

On Reading and Believing the Old Testament
John 5:45-47, February 25th, 2024

Children, is there a space in your home you don't like? Maybe it's a closet, shed, or garage that's a bit spooky? My childhood home had a basement. And in the bowels of that basement was an unfinished utility room. It was dark & musty, illuminated by a single light bulb on a pull string. It had a cold cement floor and bare cinderblock walls. Exposed pipes, air-conditioning ducts, and electrical wires ran along the ceiling. The washer, dryer, & water heater made strange bumping and churning sounds in the darkness. The breaker box on the wall had a scary warning sticker. And against the back wall were piled suitcases, Christmas decorations, and other odds & ends. It was a strange old room filled with strange old things so... I stayed out.

We can sometimes feel the same way about the Old Testament. Compared to the New Testament, the Old can feel unfinished and dim. It's filled with strange old things like talking animals, flaming mountains, burnt offerings, feast days, holy wars, genealogies & geographies. *Do you ever scratch your head trying to make sense of the OT wondering how's all this fit with the NT & the good news of Jesus and his love & what it got to do with me? Are the OT pages of your Bible crisp, white, & unread? What do we do with the OT?* According to Christ in our passage this morning ***we must read & believe the OT because it is the foundation of the gospel.***

First, the OT is the foundational of the gospel because it ***reveals our need for Christ.*** This 5th chapter of John's gospel began with Jesus' healing of an invalid man on the Sabbath. But rather than sparking the Pharisees' faith in Christ, his miracle ignited their persecution because by it Jesus violated their manmade Sabbath traditions. Their opposition exploded into murderous rage when Jesus justified his actions by claiming to be the divine Son of God. Now after weeks of carefully working through Jesus' defense of his own messianic claim, we come to his closing arguement in which he flips the script & puts his accusers in the hot seat (**v45**).

Wait... Moses had been dead for centuries. *How can he accuse anybody? What's Jesus talking about?* He's talking about the 5 books of Moses, the Torah, which the Pharisees had memorized, fanatically studied & claimed to love. And the highest peak rising from the Pentateuchal plain was Mt. Sinai to which the liberated Hebrews came after their escape from Egypt; Mt. Sinai upon which God descended with a trumpet blast, thunder & lighting, smoke & fire to inscribe on stone tablets his own holy law with his own holy finger. These 10 commandments summarize God's own moral perfection and the holiness he deserves and demands from all mankind made in his image & for his glory. Moses accused these Pharisees because they had set their hope in Moses, that is, they set their hope in scaling Mt. Sinai by their law keeping & achieving the righteousness God required.

Since it was first scaled by Edmund Hillary and Tenzig Norgay on May 29th 1953, Mt. Everest has attracted mountaineers from all over, desperate to join the ranks of those who've seen the world form her peak. But for many, even with the most sophisticated technology, Everest is an unclimbable gauntlet of death. For 2 months climbers chase after the summit while facing the gravest dangers. Avalanches, rock slides, bottomless crevices, blizzards, frostbite, hypothermia, hypoxia, dehydration & altitude sickness have claimed the lives of some of the world's most skilled mountaineers. Thus, the road to Everest's 9,000m summit is paved with the frozen bodies of those who perished in pursuit of the prize; a grizzly monument of man's limitations.

So too, Mt. Sinai, the law of God, shows us not how high we can climb, but how far we've fallen short of the glory of God in our sin. God's law is a mirror in which we see not our own beauty but the leprous boils of our own wickedness. Augustine said, "If we have not the spirit of grace, the law comes only to convict and slay us." That means that before obeying God's law can be our joyous privilege as the children of God it must first shatter our pride, demolish our

sense of moral sufficiency, and drive us in desperation to Christ, beating our breast with the tax collector, crying “God be merciful to me a sinner!” Moses accused the Pharisees for trying to climb Mount Sinai to get to heaven. If you are doing the same thing this morning, if you are trying to make and keep yourself right with God by obeying his law, Moses accuses you too.

Recite. When Jesus was asked which of the commandments was greatest, he said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself” (Matt22:37-40). *Who among you would claim to perfectly love God? Who among you would claim to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself?* Our silence is an admission of guilt before God. You see, the OT teaches that you will never get to heaven by climbing Mt. Sinai. That’s why the mountain was on fire! That’s why any who touched it died! That’s why the Hebrews cried to Moses when he came down & read the law, “do not let God speak to us lest we die.” That’s why when Moses found the people worshipping the golden calf, he threw the 10 commandments down & broke them in pieces! B/c if the OT reveals one thing it’s that God is holy & I am not! I need a champion to keep God’s law for me. I need a Savior to rescue me from my sins & the hell I deserve which is why we must read & believe the OT...

