

*Fishing Tips Part X*  
*Luke 24:25-27, 44-45*  
*Jimmy Snowden*

***Introduction***

This will be the tenth and final sermon in our present series on biblical interpretation. I have titled this series *Fishing Tips* in light of the ancient Chinese proverb; “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” It is my contention that the people of God ought to be taught basic, common-sense principles of how to read the Bible with accuracy so that they might learn to feed upon Christ through His word without having an infantile dependency upon others for doing so. The series has been titled *Fishing Tips* because it is my attempt at providing you broad principles of biblical interpretation so that you might feast upon Christ through His word on your own; so that you may be able to feed yourself ‘for a lifetime.’

Thus far we have established the biblical relevance for a series on biblical interpretation for the average joe in the pew, we have discussed some foundational considerations about biblical interpretation, and we are now in the process of discussing how to actually go about the task of interpretation. In the second section of the series (foundational considerations) we concluded that interpretation primarily has to do with discovering the original intention of the Spirit-inspired author. In this third section of the series (our present section) we are asking the question, “How do we discover the original intention of the author?”

So far we have determined that the way in which we go about discovering the original intention of the author is by practicing, considering the genre (genre = sort or kind) of literature that we are dealing with, considering the literary context (getting the big picture/hovering), and considering the historical context. Once again, the reason we are answering these questions (questions of genre, literary context, and historical context) is because answering these questions is necessary in the task of discovering the original intention of the Spirit-inspired author of the Scriptures. This morning we will continue to answer the ‘how’ question of biblical interpretation (How do we discover the Spirit’s intention in any given text?). Our discussion will focus on considering the biblical/theological context of the Scriptures.

***Consider the Biblical/Theological Context***

This principle of biblical interpretation is certainly worthy of much more attention than I will be giving it this morning. In many ways, this series through biblical interpretation has been lopsided. I spent an inordinate amount of time discussing issues that are not at the heart of Christianity. I have spent more time discussing non-essential issues than I have essential issues. I knew that this was going to be my approach before I even began the series. The reason why I spent so much time on the non-essential areas of biblical interpretation is because they are treated as unimportant. For many in the church today non-essential = unimportant. Because of this tendency, and because of the apparent lack of attention in regard to some of the less ‘spiritual’ aspects of biblical interpretation, it was necessary to emphasize them more in this series. The fact is that you are reminded of the essential components of biblical interpretation on a regular basis. For example, we just finished our study through Malachi a couple months ago. How many times did I stress the importance of considering the biblical/theological context in that series? Quite a lot.

Thus you can expect a truncated discussion on some of the more essential issues of biblical interpretation. This morning we are going to be briefly discussing the importance of considering the theological/biblical context of whatever passage we may be studying. Here is the point: in the same way that I suggested that we learn to get the big picture of individual books of the Bible before jumping into the details, there is also a need to get the big picture of the entire story line of the Bible before jumping into the details. In other words, we are to hover over the big story of the Bible, looking at the sweep of redemptive history from a birds-eye view in the same way that we are to hover over individual books of the bible.

*Ultimately, the Bible is the story of how God has redeemed fallen, rebellious mankind through His Son.* In the Bible there is a motion of forward progress; as you move from Genesis to Isaiah to Matthew there is a motion of forward progress. It is what we call progressive revelation; it is the conviction that God reveals Himself and His redemptive purposes incrementally, one layer at a time. Both God's self disclosure (revelation of Himself, that is) and His redemptive activity (acts of salvation, that is) finds its climax in the person, life, ministry, and cross work of Jesus Christ. He is the perfect and climactic revelation of God.

All of God's redemptive activity points to His Son—all of the promises of the Old Testament find their 'Yes' in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20). Jesus is the center. He is the point, He is the answer, He is the fulfillment.

### *The Big Picture*

Although I am here risking gross simplification, it is possible to break the Bible up into two major sections; the age of promise and the age of fulfillment. In this way the Bible can be likened to a good mystery novel. As you read a mystery novel you collect a large amount of data, we call them clues. The further you go into the mystery novel the more clues you pick up. However, at a certain point in the novel there will be a climax. This is where the detective solves the case. Once the detective solves the case he then begins to explain how all of the evidence which he gathered led him to the conclusion that he reached. It is at this point where all the clues begin to make sense. Before the climax of the novel, before the detective is able to shed light on all of the clues, the clues were nothing but a bunch of disconnected pieces of information. But now that the detective has solved the mystery, all the clues make sense—you see where they fit into the overarching story line.

I am not suggesting that the Bible is a mystery novel; however, it works similar to a mystery novel. God gives promise after promise after promise in the Old Testament, building up great anticipation and expectation. However, at the closing of the curtain in the Old Testament things look quite bleak. There is nothing that they (the original recipients, that is) could point to as evidence that the overarching promises given to Abraham, David, Isaiah, and the rest of the prophets were being fulfilled. Really, they were left suspended in mid-air at the closing of the Old. Questions of God's faithfulness to His promises emerge. Great questions loom, anticipation abounds, and yet there seems to be no fulfillment on the horizon.

