

## **Overview of the Bible 6 – ‘A people prepared’: The Messiah and the New Testament**

Isaiah 9:2-6 / Psalm 110 / Acts 13:16-23 / Luke 4:16-21

**Biblical books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John**

Sunday Night in the City, Bethlehem, 3 July 2022

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*Tonight we continue our sermon series providing an overview of the whole Bible, moving now into the New Testament, and I will be preaching on the four gospels, as well as proclaiming the four readings we've already heard. Let's pray: Lord God, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth.*

### **Introduction**

This is the sixth sermon in a series of ten, providing an overview of the whole Bible. If you haven't heard any of the others that's fine. Indeed I missed the last one because I was travelling, and Dr. John Kleinig instead preached on the prophetic books of the Old Testament, especially as seen through the book of Isaiah.

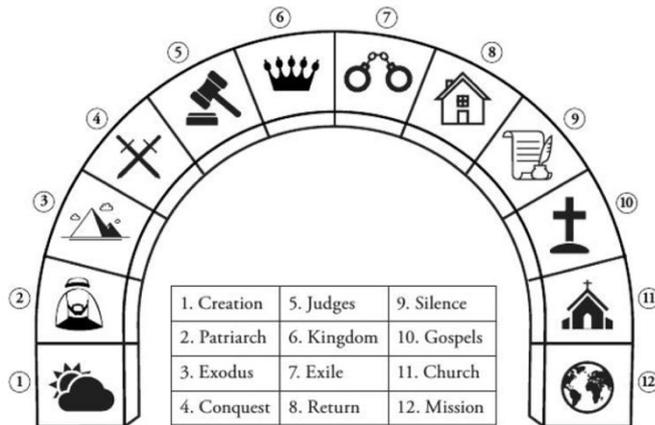
Because of that short interlude, I thought it might be beneficial to briefly refresh ourselves in the purpose of this series before getting to a recap of where we've been, and then diving into the New Testament tonight. And the way I want to do this is by reading a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which Pastor Mike Pietsch sent me, on the importance of considering the Bible together, as a whole, and not only in smaller sections of a few verses. This is what he wrote in his book *Life Together*.

The Holy Scriptures are more than selected Bible passages. It is also more than "Bread for Today". It is God's revealed Word for all peoples, for all times. The Holy Scriptures do not consist of individual sayings, but are a whole and can be used most effectively as such. The Scriptures are God's revealed Word as a whole. The full witness to Jesus Christ the Lord can be clearly heard only in its immeasurable inner relationships, in the connection of Old and New Testaments, of promise and fulfillment, sacrifice and law, Law and Gospel, cross and resurrection, faith and obedience, having and hoping...

The Scripture is a complex unity, and every word, every sentence, contains such a diversity of relationships to the whole that it is impossible always to keep track of the whole when listening to an individual portion of it. Therefore, it appears that the whole of Scripture as well as every passage in it far surpasses our understanding. It can only be a good thing when we are daily reminded of this fact, which again refers us to Jesus Christ "in whom are *hidden* all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). So one may perhaps say that every Scripture reading always has to be somewhat "too long" if it is not to be aphoristic worldly wisdom, but God's Word of revelation in Jesus Christ.

### **Recap**

So then, keeping in mind the unity of the Scriptural narrative, and that God speaks to us not just in isolated verses but also in the overarching narrative, let's also recap where we've been.



After the creation and fall (1), God elected one people, Abraham and his descendants, to bear his promise. Through them, he promised that all nations would be blessed (2). While Abraham lived in the land we know as Israel, his descendants came to live in Egypt where they were enslaved. Moses led them out of slavery into the wilderness where God dwelt with them in holiness in the Temple (3). They then entered the Promised

Land (4), and after a period of rule by judges, Israel's violence grew such that they asked God for a king (5). Through Samuel, Saul and then David are anointed Kings, beginning a long kingdom, that was split in two with Israel in the north and Judah in the south (6). God appointed prophets to reveal to the people of Israel and their kings their own idolatry and faithlessness, warning them of the doom to come, but also of the way in which God would keep his promises by sending a Messianic King, a Suffering Servant, the Son of Man (7). After both kingdoms were destroyed, and the people scattered or brought into captivity in Babylon, God works to restore Israel to his people and they return to their ruined land, where they begin the process of rebuilding (8).

### Post-exilic Israel

The return from exile occurred from the year 538 BC, with a new Temple, the Second Temple dedicated in 515 BC, the first one built by King Solomon having been destroyed. In the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Bible shows us the life of Israel in the 400s BC, as Israel is now organised as a liturgical community around the temple and the law of Moses, rather than as a political community centred on the land and a king. And so after the exile and return, Jewish communities sprout up beyond Israel's land, including in Egypt. When the Holy Family flee from Herod to Egypt, they would have undoubtedly made contact with Jewish communities there, who now had a Jewish identity not based on land and monarchy, but on the Old Testament Scriptures and temple worship in Jerusalem that they might occasionally visit.

