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DEVELOPING A CHRISTOCENTRIC APPROACH FOR
EXPOSITORY PREACHING, GRACE FELLOWSHIP,
ANNISTON, ALABAMA

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DEVELOPING A CHRISTOCENTRIC APPROACH FOR
EXPOSITORY PREACHING, GRACE FELLOWSHIP,
ANNISTON, ALABAMA

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To E. G. Pounders, Jr., "Paw-Paw,"
who first taught me how to preach,
and to
Aimee,
my friend, my love, and my partner

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PREFACE

As I think about the work that was necessary to complete the task of this ministry project, I cannot help but have a heart that is filled with gratitude. Dr. T. J. Betts, my supervising professor, encouraged me to continue to work hard in understanding the idea of a christocentric approach to preaching. This project would not have been completed without his hard work on my behalf. Thank you for your ministry to me and the church.

Grace Fellowship, you are my family and I cannot begin to thank you for the sacrifices you make so that the work of the ministry can be carried out in our daily life together. I especially want to recognize the sacrifices each of you made during the time I finished this project. It is a privilege to serve Christ with you, and I look forward to the fruit that will be born through a christocentric expository preaching ministry from your pulpit in the years to come.

I would like to extend my love and gratitude to the elders of Grace Fellowship. You men are the best partners I could ever hope to have in the task of shepherding. Not only are we ministry partners, but we are brothers and the best of friends. Thank you for granting me time to work on the project, for preaching in my place while on study leave, and for your unwavering commitment to my attaining this personal goal. I love each of you with a godly affection.

When I think about my life in ministry it is impossible to imagine that life without Aimee Weathers. Though there were many nights that were spent away from her in this process, she never discouraged me. I love her more today than the day we met as teenagers. She has become a Proverbs 31 woman, and I could not possibly live life to the fullest without her.

I want to thank Hannah Grace, Noah, Lily, and Hope for putting up with me while I tried to pastor, finish this degree, and be a godly father. You children are a great encouragement to me. Thinking about the way you are growing in stature and wisdom makes me burst with pride. God is bringing each of you to himself in a personal way, and I hope that in the years to come you will look on this project with a sense of accomplishment because each of you played a part in me continuing until the end.

One of the saddest realities that I face in completing this project is the thought that my mother, Deborah P. Weathers, will never enjoy this accomplishment with me. My mom sacrificed for me from the time I was born until she was stricken at an early age with Alzheimer's disease. Mom, I know that you will never read the words of this project, but you were a big part of my reaching this goal. You showed me how to love Jesus, you sacrificed so that I could gain an education, and you never stopped cheering for me throughout my life. I love you and look forward to sharing eternity with you in the New Heaven and the New Earth. Because of our faith in Christ, we can celebrate this project then.

Finally, I could not close this preface without thanking Jesus Christ for dying for me while I was still his enemy. The grace of God in Christ makes me marvel more and more as the years pass. I am truly the chief of sinners who is overwhelmed by the goodness of his grace. Only by God's grace did I accomplish the goals of this project, and only by God's grace will I be able to complete the course of ministry and life that he has set out for me. To God be all glory now and forever.

Carlton Eugene Weathers

Anniston, Alabama

December 2012

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a christocentric approach for preaching expository messages from the Old and New Testaments at Grace Fellowship, Anniston, Alabama.

Goals

The four goals of the project serve to judge its success or failure. The first goal was to learn to prepare and preach expository sermons using a christocentric approach. Preachers often fail to center each message on the person of Jesus Christ. The goal of the project was to help me effectively apply Luke 24:27 in my preaching ministry: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” By selecting several types of biblical literature from both Old and New Testaments, I planned to demonstrate the effectiveness of preparing and preaching expository sermons using a christocentric approach.

The second goal was to select and properly exegete six texts using a christocentric approach to expository preaching. In selecting these texts I divided them between the Old and New Testaments and considered biblical genre so that the project was balanced in its approach. These texts were used to form a six-week preaching series so the congregation of Grace Fellowship was exposed to christocentric expository preaching. During each message a select group of members were asked to respond to a survey designed to determine whether the respondents recognized that the pastor was employing a christocentric approach.

The third goal was to train selected leaders at Grace Fellowship to use the christocentric approach when they are expositing the Word of God. Training other leaders to preach using this approach was crucial to implementing a christocentric mindset throughout the local church context. This training curriculum included basic sections on hermeneutics, homiletics, and sermon delivery. At the end of the twelve-week preaching seminar, each participant was competent in applying a christocentric expositional approach to preaching at Grace Fellowship.

The final goal of this project was to improve my expositional preaching. The selected leaders who participated in the preaching seminar evaluated my preaching each week in the specific areas of training. This evaluation was used to determine if I was using a christocentric approach in my preaching and each leader was asked to evaluate my use of the basic skills of expository preaching—hermeneutics, homiletics, and sermon delivery. This project helped me become a more effective expositor of God’s Word.

Ministry Context

Grace Fellowship is located in Anniston, Alabama, which is the county seat of Calhoun County. The population of the county, according to the 2005 census, is 112,141, with Anniston having 23,332 of these residents.¹ Grace Fellowship is strategically placed in the center of the county, which makes the church campus easily accessible to the majority of the residents in the county. The demographic breakdown of the county is typical for the Northeast Alabama region. The population is 76.3 percent Caucasian, 19.7 percent Black, and 2.0 percent Hispanic. Calhoun County households on average earn \$36,066, with the poverty number in the county running around 16 percent.²

¹Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce, “Demographics” [on-line]; accessed 27 August 2008; available from <http://www.calhounchamber.com/pages/?pageID=90>; Internet.

²Ibid.

As in any rural county in the southeastern United States, there are advantages and disadvantages to the life afforded an individual in this area. One of the positive factors of living in Calhoun County is that there are two higher education institutions located in this small region: Jacksonville State University located ten miles north of Grace Fellowship and Gadsden State Community College located just minutes from the church campus. These two institutions provide a ripe harvest field for the church in the area of evangelism.

Although the county is traditionally a rural culture, many changes are taking place because of its strategic location along the corridor of interstate 20. This interstate is one of the major shipping routes in the Eastern United States. Calhoun County is positioned along the interstate between Atlanta, Georgia, and Birmingham, Alabama. The leaders of the county and the municipality of Anniston believe that the future of industry in the area is limitless.

The United States Army closed Fort McClellan, a major military facility, and gave it to the city of Anniston for redevelopment. Grace Fellowship purchased and renovated a facility on the Fort McClellan property, which will soon be surrounded by homes, multifamily dwellings, and industry. These positive facts give the leadership of Grace Fellowship hope for a bright and expansive future.

There are also disadvantages to being located in Calhoun County. Anniston, Alabama and the surrounding areas are racially divided. Deep scars from the Jim Crow era, integration battles of the 1960s and 1970s, and current political squabbles continue to divide the citizens. Grace Fellowship desires to unite people of all ethnic, lingual, and cultural backgrounds under the gospel of Jesus Christ. The racial strife in Anniston makes this unity difficult to succeed. A second disadvantage encountered by Grace Fellowship is the desire of most young leaders to move to larger cities. Most of the graduates from Jacksonville State University move to larger, more progressive cities. Many of the young people raised in this rural area move away from home to attend larger colleges or pursue

more lucrative career opportunities. As a small church, Grace Fellowship is often faced with the loss of promising young leaders due to the lack of desire the younger generation has to live in small town America. A third disadvantage to leading a church in Anniston, Alabama, is the abundance of churches already in the county. There are over three hundred churches in Calhoun County. Most of these churches are small, traditional fellowships that are suffering from a lack of vision. A few large churches attract followers with programs, activity buildings, and consumer-driven worship services, but Calhoun County is starving for churches that follow the Scripture as their sole authority, believe in Christ as the head of the church, emphasize expository preaching, and disciple members in the fellowship.

This local fellowship of believers that is now Grace Fellowship first gathered as a community Bible study on August 10, 2003. That evening fifteen families joined together for fellowship, singing, prayer, and the study of God's Word. It did not take but one week to realize that this group of believers would need to find a larger space to use for their meetings. The next week, August 17, we began to meet at the Anniston Meeting Center. The godly men who were attending the studies on Sunday night began to believe that the Lord wanted this small group of believers to plant a local church body in the Calhoun County area. I was glad to join fourteen other men in prayer and fasting for two weeks, and on September 3 this group began to plan the future of what we now call Grace Fellowship. After over a month of studying doctrine, practical ministry philosophy, and planning the foundational steps of a new work, on October 12, 2003, Grace Fellowship began its Sunday morning worship services at the Anniston Meeting Center. It was an exciting day as we saw the Lord make the dream a reality.

The vision for Grace Fellowship had been birthed in the heart of several families but the pastoral duties were initially entrusted to me. I was excited to give leadership, vision, and oversight to the new church, but from the beginning the church had a desire to follow the pattern of a plurality of pastors which is given in the New

Testament. From the start, I have been the pastor for teaching and vision. My main responsibilities include preaching on Sunday mornings, giving oversight and direction to the ministry of the church, and discipling men and young families through life-on-life discipleship. There are now three other pastors working to shepherd the flock.

The next milestone came when the Lord provided a church facility to lease near Jacksonville, Alabama. On Sunday, March 7, 2004, we held our first worship service in the new facility. That day, 135 people gathered for worship and a fellowship meal as we celebrated the new chapter in the church's history. The fellowship had already taken on a personality of discipleship, sound biblical doctrine, and evangelism. This combination allowed the church to continue to grow despite many negative attacks from surrounding churches.

Grace Fellowship faced the challenge of being one of two local churches that held the reformed perspective on Scripture. Early in our life together as a church, we were slandered by well-established churches that were afraid of the potential growth they saw among our fellowship. God continued to be faithful to this small fellowship of believers, and on April 4, 2004, Grace Fellowship received the first group of members who had completed the sixteen-week membership class. Fifty families joined the fellowship on that night, and together these people were experiencing spiritual growth like never before in their lives.

God has continued to be faithful in our life as a church. Grace Fellowship has five elders and five deacons that minister to sixty-five member families. Over the past eight years we have seen the Lord save many souls in the community and on the college campus due to the ministry of our fellowship. We have also experienced an increase in discipleship as many of the older men and women have begun to disciple the younger men and women in the congregation. In October of 2008, the Grace Fellowship family moved into a new facility. This facility has the capacity to house over three hundred in worship with plenty of room to expand on the 8.5 acres. The congregation is preparing to

build a new facility to house fellowship and education space. God continues to grow the congregation numerically. Grace Fellowship has an average attendance of over 200. The member families have always been faithful givers. The church budget has grown each year, and this year the church is on pace to exceed a budget projection of \$305,000. In eight short years the church has gone from meeting in the living room of a local home to meeting in a newly renovated, three hundred seat facility on eight acres in Anniston, Alabama. The future is bright because of the faithfulness of God and his people.

Of all the exciting statistics that could be given to show the strength of Grace Fellowship, perhaps no number thrills my soul more than the amount of money dedicated to missions each year. Grace Fellowship gives over 25 percent of the budgeted offering to local, home, and world missions. We are a fellowship that believes and lives by the demand of the Great Commission to take the gospel to every tribe and ethnic group of the world (Matt 28:18-20).

As one of the pastors in this local fellowship, I have been blessed to serve with dedicated Christian servants for the past five years. My family and I view Grace Fellowship as our extended family. I know that the Lord can place me in another ministry at any time, but it is my desire to serve this body of believers until my final breath. In the future I believe that God will raise up pastors, missionaries, and new church fellowships through the dynamic ministry of this local body of believers. I pray that God gives me the opportunity to serve him as pastor/teacher of Grace Fellowship for years to come.

Rationale

In Luke 24:25-27 Jesus said,

“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.

These words indicate that all of Scripture should be taught from a christocentric approach.

Yet in the evangelical church most people approach the Old Testament as a pre-Christian

Scripture. Pastors often speak of the Old Testament as if it is simply a history of the dealing of God with the nation of Israel that has little if anything to do with the person of Jesus Christ.

By learning to preach christocentric, expository sermons from the Old and New Testaments at Grace Fellowship, I believe the people of the local fellowship grew in their understanding of the unity found in Scripture. It is important for the Christian to come to a fuller understanding of Christ's words in Luke 24:25-27. First, Jesus emphasized in this passage the unity of the Scripture. He used the entire Old Testament to teach the disciples about himself. The Old Testament contains not only faint references to the Messiah in the books of prophecy, but from Genesis to Malachi the biblical student finds a consistent Christ-centered message. Second, Jesus rebuked these followers because they had missed the overwhelming message of the Scripture. He said, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart." It is clear that the Lord was displeased that these early Christians had missed the focal point of the Old Testament. He was that focal point.

Finally, in this passage the student is left with the idea that Jesus had already been teaching his followers to recognize the Christ-centered nature of the Old Testament. He calls them "slow of heart to believe." Jesus had been teaching his disciples a christocentric message all through his earthly ministry. I believe that pastors must return to this type of expository preaching.

Paul even instructed his young son in the ministry, Timothy,

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 3:14-15)

What were the sacred writings that made him wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus? They were the Old Testament, and if the Old Testament made him wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, Christians must take the stance that the Old and New Testament are Christ-centered documents.

Therefore, the only way to truly exposit the text of the Scripture is from a

christocentric approach. My desire in this project was to give a clear example of how to use a christocentric approach to expository preaching from the genres of law, gospel narrative, epistle, prophecy, and historical narrative and to train future pastors and teachers at Grace Fellowship to use this approach in their presentation of God's Word.

Definitions and Limitations

In this project, I used the following definition of expository preaching:

Expository preaching is the Spirit-empowered proclamation of biblical truth derived from the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit by means of a verse-by-verse exposition of the Spirit-inspired text, with a view to applying the text by means of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, first to the preacher's own heart, and then to the hearts of those who hear, culminating in an authentic and powerful witness to the living Word, Jesus Christ, and obedient Spirit-filled living.³

There are many other definitions of expository preaching, but this definition contains the important element of the Spirit's role in preaching often missing in other definitions. It was also necessary to define christocentric preaching. In this project I used the definition given by Sydney Greidanus in his book, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*. We can define "preaching Christ" as "preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God's revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament."⁴

The limitations on this project were as follows. First, the required fifteen-week length of this project did not allow for the long-term results of the project to be observed. My ability to deliver christocentric sermons from the entirety of the Scripture will be proven over the years as I continue to apply a christocentric method to my work in the pulpit. The second limitation was the men who participated in the focus group for this

³Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 21.

⁴Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 10.

project. Those who were selected are men in Grace Fellowship who are currently preaching God's Word or will be preaching/teaching God's Word in the future. All of these men are leaders in the congregation, but they are not all called to vocational ministry. It is my belief that this project helped develop the skill of men who will lead Grace Fellowship in the study of the Bible for the coming years.

Research Methodology

The first part of this project was to develop my ability to deliver christocentric expository messages. The primary way that this aspect of the project was accomplished was through a six-sermon series from the Old and New Testament implementing a christocentric approach. Each of the six sermons focused on a different literary genre, including historical narrative, prophecy, poetry, gospel narrative, and epistolary writing. I demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach from these particular types of Scripture because they are often seen as the most difficult. The selected passages were Deuteronomy 5:12-15, 1 Samuel 8:10-18, Psalm 121:1-8, Zechariah 7:1-14, Luke 6:46-49, and 2 John 1-13. During this message series a select group of people gave feedback through a prepared survey about the effectiveness of the presentation, clarity of communicating the meaning of the text, and strength of the christocentric focus.

The second goal of this project was to enlist eight men who participated in a training seminar that prepared the men to use a christocentric approach to expository preaching. I instructed these men in the areas of hermeneutics, homiletics, and sermon delivery and taught them to properly communicate the original intent of the passage they were preaching while using a christocentric approach. This training seminar lasted twelve weeks. Each participant was given an opportunity to apply the skills he learned in the seminar during the last three weeks of the project. At the beginning and end of the seminar, participants took a survey to determine if their knowledge of preaching and this christocentric method had increased during the teaching time.

CHAPTER 2
A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION
FOR CHRISTOCENTRIC PREACHING

One would be hard pressed to find an evangelical pastor or church member that would deny the need to preach with a general view toward Christ centeredness. Yet after taking a quick scan of the hermeneutical and homiletical text available from the evangelical perspective, it becomes painfully obvious that Christ centeredness means many things to many people. The problem the pastor or Bible student faces is that, at first glance, there does not seem to be a biblical style of preaching presented within the pages of the New Testament. For years people have repeated the belief that the matter of preaching style has been left totally to the purview of the individual pastor. Many believe that pastors should develop their unique styles of preaching without concern to prevailing thought in the area of biblical studies. This is not only dangerous, but ultimately robs Christ of his glory.

Christocentric preaching has been a topic of debate for centuries. The loudest outcry from those who oppose preaching Christ from the Old Testament is that to preach in this way dismisses the context of the Old Testament. Many accuse christocentric preaching of being nothing more than vague allegorical teaching that loses its grip on the historical realities of the Bible. Edmund Clowney answers this charge when he writes,

Preaching Christ from the Old Testament means that we preach, not synagogue sermons, but sermons that take account of the full drama of redemption, and its realization in Christ. To see the text in relation to Christ is to see it in its larger context, the context of God's purpose in revelation.¹

¹Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 11.

Although there are several styles of christocentric preaching, the focus in this project was primarily restricted to Dennis E. Johnson's view as taught in his magnum opus *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*. In this work, Johnson refers to his method of hermeneutics and homiletics as redemptive-historical preaching rather than simply using the title christocentric. Johnson defends his choice:

Redemptive-historical preaching ties homiletics closely to hermeneutic considerations. It emphasizes the organic unity of the history of redemption—the enactment of God's plan for the rescue, reconciliation, and re-creation of his people, climaxing in the person, obedience, sacrifice, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ, and reaching consummation at his return in glory.²

Johnson, like Edmond Clowney before him, separates himself from other christocentric preachers by masterfully blending the biblical theology of Geerhardus Vos with the hermeneutic and homiletic of the apostles.

The question still remains whether this view of preaching can be defended from the Bible. What follows in this chapter is an attempt to prove that no less than Jesus Christ himself calls all pastors to teach the Scripture from a christocentric position. Then it will be helpful to look at a few of the recorded sermons of the early church to verify that they understood Christ's instruction as a call to preach christocentric messages. While the evangelical world seems to focus on the ability of the pastor to communicate, the following pages challenge the pastor to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Biblical Foundation for Christocentric Preaching

The ultimate guide for hermeneutic and homiletic practice must be Scripture. All students of the Bible must bend the knee to the purpose for which God inspired his Word. Bryan Chapell points to the ultimate purpose of the Scripture when he writes, "All scriptural revelation discloses God. In its proper context every verse in the Bible in some

²Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 48-49.

sense points to his nature and work.”³ Because this is the ultimate purpose of Scripture, the pastor is not surprised to find evidence in the ministry of Christ and the apostles that supports a method of preaching Christ in all of Scripture.

Luke 24:25-27

Luke 24:1-49 records two separate appearances of the Lord on the day of his resurrection. One of those appearances is unique to the Luke account. It is in this unique account that one finds these words of Jesus:

And he said to them, “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.

Several points can be made from this short statement by Christ.

First, Jesus rebukes the disciples when he says, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” Bock reminds his reader, “The interjection ὦ (O!) usually indicates great emotion. The rebuke expresses great disappointment and recalls Luke 24:5-7 when the angel gave the women at the tomb a similar reaction.”⁴ The disappointment expressed in this text is centered on the fact that these disciples were not accepting what the prophets had plainly spoken. Leon Morris adds,

Their words drew a rather sharp rebuke from their companion. Perhaps ‘O foolish men’ is a trifle strong for ἀνόητοι, and NEB may give the sense better with, ‘How dull you are!’ But the words certainly fall short of being a compliment, and show that the two had done less than might reasonably have been expected.⁵

Whether the translation in most English versions is too strong for Jesus’ words, the fact is that he is not pleased with the disciples for missing what is plainly spoken in the Old

³Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 275.

⁴Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1915.

⁵Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988), 357.

Testament concerning his death and resurrection. These disciples on the road to Emmaus have not surrendered the seat of their inner will and emotion to the reality of Christ suffering. This is indicated by Jesus' use of the word *καρδία*. When coupled with his use of the word *πιστεύειν*, meaning to trust, and used in the New Testament of the conviction and trust concerned with saving faith, it is clear that although these are followers of Christ, they are struggling to grasp the full meaning of Old Testament teaching.

Second, the Lord indicates that there is more than a little discussion of his suffering in the Old Testament. In verse 25 Jesus uses the phrase *ἐπὶ πάντων* which is translated "all" to indicate that there are many places in the prophets teaching for these disciples to learn about the suffering of the Messiah prior to his exaltation. Robert Stein writes, "Jesus did not designate which prophets or where these prophets spoke of him. For Jesus and the Evangelists 'all' the prophets 'everywhere' spoke of him."⁶ But all evangelicals agree that the life, suffering, death, and resurrection were spoken of by the prophets of the Old Testament. The controversy begins over the idea that every passage in the Old Testament must be preached from a christocentric perspective. That leads to the last observation.

Finally, Jesus begins with the Torah and teaches these disciples about himself from each section of the Old Testament. On the surface of the translated text, it appears that Christ simply taught the prophetic words concerning his ministry. Bock shows that this is not all that he did:

Jesus explains the things taught about the Christ from all the Scriptures. He teaches the OT in the new era. The comprehensiveness of the teachings is underlined in several ways: from "all" (*πάντων*) the prophets he explains "all" (*πάσαις*) the Scriptures, and Jesus starts from (*ἀρχάμενος*) Moses and goes to all the prophets. This figure describes the discussion's scope: he went through the entire Scripture, front to back.⁷

⁶Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 612.

⁷Bock, *Luke*, 1917.

The statement in verse 27 goes further in declaring that when a New Covenant believer reads the Old Covenant Scripture it is to be instinctively read from a christocentric perspective. It is not just that the Old Testament speaks of Christ in specific prophecies; Luke wants the reader to understand that Christ is the fulfillment of God's plan as presented in overt references to the Messiah and types and shadows that exist in the form of people, places, and institutions of the Old Testament. Bock continues his thoughts on the passage:

That all Scripture points to Jesus is something that Luke likes to stress. Luke sees continuity in God's plan—not surprise or parenthesis. In making this point, Jesus appeals to two types of prophetic fulfillment. Texts that are directly prophetic refer only to Jesus, while typico-prophetic texts reflect patterns that Jesus reenacts and escalates to show their fulfillment or their eschatological inauguration at a new level.⁸

Jesus instructed his followers to interpret the Old Testament using the christocentric or redemptive-historic method of interpretation. If the only evidence in the New Testament was this passage, then pastors would have a clear command to teach and preach the entire Bible from a christocentric view point. But this is not the only evidence left for the pastor to draw out this conclusion. A look at two passages in Acts gives the reader examples of apostolic preaching. If it is correct that Jesus taught his followers to think and teach from a christocentric perspective, then it should be obvious from the sermons of the apostles.

Acts 2:14-36

Before covering the passage under consideration, it is helpful to make a few general observations. First, the apostles and other preachers of the first church are the best guides as to the application of Christ's words in Luke 24:25-27. Although the history of the church leaves a mixed record as to how pastors should preach Christ from all of Scripture, the voice of the first preachers should be given weightier consideration. They

⁸Ibid., 1918.

were the ones to first apply the teaching of Jesus and men who worked at times under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Surely this gives them a place of superiority in the church.

Second, if pastors are not allowed to follow the example of the apostles, then who should be the guide in preaching and teaching God's Word? Johnson writes,

You may even wonder whether it is legitimate to learn biblical hermeneutics and homiletics from the apostolic exemplars of the New Testament, because their inspiration by the Spirit of God gave them privileged access to revelatory resources not available to ordinary Christians and preachers.⁹

Many do question the validity of modeling current methods of preaching after men who were under special call as apostles. The answer to that question is clear:

Yet the apostolic affirmation rings true: in Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). Therefore the apostolic resolve makes perfect sense: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Whatever our biblical text and theme, if we want to impart God's wisdom in its exposition, we can do nothing other than proclaim Christ.¹⁰

It is best for modern preachers to look back to the first Christian heralds and seek to mimic their commitment to christocentric preaching.

Finally, it is important to understand that there are an astounding number of speeches and sermons recorded in the book of Acts. The Spirit ensured that the record of christocentric apostolic preaching was thorough. John R. W. Stott notes, "There are nineteen distinct Christian speeches in the book of Acts. Approximately 20% of Luke's text is devoted to addresses by Peter and Paul; if Stephen's speech is added, the percentage rises to about 25%."¹¹ If the Spirit dedicated so much space to the way the apostles and first preachers presented the gospel, then pastors today would do well to model their methods after these men.

⁹Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 2.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church, & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today Series (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 69.

As the first pages of the history of the work of God in establishing his church open to the reader, he finds a magnificent sermon at the founding of the new covenant community. Peter, often the spokesman for the disciples, gives a passionate address in Acts 2:14-36 explaining the events of Pentecost through the rubric of Christ in the Old Testament.

Peter begins his sermon by urging his audience to give full attention to his words. The phrase ἐπήρην τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπεφθέγ is a rare phrase in the New Testament. Bock writes,

The combination of ἐπήρην (epairo) and φωνὴν (phone) appears only four times in the NT, all in Luke-Acts (Luke 11:27; Acts 2:14; 14:11; 22:22). Peter ‘lifts up his voice,’ speaking to the entire crowd about God’s work. The verb for “address” (apophthengomai) was used in Acts 2:4 and discussed there. It is another term that only Luke uses in the NT, and it refers to Spirit-inspired utterance. This no longer is tongues speaking but a direct address to the crowd.¹²

Because the reader is being led to believe that what Peter is saying is directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, then there can be confidence that he is correctly using the Old Testament references in relation to Christ. The Holy Spirit could never lead the apostle to see Christ wrongly in passages where he is not intended to be seen. Peter launches into an evangelistic message from Acts 2:14-36 that is filled with direct reference and allusion to Old Testament texts, using all of those texts to preach Christ.

His first reference to Christ in the Old Testament is Joel 2:28-32. This passage had been understood by the Jews as a reference to the Messianic age. They had expected that the events spoken of in this text would happen at the end of the age when the Messiah set up his rule from the city of Jerusalem that would extend over all the nations of the earth. Peter informs the crowd at Pentecost that they are seeing the fulfillment of this prophetic passage. F. F. Bruce points out the significance of Peter’s use of Joel in this text: “Peter’s quotation of Joel’s prophecy means that these days, the days of the

¹²Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 110.

fulfillment of God's purpose, have arrived."¹³ Bruce continues his explanation when he writes,

The "last days" began with Christ's appearance on earth and will be consummated by his reappearance; they are the days during which the age to come overlaps the present age. Hence the assurance with which Peter could quote the prophet's words and declare, "This is it."¹⁴

It is helpful to make several observations from the text concerning the christocentric nature of Peter's address in Acts 2:14-36.

First, Peter shows that Christ is the one who is pouring out his Spirit on the people at Pentecost. Acts 2:17 reads, "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." Bock explains the idea of "pour out" when he writes,

The verb "pour out" (ἐκχεῶ) in reference to the Spirit is important in this speech, reappearing as a midrashic link in verse 18 and 33. The image is of a torrential downpour that is poured out on a parched earth (Larkin 1995: 53). The use of this verb with the Spirit (τοῦ πνεύματός μου) summarizes Joel's key promise—that the Spirit would be poured out "on all flesh" (ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα).¹⁵

In his sermon, Peter concludes in Acts 2:32-33 that Jesus is the one who, as God, has the power to pour out the Spirit: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you are seeing and hearing." Without hesitation, Peter moves from the promise made by God in Joel 2:28 to its fulfillment in Jesus on the day of Pentecost. This statement is only the first of several promise-fulfillment statements made in this speech leading to the conclusion that the apostles normally interpret and preach the Old Testament from a christocentric viewpoint.