However, once the curtain opens in the New Testament, you immediately see the fulfillment to all the promises that God had made in the Old Testament Scriptures. The New Testament opens up with God becoming a man in the person of Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus that all of the promises (or 'clues', to use the imperfect mystery novel illustration) find their fulfillment. All of the types and shadows of the Old Testament find their substance in the person, ministry, and cross work of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:16-17).

The person of Jesus is seen to be the climactic and perfect self-disclosure of the Father and the ministry of Christ, centering on His death on the cross and resurrection, is seen to be God's climactic and central act of redemption. Jesus is thus set at center stage in the Scriptures—it is all about Him. It has pleased God to reveal Himself most principally in His Son and to redeem a people for Himself through His Son.

### *So What?*

Here is where the big question of 'So what?' comes in. How will an understanding that Jesus is the center and climax of all of God's self-disclosure and redemptive activity help us when it comes to interpreting the Bible? The main way in which this will help you is by helping you see the centrality of Christ in all of God's self-disclosure and redemptive activity. When you begin studying a book of the Bible one of the first things that you must establish is where this book sits on the overarching timeline of God's redemptive activity. You must determine whether the book was written before or after the life and ministry of Jesus. God's revelation and redemptive activity through His Son is so central to the overall storyline of the Bible that you cannot read what went before Christ (namely the Old Testament) without seeing His person as the Father's ultimate anticipated revelatory display and His ministry as the Father's ultimate anticipated act of redemption; and you cannot read what went after as if the most climactic and foundational of all of God's acts had not already taken place. To not see Jesus as the key to the Scriptures would be like rereading a mystery novel without remembering at all the key to solving the mystery. Once you have read the mystery novel, all of the mystery is taken out of it; you know where the clues are leading, and you lose something of the tension, because you already know how it all fits together. So it is when you read the Old Testament.

For example, when you read God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:11-13 you must understand that this promise given to David was ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

'The LORD declares to you: The LORD Himself will make a house for you. 12 When your time comes and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.'

It would be silly to read this Old Testament passage without taking into consideration how it fits within the sweep of God's redemptive activity. After all, 2 Samuel 7:11-13 was a promise given to David in the era of promise. The fulfillment had not yet come. But we are no longer in the era of promise; no, Jesus has already come and He has already ushered in the age of fulfillment. This promise was ultimately fulfilled in Christ as Peter asserts in his sermon in Acts 2 and as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews stresses in Hebrews 1.

Isn't this just what Jesus says in Luke 24? He communicates to His disciples that they cannot understand the true sense of the Old Testament apart from reading it with an understanding of how Jesus fulfilled it through His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Just look at how Jesus talks to them in Luke 24:44-45;

'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was with you—that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Jesus ‘opened their minds to understand’ the Old Testament. In other words, He helped them understand the true sense of the Old Testament. He interpreted it for them—interpreted the Old Testament through the lens of His Gospel work. If you do not read the Old Testament through the eyes of the new, ***you will, for sure***, miss interpret the Old—you will miss the Spirit’s intention in the Old. This has nothing to do with doing backflips to force Christ into passages; rather, it has everything to do with understanding that both all the types and shadows of the Old and all of the promises of the Old have found their appointed goal and end in the New.

So, how does a big picture understanding of the sweep of God’s redemptive history affect the way that we read the New Testament? Well, the New Testament is the age of fulfillment. What does fulfillment presuppose? Promise! What does this mean? It means that the New Testament should not be read as if it were some independent, free-hanging thing. No, the New Testament is born out of the Old. The New Testament finds its root, its basis, and its foundation in the Old Testament.

Usually when the average Christian talks about reading the Bible salvation-historically, that is, with an eye to how everything fits together within the history (or timeline) of God’s salvific activity, they only focus on how such an understanding effects the way we read the Old Testament. But an understanding of the big picture of the timeline of God’s redemptive plans should have a huge impact on how you interpret the New Testament as well. Let me give you just a few examples of how necessary it is to gain an understanding of the Old Testament in order to understand what is written in the New. First of all, it goes without saying that the New Testament quotes the Old Testament all over the place (simply skim read Matthew, Acts, Romans, and Hebrews and you will find more Old Testament quotations than you can fit in your pocket). Second, turn with me to Mark 15:37-38.

‘But Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed His last. Then the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom.’

