

JOSEPH

AND THE GOSPEL OF MANY COLORS

READING AN OLD STORY IN A NEW WAY

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INTRODUCTION

At first glance, this book may seem incongruent with what I've written in the past. I assure you it is not. This book is firmly rooted in two ideas that have always motivated my ministry and writing. First, this book is rooted in biblical exposition. Like my first two books, *The Ever-Loving Truth* and *Family Driven Faith*, this book is an extended exposition of a specific portion of Scripture. We serve a God who speaks. More specifically, God has spoken to us through his Word. There is no higher pursuit for those of us who love and serve God than to know and proclaim that which he has spoken. This is precisely what *The Gospel of Many Colors* is all about.

Another aspect of this book that is congruent with my previous work is that it was born out of the synergy between church and home. If *Family Shepherds* was a practical expansion of my previous works, then this book is an even more specific and practical expansion of *Family Shepherds*. Here I am answering the question, how do we teach the Bible in practical, meaningful ways? The journey that resulted in this work involved answering that question in both the church and the home.

LET'S PREACH THROUGH GENESIS

First, the leaders of our church decided to teach through Genesis in our pulpit ministry. As Pastor of Preaching, it was my responsibility to do

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an analysis and overview of the book, divide it into teaching segments, and assign passages among the elders. In preparation for doing so, I read through the book of Genesis again in a single sitting. I was amazed at how much I gleaned just from doing this. I was familiar with the book; I had studied it, read it, quoted from it, even memorized from it. However, it is always eye-opening to read through a book of the Bible from front to back.

We then had to divide the book. This is where things really began to develop. Since Genesis has fifty chapters, we would either have to devote several years to teaching through it or divide it into major segments with intermittent breaks. We chose the latter. We decided on four sections: Genesis 1–11 (creation/cosmology/worldview); Genesis 12–22 (the life of Abraham); Genesis 23–36 (Isaac and Jacob); Genesis 37–50 (the life of Joseph and beyond).

This was the first time I delved deeply into the life of Joseph. Of course, I was familiar with, and thought fondly of, Joseph's character. However, I had never dealt seriously with other questions surrounding this biblical hero. What were the main events in his story? Who were the main characters? What was the main message? These questions and others led me to realize a truth that became the thesis upon which this book is based: the life of Joseph isn't really about Joseph at all! Moses was uncovering something far more significant in this section of the Genesis narrative.

Second, since we were dividing the book into four segments, we planned to leave Genesis intermittently to preach from New Testament books. This led to an unexpected blessing. As we preached through large swaths of the New Testament (for example, the Sermon on the Mount, 1 John, and sections of Romans), it became more and more obvious that (1) Genesis was indeed foundational to biblical theology, systematic theology, and Christian cosmology/worldview; and (2) the New Testament writers had much to offer in terms of interpreting Genesis.

Adam, Noah, and Abraham are mentioned throughout the New Testament, and those mentions are crucial to understanding both the significance of the book of Genesis and what is actually significant *in*

the book of Genesis. I discovered the paltry number of references to Joseph in the New Testament and found myself asking, “How could such a beloved biblical character be such a minor player in the eyes of the New Testament writers?” Of course, the New Testament writers hadn’t missed something, but had I? Had I been guilty of making more of Joseph and his story than the Bible intended?

Finally, in the midst of all of this, I decided to teach through Genesis during our family worship time at home. Each evening we opened the pages of this fascinating book and walked step-by-step through the entire thing. It took us several months, and the results were astounding.

It was this final leg in the journey that helped me put all the pieces together. Here, sitting in front of my children (ranging in age from newborn late teens), I had to figure out how to present the message of Genesis in ways both simple and profound. I had to answer probing questions from young adults and satisfy the curiosity of little children. Why did Adam eat the fruit? Why did Noah get drunk? Why did Abraham give his wife away? Why did he commit adultery? Why did Isaac love one of his boys more than the other? And on and on!