Second, Peter points out in verse 22 that Jesus of Nazareth was "attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your

¹³F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 61.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Bock, *Acts*, 113.

midst, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22). These mighty works, wonders, and signs are a partial fulfillment of the promised works of God in the last days according to Joel 2:30-32a. Peter’s quotation of Joel 2:30-32a is interesting because the most logical place for these words to be fulfilled is in the great Day of Judgment, which is partly true. But it is clear from the way Peter quotes the passage in Joel that he sees a partial fulfillment in the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. David G. Peterson writes,

These mighty works, wonders, and signs could include all the events anticipating the arrival of the end—everything from Jesus’ supernatural birth and miraculous activity to his resurrection and ascension, the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the miraculous events recorded in Acts.¹⁶

Joel’s prophecy, as is often the case, pushes two distinct events together into one climactic event, but in actual fact, Peter is showing that the prophecy is partially fulfilled in the life of Jesus and will find complete fulfillment in the second coming of Jesus.

Third, Peter declares that Jesus of Nazareth is the one that the Jews should call on in order to be saved. Joel 2:32a says, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Peterson comments,

The rest of Peter’s sermon is then designed to show that Jesus is the Lord on whom they are to call in the messianic era. Furthermore, the explanation is given that calling on his name means submitting in repentance and faith to baptism in his name. Indeed, there are repeated references both to the name of Jesus and to the salvation available to him in Acts 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17, 18, 30; 5:28, 40. Joel 2:32 appears to have had a profound influence on early Christian preaching to Jews and the related ministry of healing “in the name of Jesus Christ.”¹⁷

In clarifying that Jesus is the Lord spoken of in Joel’s prophecy, Peter has placed the entire Old Testament prophecy in a christocentric grid of interpretation. At this point, the sermon as recorded by Luke shifts to a second Old Testament passage, which he interprets through a christocentric lens.

In Psalm 16:8-11 David writes,

¹⁶David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 143.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 144.

I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Peter chooses this Old Testament text to explain the resurrection of Jesus. In its original context the reader sees only the truth that David has set the Lord before him, and that the Lord is his power because he is at David's right hand. But in verse 10 there is a shift that even the original audience would have perceived. David claims that his soul will not be abandoned to the abode of the dead and his flesh would not see corruption. Peter seizes on this point to show the christocentric nature of the psalm. Peter says in Acts 2:29-31,

Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

David was speaking as a prophet of the one who would be born in his lineage that would sit on his throne forever as God had promised in 2 Samuel 7. John Stott comments,

Peter next confirms the truth of Jesus' resurrection by appealing to Psalm 16:8-11 in which, he claims, it was foretold. David cannot have been referring to himself, when he wrote that God would not abandon him to the grave or let his holy one see decay (27), because David had died and was buried, and his tomb was still in Jerusalem (29). Instead, being a prophet and remembering God's promise to place a distinguished descendant on his throne, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ (30-31).¹⁸

Peter clearly has no problem viewing the Scripture of the Old Testament in a christocentric manner, and this passage displays the way the apostles delivered the sermon in a christocentric format. If Psalm 16:8-11 was to be seen as pertaining to David, then it must be connected to Christ. Darrel Bock comments,

These emphases show how Peter reads the lines of the psalm and its parallelism. The Jewish "link word" form of *gezerah shewa* appears again in the speech, linking text and exposition together in multiple terms from verses 26-27 (flesh, abandoned, hades, and corruption are all repeated here). If the psalm was ever to be connected to David, it must surely be connected even more to the Christ, whom God has shown Jesus to

¹⁸Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 76.

be by his resurrection. In addition the verb tenses for “see” and “abandon” are now aorist instead of future, underscoring the verse’s current fulfillment.¹⁹

Peter, in his Pentecost speech, has used two Old Testament passages from two distinct genres to display the fulfillment of the Old Covenant through Christ.

Having used two passages from the Old Testament to exalt Christ as the promised Messiah, Peter turns his sights on yet another passage which he interprets from a christocentric viewpoint. Jesus used Psalm 110:1 to prove his role as Lord in his earthly ministry. Mark 12:35-37 records Jesus: “‘How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.’ David himself calls him Lord. So how can he be his son?’” Jesus used the christocentric grid to understand and explain the Old Testament, so it should be no surprise that Peter follows his lead in teaching at Pentecost. Acts 2:34-36 contains Peter’s christocentric explanation of Psalm 110:1, and in this passage Peter connects the Lord sitting at the right hand of God to the ascension of Jesus Christ back to heaven. Jesus will not one day be the Lord. Jesus is the Lord. Jesus will not one day sit on the throne of David. Jesus is sitting on the throne of David. F. F. Bruce writes, “The invitation to sit at God’s right hand was not addressed to David: David did not ascend personally to heaven to share the throne of God. The invitation was addressed to the son of David, and has found its fulfillment in Jesus.”²⁰ As Bruce so rightly points out, Psalm 110:1 cannot be understood unless the interpreter uses the christocentric approach. Scripture assumes this approach to interpretation of both the Old and New Testaments. If modern preachers do not follow the pattern of the apostles in interpretation and preaching, then the message of the Bible will be irreparably lost.

In this crucial passage concerning the events of Pentecost, it is clear that Peter sees a common thread to be understood from all of Scripture, and that thread is Christ. By

¹⁹Bock, *Acts*, 129.

²⁰Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 67.

using passages from three distinct genres of Old Testament Scripture, Peter makes it clear that Jesus is the main message of the entire Scripture, not simply the few direct quotes in the prophets concerning the Messiah. The key to understanding the depth of God's Word is to understand every passage as pertaining to the person and work of Jesus. The deepest interpretation of Scripture is only possible through christocentric, historical-redemptive interpretation.

Acts 7:2-53

In the previous passage Peter was direct in his christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament. Acts 7:2-53 contains the words of Stephen in his defense before the ruling council of the Jews. In this speech Stephen is less overt in his christocentric approach, but in his indirect method there is a strong implication that he read the Scripture with Christ as the central theme. Stephen uses four epochs of Israel's history to uncover the ultimate goal of all God's work in the Old Covenant. He describes the epoch of Abraham (7:2-8), the epoch of the patriarchs (7:9-19), the epoch of Moses (7:20-44), and finally the epoch of David and Solomon (7:45-50). John R. W. Stott points out in regard to Stephen's recounting of history, "What he did was not just to rehearse the salient features of the Old Testament story, with which the Sanhedrin were as familiar as he, but to do so in such a way as to draw lessons from it which they had never learned or even noticed."²¹ This is a bold defense of Christian faith before the ruling counsel of the Jews. He has been charged in Acts 6:13-14 with the most serious charge of blasphemy, and His response in the speech does not circumvent that charge through compromise. Stephen defends himself against this charge with powerful, christocentric exposition of four epochs of the Old Testament history. It is also helpful to keep this section in the context of a defense against the charge of blasphemy. Stephen has been proclaiming the

²¹Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 130.

Old Testament in his teaching in a christocentric context, and it is because of his commitment to a christocentric approach to Scripture that the Jews are attacking. It is helpful to look at each section of Stephen's speech with an eye toward his christocentric interpretation and teaching.

Before dealing with the individual sections of the sermon, it is beneficial to look at the abrupt conclusion of Stephen's speech in Acts 7:51-53. In this section Stephen condemns the Jewish leadership of his day as "stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears. . . . As your fathers did, so do you (Acts 7:51)" Stephen distances himself from the Jewish leaders because they have rejected the ultimate fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises by betraying and murdering the Righteous One. It is interesting that his condemnation centers on the Sanhedrin's disobedience to the law as evident in their murder of Jesus. Peterson points out the significance of this conclusion when he writes, "Far from speaking against the law (6:13), he affirms its divine authority, by stressing that it was delivered by angels. His accusers are actually the ones who have dishonored and disobeyed God's law, particularly by putting to death the Righteous One."²² Stephen is obviously pointing to the Christ-centered interpretation of the Old Testament by charging the leaders of the nation with breaking the law by rejecting Jesus. Bruce comments further, "The fathers had all along resisted the plan of God, the very purpose for which he had made them a nation and called them into covenant relationship with himself; their descendants had now repudiated the one in whom the divine plan and purpose were to be consummated."²³ So, Stephen's defense culminates with a charge of breaking the Old Testament law by murdering the fulfillment of the promises. Stephen is thoroughly convinced that all Scripture must be believed, taught, and obeyed through a christocentric grid.

²²Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 265.

²³Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 152-53.

Now that the christocentric conclusion has been firmly established, the body of the speech can be examined as to its support of Stephen's conclusion. First, he deals with the epoch of Israel's history as represented by Abraham in Acts 7:2-8. Stephen says, "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran" (7:2b). Peterson points out, "Stephen's speech is framed by references to God's glory, with his vision of the ascended Christ and the glory of God (7:55-56), placing him in the line of those like Abraham and Moses (7:30-34), who received such definitive revelation."²⁴ The reference to the God of glory is unique to Stephen. It appears that he is emphasizing the fact that God has chosen to reveal himself as glorious to the true followers like Abraham, Moses, David, and Stephen. Ultimately, the revelation given to Abraham in Haran would be fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. Stephen is right to point out that Abraham's faith was not in the land of the promise, nor in circumcision, but was firmly placed in the God of the covenant. Stephen says,

Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to another, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. "But I will judge the nation that they serve," said God, "and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place." (Acts 7:5-7)

The Jewish leaders had placed their faith on the promise of physical land, physical ethnicity, and the physical fulfillment of the promise of the Old Covenant, but Stephen is pressing the Sanhedrin to think of promises in greater spiritual terms. Abraham believed although he never received a foot of land nor even had a child at the time of the promises. Faith must be placed in the ultimate glory of God, Jesus Christ.

Second, Stephen turns to the life of Joseph as representative of the lives of the patriarchs. According to this account of the story of the sons of Jacob, "The patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him and rescued him out of all

²⁴Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 248.

his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household.” (7:9-10). It is clear that Stephen is stressing the favor of God on the life of his chosen one over and against the nation of Israel. Bock makes this point when commenting,

The contrast is important. God was with the one whom the other eleven sons of Jacob rejected, a note introducing the nation’s pattern of failure to recognize the one chosen by God. This pattern began even among those who are responsible for Israel’s name and for its being known as a people of twelve tribes.²⁵

Again, Stephen is setting his audience up to see that in rejecting Christ they are siding with the historical figures who consistently persecuted and denied the truth. It is clear that Stephen is drawing a parallel to the life of Jesus through the life of Joseph, and it is beyond question that he sees his persecutors as in the line of the rebellious sons of Israel from the Old Testament. It should be argued that Stephen sees Joseph as a type of Christ, and he also understands the brothers’ rejection of Joseph as a type of the rejection that Jesus would endure from the leaders of the nation of Israel.

The third epoch of Israel’s history that Stephen uses in his speech is the life of Moses. This must have infuriated the Sanhedrin because it was Moses and his teaching that they had accused Stephen of blaspheming (6:11). In his speech Stephen follows the pattern of the Jewish teachers by segmenting Moses’ life into three forty year blocks of time. Stephen is not simply recounting the life of Moses, but he is pushing for his hearers to understand that the life of Moses is a shadow of the life of Christ. The description of Moses as “beautiful in God’s sight” (7:20) and the fact that Moses was described as growing in word and deed (7:22) draw on the life of Christ as described by Luke in his gospel account. Stott comments, “It was *at that time*, when the people’s sufferings were greatest and their prospects bleakest, that *Moses was born*, their God-appointed deliverer. ‘No ordinary child’ is the NIV’s rendering of an expression which combines the ideas of

²⁵Bock, *Acts*, 286.

his being beautiful and pleasing to God (20).”²⁶ Not only does Stephen attempt to show the connection between Moses and Christ through his early life, but Stephen also sees a type of Christ in the role of Moses as the deliverer of his people. In Acts 7:23-43, Stephen repeatedly demonstrates how the fathers of the Jewish nation rejected Moses as their God ordained leader. In doing this it is clear that Stephen is pointing out their rejection of the greater Moses, Jesus. Peterson says about Stephen’s use of this part of Israel’s history,

Moses is a unique figure in salvation history, even though a succession of prophets would later be provided to speak further words from God. He foundationally revealed the law to Israel and, by God’s empowering, became the deliverer of the chosen people from slavery in Egypt. In both respects—as revealer and deliverer—he is a type of Christ. This typology is most obvious when comparing it to the description of Jesus in Luke 24:19 as “a prophet powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.”²⁷

The rather long section reaches a climax in the rejection of Moses when Stephen says,

This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, “Who made you a ruler and a judge?”—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. . . . This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, “God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.” (7:35, 37)

Stephen sees all the events of the life of Moses as shadows of the ultimate redeemer who would save the people not from Egypt but from the Egypt of their sin. Stephen sees Moses as significant because he is a shadow of Christ. Just as the fathers of the nation had rejected God and his deliverer in the day of Moses which led them to idolatry, so Stephen points out near the end of this section of the speech by quoting Amos 5:25-27, this generation of Jewish leaders was rejecting God and his deliverer in their crucifixion of Christ and persecution of the church. It should be obvious that part of their rejection stems from their failure to rightly interpret the events of the Old Testament. The Jews of Stephen’s day failed to understand the christological import of the Scripture, and this

²⁶Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 136, emphasis original.

²⁷Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 254-55.

failure led them to further disobedience and rebellion against God.

The final epoch that Stephen covers in his christological speech is the epoch of David. Stephen turns his attention to the tabernacle and the temple as he drives home the final point. Ultimately, Christ is the dwelling place of God among the people. Stephen sees the tabernacle and even the great temple which Solomon built as types of Christ:

Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?” (7:48-50)

It appears that in this section Stephen desires the people to differentiate between the temple made with earthly hands and the true temple of Jesus’ flesh. Peterson again comments,

It is possible that Stephen’s reference to a house for God “not made with hands” was meant to point more specifically to the way God’s purpose is fulfilled in Christ and the church. We do not know whether Stephen was explicitly teaching such things, but it is a reasonable assumption, even from the false charges leveled against him (6:13-14).²⁸

The intent of Stephen and the other New Testament preachers seems clear. They had a desire to show the christocentric nature of the Old Testament. Stott’s concluding comments on Stephen’s speech are helpful,

Stephen’s speech was not so much a self-defense as a testimony to Christ. His main theme was positive, that Jesus the Messiah had come to replace the temple and fulfill the law, which both bore witness to him. As Calvin put it, “No harm can be done to the temple and the law, when Christ is openly established as the end and truth of both.”²⁹

It is becoming more and more evident that the intent of the New Testament preachers was to proclaim Christ from the text of the Old Testament. Jesus, Peter, and Stephen have been used to this point to show the necessity of christocentric preaching from both Old and New Testament. The conclusion of this chapter looks at the sermon of Paul in Acts 13:16-52.

²⁸Ibid., 264.

²⁹Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 141.

Acts 13:16-52

The last defense of christocentric preaching put forward in this chapter centers around Paul's synagogue sermon recorded in Acts 13:16-41. As with other speeches in the book of Acts, it is clear that Luke is giving a condensed version of the sermon, but it is clear even from the edited version of the sermon that Paul interprets the history of the Old Testament through the lens of Christ. In the opening of the sermon Paul points out that Israel was chosen, raised to prominence as a nation, delivered from Egypt, given the land of Canaan, and placed under the rule of a great kingdom so that the word of promise might be fulfilled in Christ. At the heart of the sermon, in verses 27 through 33, is Paul's christocentric interpretation of the Scripture, "And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you' (32-33)." John Stott comments, "Paul tells the story of Jesus, as he has told the story of Israel. In doing so, he concentrates on the two great saving events, his death and his resurrection, and demonstrates that both were fulfillments of what God had foretold in Scripture."³⁰ Paul's sermon mirrors the speech of Stephen in style. He brings Christ forward through implicit connections to the history of Israel.

Paul continues this implicit method until the end of the sermon. At the end of the sermon he shifts to a very direct form of arguing and pleading with the people to place their faith in Jesus Christ. Beginning in verse 34, Paul strings together several Old Testament quotations to prove that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises of God contained in the Old Testament. The intent of the apostle in this section of the sermon is to link the fate of the nation of Israel with her Messiah. If Israel refuses to accept the promised Son of God, then she will suffer complete rejection. Peterson confirms this perspective:

³⁰Ibid., 224.

Linking together the promises from Psalm 16:10 and Isaiah 55:3, we see that the Messiah's deliverance from death and decay is one of 'the holy and sure blessings promised to David' and that this means salvation for Israel too. Israel's future is intimately connected with what happens to her Messiah, though there is no explicit mention of the return of Christ or eternal life.³¹

The hope of Israel from the time of Abraham through the coming of Christ has always been the promise of God, and that promise finds its ultimate fulfillment in the death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus. In Paul's theology there is no room for interpreting the Old Testament through any other grid than a christological one.

Conclusion

The biblical argument for christocentric interpretation and preaching of all the Scriptures is beyond refutation. Having examined the words of Jesus, Peter, Stephen, and Paul, the reader can safely conclude that the early church and its founders believed that the Old Testament should be taught from the prospective of Christ and him crucified. If any other method is employed, the church will be left weak and floundering. Though many have successfully gathered crowds with more contemporary models of preaching, there is only one way to insure that people are being edified and that is through the proper use of a christocentric method.

³¹Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 393.

CHAPTER 3

ALTERNATE FORMS OF PREACHING COMPARED TO A CHRISTOCENTRIC PREACHING FORM

Having formed the theological foundation of a christocentric approach to preaching in the last chapter, this chapter assesses two alternate forms of preaching. The first approach has been aptly called the “felt needs” approach to preaching, the domain of the seeker-sensitive movement. The second form of preaching may be referred to as “counseling from the pulpit.” Although each minister must be given the freedom to select a personal style of communication, the preacher should never be given the freedom to change the objective of proclamation. The Bible focuses the preaching task on the redemptive-historical plan of God in Christ. In this chapter, these two alternatives are discussed and examined from the perspective of their best practitioners. The seeker-sensitive model is examined using Bill Hybels’ preaching. He is one of the foremost proponents of the seeker-sensitive movement and pastor of Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago, Illinois. The second alternate form is represented by the preaching of Jay Adams, former pastor of Harrison Bridge Road Presbyterian Church in Simpsonville, South Carolina. He is a much revered pastoral counselor, whose sermons reflect his strong desire to deal with the everyday application of the text of Scripture to the life of the average believer. In each case, the sermons are evaluated on their own merit and then critiqued from a christocentric perspective. The aim of chapter 3 is to clearly demonstrate the superiority of a christocentric approach to preaching.

Seeker-Sensitive Preaching

The first form of preaching that is examined is the seeker-sensitive approach, which began to be popularized during the late 1970s in the United States. Most large

churches follow the pragmatic approach to ministry that is encouraged by this branch of evangelicalism. It is beyond the purpose of this project to deal with the various problems associated with the seeker-sensitive movement, but one major philosophical and biblical issue must be addressed. The seeker movement is founded on philosophical pragmatism, which leads to a consumerist-driven model of preaching and teaching. When pastors are driven by the desire to appeal to the natural mind, giving the hearer a certain level of comfort and the deceptive lie that the gospel can be made more palatable to the lost world, they will inevitably find themselves as man pleasers. David F. Wells has aptly diagnosed the problem in his book *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Post-Modern World*:

In these churches, Christian orthodoxy is not jettisoned, but it is tailored for the new consumer audience, which is one much given to spirituality shorn of theology, one stripped of much of its cognitive structure. Messages are preached with civility and they are more user-friendly than they used to be. Their effectiveness is judged by their 'market value' (that is, their practical usefulness. God is much friendlier, too. Gone are the notes of judgment, though these are more displaced than denied, and they are replaced by those of love and acceptance. God, in one such message, was presented as the one "who loves you, is proud of you, believes in you, and will give you strength to stand up to the forces of evil in the world." Sin is preached but is presented more in terms of how it "harms the individual, rather than how it offends a holy God. Sin, in short, prevents us from realizing *our* full potential." Conversion is insisted upon but then, paradoxically, it is the this-worldly benefits that are accentuated, the practical benefits of knowing Christ receiving all the attention with scarcely a look at what happens if we turn away from him. To turn away from him, Hybels says, leaves that person not so much under God's judgment as unfulfilled. Thus the exclusive message of classical evangelicalism is maintained but parts of it are de-emphasized and parts are transformed to make the adjustment to this consumer-driven and therapeutically defined culture. Evangelicalism is now presented "in the friendly guise of an egalitarian, fulfillment-enhancing, fun, religious encounter with God." And is this not sailing dangerously close to adapting the gospel to the postmodern disposition for the sake of success, adapting it to those yearning for the sacred without addressing what stands in the way to knowing God? When Paul wrote to the Galatians, whom he had to rebuke, he was painfully aware of the temptation to soften the gospel. He firmly rejected the desire to "please men" because, he said, if "I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ" (Gal 1:10).¹

It is this "man pleasing" tendency that is so often the focus of criticism from the wider evangelical world. The deeper foundational issue for the seeker-sensitive

¹David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Post-Modern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 305-06.

movement and Bill Hybels, in particular, is that the Christ-centered gospel of the Bible is not the central theme of ministry. The gospel is not the driving force of evangelism, discipleship, or ministry. The felt needs of the people are the driving force of almost all aspects of church life, especially the teaching. Hybels describes the motivation for founding Willow Creek Community Church:

In 1975 a group of friends and I began to call these people “seekers,” and we decided to start a church that could reach them—a church that would answer their questions, address their needs, introduce them to Jesus Christ, and give them a taste of His kingdom on earth.²

This sounds attractive to the common Christian leader. The church is supposed to reach the lost world and to connect with the needs of the people who need to know Christ, but the emphasis of the “seeker” and his desires and needs takes center stage in Hybels’ ecclesiology. He seems to value the unchurched more than he values the glory of Christ or the purity of Christ’s church. The outward success of churches like Willow Creek cannot be denied. But when the movement is examined from a biblical perspective, it fails to meet the standard of the Scripture.

Seeker-Sensitive Hermeneutics

The topic of seeker-sensitive hermeneutics is difficult to discuss because the proponents of the seeker movement have not written a textbook on their method. Further, the movement is inclusive of many styles of preparation for preaching, as well as methods of delivering the sermon. Therefore, the following discussion is limited to the ministry of Bill Hybels.

Hybels details his own journey toward the pastorate in the book *Mastering Contemporary Preaching*. He confesses that he did not have a desire to preach for at least two reasons. One was that his pastor and denomination did not exhibit a good biblical

²Bill Hybels and Lynne Hybels, *Rediscovering Church: The Story and Vision of Willow Creek Community Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 16.

pattern of preaching the Bible. He writes, “The preaching I heard was heavily slanted toward the Heidelberg Catechism. In twenty years of hearing the creed preached, no one I knew ever had a life-changing experience.”³ The other reason he was slow to the idea of giving his life to preaching God’s Word was that his father was a business man. Bill Hybels felt certain that his own life would be given to the marketplace. His change of heart happened because he was thrust into a speaking role in his local youth group as an older teen. Hybels recounts the experience:

The youth pastor of the church was attending had left, and I was asked to give some leadership to the young people. I figured part of youth ministry was to look in my Bible and give them some devotional thoughts from time to time. What actually happened was that I discovered I had the spiritual gifts of preaching and teaching—and at the time I had never heard of spiritual gifts!⁴

From this early discovery, Bill Hybels has continued to sharpen his ability to communicate a message with great impact on those under his teaching. But the question of how he prepares and the method he uses to deliver his sermons remains in question.

The first step in the hermeneutic of the seeker-sensitive model is to consider the audience. Hybels has a strict separation between the mid-week service and weekend services at Willow Creek. The purpose of the mid-week sermons is to train believers. At the weekend services the goal of the teaching is to confront the secular non-Christians with a topic that will engage them where they are on their spiritual journey. In preparing to preach in the weekend services, Hybels says that he must first understand the way lost people in his culture think. Secondly, he has to convince non-Christians that he actually likes them.⁵ As Hybels continues explaining his approach to speaking to secular minds, he deals with the idea that the sermon and sermon series should be tailored to the

³Bill Hybels, Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson, *Mastering Contemporary Preaching* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1989), 10.

⁴Ibid., 11.

⁵Ibid., 29.

sensibility of the culture. Hybels confesses, “Unchurched people today are the ultimate consumers. We may not like it, but for every sermon we preach, they’re asking, ‘Am I interested in that subject or not?’ If they aren’t, it doesn’t matter how effective our delivery is; their minds will check out.”⁶ From these statements it is clear that in the seeker-sensitive approach the first consideration in preaching should be the audience.

It is also clear from both his sermons and his writing that Hybels believes the seeker-sensitive pastor should prepare short topical sermon series that deal with current events and issues. Hybels writes,

I’ve also found it helpful, as many pastors have, to preach messages in a series. With the non-Christian, you want to break the pattern of absenteeism. Over the course of the series, he or she gets in the habit of coming to church and says, “This isn’t that bad; it only takes an hour.”⁷

It is important to point out that Willow Creek does not believe it shrinks from preaching the gospel. Hybels is clear on this conviction when he says, “Our sermons don’t shrink back from spelling out the fullness of the gospel, including the difficult elements of sin and repentance.”⁸ The aim of preaching topical sermons is to attract the audience because of the common problem being addressed. A foundation for the information communicated during the sermon is drawn from many places, and once the foundational idea is formed, the preacher then turns to the Scripture to help stress God’s perspective.

The final aspect of the seeker-sensitive hermeneutic that must be discussed is the attitude that is projected by the pastor toward the Bible. In an interview conducted by Michael Duduit for *Preaching Magazine*, Hybels was asked about his use of the Bible in his seeker-sensitive services at Willow. Duduit asked, “In the weekend services that are

⁶Ibid., 31.

⁷Ibid., 33.

⁸Hybels and Hybels, *Rediscovering Church*, 174.

focused on the non-churched you take a more topical approach. How overt are you in your use of Scripture? Is there frequent use of Scripture, or is there simply an underlying scriptural basis for the more topical approach?”⁹ The response is telling of the attitude that is encouraged by this model of preaching. Hybels says,

I think the latter is a fair description, but it varies widely. For instance, on Father’s Day this past year my sermon was entitled “Phantom Fathers”—how fathers fail and how their failure often breeds resentment in the lives of their children. I spoke right out of the story of David and Absalom. If you studied the passage carefully, David failed as a father and created an enormous amount of resentment in the heart of Absalom, which created all kinds of complications later on. So I spoke from the narrative of the Old Testament on Father’s Day; whereas, when I did a series about a year ago titled ‘The Age of Rage,’ I used the Ephesians passage, “Don’t sin in your anger”—don’t let the sun go down without trying to bring some form of resolve to it. In a series like that I tend to use Scripture as the underlying authority for what I’m saying.¹⁰

It is clear that the topic or felt need is the genesis of the sermon rather than the biblical text. The idea for those in this style of preaching is to make the effort to be biblical in a more general sense. Hybels says,

Sure, we discuss the topics that are relevant to seekers – their marriages, their priorities, their emotions, their finances, their parenting, their quest for fulfillment, their sexuality. But it’s always from a biblical perspective, to help them understand that Christianity isn’t just true but that it also can work in their lives.¹¹

It is safe to conclude that the general attitude of this method toward the Bible is that it is helpful but not foundational to the sermon.

The pragmatic philosophy that drives the seeker-sensitive movement dictates that sermons focus on what “works” before concerning itself with the message of Scripture. If this method is used effectively, then the audience will be challenged and encouraged to live a life that is moral, happy, and harmonious with the community. It is

⁹Michael Duduit, “A Preaching Interview with Bill Hybels,” *Preaching Magazine* [on-line]; accessed 4 February 2012; available from <http://www.preaching.com/resources/articles/11563492/>; Internet.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Hybels and Hybels, *Rediscovering Church*, 174.

evident that God has used the seeker-sensitive movement to bring people to initial faith in Christ. When honest assessment is given to this approach to preaching, it is clear that while it may appeal to a wide variety of people, it is not in keeping with the apostolic preaching of the Bible. It has a very valid concern in emphasizing the need for evangelism from the pulpit, but it totally neglects the need for deeper instruction from the pulpit for the mature believer. When Hybels separates the evangelistic motive of preaching from the deeper discipleship motive of preaching he is denying the power of the gospel to both save and train the people. There would be no need for two separate styles of preaching in the mid-week service and the weekend service if Hybels and his staff employed a christocentric method of preaching.

