

**Biblical Hermeneutics:
The Task of Faithfully Interpreting God's Word**



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Lecture 1

Prologue

What is the best book that you have ever read? After reading a good book, you turn it over in your mind, you try to understand the characters and why they did that they did; you try to pull the plot together, remembering details to see the big picture; and you recall again and again the last chapter of the last page where the main character died or lived happily ever after. A good book does all of that and more – it engages all of our senses and our emotions.

In our course, *Biblical Hermeneutics: The Task of Faithfully Interpreting God's Word* we have such a book. This course is not merely an academic wrestling with individual passages so our minds can grasp a text and then we can preach to our people. Rather, hermeneutics and by extension this course, places the pastor or church leader or Sunday School teacher in the middle of a story that has not yet ended. In fact, the story is so glorious that while we know how the book ends, it has not yet happened. It is like the final verses of the book of Acts: ***Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.*** The story in Acts 1 began with the command to preach throughout the nations and ends with the gospel being preached throughout all nations. **The point: you and I are living God's history and are part of the salvation story.**

When we read the Bible, it is not to be read as individual verses that make up a story. Rather we read the Bible as a story with verses. We will come to see there is a big difference between the two. And that story, told so many years ago still speaks today. Hermeneutics asks the question: *how do we read the Bible's plot-line (interpretation) in order to know our place in the history of God's redemption?*

And once you begin the study of God's Word, His words become addicting – you want more and more. A great and holy God, the God of all creation has spoken so we may hear and respond in love and obedience. Each page of Scripture, beginning with Genesis all the way to Revelation, pours forth God's glory. And so the prayer for the beginning of the course is found in **Exodus 33:18: *Then Moses said: "Now show me your glory."*** And God's answer? ***And the Lord said, "I***

will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. Amen, so may it be gracious Lord.

Introductory Comments

What is Hermeneutics? There are a number of definitions

The study of the locus of meaning and the principles of interpretation (Tate, Biblical Interpretation)

The science of reflecting on how a word or an event in the past time and culture may be understood and become existentially meaningful in our present situation (Braaten, History and Hermeneutics)

Defining the rules one uses when seeking out the meaning of Scripture (McKim, A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics)

The goal of interpretation ... is to 'know the Author's/author's intended meaning as it is expressed in the text (Johnson, Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction)¹

Hermeneutics is the work of properly interpreting the Bible. It comes from the Greek word "interpret." The student of the Word of God diligently studies and dissects the text (hermeneutics), asking the question: *What does the passage before me really mean? How is the real and essential message of the Bible to be grasped?* The student then unashamedly speaks the interpreted text to the people (homiletics).

Scriptural Directives: Probably the best definition comes from Scripture.

2 Timothy 2.15: Paul tells Timothy to handle the Word of God aright – rightly divided.

1. Handling Accurately: proper interpretation, to dissect correctly.
2. Be diligent: hard work and difficulties implied.

¹ These definitions are taken from the main book I will use in this course: Graeme Goldsworthy, Gospel Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation, 25.

3. Not ashamed: God will grant you a proper interpretation

2 Corinthians 2.17: Paul warns about false teachers who abuse the Word of God. Hermeneutics helps us defend the truth of God's Word. This is only one place in Scripture where Paul warns of false teachers who will take the Word of God and misinterpret, leading to heresy and false teaching. Paul tells how he speaks the Word or gospel with "purity", "clearness" and in "sincerity." See also **2 Peter 3.14-16**.

Origin of the Word: the word "hermeneutics" originally comes from the Greek god Hermes, who was a winged messenger of the Olympian gods. It comes from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, "to interpret or translate" (John 1.42)

Goal: to faithfully study the text so as to discern the meaning of the text intended by the original author. It is to bring out to each new generation the same message from the text. Some interpret it loosely to mean *the way of reading an old book (the Bible) that brings out its relevance for modern man*.

Lecture 2

Laying the Foundation²

Necessity for Hermeneutics

There are a number of reasons why we need to rightly handle God's Word. Before we look at them, Goldsworthy makes an important statement: *One key assumption that most Christians make about the Bible is that the meaning of the text has significance, not only for the original hearers or readers, but also for others, including us. Thus we recognize a process of moving from what it*

² Again, I will follow the outline and summarize the excellent teaching in [Gospel Centered Hermeneutics](#).

meant then to what it means now. This may be thought of as beginning with a process of exegesis of the text in order to understand what it originally meant. This is followed by relevant hermeneutical procedures to bridge the gap between the text and us. Finally, there is the application of the meaning to us and the relaying of it, perhaps across a further gap, to others. (27)

The point is the Word of God, while written in specific cultures and in certain times of history, continues to have relevance for all time.

1. Bridging the Gap

What are gaps we must bridge?

1. Language gap accurate translations from Hebrews, Aramaic and Greek texts into our own language
2. Culture gap:
3. History Gap: why did the author include certain stories and information in those stories?
How do historical events into the larger picture of God's story?
4. Literature Gap: literary devices, etc
5. Textual Gap: we do not possess the autographs (original documents) so we must look at textual variants and uncertainties concerning translations
6. The Intended reader/hearer gap: we are not the intended hearers in a sense. For example, when Isaiah spoke to God's people, he wrote to those who were about to be lead away into captivity in Babylon. How is the Word of God now relevant to us?

2. Challenges of Communication

Goldsworthy tells us of another basic assumption: *One of the most basic assumptions in evangelical hermeneutics is that God has communicated by his word and that he is certainly capable of doing this in a way that meets the purpose of effective communication. (30)* There are three aspects to communication we will see:

- a. The Communicator: God is the communicator and he reveals Himself as the Triune God. Here we have theology - the study of God.
- b. The Communication: God's Word is the communication. Here we have salvation history.

- c. The Receiver's: God's people. At this point we have how we are involved in God's story-line. It is also at this point that hermeneutics comes in as we seek to proclaim this Word to others.

It is in this process of communication that we seek to understand what God is saying as He reveals Himself throughout history. What are God's intentions? What is the meaning of the text? How do we receive the text?

Presuppositions³

There are certain improvable beliefs all people hold onto in their life called *presuppositions*. Someone may ask you to *prove the Bible is the Word of God* or that *the God of the Bible really exists* or that *Jesus Christ is the only way, the only truth and the only life*. Goldsworthy defines presuppositions as *unprovable assumptions about reality*. Christians and non-Christians alike have beliefs which guide our thinking and living.

Two Introductory thoughts:

1. One cautionary note: *It is unlikely that Christians in general begin their spiritual journey by laboriously working through their basic assumptions and beliefs until some coherent structure is reached. But, however we arrive at it, the belief system that forms our assumptions we make as we read the Bible is a system that is always open to adjustments and fine-tuning as we understand more and more of the teaching of the Bible.* (45)
2. As mentioned, all people have presuppositions. But while all people have presuppositions, it does not mean that all presuppositions are created equal. Christian presuppositions are based, not on human thought or human experience but based on the foundation of the Word of God. In other words, while claiming that the Bible is the Word of God is a presupposition, the Christian still bases his presupposition on the Word of God as the Word of God itself confesses to be the Word of God.

³ This section is a mixture of teachings gleaned from Goldsworthy's book and my thoughts. I do not claim to represent Goldsworthy accurately. I am using his teaching and incorporating my understanding.

So what basic presuppositions do Christians bring as they interpret Scripture? Well, there are many and we will examine a few.