It didn’t take long to realize that the book of Genesis was not just a collection of character studies designed to blaze the paths for seekers of holiness. I couldn’t just point to the good characters and say, “Be like him,” and to the bad characters and warn, “Don’t be like him.” They were all flawed and in desperate need of redemption—just like my children and me, and just like my fellow church members and me. And there it was—I not only knew how to approach Genesis in family worship; I knew how to approach it in general. Studying the book of Genesis with my family was the final piece that caused the life of Joseph to come into clear focus. I knew where he fit in the overall structure of the book of Genesis. I knew where he fit in the scope of redemptive history. I knew where he fit in the context of a gospel-centered approach to teaching and preaching, both in the church and in the home.

The next several months were filled with rich, fruitful times of family worship at home and corporate worship at church. My family and I fell in love with the book of Genesis, as did our church family. It was

as though someone had turned the lights on and we could all see what had been there all along.

Soon I began to teach on the life of Joseph in other settings. I watched the same thing happen abroad that I had seen at home. People were seeing Joseph, and the book of Genesis, in a new light. Not because of some special revelation or “new teaching” that had come along, but because of what had been there all along. After years and years of moralistic character studies, people found a gospel-centered approach to this familiar narrative refreshing, liberating, and convicting.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

This is not a book of sermons. I have not collected my sermons on the life of Joseph and edited them into book form. In fact, because of the nature of our church’s team teaching model, I didn’t have the privilege of preaching all the messages on Joseph. Moreover, much of what has developed into this book came *after* our series on Genesis was completed. Like any preacher who practices systematic exposition will tell you, the time you feel most prepared to start preaching through a book is when you’ve just finished doing so. It is only then that you are able to see the big picture and the interconnectedness of the text as a whole.

This is not a commentary on Genesis 37–50. My goal here was not to provide technical or scholarly insights on this portion of the Genesis narrative. I lack both the expertise and the inclination to accomplish such a task. I am neither an Old Testament scholar nor a Hebrew expert. Plenty of quality commentaries are out there written by men far more qualified than I, and I commend them to you (see the bibliography).

In fact, you will find that I have not even included many notes from commentaries or other sources. That is by design. My goal was not to present the results of having combed through mountains of material. I want the reader to grasp the significance of a careful reading of the text. This is about observation. This is something we all can and should do.

This book is also not an allegory of the life of Joseph. There is

much talk about Christ-centered preaching, and I am glad to see it. However, the response from many Evangelical circles is skepticism. Repeatedly, I have faced questions like, “Does preaching Christ in every passage mean allegorizing the text?” And again, “Aren’t you Christ-centered preachers ignoring the grammatical/historical aspects of the text?” Let me say that these are legitimate concerns. Christocentrism done poorly is as bad if not worse than moralism, as antinomianism is no better than legalism.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS

My goal in this book was not to find Christ behind every rock. It was, however, to be mindful of the gospel at every turn. The only character worth exalting in Scripture is the character of Christ. Anything we see in the character of another is only praiseworthy to the degree that it reflects the character of Christ. The Bible is not a book of character studies; it is a book of redemption. Joseph is a link in the chain of redemption. Therefore, reading and interpreting the life of Joseph, if done right, will exalt God’s redemptive work. It is my sincere hope that this is precisely what this book does.

THE LORD OF THE STORY

Joseph is one of the most beloved characters in the Bible. His story reads like a prime-time special! Jealousy, sibling rivalry, murder plot, betrayal, suffering, deepening despair, apparent deliverance that does not come, all followed by a dramatic turn of events and triumphant ascension. And all that before reunion and restoration! Hollywood wishes it could write stories like that.

Ironically, it is the dramatic nature of Joseph's story, coupled with our addiction to heroic character arcs and story lines, that make it difficult to interpret this well-worn narrative properly. Our tendency is to look at the story in isolation as though it were one of Aesop's fables with a moral at the end: "Let 'em hate you. If you're faithful, you'll end up rich, powerful, and vindicated." However, this interpretation not only misses the mark, it also perverts the very message of the narrative in particular, and the Bible in general. Joseph is not a mere example of what awaits us if we're "good enough." His story, like every story in the Bible, is part of the broader redemptive narrative designed to cause us to recognize the glory of our great God.