Hybels' Sermons Examined

It is helpful when comparing methods of sermon preparation and delivery to examine specific sermons that can be used as a test case. Bill Hybels is one of the most recognized communicators in the evangelical church. His influence has grown over the years as thousands have joined Willow Creek, and Hybels has also established a network of pastors known as the Willow Creek Association, which has worked to train and equip many pastors for seeker-sensitive ministry. Much can be learned from this man as a leader and as a preacher. This section focuses on his sermon series entitled "Influence." Hybels delivered these sermons during the weekend service geared toward unbelievers. Six sermons were preached in consecutive order from September 7, 2008, through October 12, 2008. Hybels used his magnetic style to communicate the message effectively to his audience. It is best to review this sermon series in the areas of biblical content, central focus, and the presentation package of the sermon series.

First, Hybels used direct biblical references sparingly over the course of the sermon series. Although this is not an expositional sermon series, Scripture should have a central role in communicating the message. In the six sermons, Hybels referenced the Scripture on ten occasions, but he only dealt seriously with the text three times. In most

instances he simply read a portion of the text and launches into a story about his personal life, the life of the church, or a current event. Matthew 5:14-16 received an extended look during the first sermon. Hybels equated the light of the lamp with the impact a person has on the world around them: “Jesus is saying darkness is growing in culture, and you are the lamps to put out the darkness. You have light power that can overcome the darkness of this world. Maximize and leverage your light!”¹² This was the extent of the exegetical comments made on the passage. The rest of the message was filled with anecdotal stories, personal references, and challenges to the audience which are good but not necessarily rooted in the Scripture. During the second sermon of the series Hybels dealt with the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son found in Luke 15. The point of using this text was to drive the audience to influence others the way Jesus influenced the Pharisees in his day. He pointed out during the sermon, “Influencers learn that it’s very difficult to change someone’s opinion when it is a long held belief. To help someone make this change takes time, patience, skill in persuasion, and creativity.”¹³ The parables were then discussed from two angles. First, they were used as a test case of how people should influence others the way Jesus did. Second, the parables were used to inspire the audience to love lost people the way that God loves lost people. Both of these were valid points to consider, but neither of these was the main point of the text under consideration. It is obvious when examined closely that Scripture was being added to the idea of the preacher to give it the look of a biblical sermon. Although the ideas were true in and of

¹²Bill Hybels, “Influence, Part I” (sermon delivered at Willow Creek Community Church, Chicago, 7 September 2008) [on-line]; accessed 7 February 2012; available from http://media.willowcreek.org/?search-class=DB_CustomSearch_Widget-db_customsearch_widget&widget_number=3&all-1=Weekend+Series&cs-entry_speaker-0=Bill+Hybels&search=Search; Internet.

¹³Bill Hybels, “Influence, Part II” (sermon delivered at Willow Creek Community Church, Chicago, 14 September 2008) [on line]; accessed 7 February 2012; available from http://media.willowcreek.org/?search-class=DB_CustomSearch_Widget-db_customsearch_widget&widget_number=3&all-1=Weekend+Series&cs-entry_speaker-0=Bill+Hybels&search=Search; Internet.

themselves and they are very helpful to the people in the audience, the ideas were being placed on the text from the mind of the preacher. This is not biblical preaching. At best this is an inspiring self-help series with the Bible used to add some authority to the opinion and ideas of the pastor. The biblical content in this six-sermon series is shallow and sparse.

Second, it is good to try to understand the central focus of these sermons. In any sermon the central focus of the preacher should always be to exalt the person and work of Jesus Christ. Hybels fails to focus on Christ in these sermons. Jesus is often referenced as a person of influence, a man of great exemplary character, or the source of the most lasting impact in life, but Jesus is not found in the context of the Scripture or the one that the audience is clearly driven to worship. At times, the sermon seemed to be completely focused and centered on the needs of the congregation. Because Hybels and Willow Creek state that the purpose of the weekend services is to capture the minds of the secular people and convince them of their need for Christ, the expectation going into the series was that the sermons would drive people to the point of decision in regard to salvation. The fact is that the gospel was not present in the sermons; Jesus was simply one character among the many characters of the storyline in the sermon. The central focus of the sermon series was the need for each person in the audience to become a person of influence.

The final point to examine from the series is the presentation package for the sermons. This is an area that Hybels excels in as an effective communicator. While watching this series, one cannot help but be engaged in the sermon. Hybels is relational, current, and authentic in his presentation. Each sermon was roughly forty minutes long, which was somewhat unexpected because in his writing and interviews Hybels indicated that his sermons are typically twenty minutes. Although the sermons were longer than expected, they were filled with stories and illustrations which made listening easy. The average sermon was more than two-thirds illustrative material. The meat of the sermon

was usually contained in one seven to ten minute section, where the majority of Scripture was referenced. After giving a well-formed outline supported with effective stories and some biblical information, Hybels closed the sermons with an emotional plea for people to act on what they have just heard. This method of sermon delivery is built for results. It is easy to understand why Willow Creek has grown under this man's teaching. He is effective in accomplishing his intended purpose.

Hybels' Sermons Critiqued

With this sermon series having been examined, it is helpful to look at the sermon series from a christocentric perspective. The same categories are used to critique the sermons as was used in examining its content. The intention in this section is to highlight the ways that the sermon could have been improved through the use of a christocentric method.

First, the Scriptural content of the sermon series would have been dramatically improved using a christocentric approach. In the first sermon Hybels made several valid points that could have been greatly strengthened had he taken the time to develop the sermon from the text using his effective communication style to exalt Christ. The first sermon began with Hybels explaining Matthew 5:14-16. The audience was not brought into the context of this passage. Very little time was given to explaining the setting and purpose of the Lord in teaching this passage to his disciples. Hybels should have emphasized the centrality of the gospel in his sermon. Jesus is clearly teaching his followers that the light of their life, which will shine in the dark world, is the light of his glorious gospel. Far from being a text about influence in general, this text points to the influence of people captivated and passionate in their personal relationship with Christ. If the text was explained from this point of view, then Hybels would have been on track to push the audience toward belief in Jesus. Jesus could have been exalted through the way of progressive revelation, by going back to the Old Testament and showing the centrality of the promise of redemption. Once he firmly established the centrality of the gospel, he

could have moved into teaching that Jesus is the light of the world, and it would have been effective to then point out that Jesus was himself the city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. Finally, Hybels would have been within the parameters of this text to challenge his congregation to faith in Christ so that they themselves become lights which overcome the darkness through the influence of the gospel. In making the biblical text more central during the message, Hybels could have been more effective in reaching his desired destination.

Second, Hybels could have changed the central focus of the sermon and the sermon series from becoming a person of influence into showing the way that Christ was the ultimate person of influence. It could be argued that topical sermons in this regard lend themselves to not being Christ-centered. When a pastor deals with a concept rather than a specific text of Scripture, it is difficult to focus on anything other than the idea being presented. This is one of the great advantages of a christocentric approach. When the pastor approaches the text of Scripture in the preparation process with Christ as the focus, then he is more apt to keep the gospel at the front of his sermon. In this series, the abuse and even twisting of texts was dangerous. If Hybels had been using a christocentric method when teaching Luke 15, then he would have been more prepared to present the central theme of the parables themselves. The central focus of Jesus in telling the parables is to point out to the pharisees that they are the older brothers in the third parable. They are the ones in dire need of a savior, and in telling the stories the way he did, Jesus setup the conclusion so that the people left looking for an elder brother who would willingly sacrifice his own inheritance for the sake of the wayward younger brother. The context and setting of the story lends itself to a christocentric message because Jesus was using a compare and contrast method of teaching so that the pharisees saw that he was the only one who could ultimately fulfill the role of the elder brother. Hybels completely missed the central message of Luke 15 because he was focused on the idea of influence.

Finally, the packaging of the sermon, while effective in presentation, was not

constructed to leave the people with one singular Christ-centered focus. Because Hybels uses long and detailed personal stories, his sermons leave the audience with more connection to his family, Willow Creek Church, or the culture around them; but they do not necessarily leave the person with a better connection to Jesus Christ. The audience is emotionally connected to the many characters that Hybels brings into the sermon through effective story telling making it difficult to remain focused on the Scripture and Christ because they are constantly presented with alternate characters and storylines. If Hybels was using a christocentric method, then he would have to drop many of the stories and extra biblical information. He would need to spend the majority of his time presenting the Word of God to the people in a way that motivated them to place their faith in Christ or live their life in light of the gospel. The point of a sermon in the church should be to leave people hungry for God and his Word. While Hybels is without question a skilled communicator, he desperately needs to employ a christocentric approach to sermon crafting and sermon delivery.

Christian Counseling Preaching

A second method of preaching both the Old and New Testament is the Christian counseling or preaching for edification approach. Unlike the seeker-sensitive model previously considered, this method of preaching is not attached to a specific movement within the evangelical church. The goal of this type of preaching is explained by Dennis Johnson: “Advocates of this priority insist that regular preaching to a gathered congregation on a Lord’s Day should aim to motivate and guide believers to pursue changes that bring their patterns of behavior and relationships into growing conformity to God’s Word.”¹⁴ The purpose of preaching is not to modify the behavior of the congregation. Preaching is biblical when it turns the focus of the congregation to the

¹⁴Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 37.

person of Christ through the gospel. In this section it is helpful to look at the hermeneutical method used by the proponents of this model and is also instructive to look at the preaching of Jay Adams, the foremost recognized practitioner of the Christian counseling method.

Christian Counseling Hermeneutic

In his book *Preaching with Purpose*, Jay Adams clearly states the objective of all Christian preaching in his opinion. He explains, “Faithful fulfillment of his weekly task, then, entails edificational preaching. The minister of the Word is a mason who goes to church each week to lay block. He builds on a foundation, and to be faithful he must build that which will be able to withstand the fires of testing (1 Cor 3:10-15).”¹⁵ Adams goes on to give a much more lengthy definition of the preaching task. In this longer definition it appears that Adams is more careful to define what preaching for change should include and for what purpose the preacher is to preach for change:

Therefore, both the pastor who ignores the forest for the trees and the one who neglects the trees for the forest err. They must always have both concerns in view. Their sermons certainly must focus on individual change, but not for the sake of the individual alone; how that change honors God by blessing the whole is equally important.¹⁶

It is clear that in the edification method of preaching the aim of the preacher is life change in the context of the body of Christ for the glory of God.

In building his hermeneutic, Adams also clarifies that he does not see the apostles as models for preachers in the modern era:

First of all, we must recognize that the apostles were the recipients of an earthly source of special revelation; indeed, they themselves were writing Scripture! We are not. Moreover, we have no record of an apostolic address given in a Christian assembly. But we do see Jesus, ‘as was his custom,’ entering the synagogue and

¹⁵Jay Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: The Urgent Task of Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 12.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 13.

preaching from the biblical portion assigned for the day.¹⁷

The point of this reference is to show that in the Christian counseling method of preaching the pastor is not encouraged to follow any New Testament pattern of preaching except the pattern of Jesus in the synagogue. It is being made clear that the pastor should preach expositional messages that both explain the text of Scripture and exhort the congregation to live out the purpose of the passage in their everyday lives. The second rule in this hermeneutic is to preach like Jesus. The preacher must exposit the passage clearly and exhorts the congregation practically.

The next focus of this particular hermeneutic is to select a text for the preaching portion, and after selecting the text to work through the exegetical frame of reference to draw out the meaning of the text, form a preaching outline of the text, and prepare to preach the sermon. This is an area of strength for the preaching to edify method. Adams gives sound instruction on how to determine the meaning of a text: “To be just to any human writer, his purpose must be considered, and purposes that he did not have in mind should not be attributed to him.”¹⁸ Adams goes on to explain that the Scripture always has a purpose from the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit does not intend for us to use a passage allegorically—finding hidden meanings in every word and generating all sorts of unintended principles from any given passage, but neither does He want us to landlock a principle so that it may be used only when a situation of exactly the same sort occurs in our day.¹⁹

The preacher is encouraged to follow the path of historical-grammatical exegesis. Adams does not believe this is the end of the exegetical work for the pastor:

Historical-grammatical exegesis is essential, but not enough. Biblical-theological and systematic-theological studies of the passage likewise are important but, again, are insufficient. Rhetorical and literary analyses (areas themselves rarely acknowledged and so usually ignored) are also significant but still do not go far enough. The result of all the work done in these six ways will be uselessness, leading at length to

¹⁷Ibid., 16.

¹⁸Ibid., 29.

¹⁹Ibid., 28.

frustration and to all sorts of possible harm if you do not go on to discern, from all these efforts, the telos of the passage. Indeed, all six of these important and essential efforts in studying the passage should be made telically. That is to say, not merely to ‘understand the passage,’ if by that you mean to understand what the words mean, but should include the purpose of discovering purpose.²⁰

It is made clear that the traditional approach to hermeneutics is encouraged in this method of preaching. Adams is gifted at arguing for the application of this method so that the congregation is challenged through the pastor’s teaching to apply all truth to the building up of the individual and the body of Christ to the glory of God.

Adams teaches his students, “True preaching does all of the above (gaining the understanding of the text), but it also identifies the telos (purpose) of the passage, builds the message around it, and calls on the congregation for a response that is appropriate to it. It works for change.”²¹ Again, the emphasis on the need for change is clear. When the pastor delivers the sermon, he has only accomplished the design of preaching if the congregation is convinced to make necessary changes in life to conform to the text. As the sermon is delivered, the preacher should work hard to be true to the text’s meaning (exposition) and courageously calling for life change (exhortation). This sermon method is dependent on the pastor having a real knowledge of the congregation, and this fits well with Adams’ strength of Christian counseling. True strengths are exhibited by this method, but in the end it must be judged as insufficient. It fails to make Christ central. This preaching style again falls into the trap of being practically effective but not christocentric. Johnson draws this insight in regard to the Christian counseling method of preaching:

Paul proclaims Christ with the objective of ‘presenting everyone mature in Christ’ (Col 1:28). Therefore the aim to edify must be a priority in the pastor’s purpose for his weekly sermons. Nevertheless, questions can be raised about the appropriateness of elevating of this purpose to primacy or exclusivity as the norm that controls the pastor’s pulpit ministry.²²

²⁰Ibid., 30.

²¹Ibid., 43.

²²Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 41.

In the end, all methods that do not have Christ as the focus of the sermon fail to meet the biblical standard. The pastor cannot effectively preach the gospel, apply the life-changing message of the Scripture, and bring true life change without centering the sermon in a christocentric pattern.

Adams' Sermons Examined

As an example of the style of preaching under consideration, it is helpful to interact with a preaching sample delivered by Jay Adams. The sermon series under consideration is entitled "Overcoming Evil with Good," an exposition of Romans 12:14-21. The six-sermon series was given at a conference, preached consecutively in an expositional format. Adams' sermons are examined on the criteria of biblical content, central theme, and presentation. Adams is a gifted exegete with a keen eye for the insights of Scripture; a dynamic preacher that is talented in his use of exhortation.

First, it is necessary to consider the biblical content of the sermon series. Unlike Hybels' sermons, these expositions are dominated by the message of the scriptural passage. Quick to set the context of the passage, Adams dives into the meat of the text, and works to bring out the purpose of the author for the audience. He begins each sermon in this series by reading and referring directly to the passage under consideration. This assures that the audience understands where the message comes from and finds its purpose. Adams then turns to a detailed exposition of the verses under consideration, making sure that each of his points is a point from within the Scripture. He is careful not to impose an external message on the text. An example of his exegetical skill is his explanation of the meaning of Paul in Romans 12:21. Adams asks the question, "How do we deal with the evil we face because of our Christian faith?" He does not give a personal anecdote or story but instead points the listener directly to the text. He says,

Paul tells us in Romans 12:21 that we are at war with evil. When you see the word 'overcome' in your text you must understand that that is a term directly off the

battlefield. This word is used over and over again in the Scripture to reference the ability to win a battle. Our Captain has given us the marching order that we must overcome, win the battle against evil in our lives.²³

The exegetical insight delivered in this skillful manner helps the audience better understand the text. Adams continues to build understanding of the text throughout the remainder of his sermon. The sermon is built on the foundation of this passage, and several other passages are referenced to clarify or further the purpose of the sermon. In all the sermons examined, Adams saturates the mind of the listener with the Word of God. He is not building an idea but rather taking his purpose directly from the text under consideration. His sermons are thoroughly biblical in this manner.

Second, the sermon must be considered in the area of central theme and sermon focus. Adams states his purpose for all six of these sermons in the opening address of his first sermon. His desire is for each person in the audience to leave the conference with an understanding of what it means and what it looks like for individual Christians to overcome evil with good. The advantage of the Christian counseling method of preaching is that the sermon will almost always be centered on the biblical theme of the text. The sermons are also expositional, which helps keep the pastor from sliding into his own ideas and purposes. During the sermons Adams is able to restate the central theme of the sermon series at almost every sub point of the sermons. This helps to enforce the importance of overcoming evil with good and encourages the believers in attendance to be busy in their lives, warring against evil. The sermons are full of exposition and practical exhortations.

Finally, the sermon is examined as to how it is packaged for delivery. Adams is a skilled exegete and communicator. In the sermon series he uses examples and illustrations that are personal, historical, and scriptural. One of the best ways that he

²³Jay Adams, "Overcoming Evil with Good, Part 1" (sermon delivered at American Radio Conference, n.d.) [on-line]; accessed 30 January 2012; available from http://www.sg-audiotreasures.org/ja_index.htm; Internet.

paints the picture of the meaning of the text is to connect the purpose of the text to the life of characters in the Bible. He especially ties the points of the sermon to the life of Christ. If a person listens to a steady diet of sermons by Adams, he will without a doubt gain clear insight into the passages under consideration, understand how they relate to the real life situations, and be encouraged to apply the truth of Scripture in specific ways. There is much to be commended in the preaching of Jay Adams and the preaching to edify method. But the question must be asked as to whether or not these sermons are christocentric in nature.

Adams' Sermons Critiqued

When one critiques these sermons, the only area of criticism that can be pointed out is that the sermons are practical but not christocentric. Adams does a fantastic job of giving the believer advice that will bring his life into conformity with Scripture. He does a great job of rooting the sermon in a specific text that is under examination. Adams is a gifted expositor, but he fails to draw a clear line to the redemptive-historical thread of the progressive revelation of God. In fact, he often deals with other places in Scripture that deal with similar themes as his passage, but because he is so committed to practical exhortation, he often misses the opportunity to build a foundation of biblical theology that ends in the person and work of Christ. Adams is a man who obviously loves the Lord, so he feels compelled at times to tag a word about the person of Jesus at the end of the sermon, but this comes across forced and unnatural. It would be a great improvement in content and delivery if the sermons were used to enforce the gospel. After building the foundation in a christocentric way, then the pastor could move to practical instruction. Unfortunately without the foundation of christocentric preaching, this method devolves into a form of works-based righteousness. Johnson astutely points out, "If, however, edification is exalted to the exclusion of evangelism or narrowed to address behavior but

not belief, it falls short of the comprehensive aim that is exemplified in apostolic preaching.”²⁴ In Adams, the pastor finds a worthy example of how to exegete the passage, find its purpose as stated by the author, and apply it to practical living for the audience. The missing element of the message is the strong emphasis on a christocentric perspective. If a pastor combined Adams’ gift of exhortation and exposition with the ability to preach christocentrically, then the hearers would be both built up and grounded in the gospel.

Conclusion

The two forms of preaching that have been explained, examined, and critiqued are both effective in communicating the intended purpose of the pastor. Each pastor must decide from personal conviction if the best method of preaching is represented by one of these alternate forms: a christocentric form or a form of preaching not considered within the scope of this chapter. If his purpose is to connect with a carnal mind so that the carnal person can live a better life, then the method employed by the seeker-sensitive model will work. If his purpose is to connect a believer to his duty as taught in the text of Scripture, then the preaching for edification model will do wonderfully. But if his purpose is to proclaim the glory of Christ and his gospel, then the best approach will be a christocentric method. Although, each model has its strengths and weaknesses, a christocentric model will best encourage the hearts of the audience in accepting and cherishing the excellencies of God’s redemptive plan as it is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁴Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 43.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECT

Six months prior to starting my project, I discussed the outline and idea of the project with the elders of Grace Fellowship. The excitement and interest in the project grew as the start date drew near. I reminded the elders of the project in January of 2012, and it was at this time that they committed to help the project begin in March. In the project, two groups of people were involved directly. First, the nine men from the congregation of Grace Fellowship were selected to participate in the preaching seminar. Each of these men is referred to by numerical designation in this report. The second group directly involved in the project is a representative group of church members who critiqued the sermons each week. I refer to the sermon critique group by designated letters.

Phase 1: Preparing the Project

The first phase of the project began on March 4, 2012. This phase included soliciting participation of the nine men to attend the preaching seminar and the church members who would critique the sermons during phase 3 of the project.

Elder Meeting to Approve the Project

On February 27, 2012, I presented the plan for the project to the elders of Grace Fellowship. There had been several discussions in the months leading up to the beginning of the project, but I felt that it was crucial for the elder team to understand and fully support my work with the congregation. Each of the elders would also participate in the preaching seminar so they would need to be well aware of the details associated with the project (see Appendix 2). I emphasized the importance of full participation from

seminar participants, the sermon critique group, and stressed that the project would take fifteen weeks to complete. The discussion during the meeting was general yet supportive. I was able to secure the support of all four elders.

Project Participants Selected

After meeting with the elders, I spent the next week securing the participation of five additional men from the congregation who would participate in the preaching seminar. My goal was to select men who had showed potential as a future elder in the congregation. This criterion limited the men who would be able to participate due to the biblical qualifications for the eldership. I also felt that it would be helpful for each of the participants to be men viewed by the congregation as potential future elders. I contacted 7 men and received a positive response from 5 of those contacted. The initial goal was to have 10 men participate in the seminar, but I decided to use 9 because of the desire to train the current elders and potential future elders.

I was pleasantly surprised at the willingness of the men to be involved in the preaching seminar. The requirement to attend the seminar each Sunday for twelve consecutive weeks was a concern for many of the men. Grace Fellowship is a young congregation that is very mobile. The twelve-week commitment represented a potential roadblock for the project. It was very helpful to have the participation of the four elders because this reduced the number of participants from the general congregation. The balance between current and future elders became a real strength of the project.

It was also necessary to select individuals from the congregation to review the christocentric sermon series which would be executed during weeks 4-9 of the project. I selected a group for each sermon that was representative of the general demographic of Grace Fellowship so that the results of the survey would be representative of the congregation. The participants for this section of the project were not difficult to find

because of the low level of responsibility. I was able to select 5-9 individuals for each of the six sermons.

Preaching Seminar Pre-Seminar Survey

The 9 seminar participants were e-mailed a copy of the pre-seminar survey (see Appendix 1). This survey was designed to measure each man's knowledge of preaching and christocentric preaching in specific. Each of the 9 participants turned in a completed survey. I realized at this stage of the project that several of the men would need constant reminders to complete tasks associated with the project.

The analysis of the pre-seminar survey concluded that the men in the seminar held strong opinions on preaching (see Appendix 3). As can be seen, nine items achieved an average answer of 'agree' or 'strongly agree.' These were agreement that the New Testament is about Christ, the need of a pastor to preach Christ from both Testaments, belief that both Testaments agree with each other, that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, that expository preaching is the best way to proclaim God's Word in the local church, that both testaments have one message, that training is important for a pastor, that both testaments have equal authority, and that the preaching at Grace Fellowship should be balanced between Old and New Testaments. One item resulted in an uncertain average response. The question that received the average response was whether a pastor should preach more from the New than the Old Testament. Three items generated average 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' responses. These were the view that the Old Testament is more about works, whereas the New Testament is more about grace, that a pastor should depend only on the Spirit for sermon preparation, and that a pastor should not practice delivery of a sermon.

I was encouraged by the result of the pre-seminar survey. The information provided by the men indicated that each of them were convicted that expository preaching was key in the ministry of the local church, and I was also encouraged that

each of the men already held a belief that all the Scripture is equally inspired and useful to the body of Christ. The results reflect maturity in the leaders of Grace Fellowship. After years of serving these men and with these men as teaching pastor, it was a blessing to see that they hold on to the importance of preaching.

The second part of the survey allowed the men to express their self-assuredness in their personal level of confidence in teaching God's Word. These answers were given in short answer format so they were not analyzed statistically, but the general consensus of the nine participants was that they felt unprepared to teach the Old Testament, more comfortable teaching the New Testament, and that they would struggle to preach a christocentric sermon. These answers indicated that the preaching seminar was needed. As I prepared to start the seminar the following week, I spent time praying for each of the men. My desire was that God would use this project to shape and mold christocentric teaching and preaching at Grace Fellowship.

Meeting with Seminar Participant 1

Two days before the official start of the preaching seminar I had lunch with Participant 1. This man is an elder at Grace Fellowship and is the most highly respected man in the congregation. I knew that Participant 1 would have some concerns about preaching christocentric sermons especially in the Old Testament. He has devoted many years to the study of God's Word, and the majority of his teachers have been dispensational. During lunch, Participant 1 assured me that he was open to learning the new approach to study and delivery of sermons. He admitted that through my teaching over the years, he had begun to question his commitment to dispensational theology. I assured him that the channel for communication was always open. The conversation was encouraging because he was open to change and he already saw some flaws in his long-held theological position.

Meeting with Seminar Participant 7

On March 11, 2012, seminar Participant 7 asked to talk with me prior to the beginning of the first session. When we sat together in my office, he told me that he was excited about the seminar training, but he was also concerned that he might not be able to keep up with the requirements of the seminar. I sensed that he was nervous about preparing and preaching a sermon at the end of the twelve weeks. After talking through the content of the seminar, Participant 7 agreed to continue as part of the project. This meeting helped me better understand the anxiety that is often associated with teaching or preaching God's Word. Because I have been in vocational ministry for the majority of my adult life, it never crosses my mind that what I am doing is stressful. Participant 7 is one of the bright young leaders at Grace Fellowship, and he is already an adequate teacher when given the opportunity, but he was still almost overwhelmed when thinking about preaching a sermon for evaluation. I made note to offer regular encouragement to the participants in the seminar regarding the upcoming preaching opportunity. It was also important to do a good job of teaching the seminar so that the men felt prepared to preach.

Phase 2: Preaching Seminars

This phase consisted of twelve weeks of training men to preach christocentric sermons at Grace Fellowship. Nine weeks of the training consisted of seminars designed to equip the men in biblical theology, preaching Christ in the Old Testament, preaching Christ in the New Testament, how to study for a sermon, how to organize the content of a sermon, how to effectively use sermon illustrations, how to effectively apply the sermon, and effective methods of communication. The final week of the nine-week teaching section of the seminar was used to give the participants an example of christocentric preaching from the life of Joseph. All of the seminar sessions during the first nine weeks were held at Grace Fellowship during the morning Bible study hour at 9:00 A.M. Sessions 10-12 were designed to give each of the nine participants an opportunity to

apply the teaching in a sermon presentation. Those last three sessions were held at Grace Fellowship beginning at 2:00 P.M. and were reserved for the men to preach a christocentric sermon from an assigned book of the Bible.¹ Because most of the men had expressed a lack of confidence when handling the Old Testament, all of the preaching assignments came from books of the Old Testament.

Session 1: Biblical Theology

The seminar began on Sunday, March 11, 2012 which was the second week of the project. During the first session the men were presented a basic introduction to biblical theology. At the beginning of the lecture I gave the men several concise definitions of biblical theology, and the men were presented with a general defense for the use of biblical theology in preparation for a sermon. Most of the men had never heard of biblical theology so this presented an immediate struggle for them. Participant 5 questioned the difference between biblical theology and systematic theology, and the men were generally curious as to the connection between this type of study and the other theological disciplines. After several minutes of discussion it was clear that the men understood the basic reason for using biblical theology in sermon preparation and Bible study in general. I defined biblical theology as “the organic textual study of the Bible so that all the parts of the Bible are placed in clear relationship to the other parts in terms of progressive redemption history. Biblical theology is the study of God as he presents himself and his work in the Bible.”