If you are clueless as to the function and makeup of the temple in the Old Testament, this passage will mean very little to you—your ability to interpret Mark 15:38 will be limited. But if you understand that the temple was the meeting place between God and men and that the curtain (or veil) is what separated men from the Holy of Holies, where God’s glory dwelt; when you see that this curtain which kept man separated from God was torn in Mark 15:38 upon the death of Christ, this passage takes on massive meaning. The rending of the temple is the ultimate proof that man’s sin has been dealt with and that we now have free, unhindered, and open access to the Holy of Holies—the very throne room of God—because of the substitutionary death of Christ. But this truth is built on the back of the imagery of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Third, turn with me to Hebrews 12:18—24.

For you have not come to what could touched, to a blazing fire, to darkness, gloom, and storm, 19 to the blast of a trumpet, and the sound of words. (Those who heard it begged that not another word be spoken to them, 20 for they could not bear what was commanded: **And if even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned!** 21 And the appearance was so terrifying that Moses said, **I am terrified and trembling.**) 22 Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels in festival gathering, 23 to the assembly of the firstborn

whose names have been written in heaven, to God who is the judge of all, to the spirits of righteous people made perfect, 24 to Jesus (mediator of a new covenant) and to the sprinkled blood, which says better things than the blood of Abel.

This passage is just dripping with Old Testament quotations and allusions. You simply will have a difficult time understanding this passage apart from an understanding of the Old Testament. Just look at the Old Testament fixtures in this passage (you will find 6 Old Testament allusions): 1. a picture of the giving of the Old Covenant law at Mount Sinai, 2. a quotation from God Himself at the giving of the law in Exodus 19, 3. a reference to Mt. Zion, 4. a reference to Jerusalem, 5. a reference to ‘sprinkled blood’ (apart from an understanding of the Old Covenant sacrificial system this will mean very little), 6. and then finally a reference to the blood of Abel (from Genesis).

Hopefully this is sufficient to give you an idea of how a general knowledge of the biblical/theological context of the Scriptures on the whole can bring great clarity to the original intention of the Spirit in the Scriptures. It can be said that the greatest background material for the New Testament is the Old Testament and that the greatest tool or key for interpreting (or unlocking) the Old Testament is the New Testament. *To uncover the intention of the Spirit when reading the Old Testament you must read it through the eyes of the New, and to uncover the intention of the Spirit in the New you must read it with an understanding that it is the fulfillment of the Old.*

***Section 1: Biblical Considerations: The Relevance of Biblical Interpretation for the Average Joe***

***Section 2: Foundational Considerations: The Nature of Biblical Interpretation***

***Section 3: Practical Considerations: The How of Biblical Interpretation***

***Section 4: Application-based Considerations: The Purpose of Bible Reading***

***Application: Moving from Text to Today***

Thus far we have discussed many issues related to interpretation. I have been beating the ‘interpret first’ drum since day one. The reason I have focused so much on interpretation is because there is a misguided and uniformed approach to application in today’s Christianity. Christians by and large are so bent on immediate application that they simply by-pass the all-important step of prayerful interpretation. Because of this their theology and application ends up being more than a little weak. Thus, I spent a great deal of time on issues of interpretation knowing that, although it may not be as popular or interesting to people, a great deal of emphasis needs to be put on it because it has been so underemphasized.

Here we come to the purpose of bible reading. We have been discussing the ‘How’ of biblical interpretation and now we will begin discussing the ‘Purpose’ of interpretation. Our purpose in focusing on interpretation is not purely intellectual. The reason why we focus on interpretation as the first task in the discipline of Bible reading is so that our application will be meaningful and so that our theology will be precise. The ultimate goal of reading the Bible is to live the truth of God’s word, obey the truth of God’s word, and believe (depend upon) the truth of God’s word. This is the goal of interpretation. We want to live like, think like, and act like Jesus; we want to walk as He walked, love as He loved (and still loves), serve as He served (and still serves), forgive as He has forgiven (and still forgives), give as He gave (and still gives).

We can see this purpose in regard to the word of God clearly laid forth by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Turn with me to Matthew 7:24-27

24 "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of Mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. And its collapse was great!"

If our reading of the bible does not produce in us a greater passion for the person of Jesus Christ, and if it does not produce in us a greater desire to be like Jesus in all that we do, our approach, as precise as it may be, is off. I have just three things that I want to say about the task of application. First, our eye for precision and accuracy must not stop at interpretation, it must find its way into our application as well. There are correct ways and incorrect ways of applying the Bible. Do you need an example? How many times have we heard Christians reference Ephesians 5:18 (don't get drunk with wine) and then assert that God's way is the way of complete abstention, and that if you do not completely abstain from alcohol, you are in sin? That is an inappropriate application of that passage. It is my contention, however, that if a person focuses on precise and accurate interpretation, precise and accurate application and theology will simply flow. The Spirit challenges the heart with unadulterated truth. Application is in many ways the supernatural speaking of the Spirit in response to the preached or written word.

