Approaches to Redemptive Exposition

Some biblical texts present a succinct and direct gospel message, but many are not so obvious. In this session we will consider various approaches to interpreting biblical texts in order to highlight the redemptive message that is present.

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I. Redemptive Preaching and Honouring the Text

A. There are numerous ways to preach redemptively

We are not saying that every text will yield a direct reference to Christ, or a clever revelation of the atonement. What we are saying is that since there is always a Depravity Factor to be seen in a text and since God is the hero of every story in the Bible, there will always be a textually legitimate way to preach the redemptive revelation of God's grace when you are preaching any passage.

B. There are some unhelpful and unnecessary ways to preach redemptively

We must learn how to handle the text as well as possible, and learn how to preach the grace of God as effectively as possible, so that we do not fall into the traps of undermining the text to preach our message.

C. Always preach redemptively and always with biblical integrity

It is possible to consistently handle the biblical text appropriately, using good hermeneutical principles that will hold up under the scrutiny of our listeners. And it is possible to consistently preach the redemptive message of God's grace for fallen sinners. We can do both at the same time. We must do both at the same time.

When we sacrifice biblical credibility to proclaim a redemptive message of God's grace, we are undermining our listener's trust in the communicative ability of God, and therefore by extension, in His grace too. Our listeners should not be scratching their heads trying to understand how we magically conjured up a message about Christ and the cross from a text that did not support the presentation we made. No matter how attractive that message may be, we are asking listeners to trust God's self-revelation while at the same time giving the impression that it cannot be trusted and needs our creative and inventive eisegesis in order to impose our message.

It is vital that we handle the text well, and that we carefully show how that specific text reveals, points to or sets up some aspect of God's redemptive grace that is ultimately to be found in Christ himself.

II. What is Redemptive Preaching?

A. Common Misconceptions of Redemptive or Christ-Centered Preaching

We are not here advocating either:

1. Allegorical Preaching – We are not looking to use allegory or analogy to generate an appearance of Christ in every passage that we preach.

2. Antinomian Preaching – We are also not saying that there is no place for instruction or clarification of moral expectation for believers. How the Law functions in the life of the believer is a larger subject in itself, but whether we hold to a "third use of the Law" theology or not, our goal is greater godliness, not greater godlessness. Redemptive preaching seeks to motivate greater life change, not excuse greater sinfulness.

B. A Short(ish) Definition of Redemptive Preaching

Since every passage is written in the context of a fallen world, to fallen people, as part of the self-revelation of God whose grace is the answer to sin, therefore it is possible to preach every passage redemptively. In every passage we can point to the fallenness of humanity and the graciousness of deity. In every passage we can show where it stands in relation to the grace of God revealed ultimately in the person of Christ.

When we preach redemptively we don't preach pressure on the listener, we preach the Person revealed to the listener. When we preach redemptively we preach a personal God who is gracious to the undeserving. This means that we are seeking to point to God's redemptive nature and God's redemptive plan. We are seeking to underline grace for the transformation of lives. Overtly or implicitly we are preaching Christ as the ultimate revelation of God's gracious redemptive plan.

C. Must Christ Always Be Mentioned in Redemptive Preaching?

Technically and theoretically the answer is no. It is possible to preach the graciousness of God in many passages where Christ is not overtly referenced. It is possible to show how God provides for those who cannot provide for themselves. However, while it may be technically appropriate to not mention Christ, it is worth asking why you would not do so if you could? Pastorally it seems wise to lead people to Christ whenever you can (assuming that you are careful not to undermine listeners' confidence in the Bible to do so).

Humans are not neutral. We do not receive preaching with impartiality. Fallen world gravity means that we always tend toward self-reliance. So the preacher will preach grace, but I will tend to hear law. I will tend to corrupt what I hear to make it about myself. Therefore why not be as overt with God's redemptive grace in Christ as you can be?

III. A Selection of Approaches for Redemptive Preaching

A. There are traditional approaches that work for some biblical texts:

1. Textual Approaches – the exposition of overt reference to Christ or his messianic work. This would include both Old Testament Christophanies (such as Joshua 5), Old Testament predictions (such as a Messianic Psalm), and New Testament fulfillment (such as a Gospel account or epistolary reference to Christ,etc.)

2. Typological Approaches – there are legitimate types of Christ referenced in the New Testament, however there is much debate over whether it is appropriate to multiply the typological particulars, and/or the typological patterns (e.g. Matthew 2's reference to Hosea 11:1 and God's repeated deliverance of His son from Egypt.)

> (Note: For a relatively brief but engaging presentation of Christ in the Old Testament, please see the first section in Peter Mead, *Pleased to Dwell: A Biblical Introduction to the Incarnation* (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2014).)

B. There are redemptive approaches useful for all texts

As we study any particular passage, we can consider which of these approaches is the best approach for determining a redemptive understanding of the passage:

1. **Redemptive-Historical** – this is a macro approach that identifies the place or function of a text in the broader redemptive history.

   a. It could be a positive or bridge text – events, patterns or persons advancing our understanding of God's redemptive plan (such as Adam, Melchizedek, Exodus, etc.)

   b. It could be a negative or dead-end text – events patterns or persons demonstrating a false hope for redemption by human means (such as the Law, the monarchy, etc.)

2. **Doctrinal** – this is a micro approach that explains and emphasizes a redemptive doctrine exemplified, stated or taught in the immediate text.

3. **Literary Motif** – this uses both micro-detail and macro-awareness to recognize an authorially intended literary motif within the text that pre-figures or echoes an aspect of Christ's redeeming work. For example, Abraham offering his only son whom he loved on Mt Moriah, and then God doing the same – Gen.22, John 3:16. Or Moses striking the rock to rescue the people, as Christ was struck to rescue his people – Num.14, 1Cor.10.

4. **Relational** – this micro approach identifies grace principles expressed in God's relational interactions with people. For instance His strength in their weakness, His faithfulness amidst their unfaithfulness, His forgiveness for sin, etc. This approach always directs us to the two first foundational questions – what do I see about the nature of God, and what do I see about the need of humanity? <u>This is the most frequent and important approach to use!</u>

C. There is therefore always a Christ connection:

Every passage will, by at least one of the approaches listed above, be:

  i. Predictive of the Work of Christ – all the direct predictions including Genesis 3:15; Genesis 12:1-2, 7; Deuteronomy 18; 2 Samuel 7:16, etc. (We find these in the Torah, in the books of history, the prophets and the Psalms – i.e. the whole Hebrew canon.

ii.   Preparatory for the Work of Christ – all the sacrificial system, the Law, the persistent human inadequacy and failure, meaning that we need a better prophet, a better king, a better deliverer, etc.

iii.   Reflective of the Work of Christ – the nature of God is consistent with the work of Christ in that he provides redemption (and humans consistently show that we need it!)

iv.   Resultant of the Work of Christ – the results of the work of Christ seen in concepts such as access to the throne of grace, the grace in which we now stand, no condemnation, recipients of the Spirit, etc.

Note, I am indebted to Bryan Chapell for teaching the substance of this material, which will be published in the 3rd edition of his book, *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Expected in 2017.