Most of the discussion was generated in the last section of the class as we discussed the proper connection between biblical theology and systematic, practical, historical, and exegetical theology. Participant 2 appeared to struggle over the need to separate biblical theology from other types of exegetical theology. Although we

¹An outline for each teaching session is located in Appendix 4.

discussed this at some length, I am not sure he was ever convinced of the validity of this separation.

Session 2: Christ in the Old Testament

I anticipated the seminar participants would all struggle in some way with the content of this lecture. Most of the men at Grace Fellowship grew up under strong dispensational teaching.² Over the past nine years God has brought them out of their previously held dispensational position, but the men are still experiencing many changes in their thinking in regard to the christocentric nature of all of Scripture. I began the session by presenting Graeme Goldsworthy's overarching structure for Scripture which centers on the idea of the Kingdom.³ As we went through the material, the men discussed the advantages they could see to this bird's-eye-view approach to the Scripture. I believe it was helpful for them that I did not simply jump into the textual discussion of Christ in the Old Testament. By talking with them through the schema of Kingdom and Covenant, the men were able to see the progressive nature of revelation.

Most of the discussion centered on my presentation of Sydney Griedanus' seven legitimate paths to interpreting the Old Testament christocentrically.⁴ Participant 9 was bothered by the discussion on typology. He had previously been taught a very strict form of typology. Participant 9 was convinced that the only way to be certain of the

²I define dispensational theology as a system of theology which attempts to develop the Bible's philosophy of history on the basis of the sovereign rule of God. It represents the whole of Scripture and history as being covered by several dispensations of God's rule. There are several distinctive views of those who hold to this system. The most distinctive view is the belief that God has a special relationship with the physical nation of Israel, and that God's plan for the Old Covenant people of God and the New Covenant of God is distinct.

³Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1981).

⁴Sydney Griedanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999).

existence of a typological relationship in the Bible was if the Scripture stated the type plainly. Griedanus' rules of typology brought a measure of comfort for most of the men in the seminar. Participant 9 told me after the session that he understood the concept better than pre-seminar and thanked me for teaching the concept.

Session 3: Christ in the New Testament

Because of the obvious agreement with the idea of teaching Christ in the New Testament, I was able to focus on a standard method of study in this lecture. The participants were taught to begin with the specific texts grammar and key ideas, relate the text with the immediate context, and then seek to understand the place of the specific text within the overall context of the New Testament and the Scripture. The last step in the study process was to make sure that the text was correctly related to the person of Jesus Christ. The participants did not have any significant struggles with these concepts. I was somewhat concerned by the lack of participation during the session. This concern caused me to set up several meetings with participants during the following week.

Meeting with Participant 4. I scheduled a breakfast meeting with Participant 4 on March 27, 2012. I had not received any feedback from him during the course of the project. He is an elder at Grace Fellowship and has a M.Div. from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Because of his training and years of ministry experience, I placed a high value on his opinion of the seminar. In our discussion, Participant 4 assured me that he was being challenged to think about his personal preparation habits. It was surprising to hear him confess that even in seminary he had not received instruction in the area of biblical theology. Our conversation further convinced me of the need of this type of training in the local church. Grace Fellowship's future as a church was being shaped in some way by the project that I was currently working to complete. The benefit of the seminar to Participant 4 in his personal study and in his teaching was that he was learning to trace the redemptive-historical path to Christ from Old and New Testament. He said

that his personal devotion to Christ had grown during the first few weeks of the project, and he was looking forward to the rest of the seminar.

Meeting with Participant 8. I was also able to meet with Participant 8 for lunch on March 30, 2012. It was important to discuss his progress in the seminar because he was the youngest Christian in this group of men. Participant 8 has displayed potential for gospel ministry in his short time of following the Lord, but I was concerned that the content of the seminar was above his understanding. During our lunch meeting I expressed my concerns to him, and he was thankful for the opportunity to meet with me. Participant 8 admitted that the first session on biblical theology was very difficult for him. He was unfamiliar with most of the concepts and terminology being presented in the lecture. I told him it was my fault for not making the material simpler, but he assured me that he was benefiting from the class. We were also able to discuss his fear of presenting a sermon at the end of training sessions. I was unaware that Participant 8 was afraid of public speaking. Because of his professional position I assumed that he would be at ease in front of a few men. After discussing the situation for the remainder of lunch, he assured me that he was willing to continue the seminar.

I should have thought through the potential roadblock of the fear of preaching prior to asking the men to join the seminar. The men in the seminar are well-educated, professional men which I assumed had conquered the fear of public presentations. The added pressure of handling the Word of God might have caused more anxiety in these men than I anticipated, but at this point in the process I determined to move ahead as planned. My options were very limited if someone backed out of their commitment so I continued the seminar without asking for others who might be struggling.

Session 4: An Organized Approach to Study

On April 1, 2012, I taught the fourth session of the seminar dealing with an approach to study for the sermon. The majority of the men in the seminar have taught the

Scripture for several years. I designed this session to focus on the key steps in preparing a christocentric sermon, and I was surprised at the number of men who commented that they had never thought through an organized approach to preparation when teaching a class. This probably stems from their dependence on teaching materials and other teaching aids. As we talked through the material in class, Participant 7 commented that the step in the study process from the exegesis to linking the text to Christ helped him better understand the overall aim of the christocentric preaching method. I was encouraged by this comment because Participant 7 is a very studious Bible student. He has taught several expository Bible studies in the past, and it was significant to the success of the project that he now saw the value of christocentric teaching.

The biggest objection to this session came from Participant 3. He felt that the steps would be too burdensome for him because he works a full time job. It was his opinion that a simpler method of preparation would encourage the men to apply the christocentric method when they teach or preach. I tried to explain my reasoning for being detailed in the preparation process. My contention was that by giving a very detailed process the men would have all that is necessary in preparation. If the workload of the participants kept them from fulfilling all the steps in the process, then they would be able to adjust the study process to fit their schedule. I also took the opportunity to point out the need for full-time pastors due to the study time necessary to teach and preach week after week. Participant 3 agreed with the need for full-time pastors, but he was unconvinced that the longer method of study I presented in the class would prove effective for the majority of the men in the seminar.

This week in the seminar marked the transition from biblical explanation of a christocentric method of preaching to the practical parts of sermonizing. I was concerned that many of the men would lose interest in the seminar at this point. Grace Fellowship is blessed with men who love God's Word but they lose interest in discussions about

mechanics of teaching. Because of this fear I tried to keep the seminar interactive as much as possible. The participants seemed to respond well to the teaching.

Session 5: Using Sermon Illustrations

The purpose of this seminar was to instruct the men on proper use of illustration in a sermon. It is a common area of concern in preaching because illustrations are easily abused for various reasons. I spent the majority of the class giving specific examples of good biblical, historical, personal, and current event illustrations. The discussion during this session was hard to control. Several of the participants wanted to spend too much time discussing preachers who misuse illustration. The goal of the session was not to condemn others but instead it was my desire to help them think through using illustrations. Participant 1 and 6 did a good job refocusing the discussion on biblical illustrations. Both of these men have serious concerns about using personal illustration during a sermon because they fear that it will take the attention of the congregation from the text being taught. Participant 6 also pointed out that proper use of the Bible in illustrating a point assures that the illustration is in keeping with God's design for the text. I agreed with their conclusion but also tried to encourage them in the area of using personal illustrations. People find personal illustration authenticating in a sermon. I wanted to make sure that the men left with a well-rounded approach to this step in sermonizing.

Meeting with Participant 6. On April 13, 2012, I had an extensive conversation with Participant 6 by telephone. The call began with him complementing my teaching during the seminar over the previous five weeks. I was able to question him about specific ways he was growing in his personal understanding of christocentric preaching. He shared that it was a struggle for him to fully accept christocentric preaching. Participant 6 attended The Gospel Coalition National Conference in 2011 where the plenary sessions focused on preaching christocentric sermons. Although he

agreed with many of the points made by the teachers at the conference and points that I had made in the seminar, Participant 6 was still struggling over applying each text to the person and work of Christ. His primary concern was reading Christ back into the text of the Old Testament when Christ was not clearly in the context of the original teaching. I was able to talk with him at length about Jesus' teaching in John 5:30-47 and Luke 24:13-49 where he clearly stated that the entire Old Testament is about him. I assured Participant 6 that we do have to guard against forcing tight connections between specific texts in the Old Testament and Christ, but it is legitimate in my opinion to trace the text through a path in redemptive history to Christ. Our conversation ended with mutual encouragement and Participant 6 admitted that he was being challenged to think clearly in regard to this important topic.

Session 6: Sermon Application

Session 6 focused in on the need to properly apply the sermon. There was very little discussion in this class, and the men in the lecture seemed to agree with the approach presented. I talked through the importance of applying the text throughout the sermon instead of holding all the application until the end of the sermon. The method of application emphasized in this session was trying to form each main point into an application statement. Participant 1 commented that he typically used a style similar to the Puritans. He had been taught to hold application until after the exposition was finished. Several of the other men commented that this is how they had usually seen preachers organize their sermons. The general belief seemed to be that the sermon should be divided into exposition and application sections. I discussed the problems with holding application until the end of the sermon. The audience will tend to lose the application because the sermon has not connected with them on a personal level. I encouraged the men to try to build their sermons with application during every major point. This

discussion was profitable and encouraging because it showed a level of interest in becoming better preachers through the seminar.

Session 7: Organizing the Sermon

In this session the training centered on the practical organization of the preaching material into a preaching outline. I spent time teaching the seminar participants how they should prepare the introduction, body, and conclusion of the sermon. There were several men who had to miss this seminar because of personal obligations. I became concerned that the men were losing interest in the course of study, but after a brief discussion with several men in the seminar I realized that the length of the seminar was difficult for these men. They were interested in the information, and that fact was made clear when each of the missing participants listened to the lectures through the church website the week after missing the session.

The first part of the lecture focused on the introduction. The men were encouraged to make the introduction interesting and relevant to the sermon. I instructed the men that the introduction should only set the table for the body of the sermon. The length of the introduction is to be appropriate in regard to the length of the overall sermon. I spent time giving the men examples of introductions that distracted from the point of the sermon, and showing the participants a quality introduction.

Secondly, the lecture focused on the body of the sermon. I taught the men the proper use of homiletical questions in organizing the sermon. The participants seemed to grasp the concept of summarizing the essence of the text in a sentence, and they also understood the need to express the essence of the sermon in a sentence. Participant 1 shared with the class that in past teaching and preaching situations he often struggled to narrow his teaching to the essence of the text. The seminar participants agreed that by working through the text and the sermon until the essence of both can be expressed in a single sentence, the teaching would be more organized and concise. They also believed

that by organizing the structure of the sermon around these central statements the listeners would be more likely to leave the sermon with a clear and concise understanding and application of the text. I was impressed with the willingness of the seminar participants to except the homiletical approach that I presented in this lecture. The men in the seminar came from various traditions. The variation in traditions caused me some apprehension when I was preparing the lecture, but I now believe that the men in the seminar will be better organized when preaching God's Word.

Session 8: Communicating the Sermon

I presented the need to be good communicators of the Word of God in the eighth session of the seminar. There were several men who struggled with the content of the lecture. Grace Fellowship is a church that focuses on the power of the Word. The people of the church avoid manipulative and modern communication techniques. The participants expressed their concern from the very beginning of the lesson. Participant 6 took exception to the emphasis in this lecture on using gestures and vocal projection. It was his contention that pastors should not worry about how they use their voice, body, or Sunday attire in communicating but that they should rely completely on the power of the gospel. In my response to this man, I attempted to persuade him of the danger of totally ignoring the area of communication skill. I turned his focus from the negative aspect of the modern manipulative techniques of communication to the good uses of communication skill to remove stumbling blocks from the minds of the audience. Beyond the pragmatic uses of technique, I pointed him to the use of communication techniques in the Scriptures. Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Jesus all used communication techniques to present their message in a powerful way. Other participants noted that they had often been distracted during sermons because of poor use of gestures, bad body posture, and distracting habits of the preacher while in the pulpit. I was unable to convince Participant

6 of the value of communication technique, but I do believe that the seminar participants as a whole understood the purpose of the lecture.

Meeting with Participant 6. After church on April 29, 2012, I asked Participant 6 to sit and talk with me about our in class discussion earlier in the day. It was concerning to me that he had been so vocal about his disagreement with the lecture. I wanted to make sure that we were not in sin and that he felt I had respected him during our interchange in class. Participant 6 is a faithful member of our fellowship. He is one of the leaders of the college ministry at Grace Fellowship, and I consider him to be a close friend. During our meeting he gave me some insight into why he opposes the use of modern communication techniques in the pulpit. He told me that he understands that all preachers are communicators, and that the very act of getting in the pulpit and talking is communication. The fear that he has is caused by earlier manipulative techniques that he experienced as a teenager. I was able to reassure him that I disagree with manipulation also and that I have seen an overemphasis on delivery cause pastors to lose their faith in the power of the Word. However, I also helped him understand why it is necessary to spend time thinking through the issue of good communication technique. We agreed to continue the discussion and I felt the meeting was productive. I was also able to enlist him to help me avoid manipulative tactics in preaching. He agreed to respectfully and lovingly confront me when I crossed the line into manipulation in ministering the Word at Grace Fellowship. Although the confrontation in the seminar was uncomfortable, I believe it was helpful in the overall ministry of the Word at Grace Fellowship.

Session 9: Example from the Life of Joseph

On May 6, 2012, I concluded the teaching portion of the seminar with an example of the principles taught in the lectures by teaching from the life of Joseph. I tried to use this lesson as a window into my preparation for a sermon. The participants in the

class were able to follow my preparation through every step of the process from text to sermon delivery. This was an effective way to end the teaching phase and bridge to the participants preaching sermons using the technique.

Participant 3 questioned my applications from Genesis 50 during the sermon. He was concerned that I had not properly upheld the historicity of the person of Joseph, and it appeared to him that I had made Joseph a fictional character that only existed to symbolize the person of Jesus Christ. The concern is valid because if the characters and stories of the Old Testament are only symbols of Christ, then the truthfulness of God comes into question. I responded to this concern by pointing out that Joseph was a historical figure. The Old Testament is not merely a symbol of the coming Christ, but I tried to show the class that the Old Testament and its characters find their ultimate fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. The key to this understanding is seeing that everything was created by Christ, for Christ, and through Christ. Although this is a valid concern, the other participants in the seminar did not think the example sermon I delivered was guilty of relegating the story of Genesis 50 to historical fiction. Participant 3 was respectful in the interchange and seemed to be supportive of the christocentric approach to preaching that I presented in the seminar as a whole.

This session concluded the teaching portion of the seminar. I was pleased with the participation of the men in this class. Most of the men attended each of the lectures, and when the men had to miss for various reasons, they always listened to the lecture on the church website. The interaction I was able to have with these nine men will help to firmly establish a christocentric method of preaching at Grace Fellowship for years to come. The final three sessions of the seminar were used to give the men an opportunity to apply the material they had been learning by preaching a sermon. Each of the men in the seminar had been assigned a book of the Bible to prepare a sermon for presentation. All of the books were from the Old Testament since the majority of the men had expressed

their need to become more familiar with teaching and preaching the Old Testament. Each of the sermons were evaluated and critiqued by me and the other men in the seminar.

Phase 3: Participants Preach Christocentric Sermons: Seminar Weeks 10-12

At the end of the seminar, each of the participants were given the opportunity to use the skills they learned while attending the lectures. The participants were assigned a book of the Bible from which they selected a preaching passage. The next step in the process was for the participant to study the passage using the prescribed method. After concluding the study, a christocentric sermon was prepared and delivered. I evaluated each sermon, gave constructive feedback so that the participants may continue to develop the skills associated with preaching, and allowed the other participants of the seminar to give constructive criticism or encouragement. This was a very successful part of the project because the men were able to grow in their ability to present God's Word from a christocentric perspective.

Sermons Preached on May 20, 2012

Participant 5: "Rahab's Faith is Saving Faith" Joshua 2. Participant 5 was the first person to deliver a sermon during the seminar. His sermon focused on Joshua 2 with a sermon entitled, "Rahab's Faith is Saving Faith." The sermon was well organized and structured according to the flow of the text. Participant 5 displayed a good grasp of the concepts in the Scripture, and he was able to communicate the message of the text through strong personality and oratory. The strength of this sermon was in the historical background and exegesis of the text. Participant 5 made a legitimate connection between the atoning work of Christ and the sign of Rahab's identification with the people of Israel, but he could have drawn out the connection through more redemptive history and typology. The weakness of this sermon was in the conclusion. Participant 5 closed the sermon with an abrupt ending that left the audience wanting more direct application. I

encouraged him to tie his content together with a more developed closing section. He set the table with excellent historical background, strong exegesis of the text, and good christological connection but did not finish well.

The other participants in the seminar encouraged Participant 5 by pointing out that his delivery of the sermon was very natural. It was obvious that he was very comfortable in front of the group because his eye contact, body mannerisms, and delivery were confident and relaxed. The group also pointed out that Participant 5 could have been clearer in his application of the sermon. Most in the group felt that the conclusion was rushed.

Participant 5 and I spoke on May 22, 2012 to close out his time in the seminar. He was thankful for the opportunity to learn how to present the Word of God in a christocentric method. I encouraged him to continue developing his sermon structure to include clear application and strong conclusions. It was also good to be able to encourage him in the obvious skill he has in teaching and preaching. Participant 5 felt that the seminar helped him prepare for the future as a teacher of God's Word (see Appendix 4).

Participant 4: "Shemei and the Justice of the King" 1 Kings 2:1-9. The second sermon preached on May 20, 2012 was delivered by Participant 4. This was the most experienced preacher in the seminar, and his experience was obvious due to the high level of both study and presentation which he displayed through the sermon. Participant 4 chose to preach a text that is not often preached. Because the text was more obscure, he was able to give fresh insight into the text, and he did an excellent job of preaching the text from a christocentric perspective.

The strengths of this sermon were obvious. First, Participant 4 was polished in his presentation method. He exhibited command of the audience, used appropriate gestures, and used variation in voice which provided for an engaging sermon. The one struggle that Participant 4 had was that he is often tied to closely to his manuscript during

the sermon delivery. I encouraged him to maintain better eye contact; at times during his delivery it felt as if he was reading his sermon. The other members of the seminar agreed with this observation, and some of the men in the class suggested that Participant 4 work to preach only from a preaching outline. I taught the men to preach using only an outline, but Participant 4 has used a manuscript since he began preaching many years ago. He was not comfortable preaching with only an outline. I understand his discomfort but challenged him to grow in this area of delivery.

A second obvious strength for Participant 4 was his grasp of the overall flow of biblical history. He showed a good grasp of the history of Israel as presented in the books of Kings, Samuel, and Chronicles. Because he had a basic knowledge of the setting, he was able to give a good historical background during the introduction of the sermon. I was pleased that Participant 4 connected his text to 2 Samuel 16. It is easy to overlook all the connecting Scripture when preaching a sermon, but Participant 4 did a great job of giving the listener a historical context without getting bogged down.

A final strength of this sermon was the christocentric used to drive the listener to the ultimate application of this text. Participant 4 was able to lift the eyes of the audience from the historical truth of David's revenge against Shemei to the justice of God in the person and work of Christ. Participant 4 skillfully concludes that David is foreshadowing the person of Christ the King by bringing justice to his enemy. In his three main points, Participant 4 made it clear that David is typifying Christ as King, God is just, and Jesus Christ is the rightful heir of the Davidic throne and his kingdom is characterized by righteousness and justice (see Appendix 4). He says in conclusion,

What this narrative ultimately reveals for us is God's great hatred toward sin. God is right in judging sin. He is just in his wrath. True love and justice is displayed in the fact that God put all of his hatred for sin on his own Son. Today, you are in one of two places, either Christ is bearing your sin on your behalf or you are bearing it. God's precepts are great and we are incapable of accomplishing them. Lest Christ intercede for us, fulfilling the promise on our behalf we will be condemned like Shemei. God be praised because Christ was the promised seed. (see Appendix 4)

I was able to sit down and discuss the sermon with Participant 4 on May 21,

2012. We agreed there is always room for improvement in preaching, but I encouraged him that he has a gifted eye for christocentric connections in the text of Scripture. The only real negative for Participant 4 is that he insisted on preaching from a full manuscript. He said that that is the way he has been trained to preach in the past and he is not comfortable with only an outline in the pulpit. My encouragement to him was that if he was going to continue this approach he would need to memorize more of the sermon. This memorization would allow him to make good eye contact with his audience, and it would also allow him to move more freely and connect with the audience through better use of body mannerisms. He agreed with this suggestion. Participant 4 was encouraged by the seminar, and he was excited to continue to present the Scripture through a christocentric method.

Participant 8: “Where is Your Boast?” Jeremiah 9:23-24. The strength of this sermon was the illustrations used by Participant 8. Every point in the sermon was illustrated with a personal or biblical illustration. This sermon was applied to the church through the redemptive historical method of seeing Christ as the only boast of the people of God. This emphasis made the sermon christocentric, but the real strength of the sermon was the personal illustration and applications that were made through each major point. Participant 8 was comfortable enough to share intimate stories about his past reliance on his own strength and wisdom. The authenticity of this approach made the sermon instantly applicable to the audience.

A second strength of the sermon was the emphasis on Christ during the conclusion of the sermon. Participant 8 was able to draw out the meaning of Jeremiah 9:24 in all of its Christ-centered application. He encouraged the audience to boast only in the person and work of the Lord Jesus. In the sermon, Participant 8 said,

What does it mean to know the Lord? Many people ‘know’ my wife. But they do not ‘know’ her as I do. They do not know her in the deep personal and intimate way that I as her husband know her. This is the true heart level relationship of knowing God that Jeremiah was calling out for the people of Judah to return to. This is the knowledge we can have through Jesus Christ” (see Appendix 4).

There were many strong christocentric statements like this throughout the sermon. Participant 8 had an obvious grasp of the meaning of the text he was preaching to the point that he could make connections on a deeper level without forcing the text beyond its natural limits.

I spent time talking with Participant 8 immediately after we concluded the seminar on May 20, 2012. He was encouraged by his experience of preaching, and he said that this was the first time he had been able to preach the Word in any public setting. I was able to encourage him in the areas of strength that he displayed, and I also encouraged him to take other opportunities to preach so that his ability to present God's Word would only increase with experience. The one area that I encouraged him to improve most was in the area of preaching with confidence. Many times during the sermon Participant 8 seemed uncomfortable and uncertain of his point. I encouraged him that he needed to trust his study of the Word. Although there may be men with more general knowledge of the Bible in the audience while he is preaching, I told him that no one has studied his particular text the way he has studied in preparation to teach. I believe that Participant 8 will continue to grow in his ability to preach christocentric sermons.

Sermons Preached on June 3, 2012

Participant 2: "Our Great Intercessor" Esther 4:10-16. On June 3, 2012, Participant 2 preached his sermon from Esther 4:10-16. Prior to preaching the sermon he contacted me with concerns about the content of the sermon. Participant 2 has a real struggle with the idea of preaching Christ from the Old Testament except in the passages that are clearly prophesying his future coming or his future kingdom. This stems from his long-held conviction that the Scriptures are best understood from a dispensational framework. Although in recent years he has moved away from many of his long-held beliefs about dispensationalism, Participant 2 still has a difficult time with many of the concepts taught in this seminar. I tried to assure him that even the book of Esther can be

preached christocentrically. We took time to look at several texts from the book that point to the person or work of Christ. After our discussion, Participant 2 seemed more confident in his ability to preach a sermon that was both expositional and Christ-centered.

The sermon was centered on the events surrounding Esther's decision to intercede on behalf of Israel in the throne room of the king. Participant 2 did a good job of setting the context for the audience. I expressed my concern that too much of the sermon was dedicated to the historical setting, but the audience was given the context in a very detailed manner. The other participants encouraged Participant 2 that he should have used a more appealing introduction. They felt that the sermon was more academic and dry than it would have been if Participant 2 had developed a more personal introduction. I agreed with this criticism, but I also encouraged the seminar participants that it is important to set the context when preaching.

Participant 2 was ultimately successful in making his sermon christocentric. At the conclusion of the sermon he turned the focus from the temporal intercession of Esther to the eternal intercession of Jesus Christ. He was successful using the type/anti-type relationship of Esther and Christ. Participant 2 said,

The story of Esther points us to Christ. But what Esther did in a fleshly, temporal sense, Jesus Christ has accomplished in perfection and its effects are eternal. Where Esther was favored by an earthly king, Jesus was loved by the Eternal Father. Where Esther interceded for her people with the possibility of losing her life, Christ willingly gave His life to ransom those who the Father has given Him. Where Esther's intercession gave her people the opportunity to defend themselves and save their own physical lives. Jesus Christ forever lives to make intercession for his own and keeps them by His own power and will raise them up to glory on the last day! (see Appendix 4)

This quote at the conclusion of Participant 2 sermon is an astounding testimony to his growth in this seminar. I was able to praise him for the growth he displayed, but at the same time I was able to encourage him to be even bolder in his sermon preparation. One of the weaknesses of this sermon was that he held the christocentric connection until the conclusion of the sermon. Participant 2 would have done a better job of relating the Scripture and its purpose to the audience had he included the connection of type/anti-type

throughout every point of the sermon. I believe he was reluctant in this regard. After the seminar he admitted that he had struggled with how to include the Christ-centered material. In the future he will do a better job because of the struggles he encountered in this class.

Participant 6: “The King and His Kingdom” Psalm 45. The sermon that Participant 6 delivered on Psalm 45 was one of the most Christ-centered sermons I have personally heard from any Old Testament book. The sermon was powerful and moved the men in the seminar to praise the Lord. I could not have been more pleased with the work displayed by this student. The strength of the sermon was the exposition of the text in a christocentric style. Participant 6 did not relegate Christ to one section of the sermon, but he worked to weave Christ throughout his exposition of the verses of Psalm 45. During his delivery he balanced both the exegetical work necessary to bring understanding of the words in the text with the christocentric connections found throughout the passage. The sermon was well organized and structured to encourage the audience to respond in praise and worship. I encouraged Participant 6 in his choice of companion text to support his sermon points. Many times references distract from the central text being taught, but in this sermon each complementary text added to the understanding of the audience. The sermon was directed to the heart of the listener and not just the mind. Participant 6 clearly preached to exalt the magnificence of Christ through the words of the psalmist. This sermon was more than a lecture; it was an act of worship.

The only areas that Participant 6 needed to work on relate to his demeanor in the pulpit. While he preached he often looked unapproachable and overly intense. This can cause people in the audience to disconnect from his preaching. I encouraged him to work on his facial expressions communicating the emotion of the text he is preaching. The other participants also commented that his hand gestures were distracting at times during his delivery. My summary remarks to him were that he needed to spend more time

teaching and preaching so that his mechanics could catch up to his content. I was able to encourage him even in this area because he is a genuine man with a typically loving demeanor. I encouraged him to relax while preaching and let his normal attitude and heart shine through as he communicates God's Word. Participant 6 assured me that this seminar had given him the confidence to teach and preach on a more consistent basis. He also indicated that a christocentric approach to preaching had been something he was wrestling with before the seminar, but now that he has completed the seminar he is convinced that a christocentric approach is the biblical method of preaching from both the Old and New Testament.

Participant 7: "God's Ultimate End . . . His Glory" Isaiah 42:1-8. The sermon presented on Isaiah 42:1-8 was unorganized and difficult for the audience to comprehend. Participant 7 struggled from beginning to end to stay on point with his outline. I believe that this participant understood the need to be christocentric, but he was not good at limiting his sermon around a central idea. The feeling of the participants was that this sermon could have been several small sermons. I agreed with the assessment of the other participants, but when I spoke with Participant 7, I tried to encourage him in his areas of strength. The sermon was biblical, Christ-centered, and passionate. I believe that with more training and opportunity to teach and preach, Participant 7 could be a good teacher.