For example, this past week Kevin taught an excellent bible study lesson on John 1:16-29. The majority of the bible study was spent laboring for a correct understanding of the passage. He hardly emphasized application at all throughout the entire lesson. However, when it came time for us to discuss how John 1:16-29 applied to our lives, insights abounded. The reason why preachers and teachers feel that they have to labor and labor and labor over application is because they are not focusing on interpretation. Spirit-filled interpretation leads to radical application. Bad application usually flows from bad interpretation.

Second, we must be careful when we interpret to not assume that God values the same things that we value, emphasizes the same things we emphasize, or is largely concerned with the same things that we are most concerned about. Often times we tend to simply assume that our thoughts and will line up perfectly with God's. We come to the Bible expecting Him to speak to us about the things that concern us the most. However, God is not always interested in talking to you about what you are most concerned about or interested in. We need to let God's word shape the things that we are most concerned about, the things that we are most interested in; we need to let God tell us what His greatest concerns are. But so often we go to the Scriptures simply assuming that He wants to talk to us about whatever we want Him to talk to us about. This approach can end up causing us to force the Scriptures to itch the scratches that we have, even if the Scriptures are not interested in scratching those itches.

We must let the Spirit shape our values. Whatever is emphasized over and over and over again in the Scriptures ought to be that which we are most concerned about. Sadly, often times Christians run rough shod over the emphases of Scripture by twisting the Scriptures to reflect their own values. We saw this with the quote by Joel Osteen a few weeks ago. We want the questions we ask to be shaped by God's word. We want to get to the place where we ask the same sort of questions that the Scriptures ask.

Christians do this all the time with passages about persecution. Because persecution is neither fun nor a large problem for us in the States, we tend to over spiritualize these texts, applying them to anything but persecution. I cannot tell you how many Christian financial guru's I have heard force application about money out of passages which have nothing to do with money. Because we live in a therapeutic culture American Christians most noticeably have the tendency to force God's word to speak to their genuine tragedies. However, this is not always the best thing to do. If you are struggling in your marriage or with your kids or with your finances, although there is a definite place to seek God's voice in the matter (or just to simply hear His words of affirmation) one of the best things that a person can do when they are going through a tragedy is to go to the Scriptures without expecting God to speak to the tragedy at all. This seems quite backwards and even a bit insensitive. But oftentimes the way that God helps us deal with our problems is by getting our attention on something much larger than our problems to put our problems in perspective. Don't force application. Forced application can lead to reinterpretation (misinterpretation), legalism, or even sin. Go to the Word of God and let God speak to you about the situations that He is most concerned about. You may just find that you are most concerned about things (even good things) that God says very little about—or you may find that you are making something much more difficult than it actually is by focusing on it to such an extent.

*Third, how do you actually move from interpretation to application?* Generally it happens naturally. When a text is interpreted clearly, the application simply flows. However, I will say that the most accurate way to move from interpretation to application is to draw lines of parallel from the ancient world to our present day situations. In other words, we observe the sort of problems or situations that were faced in the text and then we find parallel situations that we are facing today. Before we can do this we must find what Grant Osborne calls the 'supracultural' principles (whether they be either theological or ethical principles) of the passage. It is all about building bridges from the situations in the ancient world to parallel situations today.

The goal is to enable the modern hearer to actualize [the] revealed message with as much practical validity as did the original audience for whom it was intended... Interpreters and proclaimers must note the situation behind the passage—that is, the circumstances that led the original author to emphasize his point—and then they must seek a *parallel* situation in the lives of the receptor audience. The passage will then be applied to and address that parallel modern situation.<sup>1</sup>

But it must be kept in mind that the goal is to *find situations which most closely parallel the situation faced in the ancient world. The closer the parallel, the stronger the application.*

### **Conclusion**

Hopefully this series has been helpful. The four main reasons why such a series is so important for every Christian in the pew are: 1. Biblical interpretation has everything to do with the pursuit of knowing God as He has revealed Himself in His word. It leads to passion and rest: passion for the person of Jesus Christ and rest in what He has done for you on the cross. 2. Every Christian is a minister of the word, and thus every Christian must be growing in an ability to handle the word so that we might all grow in our ability to minister the word to each other. 3. Satan is subtle in the way in which he twists Scripture—Scripture is evidence itself of how easily

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<sup>1</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 427.

even the most genuine of Christians can be led astray by the subtlety of Satan's theological and practical deception (just read Galatians, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude). Unless we are growing in our ability to better handle the word, we will have an inability to sniff out Satan's nastiness. And 4. in order to live, believe, and obey the word of God we must first know the word of God. If our handle on the word is sloppy, our life based upon that word will follow suit. Much is at stake when biblical interpretation is considered to be unimportant. The Bible is simply too foundational for all that we believe and do to not grow in an ability to handle it with precision and accuracy. If we lose the word of God we lose everything. We must pursue it with an eye for accuracy—too much is at stake if we don't.