

## **Old Testament and Redemptive History, Continued**

Last time we talked about the New Testament use of the Old Testament. First I would like to pray before we start this lesson.

*Father, as we come to You at the beginning of this lesson, we do not do so in a perfunctory way. We realize that it is not appropriate for us to approach You in prayer as a mere exercise on our way to doing other things. Rather we approach You as the God of the universe who has gifted for Your church the revelation of Yourself. You have done so from the very inception of creation that even in the Fall You did not revoke Your revealed presence from Your people. But through time You have chosen and elected some to be agents of You, reflecting You to the world. We are thankful that we live in an era that is on this side of the supreme revelation and the incarnation of the Son of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We desire to worship Him in all that we do and in this lesson as well. In Your wonderful name we pray. Amen.*

When we finished last we were talking about the New Testament uses of the Old Testament, and I made the point that there are many different ways that the Old Testament uses the Old Testament. In doing so it keeps with the very spirit of the Old Testament itself. There is a whole area of study that is outside our providence here that has to do with the way that the Old Testament uses the Old Testament. For example, with the Law coming before the prophets the result is that you have the prophets using the Old Testament law. Prophets follow in sequence from one another; Haggai and Malachi were on the other end of a long string of Old Testament prophets. They pick up on sayings of previous prophets and use them in various ways too. The Old Testament uses the Old Testament. Of course Jewish people prior to the first century, throughout it, and later have rightly considered the Old Testament to be their Scriptures. In the process they have used the Old Testament both to consider how to live and to reflect on God and who He is. When we get to the time of the New Testament using the Old Testament we should not see this as something new. This was something that had long been done in Judaism up until that period. So when authors like John and Matthew speak into that context, they are speaking to people who are fully aware of some of the interpretive methods that they are using. The people are also fully interested and engaged in the way that they are employing the Old Testament to speak to the Messiah Jesus. We should not assume that this came out of nowhere. We already talked about the retelling of Old Testament story and the use of exemplary characters from the Old Testament, both as good examples and as bad examples.

Let us now talk about the moral law. If we look at Ephesians 6:1-3, we will see one use of the Old Testament Law. It says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise) that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.” That is a quotation from the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament. Here Paul actually takes one of the Ten Commandments and says that it instructs you in how you as parent and child should relate. Notice I did not say that this “still instructs you.” Some people assume that law ceased with Jesus, which is a definite overstatement. If you say that law ceased with Jesus it is almost as if you imply that it has no import in the Christian life. Yet Paul cites the Law itself as directly applicable to Christian behavior and to the relationships between children and parents. There we have the Old Testament moral law being used as an illustration.

Look also at Romans 13:8-10, which says, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not

murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law." There he quotes the Ten Commandments and another commandment from Leviticus. In doing so, Paul is not only indebted to the Old Testament but also to Jesus Himself. Jesus made statements about the greatest commandments in the Old Testament: to love the Lord your God, and the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself. We see Paul picking up on the Old Testament and on the teachings of Jesus. Like Jesus, he says that the Law is applicable to our relationships with one another. We see a similar thing in James 2:11.

On the other hand, if one reads through Galatians, there are all sorts of aspects of the Law that Christians do not do anymore. You are not required to circumcise your children, to avoid pork, to only eat with Christians, or to avoid Gentile pagans. These expressions of the Law do not apply anymore. So much so that when Paul starts talking about the nature of the Law, he speaks of it as if it was of use to Christians in bringing them to Christ in a way that speaks to the Law as being the *pedagogue*, the one who leads you from your home to the place of instruction. That is what the Law does for Paul, and he even speaks in Romans 10 of "the end of the law." The question is what the end of the Law is there. It is a very complex question.

We also saw Jesus say that though He does not abolish the Law He fulfills it. There have been many books written about the Law and the relationship of the Christian to it. There is a long-held distinction that comes out of the Reformed tradition that speaks of three different uses of the Law. I want you to be aware of these because it can help you synthesize your relationship as a Christian to the Mosaic Law.

The civil use of the Law, known as *usus civilis*, restrains sin and promotes righteousness in society. The idea of the civil law is that without law, people, being sinful, would trample all over one another. Throughout the ages there has been law, but God graciously gave to His people in the Mosaic legislation laws that constrain behavior in society. That can serve as a model—though we have to be careful—of some of the ways that we should restrain similar sin in society. There is also a very careful teaching within the Reformed tradition that the civil use of the law does not continue in all of its force. All of the use within the social relationships of Israel need not continue into the present period. But the principles from that form the basis for civil society. Certainly when God gave the Mosaic Law it had a proper use in Israel to restrain sin and promote righteousness in society.