But even the potency of the temple sacrifices had begun to be diminished. The Ark of the Covenant was captured in the destruction of Jerusalem, and presumably destroyed, as its presence has been erased from any historical record, unless you count Indiana Jones as history. And so this absence in the new Temple, an absence in the Holy of Holies, already spoke of a deficiency. In Hosea 6:6, a verse which Jesus himself quotes in Matthew's Gospel (9:13; 12:7) the LORD had said: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." This was not to deny the importance of sacrifice and holiness to God, things which re affirmed in the New Testament, so much as look forward to the end of the Temple, replaced as it was to be by the Temple of Christ's own body.

But in these centuries leading up to Christ, centuries in which no books of the Bible were written, it wasn't only a prophecy about burnt offerings that hung over the people of Israel. The prophetic books of the Old Testament are full of references to a coming Son of Man

who will suffer as a servant, but who will be vindicated by God, who will raise him up to rule in divine power. There was the promise, too, of a future king in the line of David who would reunite God's people in a new Jerusalem, bringing blessings to the nations.

## New Testament Collection

And so the people into which Jesus of Nazareth was born was a people prepared, and a people expectant. No Word of God had been written for centuries but soon there was to be a springtime of the Word, a flowering of God's speech, as the whole of the New Testament is written within something like 40 years of each other, from perhaps as early as 50 AD to around 90 AD (although some suggest a slightly later end date), compared to the centuries over which the Old Testament was written.

### THE THREE KINDS OF BOOKS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Historical	Pauline Epistles	General Epistles
Matthew	<i>To Churches:</i>	Hebrews
Mark	Romans	James
Luke	1 Corinthians	1 Peter
John	2 Corinthians	2 Peter
Acts	Galatians	1 John
	Ephesians	2 John
	Philippians	3 John
	Colossians	Jude
	1 Thessalonians	Revelation
	2 Thessalonians	
	<i>To Individuals:</i>	
	1 Timothy	
	2 Timothy	
	Titus	
	Philemon	

As we turn now to the New Testament, let's begin by looking at the nature of the New Testament. There are 27 different books, but they can be categorised, firstly as five narrative accounts, including the four Gospels and Acts; then 13 letters from St Paul (and sometimes a co-author) either to churches, or to individuals; and then nine other letters, called the Catholic epistles, because they are written to groups of churches, not just one, and were written by different authors – two of whom were

Jesus' brothers (James and Jude), with the others connected to Jesus' apostles in different ways. The genre of letter, or epistle, which is absent in the Old Testament, dominates the style of writing of the New Testament.

## The Four Gospels

But it's the four gospels especially that we want to introduce now, and will be looking at for the rest of tonight and next month's sermon too. For while they may only take up a small percentage of the whole Bible, they proclaim Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom all things hold together, and as Good News, the meaning of the word Gospel.

All four Gospels are eyewitness accounts, of people who were with Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry, and, importantly, who were witnesses of the resurrection, who beheld the resurrected body of Christ. This is not necessarily to say that the authors were all witnesses in this way – St Mark and St Luke the physician were not apostles – but their accounts are drawn from those who were witnesses. That said, the Gospels are not so much biographies or histories, but rather they are sermons, proclamations about Christ. For instance, Mark's Gospel begins with Jesus' baptism, skipping over everything about the young Jesus. And then a whole third of Mark's Gospel is taken up with Jesus' crucifixion. It's not a biography

but a proclamation of Christ crucified. Or to take another example, St John in his Gospel tells us that he's written his Gospel "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The Gospels preach, and are written for preaching, for bring Christ to people and provoking faith in Christ the Son of God by the Holy Spirit.

The presence of not one but four Gospels is itself worthy of note. They are not completely independent of each other but at times rely on each other, as well as complementing and contrasting with each other. This is especially true for the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. They're often called the synoptic Gospels, because they see with the same eyes – that's what 'synoptic' means. So Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the same basic chronological story with key variants. John, however, in his Gospel gives a more theological account of the ministry of Jesus built around the seven signs or miracles of Jesus and then the discourses associated with those miracles, leading up to the great miracles of Jesus' death and resurrection.

And so it can be profitable to see whether a particular episode of the life of Jesus occurs in more than one Gospel, and whether there are interesting differences between them. Occasionally critics of Christianity have leapt upon the fact that different Gospel accounts differ in their telling, as evidence of the inconsistencies of Christianity. But what these criticisms tend to ignore is that Christians themselves have passed on and upheld these four related yet distinct accounts as all God's Word, and so can hardly be the occasion for a 'Gotcha' moment. Moreover, this proliferation of Gospel accounts reveal Jesus' ministry, his teaching, his life, death and resurrection, to be something like a kaleidoscope that can be seen from all sorts of different angles to bring out different things from the one reality.