It is important to mention a second weakness in the sermon. This sermon was at some points overly christocentric. That analysis does not sound consistent with the goal of this project, but the goal was to teach men to preach sermons that are both rooted in the text under consideration and christocentric. Participant 7 often neglected the historical context of this passage and ran directly to Christ. I reminded him that when preaching a christocentric sermon the hard work of connecting the text to Christ without violating the original context must be done. In the seminar lectures it was emphasized

that the goal of christocentric preaching was to follow legitimate pathways to Christ from the text. I encouraged Participant 7 to read Sidney Greidanus' book, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*.⁵ This book has been a good resource to my development of biblically faithful christocentric preaching.

Sermons Preached on June 10, 2012

Participant 1: "What is God's Name (Who is He?)" Exodus 3:13-15 . On June 10, 2012 Participant 1 delivered his sermon from Exodus 3:13-15. The strength of the sermon was its connection between the Old Testament passage and the "I Am" statements of Jesus Christ in the book of John. Participant 1 did a good job of setting the context, giving adequate exegesis of the text in Exodus 3. He connected the passage in Exodus with the statements of Jesus in the book of John using the progressive revelation line of connection from Old Testament to New Testament. In the conclusion of the sermon, Participant 1 encouraged the people to practically apply the passage through personal commitment to God of Exodus 3, Jesus Christ. The message was both biblical and practically applicable to everyone in attendance.

A weakness of the sermon was the lack of illustration. Participant 1 was biblical, christocentric, and he did a great job of organizing his material for presentation. The struggle that he had was that he does not use illustrative material to grab the audience's attention. I encouraged him to go through his sermon after finishing the outline and think of the best way to communicate the material authentically. Participant 1 admitted that he struggles with the concept of illustration because he has seen it abused by so many preachers. I recommended that he read Bryan Chapell's book, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*.⁶ Other than this area of weakness, Participant 1 did a good job of preaching a christocentric sermon.

⁵Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*.

⁶Bryan Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power* (Wheaton, IL:

Participant 9: “Enduring Faith” Habakkuk 2:1-4. Participant 9 selected a text which is used by Paul to outline the book of Romans in the New Testament. The idea of living by faith is crucial to Christianity, and it is an idea that can be traced from Habakkuk to Christ and the New Testament through redemptive-historical analysis, promise fulfillment, and longitudinal theme. Participant 9 did not fully develop the christocentric nature of this text. He did a good job of setting the context for the passage. I thought his exegetical work in the text was sufficient, and the sermon was built in a manner that pressed the hearer to respond to the call of saving faith. The failure of this sermon was to develop the connection between Habakkuk and Christ. Participant 9 assumed the connection of the idea of saving faith with Christ instead of developing the connection organically through a well-established pathway of christocentric preaching. The only mention of Christ in the sermon was toward the end of the exposition. In conclusion, the people were called to trust in Christ as the object of enduring saving faith. I encouraged Participant 9 to be more diligent in connecting Christ to the text rather than simply adding a word about Christ at the end of the sermon.

Participant 9 also failed to give a complete conclusion to the sermon. Several of the men in the seminar commented that the sermon just came to an abrupt ending. I felt that Participant 9 was uncomfortable during the last few minutes of preaching. He admitted that he was nervous and uncomfortable while preaching and Participant 9 stated that he wanted to get the sermon finished as quickly as possible. I encouraged him to finish the sermon no matter how he felt. It was a good opportunity to encourage all the participants of the work of the Holy Spirit during preaching. I told the men that our feelings have to be ignored and the text must be preached with boldness because the Spirit is using the preached Word to impact that lives of all the people in the audience. Participant 9 has a desire to receive more training in the area of christocentric preaching,

Crossway, 2001).

and I believe with other opportunity to apply the skills of preaching he will be an effective teacher and preacher.

Participant 3: “Grace Extended to a Dog” 2 Samuel 9. The strength of this sermon was the type/anti-type connection that Participant 3 was able to bring out between David and Christ. He also did a great job of showing the relationship between Mephibosheth and the Christian. I was very impressed with the ability of Participant 3 to set the context of the Scripture, give adequate time to exegetical concerns within the text, and make the sermon christocentric. Participant 3 made the decision to hold the connection between the text and its fulfillment until the end of the sermon. I do not generally like this approach but in this case it was a good decision. The sermon made deep connections between the person of Mephibosheth and all who are saved through Christ. Participant 3 said,

We have these great stories, pieces of history documented for us in the old and new testaments. Although it shouldn't surprise, isn't it great when it does—to find that the picture portrayed in the actual events of history are just one more arrow pointing us to Jesus Christ (see Appendix 4).

Participant 3 understands the value of a christocentric approach to preaching. He will continue to develop in his ability to use the skills he has learned through this seminar.

The greatest weakness for Participant 3 was his delivery. He is a naturally stern person and this causes him to be disconnected with the audience. I encouraged him to use more mannerism while he was preaching. Several of the other participants commented that he needed to project a more welcoming countenance with his facial expressions. I encouraged him to work on preaching in the mirror at home. This is a technique that helped me when I was a young preacher. I believe that if Participant 3 works through the practical delivery of the sermon he will be a very effective preacher of God's Word.

Phase 4: Preaching Christocentric Sermons

In the third phase of the project my goal was to preach a six-sermon series that

presented a christocentric method of preaching Christ from all of Scripture. It was my belief that the best way to accomplish this objective was to preach one sermon from several types of Scripture. The series included sermons from Deuteronomy 5:12-15, 1 Samuel 8, Psalm 121, Zechariah 7:1-14, Luke 6:46-49, and 2 John. Each of the sermons was designed to present Christ through one of the eight legitimate pathways of christocentric preaching while also expositing the text within its historical and biblical context. I asked members of the congregation to review the sermons in the areas of delivery of the sermon and content of the sermon. The surveys for sermon review were given to a random group of people each week. There was some overlap each week but the group was not exactly the same from one week to the next. The results of the surveys were compiled and charted for the analysis phase of the project (see Appendix 5). The following is a short description of each of the six sermons while also considering the comments of those who reviewed the sermons.

**Sermon 1: “Keep the Sabbath Day
Because He Is Our Rest”
Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

On March 25, 2012 I delivered a christocentric sermon based on Deuteronomy 5:12-15. In this sermon I pressed the people to understand the Sabbath Day in relationship to the person of Jesus Christ. The principle of the Sabbath was established by God in the Law to foreshadow the eternal rest available in Jesus Christ. The Sabbath Day is a type of rest we enjoy through the person and work of Jesus Christ now and throughout eternity.

First, God commands his people to work for his glory six days a week. In this sermon I exhorted the congregation to view their work as worship unto God. By contrasting the command to work found in Deuteronomy 5 with the culture of the Canaanite people that surrounded the Jews in Moses’ day, I was able to call on the church to live in contrast to the pagan culture that exists in our day. The point was further made

by referencing the command by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 that those in the church should be diligent workers that provide for their own care. I ultimately tied this first point to the person and work of Christ by emphasizing the centrality of the gospel in our work relationships. My exhortation to the people was that because we are in Christ, we are free to work every day not for our boss or company but for the King of Kings.

Second, I called on the people of Grace Fellowship to rest on the Christian Sabbath for the good of society and the glory of God. Ultimately, this is where I was able to trace the type/anti-type relationship between the institution of the Sabbath under the Old Testament and the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. I carefully followed the development of the Sabbath observance from Deuteronomy until the time of the Lord's coming in the book of Matthew. The exhortation to the congregation was that Christ fulfilled the type of the Sabbath Day, and in Christ we now enjoy not one day of rest but every day as a day of rest.

The application of the sermon was a challenge for the people of Grace Fellowship to use their freedom in Christ to establish a regular day for rest as a symbol of their devotion to God. I emphasized the tradition of the church to celebrate the day of rest on Sunday, but I stopped short of instituting Sunday as the only day we can rest. I believe that the sermon was true to both the original text and christocentric.

Sermon review by the congregation. I asked eight members of the congregation to review the sermon on March 25, 2012. The people were to fill out the review form given to them at the beginning of the sermon and return the form at the end of the sermon. The sample of the congregation was both male and female of all ages and educational background. The responses are charted in Appendix 5. Several of the respondents made comments in regard to the specifics of being Christ-centered in preaching. One respondent said, "Great exposition of the Word. He did a good job of explaining the text one verse at a time, and he also related the text we were studying to

other texts in Scripture. Carlton did a good job of showing how Christ is the fulfillment of the Sabbath Day, and he also showed how Christ is present in the Old Testament.” This comment is reflective of the general opinion of those surveyed in this review. One critical comment from those responding to the survey was that there was a lot of information to grasp in one sermon. Some of the people felt the sermon was too long and could have been more effective if presented in a more concise manner. I understand the reason for these comments. In preparation for future sermons, I will work to cut the sermon down to the essential elements so that the people are not distracted with too much information.

**Sermon 2: “Desperate for a New Leader”
1 Samuel 8**

I preached a sermon on 1 Samuel 8 at Grace Fellowship on April 1, 2012. The essence of the sermon can be summarized by the following statement: The people of God are always tempted to reject God’s leadership for the leadership of someone that better fits the world’s standards. We must realize that to reject God’s leadership is to reject God.

The first part of the sermon was used to set the context of the text in the historical situation of Israel. Israel is hungry for new leadership as Samuel approaches the end of his life, and the Bible tells in 1 Samuel 8 that the people are asking for a king like all the other nations. I compared this ungodly desire to discontentment with the leadership of Christ through the Spirit and the Word. The church in our day is no different than Israel. Many churches have given up on the leadership of Christ and have turned to the pragmatism of the world to bring results in an ever-changing culture. I exhorted the congregation not to fall into the trap of clamoring for a leader like the world has to offer.

Second, I drew a linear connection between the rejections of God by Israel in 1 Samuel 8 to the rejection of Christ as King in the day of his crucifixion. I wanted the people of Grace Fellowship to see that the heart of man has never changed. Israel was in rebellion against the leadership of God, and the truth is all mankind is in rebellion to

Christ. The line of connection can be seen as the people appoint Saul as king, Saul rejects God and his leadership, God rejects Saul and takes the kingdom from his family, and God selects a new king in the person of David. Israel was under the leadership of the house of David throughout the rest of the Old Covenant, and Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled the promises made by God to David in 2 Samuel 7 but the people again rejected God's king. I called on the congregation to not clamor for another leader. I asked each of them to call on Christ as King of their life and submit to him in humble obedience.

Sermon review by the congregation. I asked eight people in the congregation to review my sermon prior to the beginning of the service. Each respondent was given the opportunity to respond to the survey and return the survey to me at the conclusion of the worship service.⁷ The respondents felt that the sermon was delivered well and that the sermon was a good christocentric exposition of 1 Samuel 8. One of the criticisms of the sermon was that it did not have enough exhortation. One respondent said, "The sermon was very thorough in teaching, but I would like more exhortation. There did not seem to be enough practical application in this sermon." I believe that this is a valid criticism as I tend to push the people toward Christ and often do not take time to develop practical points of application. The harshest criticism came from one person who was offended by my introduction. In the introduction I mentioned the presidential election this coming fall. The reviewer said, "You mentioned we were in the process of selecting a new leader as president. This assumes that the current president will not win the election. This rubs me the wrong way." I should probably refrain from current politics as an illustration in the sermon. This can only distract from the point of the sermon. The general consensus of the review was that the sermon was effective and christocentric.

⁷The overall results of the survey are compiled and displayed in Appendix 5

Sermon 3: “Our Eternal Protector”

Psalm 121

I preached a sermon on Psalm 121 during the morning worship service at Grace Fellowship on April 8, 2012. The essence of the sermon can be summarized in the following sentence: The salvation of the believer rests on the certainty of the Creator of heaven and earth. The Creator is Jesus, and he is our help and salvation. The focus of the sermon centered on the progressive revelation of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of this psalm. As the people of Israel looked to the hills of Judea and saw their help in the form of the city of Jerusalem, the Christian looks to the hill of Calvary and sees the person of Jesus Christ who is our helper and salvation.

First, the sermon set Psalm 121 in the proper historical context. This psalm was most likely sung by the people of Israel or the army as it returned to the city. The city of Jerusalem was the earthly representation of the heavenly city of God. As the Israelites traveled back to the city they could lift up their eyes to the hills and see that their help came from God. In the sermon, I was able to connect this historical reality to the fact that we look toward the work of Jesus Christ on the cross as our help and salvation.

Second, I encouraged the people that Jesus is able to keep us from falling in the spiritual journey. The passage in Psalm 121 refers to the fact that God will not let the foot of Israel slip, and we know that because of the keeping power of the Lord our faith will not slip as we live this life. My encouragement to the congregation was that the saving and keeping power of Christ is beyond question. I referenced John 10:25-30 and Romans 8:31-39 as text that support the belief in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

Finally, I reminded the audience that our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation guarantees us safety from the evil one in this life and eternity. The psalmist brings this passage to a close by encouraging the people of Israel of the confidence they can have in the keeping power of God in their lives. I pointed the congregation to the ultimate fulfillment of this promise in the person of Jesus. Jesus is able to keep us from the evil of this life because he is more powerful than Satan and the desires of the flesh. The sermon

ended with a strong emphasis on the need of each in attendance to call on Christ from faith for salvation.

Sermon review by the congregation. I was only able to collect five reviews from the congregation on this Sunday sermon. It may have been the fact that April 8 was Easter morning and many of the people were in a hurry to be with family after the service. The sample size of this sermon review was smaller, but I feel that the five people who filled out the review did a very thorough job. The overall consensus of the people surveyed was that the sermon was relevant to the lives of the people in attendance. I received a favorable review of my use of illustrations in this sermon, and the five who returned the review forms said that the sermon was christocentric. One of the people commented, “You used good biblical illustrations that applied to the lives of the audience. Psalm 121 is a picture of the cross and a great Old Testament picture of the gospel.” Another woman who reviewed the sermon wrote, “No matter what we face in the way of adversity, we have hope. Our hope is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Creator of heaven and earth!” From these comments and the encouragement of the congregation after this sermon, I am confident that God used this sermon in the heart of the people. This sermon was effective in tracing the promise-fulfillment pathway from Psalm 121 to Jesus Christ and his rescuing work accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection.

Sermon 4: “We Must Repent from the Heart” Zechariah 7:1-14

I preached a message from Zechariah 7 during the morning worship service at Grace Fellowship on April 15, 2012. This sermon can be summarized by the following statement: The people of God must repent from the heart and turn to the only true way of salvation who is Jesus Christ. I found this sermon to be the most difficult of all the sermons in this series to prepare and deliver. The text was difficult because of the subject matter and the harshness of the wording of this text. I also found that this was the sermon

that received the least favorable response of all six sermons in this series.

In the sermon I covered the text in three sections. First, I set the context and historical setting of the text by talking through the first three verses of the chapter. Second, I encouraged the people that God always confronts hypocrisy in his people using verses 4 through 7. Finally, the congregation was exhorted to repent of their hypocrisy and believe in Jesus Christ so that God will accept them and not judge them. This message was outside my comfort zone because it was very confrontational. I am more at ease when preaching a heavy grace-oriented sermon, but I do believe that God used this sermon to encourage me of the need to preach the whole counsel of God even when it is more difficult for me personally.

The decision to use the compare and contrast pathway to Christ from this passage was probably not a wise decision. During the sermon I tried to compare the lack of true obedience displayed by Israel to the complete and perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. I also contrasted the lack of mercy Israel showed toward the widow, the poor, and the fatherless during this period of their history with the super-abounding mercy of the person of Jesus Christ. While this approach seemed obvious on paper in preparation for the sermon, I do not think it was easily understood by the congregation. Later in the week I had several follow-up conversations with people in attendance at the worship service. Most of the people understood the overall message of the sermon, and they seemed to embrace the christocentric nature of the sermon, but it appeared that most of them were confused as to the connection between Israel and Christ.

Sermon review by the congregation. I was able to collect five review forms at the end of the service on April 15, 2012. The general feeling of the people who reviewed the sermon was that it was a christocentric sermon, but I also saw that most of the people struggled with the content of the sermon. When I analyzed the answers that were given to me on the reviews, it appeared that most of the people struggled in two

distinct ways. First, some of the people had a hard time connecting with the harsh tone of the sermon. I believe I did a poor job of communicating the goodness of the gospel in this message because I got caught up in the judgment that was handed out to the people of Israel because of their hypocrisy. The fact that the people felt the harshness of the text is not necessarily bad, but I am aware that I do not need to seem harsh as I preach. I will work to preach with a more inviting countenance and tone of voice when preaching a difficult text from this point forward. The second area of concern for those that reviewed the sermon was in their inability to follow the sermon from Zechariah to Jesus. The comments indicated that the people did not clearly see Christ in this text. They knew that the sermon was christocentric but they did not follow the logic from text to conclusion. I agreed with this assessment. The selection of how to preach a text in a way that leads logically to the work of Christ is very important. This was the first and only time in the series that the people did not agree with my logic in building the sermon. The lesson learned in this preparation and delivery is that I must always do a good job in selecting the correct legitimate pathway to Christ from the text or the people will not be able to make the connection organically.

**Sermon 5: “Will Your House Stand or Fall”
Luke 6:46-49**

On April 22, 2012, I preached a christocentric sermon from Luke 6:46-49 during the morning worship service. The sermon idea can be expressed in one sentence: Jesus teaches us that wise men are those who build their house on the rock foundation of faith in Christ. The wise are those who come to Christ, hear his teaching, and obey his words. During this sermon I broke the passage into two sections. First, I considered those that are regarded to be wise according to the teaching of Jesus. Verses 46-48 teach that the wise are people who come to the Lord. I called on the congregation to come to Jesus in faith. It is not enough to come to Christ as a skeptic or an academic. A person must come to Christ in true faith. The sermon pointed to the fact that true faith is identified by

the fact that the wise hear the teaching of Jesus and obey his words. Many times we build our lives on the sand of tradition or knowledge. I called on the congregation to build their life on a true saving faith that expresses itself in obedience. Second, I considered the life of the foolish man in verse 49. The foolish man does not come to Jesus by faith and as a result he does not live a life of obedience to his commands. The end of this life is destruction. I asked everyone in attendance to consider whether their life was being built on the only rock foundation which is Jesus Christ. This sermon was strongly evangelistic. It was also thoroughly christocentric.

Sermon review by the congregation. I asked five people to review the sermon on April 22. The reviews of this sermon were very positive, and everyone who reviewed this sermon gave the highest possible rating to the question of whether or not the sermon was christocentric. One of the young ladies who reviewed the sermon commented, “The gospel was presented clearly in the conclusion. This was an excellent message! It was all about Christ. It was obvious that He was the point of the message.” I was also encouraged by the comments of one of the older men who reviewed this sermon. He is a man that studies the Bible and has heard it taught for many years. He wrote, “Excellent message! Probably one of the best expositions of this text I have ever heard. You made excellent illustrations of this text from the life of David and Saul. Christ was exalted during the preaching of the Word.” I am certain that the Christ-centeredness of this sermon was partly due to the fact that I was teaching in the New Testament. I believe that people have a trained ear to hear sermons in the New Testament as Christ focused sermons. In the future I hope to build a more enthusiastic response to christocentric preaching in the Old Testament.

**Sermon 6: “Truth and Love: The Defining Qualities of Christian Community”
2 John 1-13**

I preached the final sermon in this project to the people of Grace Fellowship on

April 29, 2012 during the morning worship service. This sermon was from the letter of 2 John, and the sermon can be summarized in the following way: Christian community is defined by their commitment to the truth of God's Word and the love they display toward one another. In preparing for this sermon, I was able to reach the conclusion that this letter was written to a congregation which John had spent time teaching in the past or had close association with in the ministry. Although many people view this as a personal letter written to a lady and her family, I believe that the letter is addressed to the church as a body of believers. The sermon was not consumed with the exegetical matters that can easily distract from the main message of the letter. I spent the majority of the time exhorting the congregation to emulate the congregation to whom John is writing in two foundational areas. First, I called the church of Grace Fellowship to continue to be known in the community as a body that loves the doctrine of the Bible. I know that the congregation is already known for their love of the truth, but I took this opportunity to further encourage them to love the truth that has been delivered to us in the Word of God. I also reminded them that by loving the truth of God's Word we are showing our love for the incarnate word Jesus Christ. This sermon was christocentric in the fact that I encouraged the people to continue to pursue loving Christ in the truth of his Word. Second, I exhorted the people of Grace Fellowship to display their love for one another in such a way that it attracts the community to the message of the gospel. In the second half of the sermon I took time to call the people to specific hospitality opportunities. The church was encouraged to live out the love of Christ to their friends, family, church, and community.

Sermon review by the congregation. I was able to hear the review of five people in attendance on April 29, 2012. The general consensus of the group was that the sermon was executed well and the message was christocentric. In discussing the sermon with one of the men, I was made aware of the need to be more explicit in my connection of Christ to the idea of Christian community. He reminded me that although he knew

what I was encouraging the congregation toward was centered on our relationship with Christ, his concern was that some would think of loving our neighbor as works-based righteousness. This was concerning to me because the last thing I want to do is further the idea of works-based righteousness in our area. The way I connected the message to Christ was in the comparison model by saying, “See how Christ loved others. We need to love others like Christ loved.” The problem I think in this method is it is not explicitly grace driven. The other reviews of the sermon were positive, and the man who criticized this one area of the sermon was generally supportive of my preaching and agreed that typically I present a christocentric message.

Conclusion

The project that was carried out over the fifteen-week period at Grace Fellowship will be further evaluated in the chapter 5. Although the project was multifaceted, I believe it was done in a way that honored the intention of the elders at Grace Fellowship. I was personally challenged during this time of ministry, and I look forward to the results of this project in the life of this congregation.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The Bible is a book that centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is a statement that many in the evangelical church would accept without question, but when this statement is applied to preaching sermons the evangelical church is divided. The purpose of this project was to establish the central importance of preaching sermons that are christocentric from both the Old and New Testament. After arguing for a method of christocentric preaching in chapter 2, I worked to establish a culture of christocentric preaching at Grace Fellowship during the implementation of the project design in chapter 4. Evaluation of the project shows that Grace Fellowship embraced this method of preaching. The project also allowed time for training men to preach using a christocentric approach to preaching the Scripture, and I gained valuable insight into how my preaching ministry can continue to develop and grow into the future. Although the project had several weaknesses and limitations, the conclusion of this chapter is that the project proved effective in establishing a christocentric preaching culture at Grace Fellowship in Anniston, Alabama.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The stated purpose of this project was to develop a christocentric approach for preaching expository sermons at Grace Fellowship in Anniston, Alabama. Prior to beginning the project, I gained the approval of the elder board of the church in implementing the goals of this project. It was helpful during the project phase to already have the support and approval of the key leaders in the congregation. The success of the project's purpose is not only seen in the responses to the surveys and sermon reviews

used during the implementation of the project, but the success of the project can also be measured by the attitude shift in the congregation toward a positive view of christocentric expository preaching in the congregation. Since the completion of this project, the elders of Grace Fellowship have expressed the desire to continue to move all of the teaching ministries of the church toward a christocentric approach for teaching both the Old and New Testament.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Chapter 1 enumerated four goals for the project: learn to prepare and preach sermons using a christocentric approach; select and properly exegete six texts using a christocentric approach to expository preaching; train selected leaders of Grace Fellowship to use a christocentric approach when preaching the Word of God; and, finally, improving my expository preaching.

Learning to Prepare and Preach Christocentric Sermons

In keeping with the first goal, I took time to personally evaluate several different approaches to preaching christocentric sermons from all the Scripture. The result of this study was an approach that used some elements of at least two approaches. I found that personally I was most comfortable using part of the method taught by Sydney Greidanus and Dennis Johnson. Since implementing a new approach to preparation and sermon delivery, the congregation at Grace Fellowship has responded positively to the changes. One Sunday after the project was completed a member thanked me for renewing her heart toward the centrality and supremacy of Christ through the preaching ministry. This is one of many comments that reflect the wisdom of modifying my approach to sermon preparation and delivery.

Preach Six Christocentric Sermons

I preached the sermon series at Grace Fellowship from March 25, 2012 to

April 29, 2012. The selected texts were divided between Old and New Testament. They were also from various types of biblical genre. Each of the sermons was evaluated by selected members of the congregation using a research instrument that was prepared prior to the beginning of the project. Through the research instrument, I was able to gather valuable information concerning the congregation's perception of the effectiveness of each sermon, and I was also able to gauge whether the people were viewing these sermons from a christocentric perspective. The project goal was accomplished through the delivery of the sermon series, but I was greatly encouraged by the personal interaction with members of the congregation concerning the preaching ministry at Grace Fellowship. This interaction has proven to be very valuable as I continue to implement a culture of christocentric expository preaching in the church. One of the clearest signs of change in the mindset of the people is that they now recognize sermons that are not christocentric, and they express the desire to emphasize christocentric preaching and teaching in the ministry of Grace Fellowship.

Train Leaders at Grace Fellowship to Preach Christocentric Sermons

The first step to achieve this goal in the project was to select leaders that had the ability to preach. They also needed the desire to faithfully complete the twelve-week seminar. I presented a list of 15 men to the elders at Grace Fellowship so that they could assist me in selecting men for this phase of the project. After discussing the pros and cons of each name on the list, I was able to limit the original list to 12 men. Over the next week I personally contacted all 12 men and asked them to pray about receiving training in the area of preaching christocentric expository sermons through the seminar. Of the 12 men asked to participate 11 agreed to be in the class. I set the start date for the seminar and was eager to train these men in the task of preaching. During the first three weeks of the seminar 2 of the men dropped out of participation because of personal conflicts outside the class. I was disappointed in this development because both of these men are

young leaders who will take significant roles in the future of the church. The end result of training the 9 men who participated in the seminar were unaffected by the loss of these 2 men.

The seminar was broken into two components. The first section was comprised of nine lectures that covered the basics of hermeneutics and homiletics. All of the men were active participants in the lectures, and the men gave a favorable review of the training they received in this section of the seminar. The second section was comprised of three classes that were used as preaching labs for the 9 participants in the seminar. Each of the participants was asked to prepare a sermon from an Old Testament book of the Bible that applied the christocentric method taught in the lecture section of the seminar. I was impressed by the level of skill and the application of the method by each of the men.

The success of this goal is best stated by the fact that since the completion of the project 5 of these men have preached a christocentric sermon in the pulpit of Grace Fellowship. Two of the men that were trained in this seminar were sent as members of a church plant team in our area. The men that were sent to be part of the church plant team are now applying the principles taught in the seminar in teaching ministries within their new context. That the leaders of Grace Fellowship are more prepared today to implement a christocentric method than they were prior to the seminar. I also believe the conviction of the nine men is that all sermons should be christocentric expository in nature.

Personal Improvement in Preaching Ministry

My preaching improved as a result of the project, thus achieving the final goal of the project. Each week during the six-week sermon series I asked a group of people from the congregation to review and comment on my preaching. The results of the surveys were consistently high, and the people that were surveyed believed that one of the strong areas of my preaching is that it is christocentric. I am not able to use these surveys to measure the improvement of my preaching because each week a different

sample of the congregation was used to survey the sermon.

One area of growth I observed was in preparation of the sermon. I have followed a methodical preparation method for several years, but while I was preparing to teach the seminar during the project I formulated the steps to this preparation process. This has helped me stay focused during the week and better plan my weekly activities to insure that I am able to properly prepare each sermon.

A second area of growth that I observed in my preaching was the emphasis on Christ in all of Scripture. Because it is easy to forget the centrality of Christ while preparing sermons week after week in the local church, I found that adding a section to my preparation that asks pointed questions of the text in regard to the place of Christ in the text and the sermon has been helpful. My elders have complemented this particular area of growth in my preaching. I am more confident in my ability to present a legitimate Christ-centered message now that I have done the work for this project.

Finally, the congregation noted a growth in my preaching over the time I worked on this project. This is not a scientific observation but is based on comments I received from the people in the congregation. It appears that the people at Grace Fellowship have sensed a new passion in my preaching, and I can only attribute that renewed passion to my focus on christocentric preaching.