1. Basic assumptions about the existence of God. We read in Genesis 1.1 the person of God is introduced without any explanation of who God is or how He exists. He simply is God and He simply exists. As the Bible plot-line unfolds, we read more and more about the character of God.
2. The Bible is the divinely inspired word of God, written down by humans, led on by the Spirit. We will look more at Scripture later but there are many who confess the authority of other “holy books.” We confess that other books are merely human books but the Bible is not simply a human document but God’s Word.
3. Based on the person of God and the message of the Word of God, we confess certain Biblical truths or doctrines revealed in the Bible plot-line. To summarize Goldsworthy uses the four “alones” of the Reformation (time of Luther and Calvin) to help us understand some other presuppositions:
 - a. Grace Alone: reality of creation and the fall which eventually leads to the coming of Christ, salvation and the new heavens and earth. Grace reveals God and essential attributes (sovereign, gracious, just, righteous, holy, etc) and actions. Grace also shows us our standing before God.
 - b. Christ Alone: the main character in God’s story is Jesus. The Old Testament told of his coming and the New Testament tells of his life. Goldsworthy states: *The purposes of God in this story are expressed in such a way as to show that the destiny of all the peoples of the world and of the whole universe is tied to the work of God in Christ. The cross of Christ is the redemptive event that has ramifications for the redemption of the whole created order.* (48) If you were to make this statement in the local religious place of worship, they would definitely not agree! We base this on the existence of God and His revelation in His Word. Grace alone also talks about our sinfulness and need of Christ.

- c. Scripture Alone: There is no other source of truth available to us by which we can know Christy and, through him, God.
 - d. Faith Alone: We are saved through Christ and not based on our works. We receive Christ through faith, a gift from God. With this confession, we state the sinfulness of humans and their inability to come to God and the work of the Holy Spirit to regenerate the lost.
 - e. Summary: the four “alones” essentially describe the person and work of the Triune God. The reason the four alones are confessed is because we are confessing the character of God. These confessions concerning thje Trinity establish the confessions of the church and the **theological framework of hermeneutics**. **Here we build a biblical theology and a systematic theology.**
4. The presuppositions of the centrality of the gospel in Jesus. We have already mentioned Jesus is the central character of the Bible story-line and so our hermeneutics must be Christ-centered. The priority of Scripture is the revelation and explanation of the gospel message. Goldsworthy writes: *The presuppositions that we have already considered can now be expressed in terms of relating specifically to hermeneutics:*
- a. *The God who is there is the God of the Bible, who is (among other things) Creator, Saviour, and Communicator*
 - b. *Humans beings were created in his image, which involves us as those with whom God communicates.*
 - c. *The truth of God is evident in all creation.*
 - d. *Sin means the human declaration of independence from God, and the suppression of his truth.*
 - e. *Grace means that god mercifully provides special revelation that informs, redeems, and makes God present to us.*
 - f. *This redemptive revelation, the word of God, is focused on Christ.*

So God not only exists but He communicates a very specific message in His Word – the good news found in Jesus Christ.

5. This means that those who interpret Scripture must be active believers. Goldsworthy again writes: *Thus the communicator (God), the message (God's word) and the receiver (humanity) are all united in the God/Man who is himself the message. If we are united to Christ we are the true receivers of the message, to receive the message so that it is not garbled or meaningless or misleading, we must at the same time interpret it aright. Our confusion and our sinfulness conspire to lead us always towards a Christless interpretation. As living a faithful Christian life involves a conscious decision to work at it, so also interpreting the Bible by the gospel involves the conscious decision to work at the relationships of all parts of the Bible to the gospel.* (62)
6. Two further thoughts: Jesus is not only the central message, he is also the mediator of the meaning. Col 1.15-16; Eph 1.9-10; Col 2.2-3.
 - a. And Jesus, based on his resurrection, grants the believer not only proper understanding but godly living. In other words, the end goal of Scripture is not only understanding but through understanding, our lives are transformed to the person of Jesus for the glory of God (Romans 12.1-2; Colossians 1.9-14)

Lecture 3

Method of Interpreting: Found in Biblical Theology

When we read the New Testament we find God giving instructions/command usually followed by example or by a promise. (cf Ephesians 5.1-2; 1 Peter 5.8-11) In other words, as we read the word of God, it is not simply “obey me and follow me and here is what you are to do” but rather “follow me and this is how and I will give you the strength - here are my promises.”

As we lay a foundation for hermeneutics, we want to look for a moment at the “big picture” of the Bible to examine if there is any guidance from God as to the method of hermeneutics. If God has instructed us in **2 Timothy 2.15** to properly handle the Word of God, then has He also given us guidance as *how we may handle the word of God so that we are faithful?*

If “yes”, then the next question would be: *How does the Bible story line help us understand the task and method of hermeneutics?* Biblical Theology loosely defined is *the examination of the individual parts to see how they fit together into the big picture.* (68) Biblical theology allows us to gain an understanding of how God used his word throughout the history of redemption - how it was to be received and how it would be received.

1. Centrality of Christ and the Gospel Message

Jesus again is our beginning reference. So we can summarize the hermeneutics of the person of Jesus Christ in the following way:

- Jesus Christ, the God/Man, is the eternally communicating God, the creator of all speech and understanding
- He is God, the author of special revelation
- As the incarnate Word of God, he is the ultimate divine message and sums up the meaning of all revelation, both natural and special.
- As a perfect human being, he is the compliant listener who receives the address of God to man with perfect interpretation, understanding and acceptance.

- Jesus' relationship to the Father includes his making the only sinless human response to the word of God to man. (69)

The point? Biblical theology teaches us proper interpretation. God's story line, focused on Christ, based on Biblical text, grant us interpretation methods. Goldsworthy takes us through the history of redemption to summarize Biblical methods of interpretation.

2. God Giving His Word and Heard By the People

Below are illustrations of how God gave His Word and how people received the Word. Here, again, we are seeking to examine how reading Scripture shows us how we are to interpret Scripture.

Creation and Fall

Genesis 1-2

- A Biblical worldview that maintains a distinction between Creator and created. Based on this we have authority of God – a God to whom we must listen. All creatures are in relationship with this One God. Today people say I do not need God but God tells us He has sovereign right over our lives.
- God creates by His Word – establishing authority and effectiveness in divine speech. *The fact that the divine word brings creation from nothing means that God's word is clear as to meaning, sovereign as to power, incontrovertible and inerrant.* (71)
- *The word of God to humans is the interpretative framework for the task of discovering truth (Gen 1.28-30; 2.16-17) (71)* Adam and Eve simply heard the Word and were commanded to obey. God spoke and this God was to be obeyed.

Genesis 3 and the fall

- Our relationship with God is affected and now we live apart from God and suppress the truth.

- *Redemptive revelation begins with the assumption that God can and will communicate such truth about himself and his gracious purpose, and in such a way that the intended recipients can and will understand it. (72)*
- *Self-definition and self interpretation without the word of God can only lead to greater disasters. (73)*

Torah

- Genesis we see themes of grace and covenant
- Moses is a minister of God's Word to God's people
- God speaks a word that is to be fully understood by His people. Not abstract.
- Deut 6.6-7 - the Word is to be passed on to future generations.

Wisdom

- *Biblical teaching is important for its epistemology [what we know and how we know it]. Biblical wisdom formulated from human experience expresses the common ground with all humanity as it engages in the cultural mandate to have dominion. (75)*
- *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge. Proverbs 1.7; 9.20. Even Solomon was part of the history of redemption.*

Prophets

- *When God has a word to his people, either to chosen individuals or to the nation, he speaks through prophets. It is also a consistent feature that the prophetic word, after the time of Moses, is a word that never moves outside the interpretive framework of the covenant and law revealed by Moses (77).* The point is that as with all Scripture, it was written with a purpose and a specific message.
- Neh 8.1-3, 7-8 - the people of God needed to be taught
- The prophets knew the people did not know God because of their sin. (Isaiah 6.9-10) The people stood in need of grace.
- Jeremiah 31.31-34. Goldsworthy writes: *Forgiveness, renewal and the knowledge of God are the ultimate goals of redemption.*

Gospels

- **Luke 24.27, 44-45:** *These are key passages because they highlight the dynamic of hermeneutics that carries meaning beyond the original and literal meaning to the person and work of Jesus the fulfiller.* (81) Here we have the redemptive historical model as we read all history pointing, coming through and culminating in Jesus Christ.
- **John 1.14-16:** Truth and reality are found in the Word, Jesus Himself. We also read that there are many who do not receive the Word.