A LETTER FROM A JEWESS

I've told this story before, but it bears repeating. My "aha moment" as it relates to preaching the gospel from all of Scripture came about seven years ago when I got a letter from a Jewish woman. This was not an

e-mail, a Facebook message, or a Tweet; this was a letter. You know: those things people don't have time to write anymore.

The woman had heard a sermon I preached on an Old Testament passage and was absolutely moved; she was so moved that she felt the need to write me a letter. As I read the letter, I could tell that she was pleasantly surprised by the sermon. As a Conservative Jew, she loved the Bible and was grateful to hear it taught, but she never thought she could get so much out of a message preached by a Gentile.

As I read her letter, my eyes filled with tears. However, these were not tears of joy because the Lord had used my sermon in the life of a Jew. On the contrary, these were tears of horror and shame! As I read her words, all I could think of were Paul's words: "But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23–24). So why wasn't my message a "stumbling block" to this Jew? Was it because she was "being saved"? No. It was because *I had not preached Christ!*

I had preached a verse-by-verse, expository message from an Old Testament passage, but I hadn't preached the gospel. And this was not unusual! I was steeped in an expository tradition that was so concerned with the "historical/grammatical" exegesis of texts that it became "atomistic" in its execution. Not wanting to wander from my text, I would force myself to "dig deep" and serve up the best, richest morsels I could find. If the passage was "evangelistic," my message was evangelistic. If the text was "discipleship" oriented; then so was my message. If the text was about practical matters, I did not want to "spiritualize" it and make it about something else. I wanted to be "true to the text" no matter what.

The result was Christless moralism: sermons that wouldn't even cut to the heart of one who has rejected Christ in favor of the Law, but instead affirmed them in their horrific error. And there I sat holding the evidence in my hands. Something had to change . . . but how? Did I have to give up exposition? Did I have to avoid Old Testament narrative? What was I to do?

The first thing I had to do was come face-to-face with my failure. I had to be honest about what I was doing, and why.

THE MORASS OF MORALISM

In his book *Soul Searching*, Christian Smith identifies the overarching theological perspective plaguing the religious lives of America's young people as "Moralistic, Therapeutic Deism."¹ This belief is characterized by five major tenets. First, there is a God who created the world. Second, God wants us to be good (as is common to all religions). Third, the main goal in life is to be happy and feel good about one's self. Fourth, God does not need to be particularly involved in our lives unless we need something. Fifth, good people go to heaven when they die.²

A quick glance at this list reveals that this worldview dominates not only the spiritual lives of teens; this thinking is ubiquitous! As a result, it becomes natural to look at the Bible as no more than a guide to morality. As a preacher, a parent, an American, and a Christian, I fight this same tendency. My church is filled with sinners; I need to preach morality. My children are disobedient; I need to preach morality. America is going to hell in a handbasket; the church hasn't done its job . . . preaching morality. I need to be a better Christian; I need to listen to someone preaching morality. We've replaced the Beatles' famous refrain, "All You Need Is Love" with "All You Need Is Morality."

As a result, we read the Bible in search of morals. Moreover, we become accustomed to—even desirous of—preaching that is moralistic. This, in turn, leads to positive feedback for preachers and teachers who emphasize moralism, which of course leads to more moralistic preaching.

If you are familiar with the story of Joseph at all, you probably think about it in moralistic categories. As a result, you see the utility of the passages in their ability to motivate believers to do better and to show unbelievers the benefits of serving God. And if you're like me, you've rarely, if ever, thought about the gospel-centered/redemptive-historic significance of the narrative. Instead, we tend to be lead by several pieces of low-hanging fruit.

The first reason we tend to revert to moralism is the fact that God’s law “is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). This, however, does not mean that the way we use the law is always good:

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. (1 Tim. 1:8–11)

Thus, when we use the law as a blunt instrument designed to reveal sin, we are safe. However, when we try to use it as a scalpel to circumcise the heart, we miss the mark.

A second temptation to an overreliance on moralism is the prevalence of sin. Of course, sin has *always* been prevalent. However, as we watch the news from day to day, we are bombarded with horrific examples of man’s inhumanity to man. We see the picture of moral degradation described in Romans 1 in high definition clarity. And a love for the law of God coupled with the bombardment of the sinful culture around us often leads to moralistic responses. “We just need to put prayer back in schools.” Or, “None of this would happen if Christians would just vote like the Bible tells them to.”

