

How Often Can We Go Cross-Country to Christ from the Old Testament? (December, 2009)

This is the unresolved question about preaching that preoccupies me the most. I remain unconvinced about the ease with which the Graeme Goldsworthys and Edmund Clowneys of this world seem to make it to Jesus from various isolated texts. Is some of this not allegory in a new guise?

Recently I gave myself the challenge of preaching entire OT books all in one go and then going cross-country to Jesus at the end. This seems to be a more secure transition to me. It looked something like this:

With Exodus...

I focused on God as the hero of the story (designing a destiny, appointing leadership, freeing people to worship, guiding and providing, making contracts ...) and then I used Exodus 33:12-23 as my *bridge passage* and the God who refuses to reveal his glory to Moses. This refusal was lifted in John 1:14 where we discover the truth-full and grace-full Jesus to be the revelation of that glory of God. John 1:14 becomes a 'table of contents' for a Gospel in which we discover *Jesus* to be designing destinies, appointing leaders, freeing people to worship, guiding and providing and making contracts with people ... The Gospel of John as the fulfilment of Exodus? Not sure what the scholars will say, but I reckon it works.

With the Psalms of Ascent...

I plunged into the depths of the emotion in which virtually every psalm is borne: lying, fear, hatred, anger, despair, injustice, guilt, pride... And then how – still deeper than this emotion, at bedrock – we find the living and active God in these psalms: protecting, showing mercy, helping, restoring, judging, forgiving, stilling... Then my *bridge passage* was Luke 24:13-35 where despairing hearts make way for burning hearts because minds (not hearts, initially!) gain a deeper understanding of the Jesus revealed in their Bibles.

With Amos...

The God of Justice is every bit as important as the God of Mercy. The searing judgements on the people of God are heard, particularly as they came through the images of the plumbline, the basket of ripe fruit, the sieve – just before being arrested by that merciful Amos 9:8b (“yet I will not totally destroy...”) and the images of hope which then take over: the tent and the vineyard. Then I crossed over to another image, the image of the cross: the cross “where heaven’s love and heaven’s justice meet.” My *bridge passage*? Acts 15 and the way James uses Amos’ tent to resolve the biggest crisis the church has ever faced: do Gentiles have to become Jews on their way to becoming Christians? I am still reeling from the revelation that in the climax of a book with such judgement is found the passage that provided the rationale which enables me to be part of the people of God because of the cross.

With Ecclesiastes...

Here we find some pre-evangelism. I like to focus on the three-fold refrain which repeats and which exposes life for so many even today: (a) it is smoke-like (“vanity”): there is nothing left IN it; (b) there is no gain: there is nothing left OVER from it; (c) it is “under the sun”: there is Someone left OUT OF it. The writer exposes such a life

on the way to providing an alternative in living in the fear of God. Ecclesiastes 11 becomes his climactic response stacked as it is with imperatives – while also serving as a *bridge passage* which opens the way to hear John 10:10 in such a fresh way: “I have come that you may have life and have it to the full”, thereby undermining (a),(b), and (c).

With Nehemiah...

We find ourselves in the final story of the Old Testament, a story of renewal with seasons of sowing (ch1&2) and nurturing (ch2&3) and weeding (ch4&6) and pruning (ch5) and blossoming (ch7&8) and ripening (ch9-12) as a people are re-established in Jerusalem as the worshipping and consecrated people of God. BUT there is a 13 – yes, a chapter 13. It is the *bridge passage*. Here is yet another season of withering as the people fail yet again. As the curtain falls on the OT, the orchestra in the pit starts playing “There is a redeemer” as the Jesus of Hebrews – the “once for all”, the “better by far”, and the “how much more” Jesus is anticipated and able to deal decisively with this endemic sin-problem.

With Malachi...

The debate between God and his people is heated and even sarcastic. It is disturbing. After their long history with God the people do not seem to have a handle on his love, his worship, their promises, his judgments, his blessing – or their own service of Him. It is a mess. But the ‘Day of the Lord is coming’ when the mess will be sorted out. But thankfully – and graciously – before that Day, the prophet will come (4:5). Here is the *bridge passage* with the prophet being John the Baptist, most famously known as the one who prepared the way for Jesus. The salvation found in this Jesus enables us to prepare for ‘the Day’ with far greater assurance and even excitement.

With Genesis ... (I didn’t preach this one in this series, but I am itching to add it in now)

I would speak of the way Genesis 1 & 2 constitutes each relationship that there is: God:creation; God:humanity; humanity:humanity; and humanity:creation. There is an original good design that God intended. Then sin and evil enters and Genesis 3-11 is the deepest and darkest exposition of that sin and evil. Then Genesis 12:1-3 is my *bridge passage* as the Great Commission in the Old Testament. God makes clear to Abraham that he has a plan for the nations. I’d touch down lightly on this theme through the OT but then live a little in the five Great Commissions of the New Testament – before concluding with Revelation 5 & 7 as the nations gather around the throne. And in the paraphrastic words of Chris Wright, “God pokes Abraham in the ribs and says ‘see, I told you so!’ “

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