Acts

- In Acts we have the work and role of the Holy Spirit as He is present and active in the world - since creation.

Epistles

A few points brought out by Goldsworthy:

- All reality has its meaning in Jesus Christ: he is the purpose and the goal of creation (Col 1.15-16)
- Wisdom, knowledge and understanding are found in Jesus (Col 2.3)
- Christ is the true wisdom and the reason for avoiding human philosophies (1 Cor 1.18-31)
- The human condition is one of a fatal suppression of the truth that is available to all in the creation (Romans 1.18-23)
- The Spirit of God regenerates people so that they exercise saving faith in Christ and so that they have renewed minds to understand the truth of reality (1 Cor 2.7, 10-13, 15-16) (83)

Revelation

- Emphasizes the sovereign control of God over all reality

Summary: As we establish a foundation for hermeneutics and as we look at the big story line of Scripture, we must establish certain assumptions: nature of God, nature of humans, effects of

human sin on our minds, goal of redemption, Holy Spirit and regeneration and the centrality of Christ in all Scripture. These and others will help us as we approach Scripture to interpret.

These Biblical teachings show us that Biblical hermeneutics is more than simply sitting down, reading a text and interpreting with certain literary “rules”. Biblical hermeneutics involves a relationship with a sovereign God, an admission of a sinful nature, a focus on Jesus Christ, and a dependence on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, among other matters.

Lecture 4

Biblical Authority

We cannot continue unless certain truths concerning Scripture are held to without reserve.

Inspiration: is an activity whereby God, who in his providence overrules all human utterance, caused particular men to speak and write in such a way that their utterance was, and remains, His utterance through them.⁴

- 2 Timothy 3.16
- 2 Peter 1.19-21

Canon of Scripture: the canon (the collection of Biblical books received) is the list of books from Genesis to Malachi and Matthew to Revelation. All canonical writings are inspired.

Confessions

1. Scripture Authenticates itself:

- this recognizes the testimony of Scripture - 1 Thessalonians 2.13 for example
- The presence and work of the Holy Spirit enables us to recognize the authoritative word, gives us the grace to bow before these divine realities, convicts us of our sin and convinces and enables us to live for Christ alone.

2. Scripture is sufficient

- Scripture is sufficient so that the believer has all they need for belief and behavior. Scripture is sufficient for salvation, for trusting God in all of life and for obeying him as he has called us to obey
- 1 Timothy 3.16, Psalm 119.105.

3. Scripture is clear

- Scripture is clear meaning that Scripture interprets itself so we may understand what God has written.
- Deut 6.6-7; Ps 19.7; 1 Cor 1.2 (written to the church)

⁴ Definition from *Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority*, *Themelios* 1.1, (Autumn 1975):3-12, JI Packer,

- Need to be careful that we do not misunderstand that while the Word of God is clear, it takes work and study to dig deep into the truths of Scripture.
- 4. Scripture can be hard to understand**
- Just as we cannot understand Jesus being both God and man, so also there are elements in Scripture that we cannot understand exactly. As God is so great and we cannot understand Him completely, so also in His Word there are mysteries too great to comprehend. The Bible is completely infallible and yet we know that there are unique divine-human realities that we cannot solve.
 - The solution is found when we are quick to acknowledge a certain mystery to Scripture and we cannot explain everything. As one author states: *When you are dealing with divine mysteries you must be prepared for this sort of thing; and when it happens, you must be quick to recognize that the cause lies in the weakness of your own understanding not in any failure on God's part to conform to His own specifications.*⁵
- 5. Scripture is Authoritative**
- We submit ourselves to god's Word as the final authority
 - Galatians 4.30; 2 Peter 1.19-20; 1 John 4.6, 5.9
- 6. Scripture is powerful:** Ps 29; 33.3-6; 46.6; Isaiah 55.10-11; Matthew 7.29; Acts 2.37-41.

⁵ Ibid, Packer. This list is also taken from Packer's article.

Lecture 5

Scripture Has a Story-Line

Before we look at certain hermeneutical principles, we must also understand that the Bible has a big story line. Each story is found in a larger story. For example, Joseph (the man with a nice striped suit), the son of Jacob is found in the book of Genesis which is in turn found in the larger Biblical, historical story found in Genesis to Revelation. In broad strokes, we could summarize the history of the story line as follows:

Genesis 1-2: The creation telling us of God's relationships with man and man's relationship with one another. They all lived in perfect communion.

Genesis 3: Adam and Eve sin against God and that brings God's sin, judgment and separation.

Genesis 4-11: Adam and Eve's descendants are multiplying and we see the devastating effects of the fall in Cain, Lamech, Noah's generation, Noah's son Ham and the tower of Babel. Sin permeates the heart of man and he lives out his rebellion.

Genesis 12 -Malachi: God calls Abraham, the father of Israel and the man from whom the promised seed would come. In this period, we read history, poetry, wisdom literature, and prophecy as God's people are led through Egypt, the dessert and into the promised land where their rebellion becomes so great God sends them into captivity. However, despite Israel's almost constant rebellion, God calls a remnant back to the land of Israel.

There is a period of 400 years when God's voice is silent

Matthew - John: the promised seed Jesus has come. He gathers his disciples and preaches the coming kingdom. He lives a perfectly righteous and obedient life and then offers it before God as he dies on the cross and suffers the judgment of God - judgment that was ours to bear. He then rises from the dead and ascends to heaven.

Acts: is the history of the NT church.

Romans - Revelation: leave us with the teachings of the NT church, now being passed down throughout the ages and will continue to be spread throughout the world until the second coming of Jesus.

The central figure in the story line is Jesus. This means that our interpretation of Scripture will be Christo-centric (Christ will be our focus). This is not to say that we always preach the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus; rather it is to say that our interpretation in the Old Testament must *move beyond strictly historical interpretation and interpret the Old Testament in light of the fulfillment in the New Testament. So Christo-centric preaching is the preaching of God's acts from the perspective of the New Testament.*⁶

Lecture 6

The Power of the Preached Word

The Importance of the Preached Word and the role of the Pastor

- God uses the Word to impart spiritual life (Preaching and teaching)
 1. Romans 1.16
 2. 1 Corinthians 1.24
 3. 1 Peter 1.23
 4. 2 Thessalonians 2.13
- God uses the Word to build believers up (pasturing – loving and caring for God's People)
 5. Acts 20.32
 6. 2 Timothy 3.16
 7. 2 Peter 1.19
 8. Romans 15.4
- God's Preached/ taught Word Is Powerful (encouraging Word for pastors and God's people)
 9. Isaiah 55.10–11
 10. Ephesians 6.17
 11. Acts 6.7; 12.24; 13.49
 12. Hebrews 4.12

⁶ The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text, Sidney Greidanus, 119

- The task of the preacher is to take God's Word and speak God's Word to the people. We will see the meaning of the passage is to be the message of the sermon. In other words, because of the power of the Word and the necessity of the preached Word, it is the Word that is to be brought to our people – saved or unsaved.
 13. 2 Corinthians 5.17–20
 14. 2 Corinthians 6.1 – fellow workers (working together with him – God)
- Quality of preaching and quality of character go together
 - ii. 1 Thessalonians 2.3–8; 11–12
 - iii. 2 Timothy 2.15–16; 22–24
 - iv. Titus 2.7–8
 - v. 2 Corinthians 6.3–4
 - vi. James 1.26–27; 3.13
 - vii. This means that if you are going to handle the word of God correctly in order to preach God's Word faithfully, preachers and church leaders must be men of character, men of grace, and men of integrity.