Not only do we hear these types of responses all the time; we offer them ourselves. It is as though we grow weary of the gospel. It sounds too redundant to remind my children of their need for Christ; they just need to “stop doing that!” We don’t have time to share the gospel with people around us. We do, however, have time to say, “That’s wrong.” It is much easier to snap back with another rule than it is to do heart surgery with the gospel. And again, the law is good! People *do* need to pray. My children do need to “stop that!” However, praying, avoiding sin, or doing “good” in itself is not the answer. “We have all become

like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isa. 64:6).

PEOPLE WANT MORALISM

We all want black-and-white rules. We want someone to tell us, “This is right . . . that is wrong.” It’s clean. It’s simple. It requires little or no self-examination. Consequently, the legalist that resides in every last one of us wants law! Thus, those of us who teach the Bible (and we have the same tendency) get a unique kind of response from people when we give them moralism. “That’s good preachin’, Pastor!” In my experience, this kind of response almost always follows a law/rule/morality based statement. It’s a sort of, “Attaboy. You sure told them” response. And frankly, it feels good!

We all have to guard against this tendency. We look at the world through a lens that is calibrated for legalism. We see something sinful or unjust, and we know immediately (1) that it is wrong, and (2) what ought to be done instead. This is not wrong, *per se*; it’s just not enough. Sure, Joseph’s brothers were wrong to be filled with such hatred toward him. That’s a no-brainer. However, did we need the story of Joseph to show us that? Certainly there’s another point to be made.

Ultimately, we lean toward moralism because it’s easy. Moralism is, as noted earlier, the low-hanging fruit. It’s the way we’re all wired, and it takes very little effort or creativity to pull off. And it feels good to boot. We all feel better when we’re taking the speck out of someone else’s eye. Especially when it looks nothing like our plank. In other words, it’s easy for me to preach hard against plotting to murder your brother and then throwing him in a pit to be sold into slavery when I’ve never done anything of the sort.

Several years ago, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution against alcohol consumption. The resolution read:

RESOLVED, That we urge that no one be elected to serve as a trustee or member of any entity or committee of the Southern Baptist Convention that is a user of alcoholic beverages.

Aside from the terrible wording of the resolution (i.e., this statement technically excludes anyone who eats chicken marsala), it has zero scriptural support.³ However, it is incredibly easy to adopt such a resolution. The SBC has never had a problem with drunkenness among its clergy or denominational leaders. The SBC is by-in-large a teetotaling bunch. Hence, it took absolutely *no courage* to pass this statement.

On the other hand, the SBC considered another resolution the same year calling for integrity in church membership. That resolution did not pass. What would it have required? Simply that churches be honest about how many members they have and clean up their roles of inactive, nonexistent members that inflate their numbers. The drinking which nobody does (the speck) was much easier to deal with than the bearing false witness (the log) that characterizes the overwhelming majority of the churches in the Convention.

The SBC is not alone in this hypocrisy. You and I do the exact same thing every time we read the Bible! More importantly, we act out our hypocrisy in practical ways every day of our lives. We look for specks in our children, our coworkers, our teammates, and our friends. And our hypocrisy infects the way we read the Bible in general, and Old Testament narrative in particular.

A MORALISTIC READING OF JOSEPH

According to a moralistic reading, Genesis 37 is a lesson in jealousy and bad parenting. We see the consequences of favoritism on Jacob's part and bitterness on the part of Joseph's brothers. The moral of the story is (1) don't pick favorites among your children, and (2) don't be jealous of your brothers.

Chapter 38 is a classic case of hypocrisy and immorality on the part of Judah. And, while it doesn't seem to fit in the narrative, the moral point is clear: adulterers will be found out. However, the heroine in this story is also an adulteress, but that little messy detail is often overlooked since it interferes with the obvious moral point.⁴

This leads us to what are by far the most popular portions of the narrative. In chapter 39, Joseph shows himself faithful to both the Lord

and to his master, Potiphar, when he causes Potiphar's house to prosper and later resists the advances of Potiphar's wife. In chapter 40 we see Joseph rise to prominence once again, this time in prison! The usual moral here, as in the previous chapter, has to do with faithfulness in difficult circumstances. Joseph becomes a shining example of the way believers ought to live when the going gets tough.

