**Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ From All the Scripture**

**By Dennis Johnson**

Dennis Johnson is professor emeritus of practical theology at Westminster Seminary California, where he taught from 1982 to 2018. He previously pastored Orthodox Presbyterian churches in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, and East Los Angeles, California. He is the author of *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures*, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption, Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation*, *Let’s Study Acts*, *Philippians* (Reformed Expository Commentary), and *Walking with Jesus through His Word: Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures*. Johnson, in other words is a serious scholar. The breadth of his scholarship is highlighted in full colors in *Him we Proclaim*.

*Him We Proclaim* aims to help its readers learn how to preach Christ. It is Christocentric in its approach but rooted in the key homiletical idea of apostolic preaching. It tries to answer the conundrum of preaching Christ from all of Scripture, “first by arguing in favor of reuniting insights and disciplines the apostles displayed in harmonious unity but that sadly have become disconnected since then. Then it suggests perspectives and strategies to help ordinary Christians discover their Savior” (kl 187). Johnson clarifies the intend of the book, “This book makes the case for imitating the interpretive and communicative methods employed by the apostles to proclaim Christ to the first-century Greco-Roman world as we minister in the twenty-first century world” (kl 194).

Johnson highlights the importance of what he calls “apostolic preaching.” Johnson contends that preachers “need to rediscover the church’s older insight, drawn from the Bible itself” (kl 359). In his own words, “﻿Apostolic preaching of Christ is redemptive-historically structured, missiologically communicated, and grace-driven. Apostolic preaching is redemptive historical in its presentation of the substructure of Christ’s person and saving work” (kl 339). As such, Johnson attempts to make the case that because the apostles was revealed through the apostles it follows that the best way to read the Old Testament is through the ordering of the Hebrew canon.

The book is divided into two parts. Johnson is an organized writer and explains up front what these two parts aim to address. He writes, “Part 1 (chapters 2 – 5) makes the case for apostolic hermeneutics and homiletics exegetically, historically, and polemically. Part 2 (chapters 6 – 10 ) is constructive more than defensive. It provides both a theoretical framework and concrete strategies for preachers who desire to reflect the Christ - centered confluence of apostolic hermeneutics and apostolic homiletics in their own pulpit ministries” (kl 462–473). The book is part homiletical and part hermeneutical in its approach.

Johnson offers a thorough examination of Paul’s theology of preaching. He also offers persuasive arguments for apostolic preaching from all of Scripture. He assumes the unity of both testaments. For Johnson, apostolic preaching and Christocentric preaching are one in the same. After all, is him [Christ] we proclaim. In convincing fashion, he argues that the book of Hebrews is a sermon. Hebrews functions as an apostolic preaching paradigm.

Johnson offers a survey of the history of biblical interpretation. His intent is to showcase the various ways in which the Bible has been interpreted throughout church history. Then, the offers apostolic preaching as the best alternative. Chapters nine and ten provide helpful insights on how to apply apostolic preaching from all of Scripture, meaning the New and Old Testaments. Finally, Johnson gives ﻿a step-by-step guide to biblical interpretation in sermon preparation, which is perhaps the most practical and insightful help–tool for preachers.

**Critique:**

*Him We Proclaim* stands apart from most books on the subject of homiletics. Its sheer size, 512 pages, communicates to the reader that Johnson is a comprehensive writer. Some of its sections are easy to follow, while others require the trained mind. Johnson does well to offer ten chapters and two parts for the book. This structure helps the flow of the book. Johnson’s arguments are unveiled with clarity and precision. Furthermore, he guides the reader through his writing by explaining his intentions for part one and two, and also for each chapter.

Johnson offers valuable homiletical critiques in the book. He is quick to point out the errors of the seeker–friendly movement but is also gracious in his approach. He also tackles Tim Keller’s homiletics and hermeneutics with grace. He does not aim to be divisive. Rather he offers constructive criticism about the current state of preaching and what we can do to remedy some of its ills. The homiletical and hermeneutical influence of men like Graeme Goldsworthy and Sydney Greidanus over Johnson are obvious. In fact, Johnson’s book is aided by a reading of Goldsworthy’s ﻿*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Bible Theology to Expository Preaching*, and Greidanus ﻿*Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*.

