be akin to that produced by children's sermons in which the intelligent child soon recognises that the answer to the minister's questions will always be one of: 1. God; 2. Jesus; 3. Sin; 4. Bible; 5. Be Good!

Of course we need to work with general principles as we develop as preachers; but it is a far greater desideratum that we develop an instinctive mindset and, corresponding to that, such a passion for Jesus Christ himself, that we will find our way to him in a natural and realistic way rather than a merely formulaic way.

This is a much bigger issue than how we preach Christ from the Old Testament, for at least two reasons.

First, because (if my own assessment is correct) many sermons from the Gospels – where the focus is explicitly on the person of Jesus – never mind from the Old Testament are far from Christ-centred.

How is this possible? The preacher has looked into the text principally to find himself and his congregation, not to find Christ. The sermon is consequently about 'people in the Gospels' rather than about Jesus Christ who is the gospel. The real question the preacher has been interested in asking and answering, is not 'How do we find Christ in this Gospel?' but 'Where am I in this story? What have I got to do?' Even although an entire series of such sermons on a Gospel is preached (as in the *lectio continua* method), we will not necessarily have communicated the basic life of Jesus. Instead we have been given an exploration of the human condition.

So there is a confused mindset here that raises a deeper question than, 'Is there a formula that helps us to preach Christ from the Old Testament?' The more fundamental issue is the question, 'What am I

² 'The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity' in *The Works of B B Warfield*, volume 2, *Biblical Doctrines*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1929, p.141-2, 1929.

really looking for when I am preaching on any part of the Bible? Am I really looking to tell people what they are like and what they must do – that is, am I really stressing the subjective and the imperative – or am I talking about Jesus Christ himself and the gospel? Do I stress the objective and the indicative of the gospel in the light of which the subjective and imperative are to be considered? After all it is not the subjective (my condition) or the imperative (respond!) that saves or transforms people's lives, but the objective and the indicative of God's grace received subjectively in the light of the imperatives of the gospel.

In evangelicalism at large there has been a Schleiermacher-like retreat into the subjective. Luther's *bon mot* that the gospel is 'entirely outside of us' has become an axiom strange to our ears. It badly needs to be recovered.

A **second** observation worth noting in this connection is that many (perhaps most) outstanding preachers of the Bible (and of Christ in all Scripture) are so instinctively. Ask them what their formula is and you will draw a blank expression. The principles they use have been developed unconsciously, through a combination of native ability, gift and experience as listeners and preachers. Some men might struggle to give a series of lectures on how they go about preaching. Why? Because what they have developed is an instinct; preaching biblically has become their native language. They are able to use the grammar of biblical theology, without reflecting on what part of speech they are using. That is why the best preachers are not necessarily the best instructors in homiletics, although they are, surely, the greatest inspirers of true preaching.

Most of us probably develop the instinct for biblical-theological and redemptive-historical preaching best by the osmosis involved in listening to those who do it well. It is always wise to listen to such preachers and their preaching as though we had two minds – one through which the preaching of the word nourishes us, the other through which, simultaneously or on later reflection, asks: 'Why did this exposition nourish me in that way? What dynamics and principles were operative?' Seeing how the hidden principles work out in practice is the best way to make those principles our own so that they become the grammar of our preaching.

Christ is the prism where all light converges

Given that we are not to become 'method' preachers applying a programmatic formula for biblical preaching, there are nevertheless very important principles that help us to develop Christ-centred expository skills. As we work with them, and as they percolate through our thinking and our approach to the Bible, they will help us develop the instinct to point people to Christ from the Old Testament Scriptures.

The most general principle is one for which we might coin the expression *fulfilment*: Christ fulfils or 'fills full' the Old Testament. He came 'not to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfil them' (*Matthew 5:17*). As Christians standing within the light of New Testament revelation and looking back on the Old Testament, Christ himself acts as a hermeneutical prism. Looking back through him, we see the white light of the unity of the truth of Jesus Christ broken down into its constituent colours in the pages of the Old Testament. Then, looking forwards we see how the multi-coloured strands of Old Testament revelation converge in him. When we appreciate this we begin to see how the constituent colours unite in Christ and are related both to each other and to him. In this way we see how the Old Testament points forward to him. We see how sometimes one 'colour', sometimes another, or perhaps a combination of them, points forward to Jesus Christ, is related to Jesus Christ, and is fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

PRINCIPLES FOR PREACHING CHRIST FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

We want to develop an instinct to preach Christ. This is the general principle. But it can be broken down into at least four subordinate principles.