Chapter 41 is definitely the apex of Joseph's character arc. In this chapter we see the familiar interpretation of dreams, the fulfillment of a promise made by his fellow inmate, and the ultimate expression of the recurring theme of being placed over the affairs of his captors. Only this time the one who puts Joseph in charge is the most powerful man in the world! Joseph has remained faithful, and God has rewarded him.

This stands as an example to all those who have been maligned or mistreated by sinful men. Just hang in there like Joseph, and you will get your reward in the end. Moreover, if you look closely, you will find several leadership principles that defined Joseph's life and aided his ascension.

Chapters 42–44 offer us a glimpse at the proper response to new-found power and position. I read one sermon that outlined more than half a dozen kinds of “power” we see exhibited in the life of Joseph. There is positional, situational, psychological, spiritual, and several other kinds of power. Joseph is the picture of power in these chapters, and there is much to be learned from him here if we are going to exercise power effectively. We could go on, but I think you get the point.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ALL OF THIS?

Everything we've observed about the Joseph narrative is true. And anyone teaching the story in a manner commensurate with the brief outline I've just given would be showing faithfulness to the text. Joseph was faithful. His brothers were sinful. He was rewarded with position, power, and prominence. All true! However, let me ask you a question. What separates that telling of the story from any other moral tale?

More importantly, where is the good news? We've been reminded again and again of our need to be faithful. But where's the hope that we can? Are we simply supposed to try harder so that God can reward us?

Also, do you notice the materialistic bent? Joseph was faithful to his father and he got sold into slavery. He was faithful to his master and he got sent to prison. He was faithful in the prison and he got promoted to second-in-command to Pharaoh, himself. There you have it: faithfulness = material wealth, success, notoriety, etc. How is that different from a Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, or plain old secular, irreligious tale? How is it distinct from *Aesop's Fables*? Because it mentions God as the source of the success? Is that all? *There must be something more!*

Finding that something more involves changing the way we read the Bible. If we read the Bible like a book of principles and principals, we will find precisely that. However, if we remember a few interpretive keys, we will find much more.

Indicatives and Imperatives

One of the most important hermeneutical keys we can use in interpreting biblical texts is the distinction between indicatives and imperatives. Technically, these terms refer to the "mood" of verbs (i.e., the indicative mood and the imperative mood). The indicative mood points to what something is, while the imperative mood points to what something does.

For example, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). This is a classic imperative. "Work out" is a command, an imperative for the reader. However, the very next verse is in the indicative mood: "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (v. 13). Here we are not told to "do" anything. We are merely told of the reality that makes it possible for us to do anything.

Sometimes we find entire books divided by this distinction. For example, the first three chapters of Ephesians are indicative, but the last three, introduced by a "therefore" clause, contain imperatives *based*

on the indicatives in the first half. This distinction is important for a couple of reasons.

First, if we mistake indicatives for imperatives, we will attempt to work for that which we can never accomplish. An indicative tells us who we are because of what God has done. Pursuing that in and of ourselves is a form of works righteousness. For example, the indicative declaration “the wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Prov. 28:1) is not an invitation to work toward becoming bolder. It is an indicative statement about what God has done in the life of the righteous. Thus, we can no more make ourselves bold than we can make ourselves righteous!

Second, if we mistake imperatives for indicatives, we will leave undone that which we ought to do. Imperatives are commands. They are to be done. When we read, “You shall not steal” (Ex. 20:15), we are reading an imperative, a command. Of course, the indicatives are still essential, since they motivate, equip, and enable us to accomplish the imperatives. Remember, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God” (Rom. 3:10–11). So when we read imperatives that involve understanding, seeking, or being righteous, we know that there are indicatives that must be in place first.

So how does this apply to the Joseph narrative? Is the Joseph narrative riddled with indicatives and imperatives? If so, how do we differentiate between the two?