The impetus behind Johnson’s hermeneutic is fueled by his desire to help preachers develop tools for approaching their sermon texts with a proper understanding of redemption history. But most importantly, Johnson attempts to make the case for apostolic preaching, which he masterfully presents. It is obvious that Johnson is a man of the Word, the whole Word. Chapters nine and ten are some of the most helpful. Though Johnson skips over apocalyptic and poetic Old Testament literature, the examples of apostolic preaching from almost each genre of Old and New Testament writings is a most welcome tool for pastors who struggle to preach from difficult section of the Bible. Furthermore, the appendix section provides the very practical approaches to preaching.

*Him We Proclaim* is a lengthy book, but a must read. Perhaps its greatest weakness is its size. Even though Johnson’s content is thorough and comprehensive, lay preachers may struggle navigating through the book. Perhaps the greatest inconsistency in Johnson’s argument for apostolic preaching is self-inflicted. He writes, ﻿the homiletic approach presented in this book is called ‘apostolic’ rather than ‘Christ-centered’ or ‘redemptive-historical’ or ‘Reformational’ or ‘covenantal’ or ‘Reformed’” (kl 356). The problem is that throughout the book Johnson actually makes the case that apostolic preaching is indeed rooted in the redemptive–historical and Christocentric models of hermeneutics. This objection is not detrimental to the book’s content, but the distinction offered by Johnson is not needed if indeed apostolic preaching contains aspects of such hermeneutical approaches.

Johnson’s book is also part commentary. His analysis of biblical texts provides good insight on certain biblical passages that preachers may find difficult to swallow. Johnson is clear about the task of preaching. In his opinion, “The Bible commends prayerful meditation on the Word and promises that patient reflection eventually bears fruit in deepened insight into the matchless treasures of God’s wisdom.” This is indeed true and much needed advice for preachers. The task of preaching must be taken seriously, and Johnson is a present example of such commitment to faithful exposition.

Finally, *Him We Proclaim* is a book about Christocentric preaching. In a world, as described by Johnson, where “felt–needs” become the priority for preachers, Christ is neglected or preached through moralistic teaching. Johnson’s work not only challenges the status quo but offers a solution to the present conundrum in today’s pulpit.

**Significant Quotes:**

* We long to preach “the whole Bible as Christian Scripture,” that is, to preach “ Christ in all of Scripture. ” – Location 174

### the apostolic affirmation rings true : in Christ “ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ” ( Col . 2 : 3 ) –  Location 182

* ﻿We can do nothing other than proclaim Christ, “the power of God and the wisdom of God . . . our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:24, 30). But how? This book tries to answer that question, first by arguing in favor of reuniting insights and disciplines the apostles displayed in harmonious unity but that sadly have become disconnected since then. Then it suggests perspectives and strategies to help ordinary Christians discover their Savior – Location 187

### To testify faithfully and effectively about Jesus the Christ in the twenty-first century, as the apostles did in the first, we need to reconcile three divorced “ couples ” whose “ marriages ” were made in heaven : we need to reunite Old Testament and New Testament , apostolic doctrine and apostolic hermeneutics , biblical interpretation and biblical proclamation – Location 200

### The heartbeat of the church as a whole has coincided with Augustine’s pithy maxim : “The old is in the new revealed, the new is in the old concealed.” – Location 215

### Anti - Semitic prejudice and religious pride should have no credibility for Christians who listen carefully to the apostles ’ proclamation of Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel and the bestower of unmerited grace to Jew and Gentile alike. – Location 243

### One major theme, to which this book will return repeatedly, therefore, is the unity of the Old Testament and the New in the person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ and consequently, also, in the community composed of believing Jews and Gentiles that his Spirit is now assembling. – Location 282