Lecture 7

Process of Hermeneutics

The goal of hermeneutics is to communicate the truth of Scripture. The question is then *how do we get from the Word of God which we study to the sermon?* It is **not** what I want to say about the text; rather the foundational question is what does the text say and mean? The basis of what we say is what God would direct us to say by His Word.

1. The Big Picture:

- A science: there are certain “laws” or principles of interpretation; an order with logic and methods.
- An art: acquired skill demanding imagination and ability to apply the “laws” of interpretation. This is why hermeneutics can never be fully learned in a classroom but must be learned through practice.
- A spiritual task: we are not interpreting the word of man but the Word of God. This means we must be saved and ultimately depend on the Holy Spirit.

2. Three stages of interpretation:

Text/ Exegesis (what does the Scripture say?):

- Exegesis mean “to draw out” of the text; to bring out of the text all that it contains – thoughts, words, etc – the whole expressed thought of the writer.
- The opposite is *eisegesis* which means to “read into” the text.
- This is sometimes calls the “grammatical – historical” method, whereby the exegete seeks to put himself into the author’s culture, historical and religious shoes.
- Exegesis searches the text (observation is key) to understand the author’s intended meaning. This level answers the question: *what does the text say?*
- Exegesis is not done when we search for the meaning of the text: Biblical theology – *how does it fit in the larger context?* And Systematic theology: *what is being said about God, humans, sin, salvation, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Church, future, etc?*

Interpretation/Devotional/Synthesis: three words to describe what the next stage is in the process of hermeneutics.

- **Synthesis:** taking the work of exegesis and bringing it together. *As I synthesize the text, what does the text say?*
- **Interpretation:** the exegete takes the gathered information and makes a statement about the truth – he interprets the Word. *What does the text mean?*

- **Devotional:** the information is not merely information but rather truth that impacts the exegetes heart. *What does the text mean to me?*

Sermon/Application: the material is then

- Communicated: spoken before the people answering the question
- Applied: *how do I apply the Word of God to my life and the listener's? What does the text say to us in our circumstances?*
- The end result is – as we will see – **expository preaching**. Expository preaching is a Bible based message, usually going through a book of the Bible.
 - It is not ultimately an explanation but a proclamation of the Word. The Word is not only to be understood but also obeyed.
 - It is not topical but expositional. Topical asks the question: *What does the Bible say about this issue?* And then takes the people through what God's Word says on that subject. Expositional preaching seeks to reconstruct the text by beginning with the text in its context and then asking the question: *what does the text say within its context?* The purpose is to faithfully proclaim what that particular text says within its context, taking the flow of the passage and applying the truth to the people's lives.

Lecture 8

Basic Principles of Interpretation

3 areas of interpretation: historical/cultural, grammatical/literal and theological.

1. Historical/Cultural Context

The Bible was written in an historical context and they are historical documents. Reading a text in its historical context seeks to understand the words in their original meaning and intent. What did these words mean to the people to whom the author wrote? The first question is *not* what does it mean to me? but rather what did it mean to the original audience? If we are to do this, then we must understand the text within its historical context.

Here we ask: who, what, when, where, audience.

Authorship: who is the author? What do we know about the author?

Date: when was the book written or what time period? What do we know was happening at that time?

Historical Redemption/Biblical History? Where in the storyline of Scripture is the text? Is it before the coming of Christ or after?

Biblical culture: geography, customs, politics, economics, military and war, cultural practices⁷

The group addressed: for whom was the book written?

⁷ Osborne, 167

Purpose and Themes of a book: why was the book written? What was going on at that time that the author was writing? Did the author have a specific intent or purpose?

We remember the Bible is Biblical history: why is this so important? Because the Bible does not convey all of history but includes stories and details with a certain purpose. Why were certain historical stories not told or why were some told the way they were told? It is because the Bible has a whole has a specific purpose and a specific story and so what is included will help us understand the purposes and ways of God.

Summary: the purpose is

- **Remember the Bible is an historical book and needs to be read within its historical context.**
1 Peter 1.12: *Even the angels longed to look into these things.*
- **The Bible is set in a historical context but it is not historically bound. The historical context conveys meaning and is written with a purpose to teach all generations about God and His actions and our response.**
- **The passage has a point within a larger context. If we read, for example, about the judge Ehud murdering Eglon the king of Moab in Judges 3, is the application *Ehud is bad and therefore do not murder* or *Ehud is good and it is OK to kill a tyrant* ? Well, neither because as the text is placed in its historical context, we read there is a greater purpose than *do not murder*. There is a purpose in the history of redemption and Ehud had a unique role to play in that history of God's story of the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

2. Literary Context

Once we have found our place in history and have learned about the history and culture of the writer, we move closer to the text and we now study its literary content such as genre, rhetorical devices, figures of speech, grammar, etc.

Genre:

Classification of various writings:

1. Narrative: telling a story includes giving of laws, autobiographies, reports, etc.
2. Prophecy:
3. Wisdom:
4. Psalms
5. Gospel
6. Epistle
7. Apocalypse

We will look at six later on in the course: Hebrew narratives, prophetic literature, psalms, gospels, epistles and apocalyptic.

Grammatical and Literary Structure

- **Words:** what do the words of the text mean? Example of *peirasmos* in James 1,2; 1.12-13 (see Osborne, p 94).
 - Study words comparatively: are the same words used in the text? How are they used in the rest of Scripture? How are they used in the immediate context?
 - What are the common words of the text? What are words that carry theological importance?
 - Starting point is to understand the words in their usual, normal way in the text. What is their natural meaning, especially within the immediate context?
 - **Grammar:** Is the word a noun, verb, preposition, direct object? Is the verb an aorist or active?
 - **Structure of a sentence or passage:**
 1. Repetition: A ... A1 ... A2 ... A3 - example - Genesis 1 - 6 days ... 8 creation acts ... 6 day
 2. Parallelism: AB ... A1B1 (example: hear O heavens, and give ear, O earth). The point of parallelism is not just to repeat but it enriches the point being made - makes it deeper as it brings in new elements.

3. Chiasm:

- a. AB ... BA: Jeremiah 30.17.
- b. Can also be ABCEDCBA
- c. Purposes can be
 - i. Mark off a textual unit
 - ii. Point to the key point of the text: Genesis 11.1-9
or in the example above, E would be the key point.

4. Inclusio: ABA - example Psalm 8 and 103. Purposes can be similar to a chiasm

5. Example (page 65 Greidanus): Genesis 2.4b-3.24

- **Remember:** context, context, context. The literal interpretation is the natural, usual, method of interpretation is the usual reading. When we read poetry, we read it as poetry; when we read history, we read it as history. This is opposed to, for example the Allegorical approach: hidden meaning behind the text which is deeper, more profound and more spiritual.

3. Theological Context

Here we deal with Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology. Biblical Theology is the theology developed throughout history. It is tracing theological themes in the text or context. Systematic Theology is Biblical theology categorized or organized under themes. The Bible is not written as a ST - it does not contain the heading of God and then describe God. ST is important as it places our understanding of God into themes and topics.