For it reveals not only my need for Christ, ***the OT reveals Christ himself (46)***. Now correct me if I’m wrong, but I’ve never read the name of Jesus in the OT. *How then can Jesus say that Moses wrote of him?* If you’ve ever driven I95, chances are you’ve seen the crazy signs for South of the Border; a zany rest area located at halfway between NY & FL. The billboards start hundreds of miles out with big pictures illustrating bright promises like “unlimited fireworks,” or “world #1 mini golf.” One sign says, “Keep yelling kids, they’ll stop.” Another has an actual twenty footlong plastic hotdog above the words, “You never sausage a place.” Each sign has a mileage countdown to let travelers know it’s coming.

In the same way, the OT is filled with big bright signs pointing forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. There are pictures that illustrate the person & work of Christ. In Hebrews we read that the prophet Moses was a picture of Jesus. As Moses led God’s people out of their bondage to Pharoah in Egypt, so Christ came to free his people from the chains of their sin and the tyranny of Satan. The Sabbath was and is a picture of Jesus Christ, our soul’s oasis in whom we find rest and communion with God. The high priest was a picture of Jesus who alone can atone for our sins, intercede on our behalf before the Father, and make us clean. The paschal lamb was a picture Christ, the spotless lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world by offering himself upon the cross, that altar of divine justice, to bleed & die for our sins and satisfy the wrath of God. The tabernacle and temple where God made his glory to dwell are pictures of Jesus Christ, our Immanuel, “in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”

But God not only filled the OT with pictures of Jesus, he filled it with hundreds of prophetic promises so precise they could not have been born of human imagination. Centuries before the Son of God took on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, God promised that he would be the son of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and of the tribe of Judah. Through the prophets God promised Christ would be the heir of David’s royal throne, that he would be a Nazarene and go to Galilee; that he would be born of a virgin in the city of Bethlehem; that he would be anointed by the Spirit to proclaim good news to the poor, liberate the captives, give sight to the blind; that he would be betrayed by his friend for 30 pieces of silver, that he would be stricken, smitten and afflicted, that he would be scourged for the sins of his people, & crucified with criminals; that his hands and feet would be pierced but no bone broken; that he would be given gall to drink, that soldiers would cast lots for his clothes, that he would be buried in a rich man’s tomb only to rise from the dead and take his seat at the right hand of God.

That's why Jesus says believing Moses is foundational to believing Christ (**47**). Lk 24:25–27 “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures (OT) the things concerning himself...They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” You see friends, the good news is not good because it's new... it's good news because it is God's kept promise from of old! If our hearts are to burn within us, if our faith is to survive the hurricane force winds of life in a fallen world and bear fruit, then the roots of our faith must dig down deep into the rich black soil of the OT.

What would you say to someone who only read Tolkien's, Return of the King, or Lewis' Last Battle, or who only watched Return of the Jedi or Toy Story 4? You'd tell them they're just scratching the surface, there's so much more to the story, to go back to the beginning! In the same way we have to read the whole story of salvation beginning in Genesis 1:1 & seek to understand more fully & faithfully who Jesus was, why he came, and who we are that we stand in need of him. One of the unique features of Matthews gospel is he can't get a paragraph out without quoting an OT prophecy because he understood that savoring Christ rightly begins in the OT. So, as people and as a people we must diligently study the OT as it offers vital historical & theological context for the rise of the church, it reveals God's ways with man from of old, it unveils the hideous origin and depth of man's depravity, it teaches us that by faith we belong to an ancient people & a legacy that is bigger than each of our own personal experiences. The OT is living proof that God's people can't out-sin his mercy and that his love is steadfast. Through pictures and promises the OT teaches us to know, love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, the OT teaches us to read the new and the NT teaches us how to read the old. That's why we preach and teach the Old and New Testaments at TPC. That's why you, with God's help, persevere in reading the whole Bible, knowing that “all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable,” knowing that Christ is on every page, confessing with Phillip, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” (John 1:45). If the OT is daunting, pray and ask God to illuminate it before, during, and after you read it. Talk to your elders about starting a bible study. Find a brother or sister and read it and discuss it together... it can even be a dead brother or sister like MH or JC who still speak through their faithful commentaries. But whatever you do... don't stay out of it!

I stayed out of the utility room as a boy. But as I grew, I understood that this room was foundational to the rest of the house. The lights worked upstairs because of the wires down here. The sinks ran hot water upstairs because of the pipes down here. The home stood because it was built on the cinder blocks down here. And I also realized that the utility room had the best hiding places. And so when the children scattered, I would make my way down stairs, into the utility room, all the way to the back and I would hide among the folds of the hanging clothes with a smile on my face. So, may we hide ourselves in the sacred folds of the OT scriptures and men, women, and children of the book.