/ The relationship between promise and fulfilment

Genesis 3:15 is in a sense the most basic text in the whole Bible: God puts enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman; the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent, and the serpent will crush the heel of the woman's seed. *Romans 16:20* and *Revelation 12:9*

both make crystal clear from the perspective of Christ's completed work that *Genesis 3:15* promises the ultimate cosmic conflict between our Lord Jesus Christ and Satan and the powers of darkness.

Of course Satan is not mentioned by name in *Genesis 3* – a point of some hermeneutical interest in itself – but when Paul writes that 'the God of peace will bruise Satan under your head shortly' (*Romans 16:20*), and John sees in *Revelation 12:9* that the serpent has grown into a dragon, it is clear that the New Testament writers thought of *Genesis 3:15* as a reference to the coming Messiah, and to his conflict with Satan. The war about which the book of *Revelation* speaks then merely climaxes an antithesis and antagonism that has run through the whole of Scripture. It is a Library of Military History, with *Genesis 3:15* and *Revelation 12:9–20:10* as the bookcase. Not only so, but it follows that the whole of Old Testament Scripture traces the outworking of this promise of God until it is consummated in Jesus Christ, and finally publicised throughout the universe in his triumphant return. Jesus' programmatic statement, 'I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it' (*Matthew 16:18*) speaks of this cosmic-conflict context, represents its high point and promises victory in it. Everything between *Genesis 3:15* and *Matthew 16:18* can, in one way or another, be tied to the fulfilment of that promise; every twist and turn in redemptive history following *Matthew 16:18* expresses that conflict, flows onward to its denouement and to that extent can be pinpointed on the map of redemptive revelation.

This is the story of the building of the kingdom of God in all its various stages, over against the kingdom of this world. The promise that the kingdom/reign of God/heaven will come/is near/has arrived is therefore a structural key to redemptive history. From *Genesis 3:15* to the end the Bible is the story of God the Warrior coming to the aid of his people in order to deliver them from the kingdom of darkness and to establish his reign among, in and through them. This is what gives weight to the words of John the Baptist that 'the kingdom of heaven is near' (*Matthew 3:2*). Breaking the prophetic silence of the centuries his message was of God's impending eschatological war-triumph. Judgement-wrath represented by the judgement axe was, for John, the

inevitable implication on the dark side; forgiveness and the reign and kingdom-blessing of God was the good news for all who repented.

This kingdom-conflict-conquest-victory theme can be traced in all kinds of narrative perspectives and dimensions of Old Testament revelation. The central point is to see the Old Testament as intimately (although of course not exclusively) connected to this fundamental idea that there is a radical antithesis driving through the whole of redemptive history, between the building of the kingdom of God by his king, and the efforts of the powers of darkness to destroy that kingdom. Recognise this and much of Old Testament Scripture can readily be understood in terms of its position in the central nervous system of the Old Testament. It should be possible to move from all of these different points to this backbone promise that runs through the Old Testament Scripture to Jesus Christ.

This is an essential hermeneutical tool with which to relate historical developments in the Old Testament back to the promise of God and forward to the coming of Christ. At the same time we are able to treat these incidents (and the people involved in them) as real in their own right. For one of the dangers inherent in biblical-theological preaching is to minimise historical actuality in our anxiety to preach Christocentrically. The result can be as damaging to the integrity of our handling of the text as was patristic allegorising. Sensitivity to the war in the heavenly realms being played out in history enables us to expound the concrete-historical and individual experiences of God's people, yet simultaneously to interpret and place them within the big picture, the meta-narrative of the whole Bible. The historical is thus taken seriously for its own sake, while at the same time it is preached as part of the story of the all-conquering Christ.