- Understand that all who seek to interpret Scripture already come with a theological framework. We come with a certain Systematic Theological understanding. The danger is that we can approach Scripture not to discover truth or submit to the teaching of the Bible but instead to confirm what we already believe. A theological framework is good and necessary but we must also be careful that we approach the Word of God with humility and allow the text to change, deepen, or challenge

already established ideas. We place ourselves under the teaching of the Word of God

- Are there Biblical themes in the passage? Themes that may span throughout the Bible (rest, covenants) or throughout a book of the Bible.
- Progressive Revelation: themes grow become deeper in the Word of God. We think of the revelation of Jesus who in Genesis 3 is “the seed” and in Isaiah 53 is the “lamb for slaughter” and in the Gospels is Jesus, the Son of Man and God.
- Biblical Theology helps the preacher: 1. The preacher will remain God-focused and Christ centered in his preaching. 2. The preacher does not treat the Bible like a bunch of disconnected puzzle pieces but rather there is a story being told and the story has meaning and purpose.
- Basic Principles of Theological Interpretation
 - i. Interpret in light of the passage: never view a passage as disconnected from the immediate context. For example, James 1.6-8,. The “doubter” is not a Christian who has occasional doubts but is instead the “double-minded” man. This makes an impact on our application to the congregation.
 - ii. Interpret in light of progressive revelation: God worked within covenants – under which covenant was this passage written. How does it apply as we live under the New Covenant? For example, animal sacrifices and holy days in the Old Covenant under Moses and Colossians 2.16,17.
 - iii. Interpret Scripture in harmony with other Scripture. Scripture does not contradict Scripture. We must keep truths in balance – for example the love of God and the holiness of God.
 - iv. Interpret the unclear in light of the clear. Every major, essential truth is taught clearly and many times. Never build a doctrine on an unclear passage.
 - v. Interpret in light of literary style (we have spoken of this before). For example, proverbs are not promises. Proverbs 22.6; 15.1

Lecture 9

5 Stages to the Hermeneutical Process

Pray

Exegesis

- a. Choose the text
- b. If you are beginning a series or if you are choosing a text, know where you are in the book or the line of argument. An example of how to find your place in the text is the following guideline
 - i. Chart the whole book to analyze the flow - here we look for the major sections and ask:
 1. Who is the author writing to and what are the main issues he is addressing?
 2. What is the author's train of thought?
 - ii. Summarize each part so you know the general flow and argument.
 1. How do you chart the book?
 - a. Skim the paragraphs or chapters with a pen in hand and simply write the progression of thought, seeking to get the flow of the argument
 - b. After skimming the book, look for patterns of thought or sudden shifts (for example, in Paul he may be teaching then he breaks out in praise)
 - c. Walter Kaiser lists some helpful clues to see seams or important shifts in a book of the Bible. These become important as we skim the Word and seek to understand the flow of thought.
 - i. A repeated term, key word, phrase, clause or sentence may act as a heading to introduce each part.

- ii. Look for conjunctions – very, very important:
then, therefore, but, and, nevertheless,
meanwhile, etc
 - iii. Look for rhetorical questions or a series of
questions. One thinks of the book of Romans in
chapter 6.1.
 - iv. A change in time or location or setting, especially
in narrative genres.
 - v. A change in a tense or mood of a verb, subject
or object. Why does the author switch to the
aorist tense? Or why does he switch from “us” to
“you”?
 - iii. Once the whole book has been charted or you know where you are in the
flow of the argument/discussion, then ask about the **immediate context**:
What comes before and after the sentence, the paragraph, the chapter?
Is this a larger part of a theme? The beginning of the argument or story?
The middle? The end?
- c. Exegete the immediate Text
 - i. Gather the facts of the passage
 - 1. Historical: what is the original setting? author and listeners?
 - 2. Grammatical/Literary:
 - a. Sentence structure, main words, connecting words,
repeated words.
 - b. What is the literary context?
 - 3. Theological: is the author addressing a particular issue? Is there
a thought or theme he is working around? Is there a problem he
is addressing? Is there a story he is telling?

Biblical Theology: what are the theological teachings within the context of Scripture? What are the major Biblical themes?

Systematic Theology: This deal with our theological pre-understandings – how does the text and what we have studied fit into our theological worldview?

Practical Theology: how do we bring the truth into the culture today? Here is a word of encouragement – the Word of God was made for all cultures and all peoples in all times, even though God spoke to a specific people in specific cultures. A few thoughts:⁸

- DA Carson writes concerning the challenge: *What we must do is fuse our horizon of understanding with that of the text that we sympathetically and reflectively grasp the principles and arguments and coherence of the subject matter, and do our best to apply such matter in our own lives and cultural contexts.* (278) This is to state that Biblical truth is supracultural (above culture).
- Nehemiah 8.8
- God became man. In other words, God adapted to our humanness as he went “Cross-cultural”.
- The Bible itself speaks to various cultures
- God made us in his likeness and he is able to relate to us, even when we are in a state of rebellion
- You will read of God speaking to Moses in the desert, in Egypt and in the desert once again. You will read God speaking to Abraham and the apostle Paul. You will read of Jonah speaking to Nineveh, Paul speaking to Romans, and Moses speaking to Israelites. The Bible, once again, transcends culture.

Message or Sermon

Formulate

- Theme: *what is the one major point of the text? What is the main theme?*
- Formulate an outline: *what are the main points of the text?*
- Formulate life lessons: *what is the relevance of the sermon?*
- Questions: How does the Word fit into our world? This is the sermon and the connection with the congregation

⁸ A very cursory summary of Goldsworthy’s chapter *The Gospel and Contextualization*.

Lecture 10

Putting Into Practice: Hebrews/Gospel Narratives

Characteristics

- **Within narratives, there is a variety of genres:** law, psalms, wisdom and prophecy, history.
- **The purpose is to record events in a chronological sequence as they actually took place including details that are important for the larger picture.**
- **They were written to drive home a certain message by the author.** Why certain questions we may want answered are not recorded.
- **The purpose in preaching historical sections is not just to communicate facts of history.** These “facts” are addressed to certain people in a certain situation with certain lessons or applications.
- **Key to interpretation is seeking to place ourselves into the scene.** We seek to be aware of the times, place ourselves in them and draw out Biblical lessons from them.

Characteristics to Notice as you work through Narrative Passages

- **The Scene: what is taking place? What details about the scene do you observe?**
 1. Characters
 2. How Is God Present
- **Characterization:**
 3. Character descriptions: Saul is tall, Ehud was fat.
 4. Contrasted Characters: Abraham and Lot
 5. Parallel Characters: Joshua and Moses
 6. Words and Actions: what do they say about the person
- **Dialogue: what are they saying? What is God saying? Who is saying what?**
 7. Narration and dialogue:
 8. Stylized Speech: why does a character repeat or why are there small differences in sometimes how things are said (example of Genesis 2.16-17 and 3.1-3)?

9. Summarized Speech: Hebrew narratives move through in a rapid pace, sometimes with little detail.
- Plot: action begins, the conflict which increases in intensity and then begins to unravel, is finally resolved and then the action ends.
 - The Narrator:
 10. Does he know all things? 2 Samuel 11.27; 12.24; 17.14
 11. Is it a point of view? Narrator brings his point of view or comment: Genesis 15.6
 - Rhetorical Structures
 12. Repetition
 13. Chiasm
 14. Structural Patterns: for example, the book of Judges

Basic Principles

- Understand the total context: as opposed to the gospel where you may work through complex grammatical structures, the preacher takes paragraphs and asks what is the meaning of the story in its context?
- Attention to detail: notice the small details. Observe particular information.
- Ask questions: who are the main characters? How does the dialogue help me understand the text? What needs to be resolved?
- Remember the centre of revelation is God and He is telling us a story about His works. The danger in narratives is that we become man-centered. David and Goliath becomes small guys can beat up big guys so you may be small but do not be afraid to take on the big guys. Well, yes but no. The question is what is God doing and why? How is God revealing His glory, how do we better understand God and His works? What is the activity of God?

Practical: Taking an Old Testament narrative: Genesis 11.1-9 – working from prayer to sermon.