The next use of the law is the conviction of sin, known as the *usus pedagogicus*. This comes directly from the concept that you have in Galatians that the Law is our *pedagogue* and leads us to Christ. In this regard the Law brings humans to an awareness of sin. You see this use of the Law especially applied in Galatians and Romans to express that the Law convicts us of our sins so that we know we need Christ.

Then in the Reformed tradition, from which Presbyterianism springs, there is also what is known as the third use of the law. It is the Law as rule of life, known as *usus didacticus*. It reminds believers of duties and leads them in the way of life everlasting. It instructs us in the kind of righteousness that God has always expected from His people.

Let me illustrate that by returning to a text that we looked at earlier. This has a very strong interpretative matrix that could be very useful. We looked at Matthew 5 and the teaching of Jesus, and He says, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." Then He describes the kind of righteousness that is required afterward. No longer does the Law merely restrain us in civil action. "You shall not murder" does not just have to do with when you

bring a murderer to the court. It also speaks to our internal state of anger, and any time we are angry with someone else in a wrong way, we murder him or her in our hearts. That is what Jesus teaches. This takes an outward civil responsibility and turns it in on us to an internal responsibility.

In the middle of this we should have two reactions. One is that we should say, "I am a sinful wretch because undoubtedly I have been so angry with people in the past that effectively I have infringed on the kind of righteousness that Jesus our Savior requires." That is conviction of sin. At the same time it instructs us into the kind of people that we ought to be. It does not just instruct in terms of our civil legislation with one another; certainly we should legislate against murder. But we should also, as God's people now redeemed by the cross, live holy lives before Him in such a way that we "put off anger." I personally struggle in this area quite a bit. The Law accomplishes three purposes right there. It says that you cannot kill someone, and if you do kill someone there should be ramifications. Second, it convicts us of sin because it makes us aware of just how sinful we are. We see our need for salvation and the cross. Third, it instructs us in how we ought to live as God's new people.

We could do this same thing if we looked at Jesus' discussion about adultery and lust, about making oaths, or about loving your neighbor. All of these things instruct us in multiple ways. If we apply the three uses of the Law it makes a lot more sense. Some have wanted to say that this part of the Sermon on the Mount is the old dispensation of the Law. They say it is no longer applicable in the new dispensation of grace because it demands too much righteousness from us. Some people in the Reformed camp say that the statement, "Your righteousness must pass that of the Pharisees," is too much. They say that Jesus is trying to lay down such a difficult law that it just convicts of sin and you just turn to Christ. I think that is too extreme as well. If you see that there are multiple things going on in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Old Testament Law itself, then you will recognize that all of these dimensions are important in the Christian life. All of them are picked up on in the New Testament, the civil least of all because they are not making civil law in the New Testament.

Jesus makes the statement, "Your righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees." Later in Matthew 5 the Pharisees asked under what civil cases they should bring someone to court. You see that the civil use of the Law is assumed here. Jesus said, "Your righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees," which convicts us of sin. If we were Pharisees it would have been very difficult to consider that we had kept the Law. The Pharisees were very strict in many respects. Even then we might have gotten away with thinking that we had never murdered anyone because we had not actually pulled the trigger. But Jesus now says that anger is worse, so that convicts of sin. In that sense the surpassing of the righteousness of the Pharisees makes us realize how much more sinful we are than we thought we were. On the other hand, He would then come to you as a Christian and say that your righteousness before the Lord also needs to exceed that of the Pharisees. Internally you really should not commit that sin of anger or lust. The Law is not able to make you do what it requires. It is not able to make you holy or live up to its standard. The Law just establishes the standard.

Paul describes the Law as holy because it is a good and gracious gift from God. But the Law does not give us the ability to keep it. Romans 6 and 8 talk about the Spirit of God, who lives in us and is able to make it so that we as Christians have any hope of living a holy life before the Lord. That is not our means of salvation, but it is our means of giving thanks to the Lord and honoring Him in a way that is truly holy in our lives. It does not become our means to salvation; following the Law is what comes after salvation. It is very important that the third use of the Law does not say that it makes them live holy lives. It reminds believers of duties and instructs them in the way of life.