This – it needs to be underlined – is not the only principle to be employed. But it does not require great imagination to see how events in Old Testament history illustrate it: the narrative of Adam and Eve against the serpent; the story of Cain and Abel, of the City of God and the Tower of Babel, Israel and Egypt, David and Goliath. The Book of Job is simply a dramatic microcosm of this. The conflicts and the miracles of Elijah and Elisha need to be read within this perspective. A submerged

axehead or a poisoned stew are trivial problems, the miraculous reduced to a Harry Potter piece of magic, unless we recognise that these events take place in the context of a deadly conflict with eternal significance for the kingdom of God. Daniel's life story and his apocalyptic visions are to be read through the same lenses. Indeed the opening words of the Book of Daniel indicate that we are entering a conflict narrative. There is war between two kingdoms. Here we have both the onslaught of the powers of darkness and this world ('Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it') and the righteous purposes of God through which his kingdom will continue and prevail ('the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand...'). Under fierce attack it requires extraordinary miracles to preserve the kingdom (now a remnant of four, exposed to destroying fire and the mouths of lions, *Daniel 3 and 6*). In the midst of this the kingdom (and king!) of this world is seen to be temporary and it and we are given intimation that it is the rock cut without human hands that will grow and fill the whole earth. Only those who see history this way (Daniel and his three friends) can sing the Lord's song in a foreign land, in enemy occupied territory (*Psalms 137*).

In a similar way the opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah is part of the unfolding of *Genesis 3:15*. These books provide conflict narratives in the confined space of God's chosen city, illustrating that the exhortations of *Ephesians 6:10-20* are as relevant in fifth century BC Jerusalem as in first century AD Ephesus.

We stand on the other side of the empty tomb; what was 'not yet' for Ezra and Nehemiah is 'already' for us. But there is also a 'not yet' for us; the conflict in the mopping up operations of war is as bloody and potentially fatal as in the decisive battle. We too, in the light of what Christ has accomplished, live in the 'not yet-ness' of the completion of the final Jerusalem. This world is as full of the Tobiah, Sanballat and Geshem of Nehemiah's day as it is of the Mr Talkative and the Giant Despair and Vanity Fair of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Understanding the principle of promise and fulfilment in terms of an ongoing kingdom-against- kingdom cosmic-conflict helps us to apply the message of the Old Testament as Christian preachers today.

2 The relationship between type and antitype

As the principle of promise and fulfilment (in Christ) develops, we see how the rest of redemptive history functions as a kind of footnote to *Genesis 3:15* in the same sense that western philosophy is sometimes said to be a footnote to Plato and Aristotle.

However, we also discover that the promise itself is developed both progressively and cumulatively; its implications become clearer as redemptive history unfolds. At particular stages in history God gives hints of what is to come (as a great artist's sketches point towards what the final work will be). So embedded into redemptive history are illustrations of the pattern of working which God will employ in his masterwork – types that will be fulfilled in the work of Christ the antitype. Paul views the relation between Adam and Christ as the supreme illustration of this patterning; Adam, viewed as a real historical figure, is the *tupos* of the coming one (*Romans 5:14*, albeit the analogy is both positive and negative, *Romans 5:12-21*).

The Mosaic ceremonial and sacrificial system functions similarly, a prominent theme in the theology of the author of Hebrews. There is a real priesthood, real sacrifice and real blood. But these, while real, also signify a greater reality that accomplishes what they can only portray. Hebrews suggests that a genuine Old Testament believer, with the stench of the sacrificial blood clogging his nostrils, could deduce from the fact that the priests ministered in this way day after day that these could not be the sacrifices that bring forgiveness. He must look beyond this (and was able to), to that of which these sacrifices were a type – namely to God's covenant promises yet to be fulfilled, and therefore (as Hebrews makes so clear), to Jesus Christ himself.

But this principle of type and antitype operates in another, less technical sense, in what we could call the divine patterning of redemptive history. When we put 'the Christ event' under the microscope we see that there are basic patterns expressed which are first seen in the Old Testament. In the light of that discovery, when we re-read the Old Testament wearing the lenses of the New, we see these Christ-patterns more opaquely. The divine footprints are already visible.