Lecture 11

Prophetic Literature

Introductory Comments

- Prophecy is found as a major portion of the Old Testament from Isaiah to Malachi. We also find it in Hebrews narratives (1 Kings 17), Gospels (Matthew 24) and apocalyptic literature (Revelation 2-3)
- Prophecy is
 15. A message from God about God. *Thus says the Lord* and the Lord will act.
 16. Prophecy is for the present:
 17. Prophecy foretells the future.
 18. Message of the coming kingdom
- Characteristics to Notice as you work through Prophetic Literature
 - ii. Various forms of prophetic literature
 1. Prose or poetry
 2. Accounts, speeches and prayers
 - iii. Rhetorical Structures: chiasms, parallels
- Working through an OT Prophecy:

Lecture 12

Wisdom⁹

Characteristics

- Practical orientation – the place of wisdom or the application of godly knowledge and the fear of the Lord to every day living.
- Familial relation – as a father pleads with a son.
- Dependence on God – Prov 9.10; 16.4, 9; Job 38.31–33 (omnipotence of God)
- Emphasis on creation – see this in the latter chapters of Job. God is dealing with life within the created sphere so we will see God's sovereignty and justice and other characteristics lived out in the natural order.

Forms

- Proverb: a brief statement of universally accepted truth formulated in such a way to be memorable.¹⁰ By their very nature they are generalized statements, giving wisdom and advice for daily life. They are not promises. Proverbs 16.3
- The riddle: Judges 14.10–18
- The admonition: Proverbs 9.9
- Hymns and prayers: Job 5.9–16; 9.5–12
- The dialogue: Job and his friends in Job and a father to a son in Proverbs (1.11–14)
- The Confession: Ecclesiastes
- Beatitude: Ecc 10.17; Prov 3.13

Principles

Osborne warns: *Wisdom literature can be difficult to interpret and apply. A basic hermeneutical error today is the tendency to take biblical statements out of context. General statements become absolute commands when the interpreters fail to note the strong clarification added when they consider the whole of Scripture on a particular issue.*(250–251) He then gives the example of

⁹ Summarized from Osborne's book, chapter 9.

¹⁰ Osborne, 247

Proverbs 6.20 as children must listen to his father's instruction. What happens if the father says that he is to no longer attend church? Does not Acts 4.19; 5.29 speak to this?

- Note the form: is it a proverb? Longer didactic saying? Allegorical? For example, Proverbs 15.25 is not literal. However, in time we can say that God will right all wrongs.
- Ask whether the context is important – see example of Proverbs 13.24 – not just rod but importance of love. Also see Ephesians 6.4 and the importance of training and instruction in the Lord.
- Determine whether hyperbole is present: Proverbs 3.9-10; 22.26-27 (be cautious when taking on a debt, for example); 23.4-5. These were written to be remembered and is a rhetorical skill.
- Obscure passages must be cross-culturally applied to analogous situations today. Proverbs 11.1; 25.24; 26.8.

Lecture 13

Psalms (Poetry)

What literary forms are being used?

- Metrical patterns - Psalm 103.10
- Parallelism - Psalm 2.2 (synonymous); Psalm 1.3 (step); Psalm 8.3-4 (climactic)

What language and imagery is being used? Psalm 1

What type of poetry?

- War songs - Exodus 15.1-18
- Love - Song of Songs
- Lament - Psalm 88
- Hymns or praise songs - Psalm 111
- Thanksgiving - Psalm 30
- Celebration and affirmation - including Royal Psalms (2, 72, 101; 110) and enthronement Psalms (24, 29, 47, 93; 95-99)
- Wisdom and didactic - Psalm 1, 36, 37, 49
- Imprecatory Psalms (12, 35, 52, 57-59, 69, 70, 83, 109, 137, 140)

Hermeneutical Principles¹¹

- Note the patterns - see Psalm 31. 1-5 (plea for help); 6-8 (statement of trust); 9-13 (complaint)
- Notice Parallel lines: Psalm 23.2-3a not talking chronological but emphasizing God's care and goodness.
- Study metaphorical language: Psalm 19 and the heavens.
- If possible, note the background of the psalm - Psalms 3; 7; 18; 30; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56; 60; 63; 142. Helps us to remember to study them first in their historical context and then apply them through NT eyes.

¹¹ Summarized from chapter 8: The Hermeneutical Spiral, Grant R. Osborne.

- Study the Psalm as a whole before drawing conclusions
- Two levels: original theological meaning and then applying to life circumstance.

Pastoral Thoughts on the Psalms

Curses

There is the matter of imprecations. How are we to preach or minister to people when we read the psalmist praying against his enemies with such words as *Break the teeth of their mouths, O God* (Ps. 58.6), *May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous* (Ps. 69.28), *May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow* (Ps. 109.9) and *O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us – he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.* (Ps. 137.8-9)

Some will attribute this type of language to Old Testament wrath that is missing in the words of Jesus. However, imprecations are found on the lips of Jesus as we read in Matthew 23.13-38 Jesus describing various “woes” to the religious hypocrites. We also read in Galatians 1.8 Paul writing *let him be eternally condemned.* In fact, Jesus quotes Psalm 69, a Psalm mentioned above as containing imprecatory language, on numerous occasions.

A point brought out by J.A. Motyer is important to remember when we talk about the imprecatory psalms. He writes in his introduction in the New Bible Commentary

... the imprecatory psalms themselves cannot be treated as if they were somehow out of step with the rest of the OT or were perhaps exemplary of the lower morality that the OT came to hold; for alongside the imprecations, these very psalms display a spirituality we would covet (Psalm 139 is a case in point).¹²

Is this not true? Somehow the psalmist is able to glory in the creative majesty of God as he declares God to be the One who “knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Ps. 139.13) and then in almost the very next breath says “If only you would slay the wicked, O God!” (vs. 19).

¹² Page 554.

So what do we say? Again Motyer is helpful:

In a positive appraisal of the imprecatory psalms it must be first of all noted that all imprecations are prayers. They are not a declaration of intent on the part of the psalmist, but a commitment of the problem to the Lord and a leaving of vengeance to him; they show an obedient faith godward and an unretaliatory intent manward.¹³

Motyer also mentions the importance of imprecations as they express a holy, moral indignation as the psalmist longed for a vindication of God's name. In a book review of a book I was unable to obtain, Winston T. Smith writes about James E. Adams' book War Psalms and the Prince of Peace that the larger context (as already mentioned in the paper) is Christ's coming kingdom and Jesus will bring the kingdom to completion. This includes judgment and vindication of His glory. Are we then permitted to pray these prayers? Smith writes in his book review:

First, our prayers must be rooted in the desire to see the expansion of Christ's kingdom. ... Our prayers are not personal vendettas; they are kingdom orientated. This includes a willingness to continue in suffering and persecution for the sake of the kingdom if it pleases God.

Second, God's Word is foundational. It is God's hatred of evil and His consistent promise to curse and destroy it that is foundational. It is not a hatred simply directed by experience or self-interest; it is directed by God's words concerning His character or plan.

Third, conversion must be a primary motivation for praying such prayers. As Adams notes concerning Psalm 83, the psalmist seeks the chastening of the wicked so that their faces may be covered with shame, "so that men will seek your name, O Lord" (Ps. 83.16)

Clearly, God often brings sinners to repentance through such chastening.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid, 554.

¹⁴ *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol 15, Number 3, Spring 1997, page 55.

Although more could be said, I want to close with two quick observations. First, Jesus prayed imprecations on himself. It is absolutely amazing to remember that Jesus called down curses on himself so that we might have forgiveness of sins through his punishment. We ought to thank God that He sent His Son who would bear our wrath.