We tend to moralize narrative passages because they are inherently indicative in nature. A narrative is a story, and stories will not contain clear imperatives unless a narrator interjects them for his readers. Think about it: when you tell your children a bedtime story, the imperatives have to be interjected. You have to come to the end (in the case of a fable) and point out the moral of the story.

At other times, we look to the narrative itself for imperatives. There are a few traps here as well. Sometimes the imperatives in a narrative come from an immoral or ungodly character. Therefore, when the queen in *Alice in Wonderland* declares, “Off with her head!” we know that we are not reading a divine imperative, but a flawed human one.

At other times, the appropriateness of some imperatives might not be clear. For example, when Joseph tells his brothers, “Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here” (Gen. 45:5), is he giving a general imperative for all those who have committed heinous sin against another? Is this a moral principle for the moment, or for all time? If we don’t have answers to these questions, how can we be sure we are reading the story the way God intends?

As we read the story of Joseph, we must guard ourselves against the tendency to read it as a fable. The Joseph story does not begin with, “Once upon a time.” This is not a fable! If we can remember this, it will take us a long way. We will recognize that we have, in large part, imposed our familiar understanding of the nature of narrative on this narrative. And in some cases, this has brought us to conclusions that are inconsistent with the intent of the author.

How, then, do we interpret the deeper theological meaning behind the text? Is there some guide that can give us a clue? The answer is yes. God has given us the New Testament!

The Role of the New Testament in Interpreting the Old

The Bible is not some disjointed collection of unrelated tales; it is a unit. Therefore, reading and understanding the Bible requires familiarity with, commitment to, and comprehension of the whole. This, of course, is a lifetime pursuit. Nevertheless, there are things we can do now that will put us on sound footing.

First, New Testament authors have addressed the Joseph narrative and can help us put it in perspective. The clearest, safest, and most instructive path to understanding the Old Testament is to rely on New Testament authors who (1) were closer to the events than we are; (2) wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; (3) were direct disciples of the Son of God who used the Old Testament to teach them; (4) used the Old Testament extensively to communicate the gospel Christ gave them; and (5) were, in many cases, Jews who grew up with the Old Testament text.

All this means we need to look to the New Testament whenever

possible to find our bearings in the Old Testament. In the case of the Joseph narrative, two main places (and two New Testament authors) deal with the story. Paul gives us a glimpse into the proper interpretation and proclamation of Joseph's life in his account of Stephen's sermon (Acts 7). The author of Hebrews gives us another example as he recounts Joseph's story in the "Faith Hall of Fame" in Hebrews 11. We will examine both.

Even when New Testament authors do not address the Joseph story directly, they address the moral, theological, and historical issues present in the narrative. New Testament authors deal with things like jealousy, bitterness, hatred, murder, forgiveness, and reconciliation. All these and more riddle the Joseph narrative from beginning to end. Thus, rather than wracking our brains to find what we "feel" or "think" Moses is trying to say, our primary inclination must be to interpret Old Testament texts in light of the way they are fleshed out in the New Testament.

Christ: The Interpretive Key to the Old Testament

A broader and more significant principle of interpreting the Old Testament is found in Christ. He is, in fact, the interpretive key to the Old Testament. This is not merely conjecture or opinion. Jesus teaches as much from his own mouth in a number of instances.

In one passage (that we usually fly right by), Jesus says to the Pharisees, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for [Moses] wrote of me" (John 5:46). Think about that for a minute. What did Moses write? He wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Jesus says that the first five books of the Bible are about him. By the way, the first of those first five books is Genesis. Therefore, *Jesus taught that Genesis was about him.*

Jesus wasn't the only one to make note of this fact. After being called to follow Christ, "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, '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). Philip not only saw Christ in the Pentateuch, but also in the Prophets. This is confirmed in

Acts 8, when Philip confronts the Ethiopian eunuch as he reads from Isaiah: “And the eunuch said to Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus” (vv. 34–35). Thus, Philip preached the gospel of Jesus Christ from Isaiah.