Evaluation of Methodology

This project was based on a good methodological foundation, but there were a couple of areas of improvement that would have made the project more successful. Although I would change the following aspects of the project if done again, the overall success of the project affirms the procedure used in this case.

Greater Correlation

This project basically comprised two distinct areas of implementing a christocentric method of preaching at Grace Fellowship. First, I preached a six-sermon

series during the morning worship service at the church. This sermon series was designed to emphasize the effectiveness of preaching christocentric sermons, and it was also used to introduce the congregation to this particular style of preaching. Second, I trained nine of the leaders at Grace Fellowship to preach using a christocentric method. This training was accomplished by teaching a twelve-session seminar on preaching Christ from the entire Bible at 9:00 A.M. on Sunday morning at Grace Fellowship.

These two areas were used effectively, but they were not correlated in any real way during the project. One change I would make if this project was done again is to bring these areas together through the use of the sermon evaluations. It would be more effective to use the men in the seminar to evaluate the sermon series instead of using randomly selected members of the congregation. This change would insure that the people reviewing the sermon series have a good grasp of what it means to preach christocentric sermon. It would also increase the interchange between the one doing the project and those who are participating in the seminar.

Adding a Focus Group

A second change I would make to the project is the addition of a focus group meeting each week during the sermon series. The focus group would be made up of a cross section of Grace Fellowship. Each member of the group would be asked to give constructive criticism and feedback from the sermon preached that morning. The meetings would be moderated by one of the elders at Grace Fellowship and the responses would be kept confidential within the group. I would design the group so that the people were confident the information was being given to me in a way that protected them from being identified. This addition would provide a better assessment of the sermons. One of the feelings I had at the conclusion of the sermon series was that the people did not give me strong constructive criticism. Their reluctance was probably due to the fact that the surveys were not done anonymously. A focus group meeting would also allow the elders of the church to interact with the people over the content, style, and delivery of sermons,

which would increase our understanding of the needs and perceptions of the people in the congregation.

Strengths of the Project

The project had several strengths, some of which the paper has already discussed. These strengths indicate that the project was successful in meeting its goals. The following paragraphs give three core strengths of the project.

Training of Lay Preachers

Grace Fellowship is a relatively small congregation. I have thought over the years that the church needed to be more proactive in rising up qualified teachers and preachers so that the future elder leadership of the church will be strong in the ability to share the teaching responsibility within the congregation. This project allowed the opportunity for nine men to receive quality training and practical experience in preaching christocentrically. In the near future we will be able to offer more training so that these men and other capable men in the congregation are given the opportunity to prepare in the area of teaching and preaching God's Word. One of the basic qualifications of a pastor in the local church is that the man be able to teach. Although this is not limited to time spent teaching from the pulpit, it cannot include less than the ability to teach the Word within the congregation. One of the strengths of this project is that nine men in our small congregation are more equipped to preach the Word. This reality is already being lived out in the congregation with great results. Since the conclusion of the project on June 10, 2012, five of the nine men who were part of the preaching seminar have preached during a Sunday service. The growth in this area alone made the project worth the time and effort that was invested in it.

Congregational Involvement

The project directly involved the people of Grace Fellowship in the process of evaluating the preaching ministry. I was able to interact with forty members of the

congregation over the content and delivery of the sermons preached during the six-week sermon series of this project. One of the weaknesses of my ministry has been providing the congregation an avenue for consistent feedback in regard to the sermons preached in worship services. The project established a spirit of congregational involvement that has continued after the end of the fifteen-week time period.

One of the benefits of the project is that all of the sermons at Grace Fellowship are now reviewed by various members of the congregation. We are also working as an elder team to develop a focus group that will meet once a month to review the teaching and preaching ministry of the church. The project inspired a new spirit of cooperation between the congregation and pastors, and Grace Fellowship will prosper in the future because of the involvement that was started through this project.

Unified Vision of Preaching

A final area of strength for this project is the fact that this project helped our leadership and lay people develop a unified vision of the purpose of preaching at Grace Fellowship. We now agree that the majority of the preaching ministry at Grace Fellowship should be expository in nature. The men in leadership have all agreed that the teaching and preaching ministry of Grace Fellowship will remain focused for the most part on book by book exposition of the Scripture. Our pattern will most often be to preach a sermon series from a New Testament book and then preach a sermon series from an Old Testament book of the Bible. This commitment was developed in the course of this project.

A second commitment that was established by the elder team was that we would emphasize christocentric expository preaching at Grace Fellowship. This was a major accomplishment. There were two elders who voiced serious reservations as to the validity of preaching christocentrically from all of Scripture at the beginning of the fifteen-week project. After the project the elders took one of our weekly meetings to discuss the outcome of the project and its potential impact on the congregation. The elders unanimously agreed that the preaching should continue to be expositional, and I

was also told that the elders supported a christocentric approach to preaching the Old and New Testament as I had presented it in the project.

The congregation was not surveyed as a whole during this process, but I received support from all the families of the church in the direction of the teaching ministry at Grace Fellowship. The comments of the people to me and the other elders were solidly in favor of continuing to preach christocentric expositional sermons.

Weaknesses of the Project

I observed two main weaknesses that in this project. Even the weaknesses that became apparent during the fifteen weeks are helpful in the overall objective of establishing a culture of christocentric expositional preaching at Grace Fellowship.

Research Instruments

The research instruments were not as effective as they could have been for several reasons. First, the instruments tried to quantify numerically some information that is hard to analyze in that form. The nine men in the seminar were asked to quantify their agreement with the statement, “I believe the Bible has one message in the Old and New Testaments.” This statement, along with several others, would have been better if it was fashioned in a short answer format. It could have also been more helpful to interview the nine men prior to the beginning and after the end of the seminar. Second, the surveys of the seminar participants and the surveys of the preaching series could have been correlated to show the seminar participants agreement with the level of christocentric preaching at Grace Fellowship. Because the respondents to the preaching series surveys were chosen randomly each week, the data was only useful as a gauge of a single sermon. I think the project research would have been stronger had there been a consistency between the surveys collected from the nine men in the seminar and the people reviewing the six sermon series.

Alternate Preaching Methods

A final weakness in the project is the lack of alternate christocentric approaches that the seminar participants were exposed to during the project. I have studied the preaching of a wide variety of christocentric preachers in preparation for this project. This study benefited me because I was able to distill my own personal style from the many styles I examined, but the men that were trained at Grace Fellowship were by default given my particular method. The seminar would benefit from being a one or two weeks longer so that the men could be exposed to different nuances of christocentric preaching. The imposition of my personal preference to certain aspects of study, structure, and sermon delivery will only frustrate the men to some extent. Since the seminar, I have been able to encourage the men to read widely in the literature of christocentric preaching, but this project would have been more balanced if I would have exposed the men to these alternate preaching methods during the seminar.

Theological Reflections

This project has proven to be effective in establishing a christocentric approach to preaching God's Word at Grace Fellowship in Anniston, Alabama. I am a better preacher today than before the project began, and there are nine men who are equipped with the basic knowledge and skills to preach christocentric sermons from all of Scripture. One overarching theological truth that was reaffirmed during the preparation and implementation of this project.

Centrality of Christ

I began this project believing that Christ is the central figure in the storyline of the Bible. As is defended in chapter 2 of this project, The Scriptures are christocentric from Genesis to Revelation. Luke 24:27; 44 says,

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. . . . Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

After completing the work that was necessary in preparing this project, I am more convinced that the meaning of this passage, and others like it, control the interpretation of all Scripture. Every passage must be looked at not simply in the light of its historical, literary, or grammatical nature but it must be examined as to how it reveals Christ. The apostles used this paradigm to shape their preaching, and we will only continue to have power in the preaching ministry of Grace Fellowship if we continue to preach christocentric expository sermons.

Personal Reflections

Several observations arise as I reflect on the personal impact of this project. First, I have seen my need for greater discipline in preparing to preach on a weekly basis at Grace Fellowship. The Lord has given me an ability to assimilate knowledge and understanding quickly. I have used this ability to hurry through preparation for sermons because I spent the balance of my week in other ministry at the church and in the community. This project has reinforced the need for extensive time to pray and reflect on the preaching passage so that I can best understand how the passage points to Christ. If the goal of the sermon is to call on the people to make practical changes in the way they lead their lives, then I can prepare the sermon in limited time. But, if the purpose of preaching is to point to Christ through legitimate pathways in the Scripture, then I will need blocks of time to prepare, meditate, and pray over the material that is to be delivered. In light of this observation I have asked the elder team at Grace Fellowship to evaluate the ministry goals and objectives at the church and help me give time only to the things that must have my attention. This shift will leave me more time to do the critical work of christocentric preaching.

A second personal reflection is that I have not placed a high enough value on congregational critique and feedback in my preaching ministry. The project forced me to open myself up to the thoughts of the congregation. In the process I was greatly encouraged by the people, and I was given some valid constructive criticism. It is not

easy for me to take criticism in regard to my preaching of the Word. This reluctance is a real flaw in my life, and I have confessed my sinful pride to the other elders. The leaders at Grace Fellowship along with select members of the congregation are now providing weekly feedback so that I can improve as a preacher of God's Word.

Third, I was encouraged by the ability of the men in the congregation in regard to preaching. Grace Fellowship is a church with 90 member families. In this project I was able to identify, train, and deploy nine christocentric preachers. This will continue to make a difference in the lives of the people in our community. We had the privilege of planting a new congregation on the south side of our community. The men who are now leading in the teaching of the Word at the new church plant are two of the men that I was able to train through this project. I have also used five other men in the pulpit at Grace Fellowship since the conclusion of the project, and one of the men will be teaching on a weekly basis in the college ministry. This has been a tremendous encouragement to me and to the other members. If this church continues to be faithful in training christocentric expository preachers, then we will see God raise up pastors, missionaries, and Christian laborers for his kingdom.

Finally, I have been confirmed in my conviction to minister through expository preaching. Grace Fellowship has been a congregation for nine years, and I have been the only teaching pastor the church has ever had. Although I have always taught expositionally, this project has solidified that preaching style in my heart and mind. God is powerful in using his Word for his glory as it is presented through weak vessels. I am blessed to preach God's Word on a weekly basis, and by his grace I will continue to exalt the centrality of Christ through consistent expositional preaching from the Old and New Testament.

Conclusion

This project has proven to be effective in accomplishing all of its stated goals. I am thankful for the opportunity to participate in this project. As a result of the project, Grace Fellowship has a newly established culture of christocentric expository preaching.

The elders of the church have taken steps to insure that the future of the preaching ministry at Grace Fellowship is shared by men who proclaim the Word from a christocentric approach. It will be beneficial to the continued development of the church if we follow up the training that was begun in the seminar phase of this project, and it will also be important to continue involving the membership in the review of Sunday sermons. My prayer is that God uses this project to further his kingdom in Anniston, Alabama, and allows me to continue to proclaim his Word through christocentric preaching at Grace Fellowship in Anniston, Alabama.

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-SEMINAR QUESTIONNAIRE

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate your understanding of the subject of christocentric expository preaching. This research is being conducted by Carlton E. Weathers for his Doctor of Ministry project addressing the need to develop a christocentric approach to expository preaching. In this research you will be answering questions dealing with your personal relationship with Jesus Christ, your level of understanding in the concepts of preaching, the Bible, and the use of the christocentric approach to sermon delivery. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

I. Demographic Information

1. Name: _____
2. Education: Please circle the last level of training you completed.
High School Undergraduate (College) Graduate (Masters or Doctor)
3. Age: Please circle the age range which applies to you.
20-30 30-40 40-50 50-60 60-70 over 70
4. How long have you been in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?
0-1 year 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 15 + years

II. Using the following scale, please write the number that corresponds to your opinion of the following statements

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. I believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. _____
6. I believe that the Bible has one message in the Old and New Testaments. _____
7. Each portion of the Old and New Testament has equal authority in my life. _____
8. I believe that a pastor should preach more messages from the New Testament. _____

9. Expository preaching is the primary way to proclaim God's Word in the local church context. _____
10. The Old Testament is in agreement with the New Testament. _____
11. A pastor should preach Christ from the Old and New Testament. _____
12. The Old Testament is centered on works of the law, and the New Testament is centered on the work of grace. _____
13. I believe that it is important for a man to receive some training before he begins to preach God's Word. _____
14. It is not important for the pastor to work on his delivery of the sermon. _____
15. The pastor should depend only on the Holy Spirit for his sermons rather than studying to prepare for preaching. _____
16. The New Testament is a book about Christ. _____
17. I want the preaching at Grace Fellowship to be more balanced between the Old and New Testaments. _____

III. Answer the following questions in short answer form

18. Do you feel confident in your ability to preach/teach God's Word?
19. If you were asked to preach/teach from the Old Testament, do you believe you could adequately present Christ through the text?
20. What is your greatest weakness in preaching God's Word?
21. What is your greatest strength in preaching God's Word?
22. If you were asked to preach/teach from the New Testament, do you believe you could adequately present Christ through the text?

APPENDIX 2
PREACHING SURVEY

Preacher's Name: _____

Your Name: _____

Date: _____ Location of Preaching Service: _____

Biblical Text Preached: _____

Rating Scale

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Poor Average Good Outstanding

The Preacher and His Delivery

Posture

Clothing and appearance

Eye contact and facial expressions

Mannerisms

Gestures

Voice

Rating Scale

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Poor Average Good Outstanding

The Message and Its Content

Introduction

Exposition

Illustrations

Relevance and application

Exhortation

Conclusion/invitation

Christ-centeredness

Summary comments and observation

APPENDIX 3

SEMINAR OUTLINES: HOW SHOULD WE PREACH CHRIST FROM ALL OF SCRIPTURE?

Seminar 1: Biblical Theology

Seminar Objective: The objective of this seminar is to stress the importance of the discipline of biblical theology, to equip the men with a basic concept of biblical theology, and to show them the vital connection between biblical theology and christocentric preaching.

- I. The best definition of biblical theology and the historical significance of this theological discipline.
 - A. The discipline of biblical theology defined.
 1. Geerhadus Vos's definition of biblical theology.
 2. Graeme Goldsworthy's definition of biblical theology.
 3. Sidney Greidanus' definition of biblical theology.
 4. Edmund Clowney's definition of biblical theology.
 - B. The historical significance of biblical theology.
 1. The New Testament use of the Old Testament is the first point of historical biblical theology.
 2. The Church Fathers were committed to the use of biblical theology.
 3. Biblical theology was used by liberal scholars in the 19th and 20th century.
 4. Biblical theology has been revived by conservative evangelical scholars during the past forty years.
- II. Biblical theology must be compared and contrasted with other theological disciplines.
 - A. Biblical theology compared and contrasted with systematic theology.
 - B. Biblical theology compared and contrasted with historical theology.
 - C. Biblical theology compared and contrasted with pastoral theology.
 - D. Biblical theology as the foundation for the other disciplines of theology.
- III. Biblical theology and its role in christological preaching.
 - A. Biblical theology is the foundation of christocentric preaching.
 1. Biblical theology is vital during the exegetical stage of sermon preparation.
 2. Biblical theology helps the pastor connect the text to the message of Christ.
 3. Biblical theology grounds the exposition of the text in a christocentric method.
 - B. Biblical theology is the guard rails that keep the sermon true to the message of the Holy Spirit in each text.
- IV. Some of the objections to biblical theology from scholars.

- A. Biblical theology faces challenges from the liberal theologian.
- B. Biblical theology faces challenges from the evangelical theologian.

Resources: Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scripture* (chapter 4-5); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (chapter 4), *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, and his lectures at SBTS found on seminary website; Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*; Edmund Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*.

Seminar 2: Christ in the Old Testament

Seminar Objective: This seminar builds on the idea of Biblical Theology that was presented in the first session. In this teaching time we will discover the reality of Christ in the Old Testament, reflect on the way that Christ should be found in the Old Testament, and provide sound instruction on the theme of redemptive history in the Old Testament.

- I. The Overarching Structure of the Old Testament.
 - A. One way to structure the Old Testament is around the idea of the Kingdom of God.
 - 1. The Kingdom of God is established in the Garden of Eden.
 - 2. The fall of man destroys the personal relationship of God with man.
 - 3. The grace of God is extended to the first family.
 - 4. The Kingdom of God is promised to the world through Abraham.
 - a. Abraham – Moses
 - b. Moses – David/Solomon
 - c. David/Solomon – Prophets
 - 5. The Kingdom promised is not fulfilled in the Old Testament.
 - B. A second way to structure the Old Testament is around the covenantal structure.
 - 1. The Covenant of Works is established by God with Adam in the Garden of Eden.
 - 2. Adam falls into sin which destroyed the personal relationship that God had with man in the covenant.
 - 3. God initiates the Covenant of Grace at the outer edge of the Garden. Man does not pay for his sin with eternal destruction immediately. God promises deliverance and fulfillment in the seed of the woman.
 - a. God reaffirms the covenant with Noah.
 - b. God reaffirms the covenant with Abraham.
 - c. God reaffirms the covenant with Moses.
 - d. God reaffirms the covenant with David/Solomon.
 - 4. God closes out the Old Testament with the continued promise of the Messiah who would fulfill all the covenant promises through the ministry of the prophets.
- II. The proper interpretation of the Old Testament through a christocentric method.
 - A. The student must use both the immediate and canonical context in interpreting the Scripture christocentrically.
 - 1. The student will need to study the specific text being taught.

2. The student will study the text in relation to the immediate context of the chapter of the book, the section of the book, and the book.
 3. The student will study the text in the context of the rest of the canon.
 4. The student will keep an eye on the redemptive-historical element of the text.
 5. The student will work to understand the legitimate path to Christ from their particular text.
- B. The student will prepare an outline of the Old Testament text under consideration.
1. The first outline the student should prepare is the exegetical outline.
 2. The second outline the student should prepare is the redemptive-historical outline.
- III. The seven legitimate interpretive paths to Christ in the Old Testament.
- A. The way of redemptive-historical progression.
 - B. The way of promise fulfillment.
 - C. The way of typology.
 - D. The way of analogy.
 - E. The way of longitudinal themes.
 - F. The way of New Testament reference.
 - G. The way of contrast.

Resources: The lecture contains information that can be found in all of the references in the first seminar. One additional resource is by Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*.

Seminar 3: Christ in the New Testament

Seminar Objective: This seminar builds on the idea of Biblical Theology that was presented in the first session. In this teaching time we will discover the reality of Christ in the New Testament, reflect on the way that Christ should be found in the New Testament, and provide sound instruction on the theme of redemptive history in the New Testament.

- I. The overarching structure of the New Testament.
 - A. The Kingdom of God in the New Testament.
 1. The Kingdom came in the life of Jesus Christ.
 2. The Kingdom is being extended to the ends of the earth through the preaching of the Gospel.
 3. The Kingdom is being made visible in the life of the Church.
 4. The Kingdom is coming to a coronation at the second coming of Jesus Christ.
 - B. The covenantal structure of the New Testament.
 1. The New Covenant was inaugurated in the life of Jesus Christ.
 2. The New Covenant is present in the life of the Church.
 3. The New Covenant will reach coronation at the second coming of Jesus Christ when he makes all things new.
- II. The proper interpretation of the Old Testament through a christocentric method.
 1. The student will need to study the specific text being taught.

2. The student will need to study the text in relation to the immediate context of the chapter of the book, the section of the book, and the book.
 3. The student will study the text in the context of the rest of the canon.
 4. The student will keep an eye on the redemptive-historical element of the text.
 5. The student will work to understand the legitimate path to Christ from their particular text.
- III. A christocentric method for students to teach Christ in the New Testament.
- A. Teaching the Gospel and History literature of the New Testament using a christocentric method.
 - B. Teaching the Apostolic Epistles of the New Testament using a christocentric method.
 - C. Teaching the Apocalyptic literature of the New Testament using a christocentric method.

Seminar 4: An Organized Approach to Study

Seminar Objective: The students in this seminar will learn to properly select, exegete, outline, and prepare a text for teaching/preaching.

- I. The student should select an appropriate text for preaching.
 - A. Time should be given to prayer as the students thinks about the proper preaching text.
 - B. Select the passage for preaching. When preaching consecutively at one church, the text is most likely part of the exposition of a book of the Bible. When teaching infrequently, the preacher will need to select a proper text (limiting the text appropriately) with the congregation in mind.
 - C. Read the text within the framework of the entire book it is found at least five times.
 - D. Begin the note taking process by gaining valuable knowledge of literary genre, historical context, author, background information, etc.
- II. The student should do the exegetical work with the text in its original context.
 - A. Translate the passage from the original language if at all possible. The preacher should also spend time reading the text in several reliable translations in the modern English. The preacher will want to note any textual variation within the text and properly understand the correct translation.
 - B. Gather more specific context information such as the reason the text was originally written, what is the purpose or theme of the text.
 - C. Make a provisional exegetical outline of the text. This will include recognition of all major and minor themes and movements in the text. It will also consider the relationship that exists from the different clauses within the text. The outline can be textual flow diagram or traditional outline.
 - D. Write a provisional theme and purpose statement, and finalize the exegetical outline.

- III. The student should work with the text in regard to its relationship with the entire canon of Scripture.
 - A. Trace the use of key words within the text in other parts of the Bible.
 - B. Note all references to the Old Testament if your text is in the New Testament.
 - C. Gather the mindset of the original audience.
 - D. Rework exegetical outline if necessary based on further study.
- IV. The student should study and learn from other men who have interpreted the text.
 - A. Try not to look at commentaries and other resources until you have study the text for yourself.
 - B. Refer to pastoral, exegetical, and specialized studies that deal with your text or the topic contained in your text.
 - C. Refer to systematic, historical, and biblical theologies as they relate to your text.
 - D. Take the time to pray over all that has been studied. Spend time meditating over the text and insights gained through study.
- V. The student should spend time developing the preaching outline for the text.
 - A. Develop an initial outline for preaching. All points of the outline should be expressed in a complete sentence.
 - B. Work on transition statements from one point to the next. It is important that the preacher spend time thinking about if the congregation can follow his thought during the sermon.
 - C. After developing the body of the outline. Spend time preparing the introduction and the conclusion. These should be long enough to grab the attention of the listener and close the preaching time effectively.
 - D. Prepare specific illustrations and thought provoking lines to communicate the message to the audience.
- VI. The student should prepare a manuscript of the sermon.
 - A. A manuscript should be written so that the flow of thought is clear. The manuscript process will especially help new preachers with the task of communication.
 - B. The manuscript should be word for word as much as possible.
 - C. The manuscript is never taken into the pulpit. The manuscript is for your personal benefit, and it can also be used for future teaching, distribution on the internet, or quick reference if the pastor is questioned after the sermon by someone in the audience.
- VII. The student should prepare the final outline for preaching.
 - A. This outline is concise. The preaching outline that you carry into the pulpit needs to be written so that you can remember you point but not too much information so that you are tempted to read.
 - B. Illustrations and specific key phrases or words may need to be written on this outline for memory purpose only.
- VIII. The student should spend time praying.
 - A. Prayer should be focused on the preacher. Confess sin, apply message to the preachers on heart and mind, and ask God to fill with the Spirit for power and effectiveness.
 - B. Prayer should be focused on the congregation. Pray specifically for the needs in the church addressed by this sermon.

- C. Pray evangelistically for those who are lost and will attend the service.
- IX. The student should deliver the message in the power of the Holy Spirit and the confidence gained from proper preparation.
- A. Remember that no one in the audience has studied your text the way you have this week.
 - B. Remember that boldness and power come from the work of the Spirit.
 - C. Remember that authentic truth telling is compassionate and passionate.

Resources: This is my outline for preparing to preach. I have been greatly helped by the outline found in Johnson's book *Him We Proclaim*, Appendix A.

Seminar 5: How do I effectively use sermon illustrations?

Sermon Objective: This seminar will help the preacher develop in the use of illustrations. Specific instructions will be given in the technique, proper placement, and frequency of use of illustrations.

- I. The purpose of Illustrations is to make the texts meaning clearer to the listener.
 - A. You can misuse illustrations and distract the listener from the text.
 - 1. Over use of illustrations can distract the listener.
 - 2. Bad placement of the illustration can distract the listener.
 - 3. Poor connection to the text can make the illustration a distraction.
 - 4. Unacceptable content in a illustration can distract the listener.
 - B. You can use good illustrations to capture the listener's attention.
 - 1. Current events can help the listener connect to the text.
 - 2. Historical events or people can connect the listener to the text. Be careful not to over use this method or the sermon will seem out of touch with modern times.
 - 3. Cultural connection between the text and modern context can engage the audience in the meaning of the text.
 - 4. Biblical examples when well placed are the best illustrations.
- II. We must use good technique when using illustrations.
 - A. An illustration is usually a form of short story. It must be done effectively.
 - 1. Be creative.
 - 2. Be vivid in detail but only use meaningful detail.
 - 3. Be redundant in the use of important terms.
 - 4. Be purposeful in bringing end to illustration.
 - B. Illustrations are one tool in the sermon.
 - 1. Use illustrations where they are needed or are clearly helpful.
 - 2. Use illustrations that appeal to the people in the congregation. Be personal and vulnerable when appropriate.

Resources: Bryan Chapell: *Use of Illustrations, Christ-Centered Preaching* (chapter 7)

Seminar 6: How do I apply the message?

Seminar Objective: This seminar will help the preacher with the all important task of applying the sermon to the life of the audience. Practical advice and technique will be given so that the preacher is more prepared to preach.

- I. Application makes the expositional sermon meaningful.
 - A. Application makes the expositional truth consequential to listener.
 - B. Application makes exposition legitimate.
 - C. Application makes exposition focused.
- II. Application gives the listener the what, where, why, and how of the text.
 - A. What = Instruction from the text for listener's life.
 - B. Where = Situation to apply the text in the listener's life.
 - C. Why = Motivation to live the text in the life of the listener.
 - D. How = Enabling power of Holy Spirit to obey the text in listener's life.
- III. Application should be made throughout the sermon not help to the end of the sermon.
 - A. Each main point should be applied.
 - B. Make the main points of the sermon application statements.
 - C. Each sub point should only support the application of the main point.

Resources: Bryan Chapell: *Christ-Centered Preaching*; Dan Doriani: *Putting the Truth to Work*.

Seminar 7: How do I organize my sermon?

Seminar Objective: This seminar will give practical advice to the students on how to develop the sermon. Time will be given to introduction, body, and conclusion. The students will also be challenged to develop the preaching outline from the outline of the text.

- I. The Introduction should be used to prepare the audience for the content of the sermon.
 - A. Introduction should be appropriate in mood.
 - B. Introductions should be appropriate in length.
 - C. Introductions should effectively set the table for the main body of the sermon.
- II. The Body of the sermon should be unified around one driving theme.
 - A. Main body of the sermon should be organized around the theme or ETS/ESS.
 - B. Main body of the sermon should be outlined around the content of the text.
 - C. Main body should have clear flow in thought so the audience can follow to the main point.
 1. Points of the sermon stated in a clear sentence.
 2. Points and sub-points of the sermon used like a road map to the desired destination.
 3. Points and sub-points should be appropriately illustrated.
 4. Points of the sermon are simply driving the listener to the single ESS.
- III. The Conclusion of the sermon should be used to close the sermon with appropriate call to response.
 - A. Conclusion of the sermon should be the servant of the main body of the sermon.
 - B. Conclusion should not contain new material that was not contained in the main body of the sermon.

- C. Conclusion should effectively call the audience to respond to the message of the text.

Seminar 8: How do I best use my voice and body to communicate?

Seminar Objective: This seminar will help the preacher be a well rounded orator. Practical advice and technique will be taught so that the preacher has a good working knowledge of basic speaking skills.