### For the present , be “ forewarned ” that I shall try to make a persuasive case that preachers who believe in the gospel revealed through the apostles should proclaim that gospel in the light of Christ’s fulfillment of the Law , the Prophets , and the Writings ( Luke 24 : 44 – 47 ). – Location 317

### Exegesis itself is impoverished when specialization and professional pressures in the academy inculcate into faculty and students a model of biblical interpretation that aborts the process short of application , depriving it of its sweetest fruit. - Location 347

### Meanwhile , pressures on pastors to market and manage church growth as entrepreneurs and CEOs produce pragmatism in the pulpit that is revealed in sermons ungrounded in biblical interpretation . Pastors ’ linguistic and exegetical skills atrophy in the flurry of activity to keep institutional operations functioning smoothly. – Location 350

### Application that does not emerge from the purpose for which God himself gave his Word will , in the end , lack credibility and power to motivate hearers who hunger for the truth and mercy that is found nowhere but in Jesus. – Location 357

### We need to rediscover the church’s older insight , drawn from the Bible itself , that the purpose of understanding Scripture is nothing less than to believe and obey its Author , and the purpose of preaching Scripture is to ground hearers ’ faith and life in the depths of wisdom , justice , and grace hidden in Christ and unveiled in infinite variety on every page. – Location 359

### Above all , apostolic preaching must be Christ - centered. – Location 365

### To focus on Jesus as example is to reduce him from sovereign Savior to ethical coach , and to transform his gospel into law. – Location 382

### Apostolic preaching of Christ is redemptive - historically structured , missiologically communicated , and grace – driven. – Location 403

### Apostolic preaching is redemptive historical in its presentation of the substructure of Christ’s person and saving work. – Location 405

### Reading and preaching the Bible redemptive historically is more than drawing lines to connect Old Testament types in “ Promise Column A ” with New Testament antitypes in “ Fulfillment Column B . ” It is recognizing that Adam’s , Abraham’s , and Israel’s entire experience was designed from the beginning to foreshadow the end , and that ancient believers experienced true but limited foretastes of sweet grace because in the fullness of the times , Jesus , the beloved Son , would keep the covenant and bear the curse on their behalf and ours. – Location 412

* Part 1 ( chapters 2 – 5 ) makes the case for apostolic hermeneutics and homiletics exegetically , historically , and polemically. – Location 462

### Part 2 ( chapters 6 – 10 ) is constructive more than defensive . It provides both a theoretical framework and concrete strategies for preachers who desire to reflect the Christ - centered confluence of apostolic hermeneutics and apostolic homiletics in their own pulpit ministries. – Location 473

### First, if the preacher has a clear conception of preaching’s purpose , that purpose will control the whole process of his study, composition, delivery, and follow-up. – Location 501

### The “felt needs ” approach to preaching espoused by seeker - sensitive megachurches , such as Willow Creek Community Church and the Willow Creek Association, is by no means the only contemporary expression of preaching intended to evangelize the unreached in the context of the church’s worship service. – Location 577

### Stated this baldly, the driving principles behind the megachurches ’ “felt needs” preaching and “seeker sensitive” ministry raises theological eyebrows (as well as, perhaps, a touch of secret envy. – Location 585

### Yet , the sermons sometimes preached to show non - Christians that the Bible speaks relevantly to their issues may sound more like a Reader’s Digest “ tips for living ” article than a summons to abandon self reliance and rest on Christ alone for all his saving benefits , lavished freely on helpless paupers. – Location 657

### Admittedly , too many preachers , forgetting their evangelistic calling when they step into the pulpit , fall into the former error , speaking as unintelligible foreigners to their own neighbors ; but we must not underestimate the opposite danger of so accommodating the biblical message into the thought categories of secularized and re - paganized cultures that the message that Greeks once scorned as folly and Jews rejected as offensive sounds palatable and unexceptional. – Location 683

### The purpose of preaching, then, is to effect changes among the members of God’s church that build them up individually and that build up the body as a whole. – Location 727