In other writings on the third use of the Law, the word that comes up again and again is that it “instructs” us. As a Christian you want to be God’s child and live holy in a way that honors Him. You need to know that the kind of anger that you and I and others struggle with is wrong. We need to constantly return again and again to God in repentance, asking His forgiveness and the forgiveness of the person whom we have wronged. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to work in us to change us. So the third use of the Law is one of instruction.

We can love the Law because it frees us to see our need for Christ. But Psalm 119 reminds us that it also gives us good and true instruction on how we ought to live. We should love it for that reason as well. The Law works in two ways. It convicts us of sin, but it also shows us the standard of righteousness that, through the Holy Spirit, we seek to obtain in this life through our sanctification. We would all recognize as Christians that we are not going to attain that standard of perfection in our lives today. That is our hope of glorification with the Lord, that when we go to be with the Lord, He will work in us in a way that we can attain perfection. But we do not stop trying in the meantime. A quick statement of all of that is Ephesians 2:8-10. This is a very famous statement that says, “It is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works that no one should boast.” Our works cannot bring us to God; we need grace because we are convicted of our sinfulness. Previously in Ephesians 2 Paul has just convicted people of their sin. He showed them that the Law shows them that they are sinful. They are “dead in their trespasses and sins.” Ephesians 3:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” It is God working in us to enable us to do the works that He prepared beforehand that we should do. We know what those are partly because Scripture instructs us in that regard.

The Scripture describes our righteousness as filthy rags, and that is because the Law convicts us of sin. When we thought we were doing fine (I have not killed anyone or committed adultery), the Law comes back to us and reminds us there is an internal state beyond that. The Old Testament says to love your neighbor, which should have been convicting enough. But then Jesus brings the Law to even more fulfillment by saying that murder and adultery are matters of the heart. You then see how filthy our supposed righteousness is. On our own merit, we do not deserve to be in the kingdom of God. That is one level of righteousness. The other aspect is that Christians are still called to be saints. We are called saints positionally, but we are called to sanctification as well. We are called to live holy lives unto our Lord. We cannot do so in our own strength, and we cannot do so in a way of achieving our salvation. We only do so as a response to God through the Holy Spirit for His saving work in Jesus. The Law displays the character of God, and thus it displays the character of people who are being recreated into His image. It shows the glory of God in His righteousness and the way that we should seek to glorify Him by imaging Him.

The fruit of faith is intended in the third use of the Law. The Law is not the fruit of faith, but the holiness that the Law points to is the fruit of faith. The Law instructs us as to what that holiness looks like. Then the Spirit enables us to have that fruit. It is the “fruit of the Spirit” that the Spirit provides the ability for us to have.

There is a lot more that we can say about the Law, but I wanted to bring you into that level of discussion. If you have that threefold understanding, then you can appreciate your Old Testament more. There now becomes motive for rereading Leviticus. It actually gives us moral instruction, not that it means that you need to avoid eating shellfish. But you have to understand the internal moral instruction that is going on in that legislation. God’s people were called to be a separate people who maintained a

level of purity that was not found in the people around them. That instructs us to that regard. There is a lot more complexity here, but I will leave it to some of my Old Testament colleagues to talk about some of those. That is just a start, and it helps us see the different uses of the Law in the New Testament. Paul did not leave aside the Law even though he says that it is our *pedagogue*. He then comes back to it and instructs us that we shall not murder or commit adultery, and we shall love our neighbor. He picks up on the third use of the Law there.

Let me quickly go through a few more things. Old Testament liturgy is picked up in New Testament praise. In Romans 11 Paul finishes this amazing discussion of the divine plan of God that is so intricate and complex in Romans 9-11 that at the end he has to say, "Oh, the depth and the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways!" Then he cannot help but invoke the Psalms when he says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given back that it might be paid back to him again?" In doing so he is specifically quoting the Old Testament Psalter in a way to bring praise to God. In a New Testament age, the Old Testament provides a means of liturgical praise of God.

Another use of Old Testament Law in the New Testament is that of prophecy. Prophecy works in a couple of different respects. We looked at how prophecy is fulfilled in Matthew, but it is done so in a way that is a bit surprising. "Out of Egypt I have called my Son." Jesus is the true Israel. Sometimes when we approach a prophetic text that refers to Jesus or the church, we have to realize that the logic is a little bit more complex in the citation of it than you or I would have initially thought.