- I. The preacher should use his voice to effectively communicate the message to the congregation.
 - A. It is always important to vary tone, pitch, and volume so that the sermon is not monotonous.
 - B. It is always important to use proper English and pronunciation during the sermon.
 - C. It is important for the preacher to use proper technique so that his voice is not damaged over years of preaching.
- II. The preacher should use his body to effectively communicate the message to the congregation.
 - A. The message is communicated by verbal and non verbal communication.
 - B. The body should be viewed as an instrument of communication.
 - C. The preacher should use appropriate gestures, mannerisms, and posture during the sermon.
 - D. The preacher should use facial expression that is appropriate for the content of the sermon.
- III. The preacher should present himself in appropriate attire for the setting in which he is preaching.
 - A. The preacher should be certain not to dress too casually because this could communicate that the message is of no true importance.
 - B. The preacher should be certain not to dress too formally because this could give the impression that the preacher is disconnected from the people.
 - C. The preacher should dress according to the custom of the audience.

Seminar 9: Pulling it All Together for the Glory of God

Seminar Objective: This seminar will be used to give last instruction, answer any questions that the students may have, and give personal example of all the steps of preparation and delivery. The content of this seminar was determined by class discussion and questions. This time was used to review material previously taught and to answer questions that the men had concerning their particular passage for preaching in the seminar.

APPENDIX 4

SERMON OUTLINES CREATED BY SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS

The following outlines were completed by the nine participants in the preaching seminar at Grace Fellowship. These men attended all nine sessions in preparation for preaching a christocentric sermon. The last three sessions were used as preaching labs for each participant to preach a thirty minute christocentric sermon from the assigned text. I have included all nine preaching outlines as examples of what the men learned during the seminar.¹

Joshua 2 (Rahab's Faith is a Saving Faith)—5/27/2012 Grace Fellowship Preaching Seminar Participant 5

- I. Introduction- In order to understand Joshua 2 must look back at event that led up to 2.
Gen. 47- Famine in land (sovereignly caused by God, contact with family/Lord's people sold themselves to Pharaoh for survival.

Exodus 1- new pharaoh, doesn't know Joseph, fears the Nation because of size, and makes them slaves. Decrees (midwives) all male that are born are to be killed (disobey). Moses mother hides Moses- basket, pharaoh's daughter finds, raises Moses as own. Moses grown kills soldier (bury in sand), breaks up fights (ridiculed) runs and hides.

- a. Exodus- Moses is married & watching father-in-law's sheep, burning bush "return to pharaoh let God's people go". God hardens P's heart. 10 Plagues- ultimately leads to P letting slaves go. P changes mind and goes after. Red Sea (parted all cross dry land), Egyptian Army & P drown.

Next 40 years Lord constantly provides for the nation as they wonder in wilderness. Water out of rock, bread from sky, gives law to live by. Numbers 13- 12 spies (milk, honey) 10 said giants we can't go (Joshua & Caleb yes giants, but Lord provides, will give us victory). Lord is angry, only men 20 younger enter into promise land (Caleb and Joshua follow lord whole heart).

- b. Deuteronomy 34 Moses end of life. Lord allows M to look over promise land. Moses death bible says Joshua "full of the spirit of wisdom" because M laid his hands on him. The nation obeys Joshua and "did as the Lord Commanded Moses." Joshua 1- commissioning of Joshua by Lord. Told cross over Jordan "everywhere foot treads, I will give you".

¹In order to maintain the integrity of the participants work, the content of the outlines (including spelling, grammar, and format) are unchanged.

Joshua tells officers pass through camp “3 days cross Jordan to take possession of the Land the Lord has given. Their response was different this time from the first time they were told 40 years earlier. “All that you command us we will do and wherever you send us we will go”

- c. B4 Joshua n nations go into promise land J secretly sends 2 spies into Jericho. Upon arriving come to house of prostitute named Rahab & lodge there. Q arises, why spies go to prostitute’s house, pleasure? Language used “came into” & “lay down” other places these give sexual connotation. Not here. 4 example v1 “And they went and came into the house of a prostitute named Rahab and lodged there”, direct object here is house, not Rahab. Spies didn’t come into Rahab, came into her house. V8 they don’t lay down with Rahab, they laid down on the roof under the stalks of flax.

Spies not there very long, soldiers of king show up. B4 answer on how they know spies are there, who is Rahab? Know she is prostitute , also genealogy of JC. Rahab great great grand maw of King David. James 2:25 says Rahab was “justified by her works and Heb. 11:31 talk about her faith, so we know she becomes a believer.

How does king know of spies? May watchman reported to king, not for sure. What is known is soldiers came to Rahab, “where?” Rahab “they were here, but left in direction on gate”. Tells them “go after and catch them.

Pause and discuss, danger R is in. Lied to soldiers, easy to turn over spies, business woman after all. Soon see she knows intention of soldiers because Lord revealed himself to her b4 arrival of spies.

How often today do we turn from what is right and do what is easy? “What time did you get to work, 6:30? You boss 7am, go right down 6. Putting down 6:30 gets you a meeting with the boss. You’ve been warned about being late. It’s ok, you can work through breaks.

Think judgment never comes. Like fish on wrong side of net unaware of fisherman pulling them to shore like the parable of the net in Matthew 13. We go about our lives not thinking about consequences to decisions we make. Rahab weighed her options and chose to protect spies.

- II. Rahab comes to spies and tells them all she knows about the Lord and what He has done. Knows “the Lord, given them the land” caused great fear amongst people. Talks about Lord Red Sea (amazing from saturated to unsaturated). Mentioned Sihon and Og (kings who wouldn’t allow the Israelites to pass through lands and were defeated and killed (#21).

Why Rahab turn back on people, obvious she knows why spies are there and what capable with Lord. Seems R turning back on countrymen. Truth R isn’t turning back on people, Jericho no longer her people. Grafted into Nation.

Matthew 8 J talks about cost of following Him. One says “follow u wherever you go” “Foxes have holes, birds of air = nest. Son of Man nowhere to lay head”.

Another has what seems reasonable request “let me bury my father then I follow”. Jesus responds “let the dead bury dead”. J isn’t saying “father isn’t important, I’m more important. R knew Lord better than career and countrymen. Chose to protect spies by hiding them. May we be like R and make right decisions for Lord, even when hard.

III. Rahab professes faith in God and makes a covenant with His people. R looking for sign. “Show me found favor in eyes”. Not just for her, entire family. R places her life and families in protection of God and Nation of I.

V14 find spies agree to covenant with R to protect her family when they return. Problem here (Deut. 7:1-5) what are they to do with the Canaanites? Destroy not make covenant. What we see happening in Joshua 2:14 is a covenant not with R the Canaanite, but R child of God. When she speaks of Lord, it’s personal, ownership in her words “swear to me by the Lord”. She isn’t ethnic Jew, but is circum of heart. Curse is over Salvation come to her house (Act 16 Paul Silas).

IV. R sneaks spies out of city “hide in woods 3 days coast is clear. Sign of agreement of covenant ties scarlet cord and hang outside window spies escaped. Easy reminder to Nation of Passover (slaves n Egypt, Blood on doorpost, first born dies, rich poor slave animal, no passes except covered by blood.)

Atoning work of JC on our behalf satisfied wrath of Almighty God. Shed blood and death of cross covered sins. Cord hanging from window of prostitute’s house brought salvation from wrath of God on Canaanites. Act didn’t save her, her faith saved her, act evidence of salvation. James 2:25 “and the same way was not R the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way”. What great model we should follow. Our faith will have works that show faith.

In end spies hid in hills 3 days report Joshua. Israelites follow Ark across Jordan, new circumcision of those not already c. Lord orders Joshua to march Ark & nation around Jericho 6 days in silence. On 7th, the Ark and the priest are leading and blowing trumpets nation walks silently until the 7th lap. Then Joshua orders them to shout for “the Lord has given the land to them this day”. Shout, walls fall everyone destroyed.....except R and family. Make out alive, why? Her faith was in the Lord, she stood up against the king’s men and said “no spies here, and because of her faith, the Lord protected her and her family. Salvation had come to her house.

Shemei and the Justice of the King—May 20, 2012
1 Kings 2:1-9
Grace Fellowship Preaching Seminar
Participant 4

Introduction

Today’s message is taken from 1 Kings 2:1-9. In this passage David is approaching the end of his life. In chapter one his fourth son (Adonijah) had secretly attempted to crown himself king. This required David to crown Solomon King quickly. He then sets out to give Solomon advice regarding the transfer of power. READ PASSAGE.

We read all nine verses here because it provides for us some context but our primary focus will be verses 5-9 and more specifically 8-9. The event that David is referring to in verses 8-9 is given in greater detail in 2 Samuel 16, starting in verse 5. READ PASSAGE.

In this 2 Samuel passage Absalom, David's son, had just conspired to take the kingdom from his father David. As a result, David and his court, along with hundreds and possibly thousands of other men set out toward the east, across the Jordan into the wilderness in order to flee Absalom. Chapter 15 is filled with emotion. There is a great deal of weeping. There is sadness. There is mourning. And through it all David's character is

remarkable. In this passage we see the David that we all remember, a broken man, a man marked by humility (even in the midst of Shemei's cursings).

The author of Samuel fills us in on who Shemei is. He is of the lineage of Saul. He comes out cursing David, pelting him with stones. He is calling David a murderer. He is calling David a scoundrel. In essence, he is saying that the Kingdom has been given to Absalom because David murdered Saul.

We all know that this is not true. Saul was wounded by the Philistines and thus killed himself. He said that he didn't want to risk torture at the hands of uncircumcised men. But it was his own sin, his own rage that led to his demise. And yet, men like Shemei are always looking for someone to blame. This happened to be David, even though David did everything he could to be at peace with Saul. He even refused to defend himself against Saul's lethal attacks, refusing to lay a finger on God's anointed.

David had always acted with upright, moral character in his dealings with Saul. And yet, Shemei accuses him of murder. He throws stones, he mocks, he insults, he rages against the King. And this goes on and on throughout their entire journey, seemingly on into the night until they arrive at their destination, exhausted (as the passage says).

Abishai, David's hot-tempered nephew, one who typically wanted to settle his disputes with the sword said, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head." But the king said, "If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'"...He says a few verses later "Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to."

David was revealing a high level of humility here, a high level of brokenness, a deep-seated belief in the sovereignty of God. And our message could be about any one of those themes today. As much as this could be a great sermon about the character of David, about standing strong in the midst of daily persecution and difficulty, about dealing with the "Shemeis" in your life I believe there is a greater, deeper meaning here. God is not just giving us an object lesson, a character sketch, but he is showing us something about his character, about who he is.

In wrapping up our introduction today and entering the main text I just want to highlight a potential delima here, the seemingly great contrast between the David of 2 Samuel and the David on his deathbed. In 2 Samuel we see a man who seems contrite, broken, humble, loving and in 1 Kings (on his deathbed) the same man who appears to be angry, bloodthirsty, set on exacting vengeance on his enemies.

What should we make of this? Is David somewhat schizophrenic here? Are we seeing two different, opposing sides to his nature here (kind of like a jekyll and hyde)? Was this a political ploy? After all, Joab knew a lot of secrets about David. He was his right hand man. Why after all of these years would he bring up Shemei again? After agreeing to spare his life he now declares that he must die.

I have to admit that I wrestled with this text at first. It really got me frustrated. I was like, "Really David? You're dying, and all you can think about is killing these guys? Just let it go already." But after giving it some time to sink in The Lord gave me a few principles that led me to a correct and balanced understanding of the text.

- I. David Typifies the Kingly Rule of Christ
 - a. David's role as prophet, priest, and king.

- b. David’s reasoning behind allowing Shemei to live (2 Samuel 19:15-23).
Quote: R.C. Sproul once said that “The mystery is not that God pours out His wrath on sinners. The mystery is that our Holy Father puts up with transgressors at all. It is a wonder that the Lord is long-suffering, since to Adam he only promised wrath (Gen. 2:16–17). God cannot, and will not, comprise His holiness, but He can mercifully substitute Christ’s righteousness, which His people so desperately need.”

II. God is a God of Justice.

- a. Reasons for not affirming and promoting the justice of God.
- b. Examples of Justice in the Scripture (Nadab and Abihu, Uzzah, etc.)
- c. David and Solomon’s justice toward Shemei and their corresponding “common grace” (1 Kings 2:36-44)

Biblical Illustration: Read Matthew 19:32-34

III. Jesus Christ is the rightful heir of the Davidic throne and His kingdom is characterized by righteousness and justice.

- a. Jesus Christ is the second David (Acts 2:30-31)
- b. Compare Solomon’s Kingdom and Rule with Jesus’ (refer to Ephesians 2:6 and Hebrews 12:22)
- c. David’s obsession with justice in the Psalms

Conclusion

In closing today, I would just like to submit that David was just and right in his anger and judgment toward Joab and Shimei. There is no contradiction between the broken, contrite character of David in the face of Shemei's cursings in 1 Samuel 16 and then the judgment that he declares for him in 1 Kings. What these men had experienced up until this time was the king's benevolent, common grace.

What this narrative ultimately reveals for us is God's great hatred toward sin. God is right in judging sin. He is just in his wrath. True love and justice was displayed in the fact that God put all of his hatred for sin on his own Son. Today, you are in one of two places, either Christ is bearing your sin on your behalf or you are bearing it. God's precepts are great and we are incapable of accomplishing them. Lest Christ intercede for us, fulfilling the promise on our behalf we will be condemned like Shemei.

Where is Your Boast?—Jeremiah 9:23-24
May 20, 2012
Grace Fellowship Preaching Seminar
Participant 8

Jeremiah 9:23-24(ESV) 23 Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

Introduction to Jeremiah

-Jeremiah understood this scripture because he understood and knew the Lord.

-He understood the great steadfast love, justice, and righteousness God had shown the people.

Although they did not deserve the Lord's compassion any more than another nation.

- God had open Jeremiah's eyes and his heart.

- He understood why the people's only boast could be in God alone.

-And he knew this was not what the people boasted in.

-The riches, treasures; strength of men, wisdom, and knowledge- to these to people understood and

knew-not God.

-Though God had spared the people of Judah many times before, their time was running out.

-Judgment was soon to fall.

-Jeremiah knew this- for God had declared it so.

-Years of seeing the hard hearted and unrepentant people mock God proclaiming Him somewhat openly

with their mouths but yet in their hearts they were desperately wicked toward the Lord.

-this drove Jeremiah to weep so bitterly over the people

Jeremiah 9:1 Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!

-Jeremiah would faithfully proclaim God message to the very bitter end.

-God's judgment would come by the hands of the Babylonians.

-And the kingdom and world the people knew and loved and therefore boasted in fell, and great was its fall.

I want to demonstrate from the text some similarities in Jeremiah's day to ours. How there are dangerous consequences in boasting in any other thing but this, to understanding and knowing the Lord.

1. Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, a.(Explain)

-Let not or do not boast in wisdom

-Has God given you great wisdom?

-It cannot be your boast or what you glory in!

-Has God given you great access to education, understand of a topic or trade.

-Do not let that be your boast.

b. (Illustrate)

-Where is the root and beginning of wisdom?

-Where should it come from?

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

-Judah's wisdom had become of no value,

-Why? because their boast was no longer in God

-Therefore they no longer had a fear of God making them fools to despise wisdom and instruction

-The real wisdom and instruction God was speaking through a man, Jeremiah they despised.

Jeremiah 5:22 Do you not fear me? Declares the Lord. Do you not tremble before me? I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it.

-peoples response to this in general, “well that’s great Lord, we’ll be over hear doing our on thing, o come

join if You want....

-God’s response..!!!

Jeremiah 4:22-“For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are ‘wise’—in doing evil! But how to do good they know not.”

c. (Apply)

-In our day, people boast in their own wisdom as in the days of Jeremiah.

-How? Some examples:

-1.wisdom used to put together the car that became a finely polished idols to millions,

-2.lifesaving medicine and surgeries became death to the unborn and disabled,

-3.study of the earth and science found within became worship of the creature rather than it’s Creator,

-4.a computer that was designed to solve mathematical equations becomes a media information device that became a tool used for self-gratification and self-worship,

-5.places and rooms that held people together for worship become buildings and temples where gods of our own making are worshiped.

-Apart from the fear of God, we have no wisdom to boast in either, just like the unrepentant people of Jeremiah’s day.

2. let not the mighty man boast in his might,

a.(Explain)

-Mighty man, people with physical strength, people of great political power.

-examples of those who were the might men of Jeremiah’s day: Kings, princes, rulers, priests, men of war are

-these people have no room to boast or glory

-A persons’ might or strength is fading away each day.

b. (Illustrate)

Samson, Judges 13-16

-great physical strength given by God,

-Nazirite oath God made with Samson’s parents

-obedient to the oath thus leaving his hair long- no one could bind or subdue him

-breaking that oath by allowing his hair to be cut by the Philistines- his strength was gone and his eyes were put out by the Philistines and then he was imprisoned.

- While his boast was in his might, he ignored the oath and thus the word of God, -God’s blessing not on him

-Later on in a time of repentant prayer to the Lord and after his hair had grown back, God allowed his strength to return

-Samson destroyed the pagan temple of the Philistines.

-This same event ends his life.

c. (Apply)

-time in my life where my strength that I have boasted in greatly was removed, I was not be able to walk but a short distance before physical fatigue and exhaustion

-God graciously has restored my strength

-my boast can and shall never be in my strength.

3. let not the rich man boast in his riches,

a.(Explain)

-Are you a person God has blessed with wealth?

-God said not to boast in riches.

-Boasting in your wealth never glorifies God and only leads to every kind of evil.

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

b. (Illustrate)

-People of Judah learned too late as the Babylonian army successfully laid siege to the nation.

-God poured out his wrath for their unrighteousness.

-They refused to repent of boasting in their riches.

Proverbs 11:4 Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

c. (Apply)

-In our day we are no different from the people of Judah.

-We boast in our riches, not God.

-Many will pursue riches at all cost. Spouses, Children, Health, Church, etc...all lay victim to lustful pursuit of riches.

-Why does the very mention of riches or (money) bring about tension to our minds?

-Ever wonder why that is?....

-Does it expose where our boast really lies!???

4. 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

a. (Explain)

-No one should ever boast in wisdom or intelligence, strength or power, or wealth.

-Boast in this says the Lord.....that you understand and know ME!!!

-Judah did not know the Lord, only knew lawlessness.

Jeremiah 9:3 They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong[a] in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, declares the Lord.

b. (Illustrate)

-What does it mean to understand and know the Lord?

-Example: how I know my wife vs. how others know her

-True heart level relationship of knowing God, Jeremiah was calling out for them, to return to.

Jeremiah 7:5-7 5 “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly

execute justice one with another, 6 if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, 7 then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

-Why should they boast in understanding and know Him.

-Because God has said that He delights in these:

I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

-He is the Lord their God, the God of their fore fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Lord who had - lead them by the hand out of Egypt into the land promised to them.

-He is not like the gods of the gentiles whose god's are cruel and unappeasable.

c.(Apply)

-In the end Judah would not listen,

-her boast would not be in the Lord, and judgment fell on her.

-complete and utter destruction for the nation and Jerusalem.

-But, God promised a remnant through which the **Messiah** would be born, in keeping with the promise to the line of King David even though taken into captivity to Babylon.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 5 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’

-In time, a remnant returns to rebuild Jerusalem, Ezra and Nehemiah,

-several hundred yrs later, God himself stepped down into time through his remnant people.

-savior, the promised one, the hope of Israel, **Christ the Lord** into to which we (the remnant (the church))

are grafted into through faith in Him....

-Conclusion

-Church, where is our boast?

-In our wisdom, our strength, our wealth?

-If our boast is in these things we will suffer the same fate as those in Jeremiah's day.

-May our boast be that we truly know Him and come to understand Him through His word.

-Jesus Christ the Lord.” He is our boast!!

**Our Great Intercessor—Esther 4:10-16, June 3, 2012
Grace Fellowship Preaching Seminar
Participant 2**

Introduction: One of the wonderful things about the Holy Scriptures is how they not only tell us about God's marvelous works of Creation and Divine miracles that can only to be attributed to Him and His power but also how He controls every aspect of history in order

to bring to fruition His Sovereign purpose for His own glory! Such is the book of Esther, where God is not mentioned or referred to by name but is evident that He is in control. The setting of Esther is the Medo-Persian empire from 483 to 473 B.C. under the rule of king Ahasuerus or (Xerxes 1 in the Greek). Esther or Haddassah is a Jewish girl being raised by her uncle Mordecai who is from the tribe of Benjamin. They are part of the Jewish population dispersed throughout the 127 provinces of the Medo-Persian empire, from India to Ethiopia. Esther rises to prominence after being brought into the king's harem and being chosen by the king to Queen Vashti who had fallen out of favor with the king. Mordecai, her uncle, kept a close association with Esther and seems to have been a man of some influence in the kingdom because he sat at the king's gate, which was not permitted to everyone. But also in the kingdom was an evil man by the name of Haman the Agagite, from the Amalekites, descendants of Amalek, a son of Esau. (Gen. 36:12). 550 years earlier, Agag, the king of the Amalekites was hacked to death by the prophet/judge Samuel. (1 Sam. 15: 32,33) after Saul, the first king of Israel, disobeyed God by not totally destroying the Amalekites and their king Agag. In the Middle East, then as it is now, history NEVER dies, it always lives. As a result of a history of hatred of the Jews, Haman uses his influence with the king to order the extermination of all the Jews in the kingdom, and all of their possessions to be taken and put in the king's treasury. Esther's ethnicity as a Jew has been kept a secret up until now. But now the edict of the king has been passed and there is seemingly, no hope of survival for the Jews. All seems lost but God is really still in control, this brings us to Esther 4: 10.

I. A Hopeless Cause – Esther 4:10-11

Esther's uncle Mordecai, upon hearing the king's edict that all the Jews in the empire were to be exterminated, sends word to Esther (as queen) that she is in the greatest position of influence to persuade the king to rethink or even recant his position on destroying the Jews. Mordecai understands that if God's people are going to survive, they must have an advocate or in other words, a deliverer. The Jews throughout the empire were in a hopeless situation and that if all the promises God made to Abraham and David were going to be fulfilled, God would have to intervene. From the time of the Exodus, the world powers had sought to destroy the nation of Israel. The Amalekites, Ammorites, Philistines and many other nations came out to war against the Israelites in order to drive the Jewish people from their land and their place of blessing as the people of God. God, at times, used these nations to chasten Israel for their sin and purge the evil from the nation but God always preserved the remnant He had chosen for Himself. Even more specific was the preservation of the Messianic line which in 2 Chron. 22:10-12 was reduced to one child, Joash, who was rescued and hidden from the evil Athaliah. But in spite of the history of God's providential care, the fate that the Jews faced under the pronouncement of king Ahasuerus, masterminded by Haman, seemed insurmountable, with no way to defend themselves from the onslaught to come. Queen Esther expresses the hopelessness of the situation in verses 10 and 11 (READ). Think of how Esther must have felt. She had not been summoned to the king's presence in 30 days. Esther did not know whether or not she was still in good standing with the king or not. Had she been replaced by someone else like she had replaced Vashti? Also, it was known to all, that to approach the king without being summoned meant certain death with no way of knowing whether or not the king would show grace by extending his golden scepter. The unchangeable nature of Medo-Persian law can be found in the book of Daniel 6:8-9 which sent Daniel to the lion's den for his civil disobedience. So all the circumstances surrounding Esther and her people made their fate seem bleak and annihilation certain. But Mordecai offers a honest rebuke to the queen's despair.

II. An Honest Rebuke – Esther 4:12-14

In verse 12, Esther's response is related to Mordecai and his response is both one of faith and of stark reality. Mordecai sends word to Esther that if her hesitation to speak to the king on behalf of her people was to preserve her own life, that would be a gross assumption. The edict was for ALL the Jews in the provinces to be slain (this would include Esther) and their possessions to be taken as spoil. The argument could be made that Mordecai would have a better argument for preserving his own life because he earlier had uncovered a plot to assassinate the king and made it known in order to save the king's life but Mordecai did not presume on any gratitude that might be owed to him. He also understood that this was not an "every man for himself" scenario. It was about the salvation of God's people from the forces of evil. Mordecai stresses to Esther that the very reason for her favor and status with the king may be that she is the very one to intercede on behalf of her people at this time in their oppressed history. But Mordecai also had great faith in the fact that whether Esther intercedes for her people or not, God's promises will not fail. In verse 14, Mordecai states relief and deliverance will come. It is a surety. It is an understanding that God is not bound by human circumstances. He is Sovereign over all of His Creation and will fulfill the promises He made to Abraham in Gen. 22:15-18(READ) and hear the words of the promise to David in Psalm 89:30-37(READ). Mordecai may not have known HOW God would deliver his people but had great faith that He WOULD deliver them. For Esther to reject the opportunity to intercede for her people after being elevated to a position to do so would manifest a dead faith (James 2:17) which always leads to destruction. So, what would Esther do? She answers Mordecai plea with a heroic response.

- III. A Heroic Response – Esther 4:15-16
 Esther responds by calling for an assembling and unified fast from all the Jews in Susa (the capital city). Although prayer is not mentioned here, it is most assuredly implied in concert with fasting. Throughout the Scriptures, fasting and prayer are linked together. (a couple of examples are 1 Sam. 7:6 and 2 Sam. 12:16). Implied in the this time of fasting was a seeking of God's favor for the decision that Esther had made to go in to the king on behalf of her people even though, as it says in verse 16, it was "not according to the law". Esther walking by faith that leads to obedience no matter what the consequences. "If I perish, I perish". This is the same faith exhibited by Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael(Meshach) and Azariah(Abednego) in Dan. 3:11-18 (READ)

**The King and His kingdom—Psalm 45, June 3, 2012
 Grace Fellowship Preaching Seminar
 Participant 6**

Introduction: I went on a caving trip one time with a rock climbing friend of mine who boasted that caving was great fun. I trusted his guidance and we began our exploring by wiggling through a stump hole just slightly larger than my waist. After some work and some light, the little stump hole opened into a great cavern with many tunnels. Psalm 45 is much like spelunking. I crawled into a little hole and found a grand cavern of the gospel with Christ in every tunnel.

v1. My heart overflows with a pleasing theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

- a. The psalmist begins by stating that his heart is stirred with inspiration and is "boiling over" with the pleasing or noble theme.

- b. The psalmist addresses his praise to the king and it was not possible for him to contain himself as he wrote for his majesty the king. His praise is directed and intentional, not abstract and impersonal.
- c. His speech is inspired and would be like a finely written and edited work. His tongue is poised and is ready as a holy instrument.

For the psalmist, his heart is the origin of praise and his tongue is the instrument of worship. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” – Mt 12:34, Lk 6:45. As the hand controls a pen, the heart controls the tongue. A heart led by the Spirit produces a ready tongue of praise (James 3:1-12). Those who speak of Christ speak of the greatest subject in all of history. There is no speech more loving or more noble than speech of Jesus Christ.

v2. You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.

God has blessed this king eternally because of his speech. The king’s words are gracious--evidence that God has blessed him.

Lk 4:22 “And all spoke well of him (Jesus) and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” Those that love Christ do not mind telling him so. The psalmist describes a king that is lovelier than any other, and his speech makes him so. The psalmist, elsewhere, has referred to the word of God as sweeter than the sweetest honey (Ps 19). Christ’s words...even his enemies found themselves confessing. His word instructed the ignorant, comforted mourners, rescued the wicked, silenced the adversary, healed disease, controlled the storm, and raised the dead---so the Father loved, exalted, and blessed Jesus forever.

The same is true today. When we hear the grace of Jesus Christ...the simple are made wise, the broken are healed, the wicked are rescued, the rebellious are made faithful, and enemies are made heirs!!

v3. Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your splendor and majesty!

- a. The king is addressed as ready to go into battle. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. This sword is quick and powerful, and shaper than any two-edged sword, and John says this sword comes from the mouth of Christ (Heb 4:12; Rev 1:16).
- b. The king is a mighty one. King Jesus is the Mighty God and the government will be on his shoulders (Isa 9:6).
- c. Attributes given only to the divine (Ps 96:6; 104:1; 111:3). The nature of this divine King is glory. This is not some earthly king who is a little better than other men, this is the “other than” king. This is the Holy One of the heavenly temple whose robe fills the temple of all creation (Isa 6). This is King Jesus sitting on the throne. The seraphim agree with the psalmist and thunder “holy, holy, holy”.