### **Differences between the Gospels**

As we look at the different angles the four gospels have, I'll make reference to four traditional symbols that are assigned to the four gospels and which have a biblical basis (see Ezekiel 1:4-14; Revelation 4:6-9). Those symbols – a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle – you would have passed when you came in tonight as they're inscribed on the windows of the entrance doors to our church.

Matthew's Gospel is especially focussed on Jesus' mission to Israel (cf. 10:5-6). Whereas other Gospels can sometimes explain Jewish customs, Matthew simply assumes them (e.g. 15:1-2, cf. Mark 7:1-5), showing that he especially has a Jewish audience and that he also seeks to show how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. Matthew himself was a Jewish tax collector known also as Levi (9:9). Matthew even divides his Gospel into five sermons of Jesus' teaching (5-7; 10; 13; 18; 23-25), echoing the Pentateuch of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. The symbol traditionally associated with Matthew is the man, the perfect man, a better Moses, the Son of Man, come to achieve what no man could.

Mark's Gospel is full of action, with the word "immediately" occurring again and again. Mark has an emphasis on what Jesus did and is doing, rather than on what Jesus taught and said. It's the shortest of the Gospels and possibly the earliest. While Mark was not an apostle, he was a secretary to St Peter (1 Peter 4:14) and so the voice of St Peter is behind Mark's Gospel. Because of its action, and the association with kingship, Mark is symbolised by a



lion. And so, for instance, if you visit San Marco square in Venice, St Mark's square, you'll see statues of lions everywhere, as the Venetian symbol.

Luke's Gospel, the physician, highlights that Jesus is God's royal servant from the book of Isaiah who brings God's light to the nations. And so Luke has Jesus read from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue, as we heard in the Gospel for tonight: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news – Gospel – to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty the captives and recovering of sight to the blind"

(Luke 4:18). In Luke's Gospel there are nine different banquet scenes, with Jesus as both guest and host, with a strong emphasis on Jesus' presence as our host in the heavenly banquet we celebrate every Sunday. His symbol is the ox, a sacrificial animal as Luke's Gospel opens with Zechariah serving in the temple, and there are other sacrificial overtones.

Finally, John's Gospel is quite different from the other Gospels. It is structured in a different way, around seven signs or miracles that all foreshadow what Jesus finally accomplishes in his death and resurrection (cf. 2:11, 23; 4:54). In John's Gospel there are also seven "I am..." saying that Jesus gives: Bread of life (6:35); Light of the world (8:12); The door (10:7); The good shepherd (10:11); The resurrection and the life (11:25); The way, the truth and the life (14:6); and The vine (15:1). Throughout there is a focus on Jesus the Son being unified with his heavenly Father (e.g. 10:22-30), and being God himself – "the Word was God", as John begins. For that reason, his symbol is the eagle, representing the spiritual realm and Christ's divine nature.

### **The Bible is one book**

But for all their differences, their message is unified. And in an even greater way, so too is the message of the New Testament unified with the Old Testament. To call the Bible 'the Bible' is to say that it is one book. To be sure it is made up of many books, but it is also the story of the one God and his people.

Martin Luther once summarised the whole of the New Testament in a few short words. He said that the New Testament is nothing but a message that what God promised in the Old Testament is given in and through Jesus Christ.

And so as we read the Gospels and the New Testament, we can see that there are many threads from the Old Testament that are continued and fulfilled. As we have seen the Old Testament itself leaves these threads hanging, mid-weave. Who will the king be? How will

he redeem Israel? And so when the Apostles come to proclaim that Jesus is the Christ, they very consciously proclaim that Christ is the fulfillment of God's work in the Old Testament. We saw this in tonight's reading from Acts (Acts 13:16-23) in which Paul stands up at a synagogue full of Jews like himself in Antioch in Pisidia. "Men of Israel" he begins, before summarising the whole of Israelite history, mentioning Egypt, the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, the Promised Land, Samuel, Kings Saul and David, and then Jesus, the promised Saviour.

In the Gospels, also, we can see that when they want to talk about Jesus, they're constantly referring to the Old Testament, while telling his story. So, to take just one example, when Jesus is born in Bethlehem, Matthew reminds us that this was anticipated by the prophet Micah in the Old Testament: "And you, Bethlehem... out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people" (Micah 5:2).

At other times, the Gospels even show that Jesus discussing and arguing with the Old Testament. The Psalm we heard tonight, Psalm 110, is what Jesus uses in Mark 12:36. Because in the Psalm David says "The Lord said to my Lord", Jesus shows that David is calling the Messiah not just his descendent, but also his Lord, that is, God. Indeed Psalm 110 is used some 17 times in the New Testament.