Second, there will be times we ought not to pray imprecatory psalms, especially against individuals. Ken Langley in his article entitled “Praying Poetry” gives the following account:

One possible (and surprising) result of praying the Psalms may be that we discover we cannot pray them as we meant to when we started out. Several years ago I was forced to resign from a ministry I loved because of some ugly church politics. In the months that followed, I tried praying the prayers of imprecation (sometimes mislabeled “vindictive” psalms) concerning the “bad guys” who drove me from my pastorate. I found that I could not do so. Painful though my experience was, it did not begin to compare with what David and some of his fellow poets suffered. Neither were my “enemies” anywhere near as bad as the wicked against whom the psalmists prayed such things as “Strike them on the jaw and break their teeth!” (Psalm 3:7). I did not want God to do anything of the kind: not because I’m more spiritual than the psalmists, but because the people who hurt me did not merit such drastic chastening. (I was, however, able to sincerely pray Psalm 109:8, “May someone else take their place of leadership!”)

Attempting to make the psalmists’ words my own had the unanticipated result of putting my problems in perspective. I realized that if I’m going to pray the stronger psalms of judgment I must do so with reference to the real moral monsters of our time. I will pray them in solidarity with my persecuted brothers and sisters around the world, and I will pray, not against those who have hurt me personally, but against the enemies of Christ, who Himself prayed these psalms.¹⁵

This is solid and wise pastoral advice.

¹⁵ *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Winter 2003, pages 33-34.

Thoughts on Psalm 119

David Powlison, in his book Speaking Truth in Love, writes an interesting chapter on Psalm 119. If we were to summarize Psalm 119, we would maybe talk about the importance of God's Word. But Powlison writes:

Far and away the most common words [in Ps. 119] are first and second personal singular pronouns: *I, me, my, mine, and you, your, yours*. Psalm 119 is the most extensive I-to-you conversation in the Bible. Only the first three verses talk *about* people-in-general, *about* God, and *about* the Word, stating propositions and principles in the third person ... After that, for the next 172 verses, *I, your servant, talk to you, Lord, who speaks and acts, whom I need and love*.¹⁶

Psalm 119 is not a topical study of God's Word and how to make it part of your life (while this is legitimate). It is much richer as a personal prayer:

We hear what a man says out loud in God's presence: his joyous pleasure, vocal need, open adoration, blunt requests, candid assertions, deep struggles, fiercely good intentions. The various words for the Word appear once in each verse, but I-you words appear about four times per verse. That's a 4:1 ratio and emphasis.¹⁷

What then is the flow of Psalm 119? Powlison talks of four strands, the first being "You are..., You say..., You do...". This portion of the psalmist prayer describes God to his face – what God is like and who God is: ***You established the earth, Your faithfulness continues through all generations, Your law is truth, You rebuke the arrogant*** and so on. The psalmist is talking with God as he has listened to who God is and responds in faith. Where did the psalmist learn about God? He learned about God in the Word.

¹⁶ Pages 13-14. Powlison does mention in a footnote that only Psalm 119.115 breaks from the pattern of I-to-you.

¹⁷ Ibid, 14.

Strand 2 is “I Am Facing A Struggle With ...”. As we read Psalm 119, we find a person who is in anguish of life. Psalm 119 is spoken to God out of an ongoing struggle as the psalmist finds evil within himself and evil coming at him. Powlison writes:

There’s nothing else like that in Psalm 119. It arises from the ashes of distress. His hope speaks within the fragility of his situation and steps into light. He summarizes what has happened with words paraphrased in the title of this chapter: If your law had not been my delight, then I would have perished in my affliction” (v. 92).¹⁸

Strand 3 is “I Need You To ...” The Psalmist cries for God to teach him, make him understand, pleading with God to save him, help him, rescue him, plead his cause, look on his affliction, comfort him (when will this happen??), judge those who persecute him, among other cries of faith.

The final strand found in Psalm 119 is “I Am Committed To ...” The Psalmist is a man of conviction as he clings to God’s testimony, hopes in God’s salvation and forgets not the commands of God. We also read the psalmist delighting in God as he rejoices, gives thanks, marvels and sings praise – all in the midst of suffering.

While Psalm 119 is a celebration of God’s Word, it is more. It is a suffering saint crying out in faith, carrying on a dialogue with God as revealed in His law, delighting to speak with Him and stand firm. Next time we bring Psalm 119 before God’s people, it should be more than just an encouragement for daily devotion. Psalm 119 ought to become the words of the people as they talk with God about their struggles and pain.

Speaking Honestly To God¹⁹

Jones tells us today’s sentiment about honesty with God emerges something like this following statement, “Tell Him how you feel. Tell Him if you’re angry. Be honest. Don’t hide your feelings.

¹⁸ Ibid, 24

¹⁹ This section is taken from Robert D. Jones article “Anger Against God” in *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Volume 14, Number 3, Spring 1996, pp. 15-20 and a sermon from David Powlison on suffering from a John Piper Conference. I am unable to locate the year the sermon was preached.

Be transparent with Him. He'll understand. He's a big boy. He can handle it."²⁰ It is OK to be angry with God, in all honesty, and we turn to the psalms for justification because after all, the psalmist was honest with God, right?

While not able to spend a long time here, it is helpful to briefly examine the two propositions Jones spells out when learning to deal honestly with God. First he says that *It is always wrong to hold in your heart or voice with your mouth anger against God*. To be angry with God is to accuse God of wrongdoing and honesty in the psalms is not accusing God of doing wrong. The second proposition is *It is always right to bring your doubts and questions to God in a holy and humble way, out of a heart of fundamental faith*. In the psalms (cf. Ps. 13) we will not read the psalmist accusing God of wrongdoing but rather we will hear confusion and bewilderment over apparent inconsistencies between God's revealed character and the current events. This is followed by questions or cries to God, the point being that the psalmist is **always moving towards God**. Finally, the psalmist, although not perfectly, clings to the basic truths (He listens to God) and places his (at times imperfect) trust in God, reaching resolution to live for Him and praise His name.

Pastorally, we must be careful to dissuade God's people from using the psalms to get matters off their chest, since, "God knows their hearts anyway." Sometimes in my own ministry people have talked rather angrily to God and shared it with me and I have affirmed their action. However, the psalms teach us that anger with God is to be repented of and honesty comes in the form of first listening to God and coming to an understanding of His character, despite the circumstances around us. In this frame of mind, we then come to come "face to face", allowing God's Words to be spoken to Him with an honesty and frankness.

Genre and Poetry²¹

Finally, it is useful to remember the genre as we preach and counsel God's Word. Langley has some excellent thoughts, some of which I will briefly summarize. He writes it is important that we treat the psalms as poetry.

²⁰ Jones, 15.

²¹ Taken from two articles written by Ken Langley from the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*: "Genre-Sensitive Use of Psalms in Counseling" Spring 2002, 38-45 and "Praying Poetry" Winter 2003, 28-36.

Some psalms are prayers, some psalms are songs, but all psalms are poems. Some are didactic, others historical; some are praises, others laments, but all are poems. This means, among other things, that their appeal is not only cognitive, but affective, imaginative, and aesthetic as well. The same can be said for most literature, of course, but the degree and directness with which poetry appeals to emotion, imagination, and aesthetic sense surpasses that of ordinary prose. Without disparaging the theological content of the Psalms, the biblical counselor will use these poems in concert with their Spirit-given form, which is to say he will address affect, imagination, and beauty.²²

Part of the beauty of the psalms is found in their emotions, as they give expression and direction to people's hearts. Another aspect is their imagination as we give to God's people images such as God as our rock and shelter, the in whom we take refuge. These pictures of God's greatness and compassion inspire and encourage the people of God. We also rejoice in the aesthetic as well when we read that the Word is precious or of the longing to be in the temple of God. Psalms affirm the believer's delight in God's beauty and sovereignty and give expressions that cause us to love Him. As Langely writes:

Pastors and counselors want to *commend* as well as *defend* the biblical vision. We strive to win admiration for God's Word, not just grudging assent to its truthfulness. We realize that it's no good convincing a counselee that the Bible is true if we do so in a way that leaves him wishing it wasn't! We realize that a man dazzled by an adulterous affair he's having is not likely to be shamed into repentance if the way of godliness appears drab by comparison. Somehow the beauty of married life under the smile of God must be shown as a superior satisfaction. The Psalms, with their unabashed appeal to our aesthetic sense, can help: "Rejoice!" "Delight!" "Taste and see!" "Worship the Lord in the *beauty* of holiness."²³

²²"Genre", 39,

²³ Ibid, 43.