An interesting illustration of this is the use of *Hosea 11:1* in *Matthew 2:15*: ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son’. These words, Matthew says, are fulfilled in Christ. But isn’t this either an esoteric or naïve approach to reading the Bible? Hosea is talking about the historic event of the people of God coming out of Egypt in the Exodus, not about Jesus going to and returning from Egypt in his infancy. So what is going on in Matthew’s mind? Is he saying *Hosea 11:1* is fulfilled in Jesus just as *Isaiah 53* is? Yes. But not in the same sense. Rather Matthew, writing in the light of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognises that the divine pattern in the Exodus (delivered from Egypt, led through the wilderness, given the covenant bond and kingdom-code) constitutes a pattern to be used in the experience of the true Israelite, Jesus Christ. In doing this Matthew provides us with a key to reading and expounding the entire Exodus narrative in a Christo-centric way, and indeed his own narrative against a background that enriches our understanding of Jesus’ identity and ministry.

Another example of this kind of pattern-repetition in redemptive history is that of Elisha healing the son of the Shunammite woman (*2 Kings 4:8ff.*). The miracles worked through Elisha demonstrate God’s intimate care for ordinary people – the humble poor, the widow and the barren woman. The healing of the Shunammite’s son echoes later in the town of Nain, where Jesus too healed a widow’s son (*Luke 7:11ff.*). Luke surely means his readers to empathise with the mindset of the people in Nain who knew well that it was in their little community that the miracle had been accomplished through Elisha (who followed Elijah, the one whose return was promised, *Malachi 4:5* and fulfilled in John the Baptist, *Matthew 11:14*). Nain was near the site of Old Testament Shunem. Even the reaction of the people of Nain to Jesus echoes with allusions to this distant event: ‘A great prophet has arisen among us! God has visited his people’. It is as if they are saying ‘something like this happened here before; and ever since Elisha, we have been looking forward to something even better still to come – the prophet himself. Could this be he?’

So we are meant to see pattern repetition, which comes to its

fullness in the person of Jesus Christ, the great prophet who heals not merely through delegated authority from God, but on his own authority, without rituals or prayers, but with a simple word of power. Here is the great God and Saviour of Israel in the flesh, whose person is both the origin and consummation of all the patterns and echoes which have prophesied this grace to his people all down the long ages of their history. Yes, God has visited his people, at last, in the person of his Son. But clearly this sheds light backwards on the function of Elisha. Now we see the significance of his healing within both the micro-reality of his personal context, and also within the macro-reality of his significance in the patterns of redemptive history.

As we work intimately with the two Testaments we will increasingly recognise the echoes of the Old Testament. And as we become sensitive to these patterns and allusions, lines from the Old Testament to Christ will become clearer to us and easier to draw.³

3 The relationship between the covenant and Christ

In the New Testament Jesus himself embodies all that the covenant signified in the Old Testament. His is the blood of the new covenant (*Luke 22:20*). He fulfils all the covenant promises of God. ‘No matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ’ (*2 Corinthians 1:20*).

The covenant promises of God form the scaffolding that God was putting in place as he directed redemptive history towards the coming of Jesus Christ. The scaffolding in the Old Testament is therefore built around the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ and shaped by him. We can see this in two ways.

First, there is the principle that in the covenant relationship the imperatives of God (his laws and commands) are always rooted in the indicatives of his grace. That is how the covenant works: ‘I will be your God; you will be my people.’ This is scaffolding shaped around Christ and the gospel. For this is how the gospel works: ‘I will die for you;

³ A useful manual in this context is the Index of Allusions and Verbal Parallels printed in the corrected 3rd edition of the *The Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies) ed. K Aland, M Black, Martini, B M Metzger and A Wikgren, 1983, pp901-911.

therefore trust in and obey me.' The dynamic of the Old Testament covenant was shaped with a view to the coming of Jesus Christ.