Another example of this is in Acts 2:17 and following. This is the first major sermon that we have reported from Peter. It is based on several citations of the Old Testament, three in particular. A couple of them go to display that Jesus, the Messiah, was to be resurrected. Verse 25 says, "For David says of him, 'I was also beholding the Lord in my presence, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue exalted; moreover my flesh also will abide in hope because you will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow your holy one to see decay. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'" The point is that David said, "My soul will not be abandoned to Hades." Peter quickly says, Brothers, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that his tomb is with us to this day." His skeleton is rotting in a grave, so this psalm cannot be applied to him in a full way. In terms of its internal logic, this was not typically deemed to be a Messianic prediction. But Peter sees it as a prophetic text because it is a psalm of David. The Messiah is great David's greater Son. What David saw only in a shadowy way is exemplified in the resurrection of Christ, whose soul is not abandoned to Hades and whose body is not undergoing decay. You see this prophetic use of Scripture. It is not a clear Messianic prediction that is clearly talking about Jesus. This is about David, but it cannot be fully about David. It has to be about the Messiah, therefore it is about Jesus. You have to go through a few intervening steps before you come to our Lord.

This is the prophetic use of Scripture. We could talk about this a lot more. The prophetic use of Scripture is often in a way that is not how we deem prophecy to work. We deem prophecy to be a clear description of several points that refer to one person. You just know that it has a checklist that matches up with something. Often prophecy works in a much more sophisticated way in the mind of God, though.

An illustration was given to me by one of my teachers, Willem Vangemeren, who is a fantastic biblical theologian. He wrote a book called *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, and he has also written a fine book describing the story of the Old and New Testaments called *The Progress of Redemption*. He is Dutch,

which means that he loves flowers! He likes to describe the unfolding of the prophetic story as a rose. He has a wonderful garden, even in Chicago where the weather is terrible. He planted many roses in his back yard. If you put the seed in the ground, slowly the flower comes up, and you know it is going to be a rose because that is what you planted. But you do not know if it is going to suddenly go to the right or left, or where the leaves are going to be. You might not even be sure of the color of the rose. Certainly when it forms, one of the things that makes a flower so beautiful is that you look at it, and there is such sophistication to its beauty. There is a predictableness to it; you can recognize that it is a rose. But the way that it continues to unfold is not wholly predictable. That is what makes a flower so beautiful. Vangemeren uses that picture to describe Old Testament prophecy. You know it speaks of the Messiah, but you do not know exactly until after the fact when you see the beauty and the glory of what that Messiah looks like. That is his illustration of Old Testament prophecy, and there is profound insight there. No one would have applied this psalm to the Messiah and said He was going to be resurrected, come back to His people, and proclaim to them that they are going to need to stay on the earth for thousands of years, proclaiming His glory until He finally returns. But from the back end of things, we can look back on it and see the glory of that promise now in its fulfillment.

There is also allegory in the New Testament in one place. In Galatians 4 is an allegorical use of the story of Sarah and Hagar, representing two different kinds of approaches to God. We have to acknowledge three things about this. First, there were some Jewish people who engaged in allegorical interpretation in the first century. Philo did this all the time. It was an interpretive method that was present in Paul's day. Paul was extremely restrained in his use of allegory, and he only uses it in this one place. Second, in using allegory he is probably meeting his opponents in the very kind of argumentation that they themselves might have employed. Third, we need to be very careful in assuming that we can approach the Old Testament in an allegorical fashion today. I acknowledge that in one place the New Testament uses the Old Testament in an allegorical way. It takes people, and instead of them representing literal people, they suddenly become huge images of things in the story that you had no notion they would image. For Sarah and Hagar it is grace versus law. It is done, but it is restrained. We need to be very restrained and skeptical of that kind of usage in our own exegesis. Some of you will immediately track with what I am saying, and some of you might disagree.

Finally, typology is a use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. Typology is a sophisticated way of seeing the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. Look at Matthew 12:39-40, where Jesus says, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The story of Jonah is in the book of Jonah, and it has a literal referent. It literally refers to a man in a whale. There might be something beyond that in terms of its redemptive import. It images that even a prophet of God may be called to a time of being captivated by death itself before he is released in God's redemptive plan. Jesus does not apply the literal referent, but He applies the typological meaning of it to Himself. That is how typology works, but note several things about it.