### The theological homiletic is especially alarmed at the emotional manipulation and thinness of content in the preaching of the American church . No wonder the evangelical churches in North America , despite their reported large numbers of attendees , are being swept along by the culture rather than transforming the culture biblically . The contemporary church is “ a mile wide and an inch deep ” ! Solid doctrinal teaching is the only remedy for “ the scandal of the Evangelical mind. ” – Location 845

### The redemptive - historical approach to biblical interpretation in confessionally Reformed circles can be traced to the seminal thought of Geerhardus Vos , who served as the first professor of biblical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1894 to 1932. – Location 879

### The Christian preacher must never preach an Old Testament text ( narrative or other genre ) in such a way that his sermon could have been acceptable in a synagogue whose members do not recognize that Jesus is the Messiah. The purpose of Old Testament historical narrative is not to teach moral lessons , but to trace the work of God , the Savior of his people , whose redeeming presence among them reaches its climactic expression in Christ’s incarnation. – Location 923

### preaching must be Christ centered , must interpret biblical texts in their redemptive - historical contexts , must aim for change , must proclaim the doctrinal center of the Reformation ( grace alone , faith alone , Christ alone , God’s glory alone ) with passion and personal application , and must speak in a language that connects with the unchurched in our culture , shattering their stereotypes of Christianity and bringing them face to face with Christ , who meets sinners ’ real needs — felt and unfelt. – Location 983

### Which of the homiletic emphases described in the previous chapter is the “ right ” one ? To which should the preacher commit himself as devoted apprentice , shunning all others ? Wrong questions ! Each view has valid , biblical insights , which can be illustrated in the apostolic preaching that we find in the New Testament. – Location 1078

### Preaching progressively conforms hearers of the Word to the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. – Location 1150

### Christian preaching has as its purpose nothing less than the complete conformity of every child of God to the perfect image of Christ the Son ( Rom . 8 : 29 ; Col . 3 : 10 – 11 ; Eph . 4 : 24 ). – Location 1170

### Apostolic preaching is addressed to people in need. The very fact that preaching’s purpose is to “present everyone perfect in Christ” implies that our hearers are not now perfect. They need change. – Location 1233

### Like Paul, we are called to preach in the redemptive - historical epoch in which God speaks his gospel in the languages of all the peoples . We face the same challenge: to show how every Scripture proclaims Christ in ways that make the message clear and vivid to diverse audiences. – Location 1314

### Christ’s supremacy as the reconciler of God’s people is the other great reason that Paul’s whole preaching ministry can be summed up as “ proclaiming Christ.” – Location 1385

### Just as preaching Christ necessarily entails preaching grace, so also there is no faithful preaching of saving grace that is not a preaching of Christ, in whom and through whom alone God’s reconciling favor and re - creative power flow to human beings. – Location 1477

### The apostolic preacher’s struggle, therefore, is at its root a spiritual wrestling match with evil spiritual forces whose strength outmatches our own — were it not for the victorious power of our Champion Jesus. – Location 1572

### Through the proclamation of God’s good news about Christ, in dependence on the power of God’s Spirit, the preacher seeks to change people’s “ inner ” life and, as a result, their “ outer ” life, so that both in the hidden recesses of the heart and in the behavior that others observe they increasingly conform to Christ’s perfect maturity. – Location 1734

### Classical preachers, whether patristic, medieval, or Reformational, shared the beliefs that all of Scripture is ultimately the Word of one divine Author and therefore that the primary context in which any passage should be interpreted is the entire, completed canon of the Old and New Testaments, which has its integrating center in the person and work of Jesus Christ. – Location 1804

### Evangelicals are heirs of the Reformation, grateful for the exegetical sobriety that its sola Scriptura emphasis introduced as a corrective to the allegorical excesses that preceded it. – Location 2310

### Let us therefore begin by stating frankly some of the reasons that contemporary theologians and preachers, both historical critical and evangelical, harbor suspicions about attempts to interpret every biblical text in relation to Christ and his saving mission. They fall into three general categories: ( a ) misgivings about biblical unity; ( b ) misgivings about interpretive accountability; and ( c ) misgivings about interpretive credibility. – Location 2364