### **The Baptism of Jesus**

Then there are other times when the writers weave in Old Testament references without explicitly quoting the Old Testament. Let's take the example of Jesus' baptism. Mark tells us that while Jesus was from Nazareth, he travelled to the Jordan river to be baptized. There the heavens are opened, the Spirit descends on Jesus, and a voice from heaven declares "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:9-11).

For Jesus to be baptized in the Jordan river has strong resonances with the book of Joshua, and Israel's crossing of the Jordan river to enter the Promised Land. Jesus even had to exit the Promised Land to be baptized in the Jordan river, showing that in Jesus' baptism, and so in ours, we have now left our slavery to sin, and have entered into a new Promised Land, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God.

Then, when the Father proclaims "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased", He is alluding to other Old Testament texts. "My Son" resonated with Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110 itself, identifying Jesus as the promised Royal Son of David. "Beloved" also alludes to the seed of Abraham in Genesis 22:2, when God told Abraham to take his beloved son Isaac and sacrifice him. And then when the Father says he is "well pleased" with Jesus, there is an allusion to the promised Servant of Isaiah 42:1, who is going to suffer from the sins of his people.

### **Jesus is the Christ**

But there is one other allusion to the Old Testament in Jesus' baptism that I want to draw out, and it's something that goes to the heart of the Gospels, what they are about.

For at the heart of the Gospels is the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ. Christ means anointed one, the Royal King. Now, if someone was going to be a King in Israel, there were a

few conditions that had to be met. First, they had to be a descendant of King David. Second, they had to be anointed as a king. King Saul was anointed with oil by the Prophet Samuel, and so was King David. King Solomon was anointed with holy oil by Zadok the priest, and thereafter every king was anointed by the High Priest in the Temple. Thirdly, the king was crowned, a coronation ceremony. And then finally the king was enthroned, at the palace. From then on the King reigned, and people would come to pay homage to him – Hail, King of the Jews.

The proclamation that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, that Jesus is the Anointed King, was a proclamation that Jesus was a new King with a difference. Firstly, He was born in the line of David. So the very first words of the New Testament, of Matthew's Gospel, are: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). Along with Matthew, Luke makes a big deal of showing that Jesus was born into the lineage of David (1:27; 1:69; 2:4; 2:11; 3:31). Second, and this is the other reference to the baptism I wanted to make, Jesus was anointed as a king at his baptism. But rather than be anointed with holy oil, Jesus was anointed directly with the Holy Spirit who descended on him. So the Baptism of Jesus can only be understood as picking up threads from the Old Testament. From his baptism on, Jesus acts as a King, but only in his death does he receive his royal coronation, not with a golden crown, but with a crown of thorns in mockery. The soldiers gave him a sceptre, too, and a robe on him and bowed down before him saying 'Hail, King of the Jews'. They thought they were mocking him, but the irony was that it was Jesus' actual coronation, as if to show dramatically that his kingdom is not of this world. Then fourthly, lastly, Jesus is enthroned. In Mark and John's Gospel, the emphasis is that Jesus was enthroned on the cross – that's where he reigns. But in Matthew and Luke his enthronement is seen more as being at his ascension, where Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father in heaven, reigning over both heaven and earth. "He sits at the right hand of God the Father", we say in the creed, sitting as an enthroned, reigning king. So when Jesus says "I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32), he means both lifted up on the cross, and lifted up in heaven, where he reigns.

So Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the King. Earlier I quoted the first verse of Matthew. Listen now to the first verse of Mark's Gospel: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). When Mark says "the beginning" he's talking about his whole book. That this book is just about the beginning of Jesus' reign as the Christ, the King. Because Christ is now enthroned, and will be forever. He is now reigning, over your life and mine, over the whole world, and also heaven. And this is good news, Gospel. For he has come to heal the sick, to forgive sinners, to love the unlovely, and to cover our unrighteousness with his righteousness.

*And may the peace of God, that passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

***Next Month...***

**7 August: 'That believing you may have life in his name': The ministry of Jesus Christ**

Biblical books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

Texts for the Divine Service:

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 / Psalm 2 / Hebrews 10:11-25 / Mark 8:31-38

Recommended Pre-Reading:

- Matthew 5-7 – The Sermon on the Mount
- Matthew 16-17 – Peter's Confession and Jesus' Transfiguration
- Mark 11 – The Triumphal Entry
- Luke 14-16 – Parables of Jesus
- Luke 24 – The Road to Emmaus
- John 18-21 – The Passion of Christ

Recommended on YouTube:

- Search for 'The Bible Project Matthew', and likewise for the other books