We can go further to say this: that which was promised by God in the Covenant at Sinai, and demanded by God in terms of its imperatives, did not have a sufficiently strong foundation to effect what it commanded. Geographical relocation is not an adequate support to provide the dynamic for Decalogue-style moral holiness (cf *Romans* 8:3-4). A geographical resettlement may motivate, but it cannot cancel the guilt of sin or empower morally. Thus the Sinai covenant – in its weakness – was always prophetic of a greater and fuller deliverance through God's redeeming grace. 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. You shall not have any other gods before me' (*Exodus* 20:2-3) was always a statement that looked forwards as well as backwards. Written into the way in which the old covenant works is an implied expectation, even necessity, that the indicatives of God's grace will find a better consummation and the imperatives a better foundation – in Jesus Christ.

Second, the shape of Christ's work is expressed in the covenant principle of blessing and cursing.

Today our appreciation of much of the Bible's language has become very threadbare. There is a tendency to think that the words 'blessing' and 'cursing' function in a relatively trivial manner, equivalent to a kind of divine 'boo-hurrah' approach to morality. When someone sneezes, we say 'Bless you!' Few people set this within the historical context of the pre-modern world when sneezing was a symptom of the plague. It was therefore seen potentially as a sign of the displeasure of God. One prayed that the person sneezing would receive the blessing of God and *therefore not perish*. That is much nearer the Bible's understanding of blessing and cursing than our usage is.

Blessing is not 'have a nice day!' nor is cursing 'you are a bit of a pain in the neck.' Rather, here is God's covenant; when we respond to it in faith he showers upon us the blessing he promised when he made it with us. And when we respond in unbelief he showers upon us curses (cf *Deuteronomy* 27-30). The gospel is that Christ took the curse of the covenant in order that the blessings of the covenant (promised to Abraham) might come to us (*Galatians* 3:13). Paul's thinking here is

both redemptive-historical and biblical-theological. He recognises that all of this covenantal outworking of blessing and cursing in the Old Testament is inextricably tied to the fulfilment of God's covenant purpose and promise in Jesus Christ.

This principle of Christ as the heart of the covenants of God, with respect to their blessing and cursing, helps us expound and apply the Old Testament as a covenant-focused message in the light of the fulfilment of both blessing and cursing in Christ. The consequences bound up in the covenant blessing and cursing point us forwards inexorably, if typologically, to the eternal consequences of acceptance or rejection of the gospel. The contents of biblical history and wisdom literature, prophecy and the psalms all reveal this covenant dynamic. Insofar as this is true we are able to relate them to the ultimate fulfilment of that dynamic in Christ and the gospel.

4 Proleptic participation and subsequent realisation

Despite the continuing influence within evangelicalism of various brands of dispensationalism, it lies on the surface of the apostolic writings that the majority of illustrations of salvation in the new covenant era are actually drawn from the old! Of course the apostles recognise the substantial discontinuity between old and new. Pentecost is indeed a quantum leap forward. But that notwithstanding, when Paul wants to illustrate how the gospel works, he goes back to the Old Testament figures of Abraham and David and says 'This is how the gospel works'. A seismic shift took place after Pentecost so that the least in the kingdom is greater than the greatest of the prophets (John the Baptist, *Matthew* 11:11). Men and women of faith do not come to perfection apart from new covenant believers who experience better things (*Hebrews* 11:40). Nevertheless Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets are examples of faith (*Hebrews* 11). We receive salvation 'better', but not a better salvation. If you want to know what the Christian life looks like, then there is much to be learned from the Old Testament! What right-thinking Christian has not aspired to experience the whole-souled faith and worship of the Psalms?

But how could Old Testament believers experience grace and the fruit of the Spirit? They experienced *proleptic participation* in what would be consummated in Jesus Christ and then subsequently realised in its fullness in post-Pentecost Christian believers.

Orthodox evangelical Christians employ the principle of proleptic participation with respect to justification. Were Old Testament saints justified by grace, and if so, how? Yes, of course – by faith in the promise of the Saviour. We who are as far removed in time as Abraham was from Christ are justified because we believe in the once-promised Christ now come. But through the promise of God, Abraham experienced in proleptic fashion what we now experience in the light of the actuality of the incarnation.