### The credibility of Christ’s gospel is not best served by subjecting Scripture to an interpretive grid that disqualifies, even in part, Scripture’s own methods in interpreting itself. Rather, our hearers must be shown persuasively the logic of apostolic hermeneutics, which are grounded in divine sovereignty over history, divine inspiration of Scripture , and the divine agenda that drives history forward toward the redemption of his people and the ultimate recreation of his cosmos. – Location 2621

### To practice apostolic hermeneutics with integrity and a clear conscience , we need to discern the theological underpinnings, the foundational understanding of the ways of God that provide the basis for the way in which Jesus and the apostles interpreted the Old Testament. – Location 2983

### This book contends that the apostolic preachers through whom God gave us the New Testament normatively define not only the content that twenty - first century preachers are to proclaim but also the hermeneutic method by which we interpret the Scriptures and the homiletic method by which we communicate God’s message to our contemporaries. – Location 2993

### The Epistle to the Hebrews, our one New Testament example of apostolic preaching addressed to an established congregation, illustrates the integration of Christ - centered biblical interpretation with hearer - contoured communication and application. – Location 3528

### The correspondence between an Old Testament type and its New Testament fulfillment makes the type a credible and intelligible anticipation of its fulfillment in Christ. –  Location 3608

### To understand how any Old Testament event (or office or officer or institution) preaches Christ and finds its fulfillment in him, we first must grasp its symbolic depth in its own place in redemptive history. –  Location 4231

### Every redemptive, salvific experience of Old Testament saints fell short of the fullness of salvation brought by Christ and was dependent, ultimately, on his redeeming work. – Location 4242

### Seeing Christ throughout the Scriptures demands a patient and humbling process of listening as the apostles point out to us the interwoven patterns (or, if your prefer Spurgeon’s metaphor, the interlocking highway system) that make the Bible’s diverse documents , belonging to diverse genres and ages, cohere around a central theme: God’s redemptive, restorative, recreative agenda for world history. – Location 4281

### Two motifs that seem to undergird the whole redemptive agenda unveiled in Scripture are the themes of new creation and new covenant. – Location 4339

### The motifs of new creation and new covenant also point the way toward appropriate (heart - searching, grace - grounded, behavior - transforming, and specific) application of each text’s unique message. – Location 4343

### The Bible is the instrument of the Holy Spirit to announce and to apply what God has done to reverse sin’s dire results, for it is through this Word, God’s personal communication to his people, that the Spirit liberates us from self - trust and creature - worship so that we trust and serve the Creator who alone deserves our absolute allegiance. – Location 4389

### Apostolic preaching, however, reverses the order that makes sense to human wisdom. Instead of motivating obedience by offering God’s favor as contingent on human performance , the apostles spoke for a God who had begun the process of new creation by extending unmerited mercy and who thereby evokes from renewed people a grateful love and eager desire to obey. – Location 4790

### The Bible commends prayerful meditation on the Word and promises that patient reflection eventually bears fruit in deepened insight into the matchless treasures of God’s wisdom. Although such slow disciplines frustrate those accustomed to lightning - quick search software and enamored of foolproof checklists , they are nevertheless the means by which the Lord Jesus not only discloses the good news he wants preached but also conforms , attunes , and subdues his messenger to that message of sovereign justice and grace. – Location 4903

### The contemporary preacher who would follow the apostles’ footsteps, as they were led by Jesus, along the various paths of the Old Testament’s witness to the coming Christ faces a daunting but rewarding task. – Location 5994

### Our task as preachers to proclaim, explain, and apply the Old Testament in its integrity as God’s witness to his Son is challenging, but it is also a high privilege, refreshing our own souls and bringing salvation to our hearers, by the grace of God’s Spirit. – Location 6005

### This, too, is our mission, as we follow in the apostles’ footsteps. Both the content of our message and the method of our mission must be conformed to the pattern of sound words that the Spirit of the risen Christ breathed out in their writings as the divine canon for Christ’s church. – Location 7239