First, I am not changing the literal referent of the original Old Testament story. The book of Jonah still involves a guy in a whale. I am not saying that Jonah is Jesus. I am saying that this shows one of the redemptive ways that God works with His prophets. That is what is applicable to Jesus. One can look at the Old Testament law and sacrifices in this regard as it is done in Hebrews. Hebrews describes the Day of Atonement, and Jesus is the fulfillment of that day. The literal referent of the Day of Atonement was a guy in a temple presenting sacrifices as God required. That was literally what the Old Testament was talking about. The author of Hebrews describes this as a mere shadow of the heavenly reality, which is the heavenly temple and sacrifice. It is that which Jesus accomplishes. We need to be very careful about

saying Jesus is the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament. The Day of Atonement has a literal reference. Jesus is the Day of Atonement only insofar as He accomplishes most fully what this in God's redemptive plan entails. Typology is used multiple times in the New Testament. I am careful to read Jesus back into the Old Testament, but I see the Old Testament setting up patterns of thinking for the people of God so that when Jesus comes, He fulfills those patterns of thinking in a way that shocks us all.

When we look at typology we see the Old Testament as setting up patterns of thinking. How does God work in the world? The New Testament becomes the fulfillment of that because it takes all of those to a completely different level with Jesus. That does not permit us to go back to the story of Jonah and read everything about Jesus into the life of Jonah. "Being thrown into the water was like Jesus being crucified, his time in whale was like the time that Jesus is "in Hades," when he is spit out is like the resurrection, and then he goes off and proclaims..." People try and make these statements. But there are discontinuous aspects there too. Jonah got really mad when Nineveh repented, but Jesus does not do that. There is so much discontinuity. All Jesus is saying is that sometimes the prophet is called to a period of captivity. He would undergo a similar captivity of His body, but then He would be resurrected. We dare not apply more of Jonah's life to Jesus because Jesus did not sanction that. Nor do we apply more of Jesus' life to Jonah.

Let us look at Matthew 27:46, which is when Jesus is suffering on the cross. He has been suffering on the cross for at least three hours by that point. It says, "About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" On the one hand we can say that this is a cry of despair in the midst of suffering. On the other hand people have found in this a spiritual separation of the second person of the Trinity from the first person of the Trinity. That is possible, and I will let the theologians debate all that. But it is not overt that that is what is going on there. There is a third possibility that is clearly going on.

Turn also to Psalm 22, which begins, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I have no rest. Yet you are holy, O you who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried out, and they were delivered. In you they trusted and were not disappointed. But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by men. All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip; they wag the head, saying, 'Commit yourself to the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him because he delights in him!'"

In a sense the whole thing is about Jesus. It all describes different aspects of what happened to Jesus. Verse 16 says, "For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet—I can count all my bones—they look, they stare at me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." When Jesus quotes David in Psalm 22 from the cross, great David's greater Son is suspended on a cross, and all of this is being fulfilled in Him in that moment. He provides an interpretive matrix for His followers to understand who He is. The Son of Man, the Messiah, the Son of David, had to suffer in such a way. In the midst of all of this is the constant refrain that "I will tell of your name to my brothers," "for he has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of his afflicted, neither has he hidden his face from him, but when he cried to him for help he heard." So you get a hope as well in the midst of Psalm 22 that it will not end in death. So is the case with Jesus.

Jesus makes a New Testament use of the Old Testament there. He instructs His followers in how to frame His death as the Messiah in light of the cross. At this stage, as far as I can tell in first-century

Judaism, no Jewish expectation of the Messiah had Him going to a means of death let alone to the cross and crucifixion. His disciples needed a way of understanding this as Messianic fulfillment in a way that no one else in His day would have understood it.

One of the last things He does on the cross for His disciples is give them a way of understanding what was going on. That is not to say that that is the only place in the Old Testament where the suffering and death of the Messiah is mentioned. Isaiah 52 and 53 provide an even fuller expression of the kinds of suffering that the afflicted one will endure for our sakes. "He was afflicted for our sakes; for our stripes he was healed." That also is very much understood as referring to the Messiah from the standpoint of Christians looking back on the cross. It is repeatedly used in the New Testament.

There are various Old Testament images that can refer to the death of Jesus. The last one I want to look at is in Deuteronomy 21, which we covered a few lessons ago. It says, "Cursed of God is the one hung on a tree." "Cursed by God" is how Paul understands it in Galatians 3. He understands that the curse that Jesus bore while suspended on the tree, the cross, is the very curse of our sins that He takes upon Himself.