But exactly the same principle operates in the area of sanctification – both definitive (the once-for-all separation from the dominion of sin which takes place in regeneration) and progressive (the ongoing overcoming of the presence and influence of sin which takes place throughout the Christian life). For justification and sanctification, while distinguishable, are not separable in either old or new covenant realities. Saints in the Old Testament were justified in the light of what Christ would do; they were sanctified in the same way: their lives were shaped and formed in the light of what Christ would do. An example of that is seen in *Hebrews 10:39*: ‘We are not those who would shrink back and be destroyed. We are those who believe and who are saved’. But from what source does the author illustrate this principle of the grace of perseverance? From the Old Testament! Old Testament saints were commended for their faith, yet none of them had received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us and only together with us would they be made perfect. What they experienced then, was a proleptic, anticipatory, form of the reality we better experience in its fullness, namely the working out of union and communion with Jesus Christ.

It is the perspective of the New Testament that from the moment an individual becomes a believer, his or her life is shaped providentially by God and pressed into a mould which takes its form from the dying and rising of Jesus, and is shaped by his crucifixion and resurrection, his death bringing new life. In sanctification God transforms us into the like-

ness of his Son, so that reminiscences of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected appear in us, and the pattern of death and resurrection shapes our lives – these are the genuine biblical *stigmata* in which all believers share.

But this pattern is also present in the lives of Old Testament saints. Admittedly the fascination with typology in some evangelical groupings has been unfortunate and without controls; but nevertheless a Christ-shape and a Christ-pattern appears clearly in a variety of Old Testament saints, and must ultimately be analysed as a shadow in their lives created by the backwards projection into history of the work of Christ.

There are so many illustrations of this that one might almost say that there is not an Old Testament historical-biographical account of any length that does not involve dying and rising, humiliation and exaltation, being brought down and being raised up, experiencing opposition and then deliverance, suffering want and then experiencing extraordinary provision. This is not merely the form of good storytelling. It is the embodiment of the gospel pattern.

Joseph is a classic case: the story of his life is shaped unmistakably by the pattern of death and resurrection. A pattern is written large in him: humiliation (rejected and stripped of his glory-robe, becoming a slave, being made of no reputation); exaltation (being highly exalted at Pharaoh’s right hand); provision (for the needs of the whole world); the ingathering of his people. This, at the end of the day, is the Christ-pattern in sketch-like form. The pattern of meant-for-evil; producing good, the salvation of many (*Genesis 50:20*) is fulfilled in the One crucified by the hands of wicked men – yet according to the plan of the God who raised him from the dead for the salvation of the nations (*Acts 2:23*). That same pattern, while written large in Joseph, appears throughout the Old Testament. It connects the Old Testament saints to Christ, and underlines that we do not fully understand their experience apart from this template.

DEVELOPING A CHRIST CENTRED INSTINCT

If these principles hold good, then it must be possible along different lines, sometimes using one, sometimes using a combination, to move from any point in the Old Testament into the backbone of redemptive

history which leads ultimately to Christ its fulfilment and consummation. In this way, the context and destination for all our preaching will be Jesus Christ himself, Saviour and Lord.

These are general principles; they do not constitute a simple formula, an elixir to be sprinkled on our sermons to transform them into the preaching of Christ. There is no formula that will do that. We never 'arrive' or 'have it cracked' when it comes to preaching Christ. But as we come to know the Scriptures more intimately, as we see these patterns deeply embedded in the Bible, and – just as crucially – as we come to know Christ himself more intimately and to love him better, we shall surely develop the instinct to reason, explain and prove from all the Scriptures the riches of grace which are proclaimed in Jesus, the Christ, the Saviour of the world. The ability to do that will itself be adequate reward for the hard work involved in learning to preach in a way that takes the Old Testament seriously within its own context, but also recognises that that context is not complete apart from Jesus Christ.

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The fundamental conviction underlying the work of The Proclamation Trust is that when the Bible is taught God's voice is heard. The main aim of the Trust, therefore, is to teach the Bible to preachers in order that they can in turn teach it to others. A further aim is to provide a fellowship of like-minded evangelicals across denominational lines for encouragement in an exacting work.