This should strike terror into the hearts of men, for this warrior king is mighty in battle. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17). It is with the king’s sword that sinners find grace in the promises of the gospel, and dead souls are made alive and submit to the king’s authority. It is by this king’s sword that many will be sent to eternal punishment (Rev 19:15). It is Christ’s sword that divides a man and his father, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law (Mt 10:34-39). It’s the sword of the gospel that converts Jews and Gentiles and destroys nations. The call of the psalmist

echoes the call of Christ...forget your people and your father's house. This King is mighty in battle.

v4. In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let your right hand teach you awesome deeds!

Conduct a successful war because of truth, meekness, and righteousness. The psalmist is calling on the king to demonstrate his splendor and majesty by riding to establish truth, humility, and justice and we have heard the model prayer set by Christ himself – “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:9-13). God's will be done.

Christ has fulfilled this verse in that he came to demonstrate the gospel itself (i.e. He is the gospel) – truth, meekness, and righteousness.

2 Ti 2:25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,

Mt 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

As soldiers for the king, all believers should exhibit truth, meekness and righteousness. We have seen that these are a mighty force (1 Cor 4:12-13). Christ has come and set up his kingdom and the people of his kingdom will exhibit those qualities of the sovereign King to whom they belong (Mt 5:2-11). Marks of this kingdom are truth, power under control, and righteousness.

v5. Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you.

Verse 5 is a direct result of verses 2-4. His mission is successful.

Re 6:2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

Terrible wounds must be inflicted for the advance of this kingdom.

1st...Hearts must be pierced/convicted concerning sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). There are those by nature enemies of this kingdom and must be wounded in order to be subdued in order to be subject to Christ's laws and his government. Those that fall on this stone are broken (Mt 21:44). Convictions are like arrows, which are sharp in the heart and bring people into subjection (Acts 2:37).

2nd...Those that persist in their rebellion to the king are wounded, ending in their infinite and eternal punishment. They will be made his footstool (Ps 110:1). Those that will not have him reign over them will be brought before him and slaughtered (Lk 19:27).

King Jesus is an armed warrior, skillful in the use of every weapon. He attacks in a personal or hand-to-hand way with the sword and he also attacks from a distance with the bow and arrow. The conquests of Christ are those of his word over sin unto salvation, or those of his damning wounds. Every knee will bow to this king (Rom 14:11). How will you fall? In subjection or rejection?

Ps 2:12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

v6. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;

The battle being fought and the victory gained, the psalmist calls our attention to the “**throne**” and the “**scepter**” of King Jesus who he addresses as God.

Elohim: the transcendent God, a Hebrew plural form used more than two thousand times in the OT and usually termed a “plural of majesty” of the general name for God. –The Moody Handbook of Theology

This name implies: One in covenant, fullness of might. It refers to absolute, unqualified, unlimited energy. A plural name revealing God in the unity and Trinity of all His divine personality and power. –The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names

He is above all others who are called god. His **throne** is distinguished from the thrones of this world by its eternality and his **scepter** by its justice. His throne shall continue throughout all eternity in spite of all the opposition. His throne is just and exactly according to the will of God.

“**throne**” and “**scepter of your kingdom**” are different descriptions of the same truth. A **throne** is a seat where the king sits, rules, and exercises authority over his kingdom. Christ is said to occupy the throne of heaven in Isaiah’s vision (Isa 6, Jn 12:41). Christ’s kingship is infinitely superior. No other rules. No other reigns. Christ occupies the position as supreme and eternal. There has never been nor will there ever be a time when Christ’s rule is not sovereign.

A **scepter** is a stick used for punishing, writing, fighting, ruling, walking, etc. A “**scepter**” is simply a staff or rod that is a symbol of rule and authority. The symbol of the scepter was derived from the thought that a ruler was the shepherd of his people, and so at many times a scepter was used as a symbol for a ruler or shepherd. It was a staff used by secular kings to signify favor or disfavor to those who desired an audience. Nu 24:17 I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a **scepter** shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.

Ps 110:2 The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty **scepter**. Rule in the midst of your enemies!

The **scepter** of the kingdom is Jesus Christ!! He rules with uprightness. He is the rod for punishing and ruling!! He will crush the head of the enemy!! He will shepherd His people!! His is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of this nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power (Heb 1:3).

v7. you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;

The King loves righteousness and hates wickedness. He loves those who do righteousness and hates those who do wickedness. This is manifested in the life of Christ by the holiness of his life, the worth of his death, and really the overall design of the gospel. For God could not just turn a blind eye to sin, but poured out his wrath on the scapegoat Jesus Christ...thus satisfying God’s justice. God’s hatred of wickedness was proven in the sufferings of Christ. Christ being full of the Spirit satisfied the wrath of God.

God has **anointed** Christ with the **oil of gladness** which is the Spirit of the Lord. Because Christ loved righteousness and hated wickedness, God has blessed him with abundant joy. God anoints God with God and yet there are three distinctive persons. God is One.

Is 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to

proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

Lk 4:18“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, “**Therefore**” God has anointed the Son beyond any other. Because Christ is eternal, just, loved righteousness, hated wickedness...because Christ is the scepter of uprightness, God has exalted Him above all others (especially the angels...Heb. 1:8,9).

Php 2:8-11 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The teaching, the sermons, the example, the death of Christ for the expiation/propitiation of sin demonstrated his love of righteousness and hatred of wickedness. For this reason, he was “anointed” with the Holy Spirit and with infinite power so that the wounded people of his kingdom would receive a portion of heaven’s gifts.

Subject yourself to King Jesus. Forget your people and your father’s house and purify yourself. Bow to him. Praise His name forever.

God’s Ultimate End . . . His Glory—Isaiah 42:1-8
Grace Fellowship Preaching Seminar
Participant 7

Introduction

As we start to take a look at Isaiah I would like to do a quick over view of the setting and context of the book. Most would agree that the prophesy of Isaiah was written circa 700 B.C. You will see dates range from 680 to 750 B.C. It is amazing to me that we are going dig into this particular part of God’s Word that is some 27 to 2800 years old and is still as relevant as it was when the Lord spoke to Isaiah. The task that was set before us was to prepare a Christocentric sermon from the book. Isaiah is full of Christ, the problem was trying to pick one specific text. This evening we are going to look at Isaiah 42:1-9. As I pondered and studied there is one question that keeps ringing loud....What was the ultimate reason for God to send his Son?

C.H. Spurgeon put it this way. .”The great end of God in Christ was the manifestation of his own glorious attributes”

Jonathan Edwards said this “It is manifest from scripture, that God’s glory is the last end of...the work of redemption by Jesus Christ”

Isaiah 42 paints us a beautiful picture of this great work that He promised and fulfilled in Christ. In the first part of the text God the father gives us a description of His Beloved Son then we will see starting in v.8 the purpose of His Son. “I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols. What we first must understand is the state of God’s people at this particular time in history. Chapter 1 v.21 sheds great light on this...See how the faithful city

has become a prostitute!

She once was full of justice;

righteousness used to dwell in her—but now murderers! God’s people (Judah and

Jerusalem) was in full open rebellion. So this begs the question what was specifically going on. In short they turned their trust to other kings. Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord! Later in the chapter The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together. How often are we guilty of trusting in the wrong things....who is the kings in our lives that get our eyes off of Christ? Now lets look at our text and see what God's Word has to say.

V.1-Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. The first word of the verse ought to catch our attention.. "Behold". He calls the Church to behold Him as a servant and as His chosen in which God the Father delights. The delight the Lord has in Christ is directly related to His character and His obedience. We find in John 10 Christ explaining the Father love for Him.. 17"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." The beauty that we have is that we have seen this promised fulfilled historically and physically. Jesus came and did exactly what the Father had and has sovereignly ordained him to do, this was not self appointed. Heb. 5:5-6 "So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you";6 as he says also in another place, You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.". Throughout verse 1 we see the 1-The power of God manifest through His Son...whom I uphold, whom I chose, whom I put my Spirit on. Next we see the pleasure of God..His pleasure is wrapped up in His Son. In whom my soul delights. Lastly we see the Purpose..he will bring forth justice to the nations. Let take a closer look at the word Justice..or what does it mean to restore justice to... The Hebrew word here is mispat-same Hebrew word is used nearly 30 times in Psalm 119, and you will find it used around 20 time in Deut. Better understanding of this word is God's righteous standard. So in other words the work of the Son will restore God's righteous standard. We are assured in John 19 that Christ will not be discouraged and it will be finished....28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. What God had promised in Gen 3:15, to start with and numerous other passages and here in Isaiah had been completed. We will see later that the text repeats itself. Justice being at the heart of the text and God's Glory being the end.

Verses 2-4 paint the picture of the manner in which Christ will do these things.
2 He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. As we think of these statements in these verses we must think on what are these verses grounded on. God's Word. If God's word

is not absolute truth then he ceases to be God. We must understand that God's plan in redemption was always penal substitutionary atonement. Christ was more than an example for us, rather he was our representation. Just as Adam was our federal representation so is Christ for the Bride, but still this was not the primary goal of the father in sending His Son, we will see later that the ultimate Goal of the father was to glorify himself. So what am I saying. .this is what I am saying.. God chose to glorify himself through the Son by way of sending him to restore Gods righteous standard to the nations, whereby Christ redeems His Bride and in return that glorifies the Father. Its not about you and me..its always been about his glory. You know we continually confess here in our body about the glory of God but I wonder how much we really live that out in our lives. We are prone to stray in our depravity, we fool ourselves and set up idols in our own lives just the same way we are studying here in Isaiah. I challenge you to examine yourself and see really what your hope is founded on. I think if we are real honest with ourselves we need to repent and take a look at scripture as a whole and confess that it is not about us, but it is about his Glory. Jesus affirms this thought for us in Jn 12:28 where he says 'Father glorify thy name' Then in the prayer of Jn 17 Christ prays "4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. This is not a new idea Christ assures us that this was always the desire of the Father. Psalm 79:9 Help us, O God of our salvation, or the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake!

Now lets look at the result of idol worship in v.v 5-9

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it:6 "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations,7 to open the eyes that are blind, o bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.8 I will give you as a covenant for the people

In verse 5 we see the power of the Creator...who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.

Next in v.6 God assures us of our hope. .I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, The Father is speaking directly to Christ God reveals the mystery of redemption in the covenant. The Father begins with the call of Christ. .I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, Christ was called by the Father yet he came voluntarily. Next the promise is that God will take Christ by the hand and keep him. The Father promised the Son that the power of God would keep him. This cannot be thwarted or stopped. This is where our hope is look at the end of the verse...Christ will be a light to the nations. Sound familiar doesn't it. Is Christ your Light that you look to or have you set up idols and Kings. Israel was to be a light, Christ was sent as the true light and darkness could not comprehend it, and we as the body are called to be light set on the hill grounded in the True light Christ. For what? Gods glory. How will the Father accomplish this...look in the text..' I will give you as a covenant for the

people. Why is there Hope? That God gave Christ as a covenant to his people... Jesus would be the representative of His people and Whole of the covenant for them acting in there name and stead. In other words there was nothing dependent on mankind to make this happen. It was consumed in Christ and was ordained and purposed by the Father. In all He did and suffered was for the sake of his people and ultimately Gods Glory. So what is the result of this promise. We find it in the next verses.

v.7 1-to open the blind eyes.

2-to bring out prisoners from the dungeon who sit in darkness.

We know that from scripture Christ did these things both physically and spiritually. But why must he do these things.

v.8‘I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols. God shares with nothing or nobody and is worthy of all Glory. Does not the creator of heavens and earth not have the position of Glory and Honor? Or the better question would be where does he fit in your life?

Application-Practically how is this fleshed out in our own lives. Is Gods promises still true, did Christ really do the work to bring light to the nations, Is God going to glorify Himself through the Work of Christ. The answer is yes, yes and yes! Life on Life example... Carlton Weathers..

What is God’s Name? (*Who is He?*)—Exodus 3:13-15

June 10, 2012

Grace Fellowship Preaching Seminar

Participant 1

- I. Introduction
 - A. What does a name mean?
 - 1. Examples of our children’s names
 - 2. Examples of people in the Bible – named or renamed by God
 - B. Does God have a name? What is it? What does it mean?
 - 1. If a Muslim asked you what is your God’s name, what would you say?
 - C. God’s names in the Old Testament
 - 1. Elohim – God the Creator
 - 2. Adonai – God the Master or Lord
 - 3. Yahweh – God the Self-Existent One
 - D. God’s Revelation in His Names
 - E. God’s Revelation in His Word
 - 1. Historically (in the Past)
 - 2. Propositionally
 - 3. Progressively
 - 4. Personally (Savingly!)

- II. Scripture
 - A. God answered the question to Moses in Exodus 3
 - B. Background, Setting & Context of Passage
 - C. Read Passage – Exodus 3:7-15

- III. Exegesis
 - A. Who is God? – THE Question!
 - B. God’s Answer – YHWH, Yahweh, I AM!
 - 1. “I AM WHO I AM”
 - 2. “I AM has sent me to you”
 - 3. “Yahweh...has sent me to you...this is My name forever.”
 - C. Implications from God’s Answer
 - 1. I AM does not change!
 - 2. I AM alone IS!
 - 3. I AM is the Being One!
 - 4. I AM is the Saving One!
 - D. “I AM” in Isaiah 40 through 45
 - E. “I AM” in John’s Gospel
 - 1. Seven (7) “I AM” statements of Jesus in John
 - 2. John 4:25-26
 - 3. John 13:19
 - 4. John 18:4-8
 - 5. John 8
 - a. John 8:23-28
 - b. John 8:53-59
 - F. “I AM” in Revelation 1:8
- IV. Conclusion
 - A. Who is God? What is His Name?
 - 1. I AM Who I AM
 - 2. I AM
 - 3. Yahweh
 - 4. Jesus the Christ, the Being One!
- V. Applications
 - A. We can trust and believe in the God Who IS!
 - B. We can be sure of the Deity of Jesus Christ; and all His promises!
 - C. We all have a “god.” What is your God’s name? There is only one right answer!
 - D. We are becoming something! Why not become like Him?
 - E. Behold – Believe – Become!

Endurin Faith—Habakkuk 2:1-4, June 10, 2012
Grace Fellowship Preaching Seminar
Participant 9

- I. THE CHALLENGE TO ENDURING FAITH (2:1)
 - A. Unchecked Sin
 - 1. Unchecked sin within God’s People
 - 2. Unchecked sin in the world
 - B. Unbelievable Judgment
 - 1. God uses ungodly Chaldeans to chasten his people.

2. God judges the Chaldeans (world) severely

II. THE PROMISE OF ENDURING FAITH (2:2-3)

- A. God makes his promises clear to the eyes of faith (2:2)
- B. God's judgment has an appointed time (2:3)
 - 1. God's judgment comes with force at the right time
 - 2. God makes his people wait in faith for the coming judgment

III. THE CERTAINTY OF ENDURING FAITH (2:4)

- A. The ungodly are prideful and our faith tells us they will be judged
- B. The righteous are faithful and our faith tells us we will live

2 Samuel 9, 6/10/2012
Grace Fellowship Preaching Seminar
Participant 3

❖ **Intro**

- Our passage today can be found in 2 Samuel 9 and involves 2 main characters – David and Mephibosheth.
- But before jumping into our passage, I thought it might be helpful to remind you of a few events leading up to our passage. Walking through these might remind us of more of the history in the life of David and how it should or should not impact David's decisions.
 - Israel wants a king like the rest of the world – one to judge over them – be like other kingdoms.
 - God allows the people to have Saul as their king.
 - He also tells Samuel (the prophet) they really are not rejecting Samuel but rejecting God himself.
 - Through Samuel God warns Israel about pitfalls of Saul's kingship.
 - Saul turns back from following God and God's instructions. God rejects Saul as king.
 - Later, Samuel anoints David as next king, while Saul is still on the throne
 - Saul needs David's musical ability to deal with Saul's evil spirits
 - David becomes Saul's armor bearer while maintaining duties as shepherd for family
 - David accepts challenge with Goliath in the name of the Lord & kills the giant.
 - Through David's association with king's household, Jonathan (Saul's son) and David become great friends
 - Saul turns against David and even seeks to kill him.
 - David marries Saul's daughter (Michal).
 - David is protected from Saul by Michal warned to flee. He goes to Samuel's at Ramah.
- Brings us to chapter 20 in 1 Samuel.
 - Exchange between Jonathan and David.
 - David returns to Jonathan to talk to him about the situation with Saul.

- Jonathan and David devise a plan so David can be warned about the demeanor of Saul and if Saul still is set on killing David. Jonathan is going to communicate to David whether or not it is safe for him to return.
 - Out of this conversation comes the covenant between David and Jonathan that is referred to in our passage today.
- Let's look at the specific language of the covenant. Read 1 Sam 20:8-17 and walk through.
 - As we walk through it, look for key elements – especially references to the LORD.
- ❖ **Passage**
 - Now skip over to our passage today in 2 Samuel 9
 - As we pick up here, Saul and Jonathan are both dead.
 - David has been king over Judah and has now been received as king over Israel and began his reign in Jerusalem.
 - Read passage.
- ❖ **David to fulfill oath of God between he & Jonathan (v1-3)**
 - V1 Is there anyone left in the house of Saul that I can show him kindness for Jonathan's sake.
 - We are reminded of the covenant made between Jonathan and David back in chapter 20.
 - Even though Jonathan is dead, David is intent on keeping the covenant he made with Jonathan and for Jonathan's family.
 - V3 Asks question again and says show "kindness of God" to.
 - What kind of kindness? Remember the oath was before God, and David doesn't want to show just human kindness, but the kindness of God.
 - Remember was David anointed as king before Saul vacated the throne. While Saul was on the throne, David treated Saul as God's anointed because he was. Yet, Saul consistently hunted David to have him killed. Now, Saul, Jonathan, and their family are dead except for Meph who David does not know about. Yet David still seeks to fulfill his covenant made with a now dead friend AND before the LORD.
- ❖ **Mephibosheth is unworthy & lame (v1-3)**
 - Look at Meph's condition.
 - Unworthy - House of Saul
 - Mephibosheth is the son of Jonathan, who is the son of King Saul.
 - It was not uncommon for incoming monarchs to totally eliminate the former royal house. This was often even the first order of business in a new regime to prevent potential future uprising of the ousted family.
 - And in this case, based on how David was pursued, he had even more reasons to clean house.
 - Mephibosheth was a member of a rejected family. He was a son of a prince, yet was living in dependence on others away from the city of Jerusalem.
 - Crippled in his feet - V3 says Meph was crippled in his feet.
 - 2 Sam 4 - 4 Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth

- Here we see how Mephibosheth was injured and why David did not know him.
- ❖ **David initiates call to Mephibosheth (v4-5)**
 - Meph had not sought David out, but rather had run from him and stayed hidden from him.
 - David asked where he was and had Meph brought to himself.
 - David had never seen Mephibosheth, yet he loved him for Jonathan's sake.
 - If not for David initiating act, Meph would not have been brought to the king's table.
- ❖ **Mephibosheth's response & attitude (v6-8)**
 - Meph has a humble attitude & an understandable amount of fear.
 - Meph apparent first words to the king were "I am your servant".
 - Here we see the humbleness of Meph. Humbleness goes beyond just respect. This is not just posturing because he is before the king. Meph genuinely sees himself as a servant to the king.
 - David clearly saw fear – "Do not fear"
 - Imagine Meph body language –knowing all Meph knew
 - Already discussed eliminating family of former monarchs & Meph certainly knew how Saul had pursued David.
 - Mephibosheth's gratitude (v8)
 - Meph again reiterated how he saw his position before David.
 - Dead dog - A "dead dog" was considered contemptible and useless. Mephibosheth saw himself as such in that he knew that he had not merited David's kindness.
- ❖ **David's deliverance (v7, 9-13) – what did David do?**
 - V7 Restore all the land of Saul your father & you will eat at my table always
 - Read v9-13
 - V9 "All that belonged to Saul & to his house" He gave the land, and "all that belonged to Saul and his household". - The estate belonging to Saul was quite substantial.
 - V10 & V12 -"you and your sons, & your servants", "all who lived in Ziba's house became Meph's servants"
 - Ziba was Saul's land steward. He oversaw his estate. Ziba had 15 sons and 20 servants.
 - David gave all Of Saul's family wealth (material & land), along with Saul's servants to tend the wealth, to Meph.
 - V13 Lived in Jerusalem & always eat at the king's table.
 - Wealthy - Jonathan goes from among the being poor & unable to care for himself to being rich and having servants to care for him.
 - Prominent - His social status was raised to not only rich, but a member of the king's family who dined at the king's table daily.
 - Not a temporary honor; it would continue throughout Mephibosheth's life
 - David provided for his every need and even his wants above his needs.
- ❖ **A Picture of Salvation**
 - Many times in the OT, we see a picture or type related. As we walked through this small passage, some pictures may have jumped off the page at you. But some

- may have been less obvious. I wanted you to consider the picture of salvation that was drawn for us in this historical passage.
- ❖ **Covenant fulfilled**
 - David made a covenant with Jonathan before Meph was even in the picture.
 - Mephibosheth was wonderfully blessed, not because of anything he did, but because of David's faithfulness to that covenant promise.
 - God made a covenant, long before our father's, father's were even in the picture.
 - Believers in Christ are blessed, not because of any good work but because of God's faithfulness to the His covenant and the promises of gospel.
 - ❖ **Unworthy & broken**
 - Mephibosheth was lame in both his feet that were broken because of his fall.
 - He was unworthy to be before the king based on his & his families' standing before the king.
 - We are broken because of the fall of Adam.
 - We are unworthy to stand before God because of our sins of the past and present.
 - ❖ **God initiates**
 - Would Meph have sought David? He had not done so to date.
 - David had to initiate the relationship.
 - David sent for Mephibosheth, just as God sent Christ to this earth for us - to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).
 - Salvation is God's work! He must take the first steps, because the lost sinner will not by nature seek God.
 - ❖ **Our response and attitude toward God**
 - "Fear not!" were David's words of grace to the trembling crippled man.
 - When recognize our standing before a holy righteous God, we too should be afraid of getting what we deserve.
 - Yet "Fear not!" is what Christ says to every believing sinner.
 - Romans 8 tells us that because of Christ - "There is therefore now no condemnation ..."
 - ❖ **God's deliverance**
 - If Meph had he appeared before that throne asking for what he deserved, he would have received condemnation.
 - Meph had no claim upon David; he had absolutely no case to present.
 - David's throne was a throne of grace, not a throne of justice.
 - David gave to Mephibosheth all of the inheritance from Saul – land, wealth, household, & servants.
 - If we appear before God without Christ, we will have no claim to make.
 - But through Christ, God's throne is a throne of Grace.
 - Christ satisfies our material needs. Like Meph, we are graced beyond our needs even into our wants daily.
 - As Mephibosheth was regarded as an adopted son, so believers have been adopted as sons and daughters into the family of God (John 1:12; Rom. 8:15; Eph. 1:5).
 - ❖ **Summary**
 - As we study this illustration, we must keep in mind that the salvation we have in Christ supplies "much more." David rescued Mephibosheth from physical danger and supplied his physical needs.

- Christ meets our physical needs, but more importantly, has saved us from eternal hell and daily meets our spiritual needs.
- We are not sons of some earthly king; we are the very children of God.
 - We have an eternal inheritance.
- We have these great stories, pieces of history documented for us in the old & new testaments. Although it shouldn't surprise, isn't it great when it does – to find that the picture portrayed in the actual events of history are just one more arrow pointing us to Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX 5

PRE- AND POST-SEMINAR NUMERICAL DATA

Respondents were nine men. Average education level was between high school and an undergraduate degree. Average age was about 40. The average time each man indicated a personal relationship with Jesus Christ was 11-15 years.

Pre-test items 1 through 13 were analyzed by inspecting their mean ranks. Data reduction methods such as factor analysis or principal components analysis were not warranted because of the small number of cases and lack of variation in some of the answers. Thus, answers to each question were averaged and the answers sorted on basis of agreement (i.e., from “strongly agree” (5) to “strongly disagree” (1)).

The means (average responses) and standard deviations (agreement in the answers) are given in table format:

Table A1. Pre-seminar survey

Question	Mean	SD
Delivery Not Important	1.555556	0.726483
Depend Only on Spirit	1.666667	1.322876
Old = Works, New = Grace	2.111111	1.269296
Should Preach More From New	3	1.118034
Balanced at Grace	4.222222	0.833333
Equal Authority	4.555556	0.726483
Training	4.666667	0.707107
One Message	4.777778	0.666667
Expository Local	4.888889	0.333333
Inspired	5	0
O-N Agreement	5	0
Preach Christ from Both	5	0
NT about Christ	5	0

As can be seen, nine items achieved an average answer of “agree” or “strongly agree.” These were agreement that the New Testament is about Christ, the need of a pastor to preach Christ from both testaments, belief that both testaments agree with each other, that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, that expository preaching is the best way to proclaim God’s Word in the local church, that both testaments have one message, that training is important for a pastor, that both testaments have equal authority, and that the preaching at Grace Fellowship should be balanced. One item resulted in an uncertain average response (M = 3). This was whether a pastor should preach more from the New

than the Old Testament. Three items generated average “disagree” or “strongly disagree” responses. These were the view that the Old Testament is more about works, whereas the New Testament is more about grace, that a pastor should depend only on the Spirit for sermon preparation, and that a pastor should not practice delivery of a sermon.

Post-test responses taken after the seminar were similar. These responses are listed in the following table.

Table A2. Post-seminar survey

Meaning	Mean	SD
Depend Only on Spirit	1.222222	0.440959
Old = Works, New = Grace	1.555556	0.726483
Delivery Not Important	1.555556	1.013794
Should Preach More From New	2.888889	0.927961
Balanced at Grace	4	0.866025
NT about Christ	4.555556	1.333333
Training	4.666667	0.5
Equal Authority	4.777778	0.440959
Expository Local	4.888889	0.333333
Inspired	5	0
One Message	5	0
O-N Agreement	5	0
Preach Christ from Both	5	0

Correlations in the men’s responses from pre- to post-test was computed with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .99$, indicating virtually unanimous ($r^2 = 98\%$) agreement between the surveys given before and after the seminar. Not surprisingly, none of the change scores differed significantly from 0 (all $ps > .18$).

Table A3. Correlation of pre and post-seminar survey

Question	Post- Pre-
Old = Works, New = Grace	-0.55556
Depend Only on Spirit	-0.44445
NT about Christ	-0.44444
Balanced at Grace	-0.22222
Should Preach More From New	-0.11111
Inspired	0
Expository Local	0
O-N Agreement	0
Preach Christ from Both	0
Training	0
Delivery Not Important	0
Equal Authority	0.22222
One Message	0.22222

There are at least three reasons why the score did not change significantly over the course of the seminar. First, these men probably have been influenced by my views on the subject of Christ in both Testaments. Second, they may choose to attend Grace Fellowship because they already agree on these topics. Third, their views clustered at both extremes, suggesting strongly held opinions that may not be subject to change.

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A CHRISTOCENTRIC APPROACH FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING, GRACE FELLOWSHIP, ANNISTON, ALABAMA

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This project works to establish a pattern of christocentric expository preaching at Grace Fellowship, Anniston, Alabama. Chapter 1 outlines the limits of the project, sets the context of Grace Fellowship, and defines christocentric expository preaching. Chapter 1 also serves as the introduction to the project as a body of work.

Chapter 2 begins with an analysis of important passages of Scripture that form the foundation of a christocentric approach to expository preaching. The chapter focuses on the preaching of the apostles as a model of preaching for pastors in our day.

Chapter 3 compares christocentric preaching to two alternate approaches of preaching. Both methods are analyzed using the preaching ministry of prominent advocates of the preaching style.

Chapter 4 gives the details of the work completed during the fifteen-week project that was conducted at Grace Fellowship. The three main elements of the project are evaluated and reported for the reader to analyze this project.

Chapter 5 is the final chapter in this ministry project. It seeks to summarize the conclusions of the project and suggests ways this project can be improved.

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