There are three major texts from the Old Testament that provide interpretive matrices for understanding who Jesus is. We went through that quickly, but I hope that if you ponder that some more you can see just how important these texts are. I encourage you to go back and read through Psalm 22 and the servant's song that begins in Isaiah 52 and goes through Isaiah 53. See the aspects of the suffering of the Messiah, who is the true servant of God and also the hope of life and resurrection.

In keeping with what Peter says about the prophets, they are borne along by the Holy Spirit. There is a sense in which they see what is going to happen, but they do not see it clearly. It is as if there is a fog. They can make out images because those images have been revealed by God. The fullest and clearest understanding of those is not given to them. I caution us again that we need to be careful not to say that we can see through that fog more clearly unless it is specifically revealed to us in the New Testament itself. That is why I say I am restrained in typology to the types that the New Testament authors themselves mention. They see them clearly, and they do so in a revealed fashion. I might be willing to speculate about other texts and what they mean, but I put it in the category of speculation. I do not have the divine light of revelation to clearly tell me that that is a type.

Let us talk about Jesus for a few minutes in this lesson, and we will talk more about this next time. According to our diagram, we have an author talking to an audience in a cultural framework, drawing explicitly on the Old Testament and on Jesus. For the last 200 years of scholarship there has been the question of what we know about the historical Jesus. The question has been asked, and I do not think it is inherently a wrong question: do the Gospels present an accurate portrayal of Jesus? Certainly we would all recognize that the Gospels do not present a complete picture of Jesus. We only get certain slices of a few years of Jesus' life. People have long wanted to know more about Jesus and go beyond the Gospels. Another aspect of the Gospels is that they present four parallel narratives, but in doing so they bring up instances that are in one Gospel but not the other. Naturally we want to try to lay out a chronology of Jesus' life as it historically happened. But the question is how we would move those pieces around so they all fit together in a natural chronology. In both of those respects, this idea for looking at who the historical Jesus is has some reason and rationality to it. It is not inherently wrong.

The quest for the historical Jesus has been combined with a high level of skepticism as to the degree to which we can actually get to know who Jesus was historically. This is centered around a skepticism

about the Gospels. For example, you and I live in the twenty-first century. We are an enlightened group of people. Just think of the advances that have happened in science in the last 400 to 500 years. We are at a forefront of knowing so much scientifically about our world. We know, for instance, that all things in this world happen via some form of cause and effect. And that means that things do not just happen out of nowhere as if there is no explanatory cause. One expects a series of natural events leading up to natural events. In other words, you and I do not expect to see miracles on a daily basis. If you get sick you take and aspirin. You go to the doctor and take an antibiotic. You do not suddenly expect to be healed. There might be some who say, "I expect God to heal me," and I do too. But describing the society that is around us, science has such explanatory force that miracles cannot happen. Science has been around for several centuries. Two hundred years ago people thought they were in the "heyday of science," and it was explaining so much about the nature around them. They approached the Gospels and read that Jesus walks on water. That does not happen physically! There is not natural physical cause that lets Him walk on water. It has been suggested by some commentators, including William Barclay, that there was really a sandbar under His feet that people did not see. But if you look at the Gospels, they are full of miracles. We do not believe in miracles anymore.

Second, if you look at the Gospels, there are times when they present different stories of Jesus' life, but sometimes these stories seem somewhat at odds with one another. For instance, in the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) Jesus cleanses a temple at the end of His ministry. It makes the Pharisees and others so mad that they seek to put Him to death. They were looking before that, but they were looking all the more afterward. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus cleanses the temple toward the end of His ministry. But in the beginning of the Gospel of John, it is one of the first things Jesus does. Then He goes to Jerusalem several times after that, and there is no cleansing later. People will point out that there are tensions between the chronologies, so they say that somebody got it wrong. Therefore they say you cannot trust the Gospels as accurate historical accounts. How do you go about determining what is historical and what is not historical in the Gospels in order to understand who the historical Jesus is?

That is the Jesus Seminar that some of you may have heard about. Every year now for the last several years, right before Easter, it is on the front page of *Time* and *Newsweek*; they talk about who Jesus is. We need to understand the reason people talk in those terms, and we need to have an articulate response. We cannot just say, "I believe in miracles; I think the Gospels are right." You cannot speak to this culture and this society unless you are able to articulate a response about these things. We will talk about this next time.