Nowhere is this idea that the Old Testament points to Christ communicated more clearly than in the Lord’s discourse on the road to Emmaus:

And he said to them, “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 the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25–27)

Jesus makes it clear that (1) the Old Testament spoke of him, and (2) it did so in a manner sufficiently clear as to call into question those who missed it. Moreover, having made these points, he begins right where we find ourselves, “with Moses,” and goes on to demonstrate how the entire Old Testament points to himself.

WHAT THIS DOES AND DOES NOT MEAN

This does not mean that morality is irrelevant. One of the chief complaints against the redemptive-historic approach to Scripture is that it promotes antinomianism, or at least that it emphasizes indicatives at the expense of imperatives. In other words, redemptive-historic preaching is seen as “soft on sin” because it doesn’t press people to action or obedience, but instead calls upon them to simply rest in Christ’s redemptive work.

In fact, I was the object of a public protest after preaching a message on the life of Joseph at a prominent church in the Deep South. This particular church is known for high-octane moral preaching, which is one reason I chose my particular text that day. For the most part, the reception of the message was phenomenal. Christ’s sheep really do hear

his voice (John 10:27), and the people of God are hungry for the gospel, especially when they've been steeped in moralism. However, this can also create suspicion.

The lead instigator of the protest wrote me a long e-mail with an excerpt from a lecture about the dangers of redemptive-historic preaching. He accused me of, among other things, failing to celebrate Joseph's faithfulness in the face of trials, and, by extension, not calling God's people to persevere. Ironically, when I wrote him back with several concrete examples of where I had done precisely that, he told me that it was too late—the public protest, in the form of picketers outside the church, had already taken place.

This interaction highlighted both the principal concern of those unfamiliar with or suspicious of redemptive-historic preaching, and the sad reality that people's appetites have been so affected by moralism that when they hear something else, they assume it's not right.

This does not mean that we find Jesus in every verse. Another objection to the redemptive-historic approach to Old Testament narrative is that it inevitably leads to allegorizing the text. Suddenly, every part of the story refers to an aspect of Christ. The pit can't just be a pit; it has to be a type of grave. The prison can't just be a prison; it has to be a type of hell. And, of course, coming out of prison and going before Pharaoh must be a type of resurrection. The possibilities are endless, and the dangers, myriad.

However, as we will see, this is not at all what is being suggested here. Joseph's story must be read and understood in its immediate context before we can even begin to put it in its broader, redemptive-historical context. And while there are definitely types and shadows, the goal is not to find those everywhere, but to recognize them when the narrative makes them obvious.

This does mean we read the story of Joseph in light of Christ. Reading the Bible is challenging! Where do I start? How do I know what's going on? How much background do I need to know? These are just a few of the questions that paralyze many a Christian who knows he should read the Bible, but just can't quite get in gear. Now we're

adding what appears to be another barrier between the believer and his or her ability to approach the Scriptures with confidence. However, that's not the case at all!

Far from making the Bible more difficult to read and understand, the approach we will take in this book is designed to make the Bible more accessible. We're taking what we already know—the story of God's redemption of sinners through the person and work of Christ—and using it as a grid through which we interpret all of Scripture. We're unlocking the Old Testament!

Granted, our task will still require some work. However, once we understand that the Old Testament is all about Christ and his redemptive work, much of the confusion over application is taken away.

IS THERE ANY GOOD NEWS?

“By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones” (Heb. 11:22). That's it. That's how the author of Hebrews views the crux of the Joseph narrative. Not a word about all the things we make such a big deal of in our efforts to apply the text. For the author of Hebrews, Joseph's story is about faith—a faith that allowed him to look beyond Egypt to the exodus.

The good news in the story of Joseph is not that he went “from the pit to the palace.” If it were, then the palace would be the end of the story. As it stands, the palace only gets us halfway. The palace is good news in the temporal sense, but no more. If we were merely a temporal people, that would be enough. But we are more than that. We were made for eternity. And unless there's something in the story of Joseph that gets us ready for, closer to, or more informed about that, there's no good news at all.

As God would have it, there *is* more to the story. There is good news. There is a message of redemption in the temporal as well as the eternal sense. There is a story of a people from whom will come a Savior, through whom will come redemption. That, my friend, is the good news. And the story of Joseph is full of it.