In Langely's second article concerning Praying Poetry, he reminds us of the importance of the psalms as they teach us to pray. While much could be said about the importance of the unspecified situations of the psalms or the simplicity in imagery or even the use of hyperbole, I want to leave us with a quote that expresses the benefits of praying through the psalms daily. Langely writes

There's an ancient tradition of spirituality in which you start with Psalm 1, read one or two every day until you get to the end, and then start over, regularly, daily, over a lifetime. What this does for us is *discipline* our praying. We can't say, "I'm not in the mood to praise God today." If the next psalm in order is a hymn, we praise God whether we feel like it or not. When today's text is a lament, we enter into the suffering and sorrow of our broken planet even if at the moment we feel like we don't have a care in the world. We don't choose what to pray any more than we choose what life under the providence of God will dish up today.

... Praying the Psalms sequentially is one way to break out of this self-absorption, for although praying the psalms can be private, it is never individualistic.¹³ When we pray the Psalms, we enter into a worldwide, trans-generational community. When we pray the Psalms *in order*, regardless of how we're feeling or what we're experiencing at the moment, we learn to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Praying the psalms of lament reminds us that others have suffered, often far worse than we have, and that "No temptation has come your way but such as is common to man." Praying the psalms of praise refocuses us on glorifying God.²⁴

In a world filled with self and living in a selfish body, praying through the psalms becomes a way to battle pity, revenge, anger, and spiritual lethargy.

²⁴ "Poetry", 35.

Lecture 14

Parables

Meaning and Use

- 1/3 of Jesus' teaching is found in parables
- There are many forms of parables: proverbs (Lk 4.23), metaphors (Matt 15.13); similes (Matt 10.16), short comparisons (Matt 13.31-32), or longer analogies (Luke 11.5-8), figurative sayings (Luke 5.36-38), story parables in the form of fictional characters (Matt 25.1-13 - 10 virgins) or allegorical parables in which several points of comparison are drawn (Mk 4.1-9).
- The common element is that they use everyday experiences to draw a comparison with kingdom truths. (Osborne, 292)

Purpose

- **Mark 4.10-12** and **Matthew 13.13-15**- negative purpose as a sign of God's judgment on the unbelieving.
- **The greater event taking place is Jesus is telling a story in which the listener is invited to consider and upon consideration, cannot stay neutral.** The hearer must respond either in obedience or disobedience.

Characteristics

- Earthiness: home life, nature, animals, commerce, royalty, wedding, hospitality, agriculture
- Conciseness
- Major and minor points
- Repetition: Matthew 25.21, 23
- Conclusion at the end
- Reversal of decision: Jesus makes astounding statements as he speaks of the good Samaritan who helped a Jew!!
- Kingdom -centered eschatology: read often of the presence of the kingdom
- Kingdom ethics: Matthew 5.13-16; 6.19-24

- God and salvation – example of prodigal son – Luke 15.11-31

Principles

- Note the setting within which the parable is placed. Whom is Jesus' audience? (Luke 7.41-42 – Simon the Pharisee or the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke 18)
- Note the structure of the parable: are there any changes in focus or reference points (Luke 7.41-43 again)
- Uncover the background of the earthly details
- Determine the main points of the parables
- Do not base doctrines on the parables without checking corroborative details elsewhere. This is helped when one keeps the parable in the broader context of the gospel.
- Apply the central truths to similar situations in modern life

Lecture 15

Epistle Literature

Principles

- Study the logical development of the argument and then ask as you preach a text – where are you in the flow of the argument or teaching?
- Study the situation behind the statements. Why did Paul write to the Corinthian church or Peter to the scattered?
- Note various subgenres in the epistles: hymns, creeds, prayers, apocalyptic

Lecture 16

Apocalyptic Literature

Features

- Communication through revelation: God or a heavenly being speaks
- Angelic meditation: think of Revelations as the angel show visions and communicates meaning.
- Ethical discourses: prophets seemed to warn the people while apocalyptic literature seems to bring comfort and hope for the suffering people of God. This is a broad characterization and we cannot press it too far, it is helpful to see that this genre seems to bring comfort.
- Symbolism is used to bring out Biblical truths: again we think of Revelation and the beasts, jewels, lion, lamb, and heavenly city. Numbers also become important: 666, 12, 24
- Recital of history: Daniel 2, 7-12. Purpose seems to emphasize God's control over history.

Characteristics

- Pessimism toward the present age: *The prophet argued that if Israel returned to God the condition would be met and the prophecy of doom avoided. The apocalypticist could offer no such optimistic forecast but could only comfort the reader that God in the future would bring contemporary history to a close and vindicate his people. In a very real sense one could say that the apocalypticists had a healthy respect for the depravity of humanity. They soundly rejected the falsely optimistic view of the progress of society and placed their trust not in humans but in God. ... No longer would things be right with the world, for not only did Judaism face troubles from without but troubles from within, a growing secularism and a clash of cultures with Babylonian, Persian and later Hellenistic values. Only God could bring order out of the chaos. (Osborne, 281)*
- Promise of salvation and restoration: Rev 6.9-11; 8.3-5 - this is the other side of the coin.
- A view of transcendent reality - from God's eyes.
- God completely controls history - sovereignty of God never doubted
- Eschatological perspective

Principles

- Note the type of literature: there are portions of apocalyptic literature that is prophetic (Zechariah 1-6 primarily apocalyptic and Zechariah 7-14 is primarily prophetic. See also Revelation 1.3; 19.10; 22.18-19 as prophetic in a largely apocalyptic book.
- Note the structure of the passage and the book
- Note the function and meaning of symbols: a number of examples from the book of Revelation
- Be humble: there can be difficult passages. Mix with this that one of the primary purposes of apocalyptic language is to comfort the people of God, we can keep as our purpose that even though we may not understand all the language, we can derive comfort - and God has given us enough to be comforted!
- In the book of Revelation, an understanding of the Old Testament is key.

Lecture 17

Concluding Thoughts

The Word of God is powerful. Psalm 29 tells us in poetic form how powerful the Word of God is as He speaks. There are many great tasks in life and many great privileges but perhaps the greatest gift, apart from our great salvation in Jesus Christ, is His Word and the tremendous privilege to study and speak His truth. That is the gift of hermeneutics. I want to conclude with three encouragements:

- When you were first married (and hopefully even 20 years later), you want to show your wife off to the world – you love her so much. You want others to know about her as well. Do you speak lies about your wife when you tell others? No – you represent her well. What happens if someone says something that is not true about your wife? You correct them. In an even greater way, we have been given the privilege to be used as weak instruments to proclaim the person and work of God – and we want to faithfully represent His glory.
- Digging into the Word is like digging into a treasure chest of priceless jewels. We dig into the text and examine the jewel and are amazed. Hermeneutics is digging into the Word, seeing Christ and marveling again and again and again. It is a piece of the glory to come as we will gather around the throne and worship him for all eternity.
- Nobody ever arrives. We are all students of the Word our whole lives. It is a lifelong journey but what a journey! Moses longed to see the glory of God. I pray you will see more and more and as you travel with Him, you will bow before Him in absolute wonder and love and fear, praising His Name and shining His light in a dark world.
- Enjoy God
- Enjoy God's people