

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter – April 14, 2024

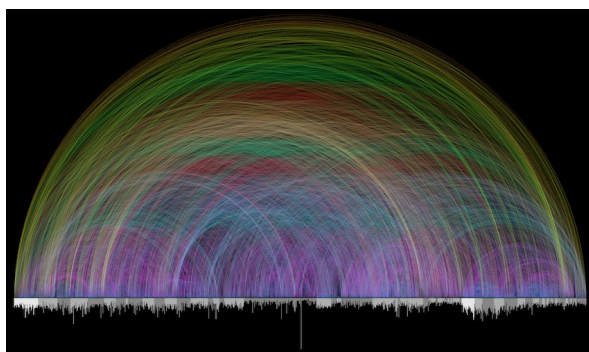
As I did a couple weeks ago, today’s message will be a merging of several different ideas written by preachers and biblical scholars from a couple different websites. Namely Pete Lange from 1517.org and Bradley Grey from graceupongrace.net. So let’s dig in and get started. From today’s gospel:

Jesus said to them, “These are the words I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.”

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and in His name repentance and forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.

I don’t know if you’re anything like me, but there are many things in the bible that I find hard to understand. I’m like Jesus disciples; I need Jesus to “open my mind to the scriptures” because on my own I just don’t get it. But what does that look like? What might having my mind “opened to the scriptures’ look like?

Well in 2007 two guys came up with a Bible Visualization Chart <slide 1> to visually represent how the bible is connected to itself. I don’t know if it’ll make you feel more or less overwhelmed but let’s take a look:



The bar graph that runs along the bottom represents all of the chapters in the Bible, starting with Genesis 1 on the left. Books alternate in color between light and dark gray, with the first book of the Old and New Testaments in white. The length of each bar denotes the number of verses in that chapter (for instance, the longest bar is the longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119). Each of the 63,779 cross references found in the Bible are depicted by a single arc - the color corresponds to the distance between the two chapters, creating a rainbow-like effect.

Generally I'm not a visual person but this chart does a good job of showing us just how connected and beautiful God's Word actually is. When Jesus "opened their minds" to the Scriptures I think this chart helps us capture a bit of what he's talking about. <slide 2> On the road to Emmaus we hear that Jesus began with "Moses and all the Prophets" and explained to the two disciples what "had been written in all the Scriptures about Himself". In today's gospel reading, which takes place the evening of the same day, Jesus does the same with the disciples who had locked themselves in the upper room because they were afraid. He opened their minds to understand the Scripture so that they could take that message to the nations. And Jesus calls us to do the same today.

Unfortunately, when we start looking at God's Word as it's recorded in the Bible we can run into two problems. First we might just look at the overall picture and miss the important details that are needed to give the full story. "God is Love". True, but what about sin, repentance and our need for forgiveness? Or we might get bogged down in so many details that we miss the main point. Remember how Jesus chastised the Pharisees in Matthew 15 when he quotes: "For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'?" But the Pharisees had twisted things claiming it was more important that they "devote themselves to God", therefore that requirement of God's law wasn't required by them. In following the letter of the law it is all too easy to miss the purpose for which it exists.

So what does that mean for us? Pete Lange notes that unlike other religions, as Christians we don't just follow a book. We believe the Word of God because Jesus Christ himself **is** the Word, our light, life, and very salvation. The Gospel of John begins by tell us "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God.**"

Jesus is the key that unlocks God's Word. So let's look at this more closely. Bradley Grey did a series of lectures on the book of Hebrews which discuss Jesus in contrast to the law as represented by Moses. I think it really nails the issues. <slide 3> and can help us understand a bit more about how Jesus unlocks the Scriptures for us.

Bradley starts with a couple quotes from the book of Hebrews

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." Heb 10:23

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess." Heb 4:14

Note how the author of Hebrews repeatedly says that his most earnest desire is that his audience "hold fast" (Heb. 3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23). But to what are these believers called to "hold fast" to?

The answer, of course, is fairly evident: These believers are to "hold fast" to none but Jesus. "Therefore, holy brothers you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession" ([Heb. 3:1](#)). Jesus is the One they were to "consider," or "focus intensely on." All of their concentration was to be given to him, "the apostle and high priest," the sent one from God and the maker of peace with God. Jesus is the source of the truest confidence and surest hope ([Heb. 3:6](#)). "To 'consider' Christ means to behold Him," [notes Arthur Pink](#), "not simply by a passing glance or

giving to Him an occasional thought, but by the heart being fully occupied with Him" (1:154). Consequently, Jesus alone is to be the object of all their attention and affection. Why? The writer's "therefore" provides the answer: "Because of everything I've just declared and discussed!" "Set your focus on Jesus": the Son of God who took on flesh for you, who willingly endured the "suffering of death" for you, that you might live.

All of that, perhaps, seems rather obvious — but why is this such a big deal? Well, it's a big deal when we consider a second question. *If these believers were abandoning Jesus, what were they embracing instead?* What were they putting their hope in if not in Jesus? Well in Hebrews, the short answer is, they were running to Moses. Those who left "the confession" behind were taking up "Moses" instead; that is, they were taking up the law. And this is just as relevant today. Let me explain.

Throughout the New Testament, the high regard for Moses is on full display. In [John 9](#), on the Sabbath day Jesus heals a man born blind, which leaves the Pharisees more than a little displeased. When questioned the once-blind-now-seeing man says, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' And [the Pharisees] reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from'" ([John 9:26–29](#)).

The Pharisees divulge who they're really following — and it's not God. They are holding fast to the words and doctrines of Moses above all else. Which, of course, is why when Jesus comes on the scene and, seemingly, overlooks the law of Moses at every turn, those law-addicted Pharisees were sent into a tizzy. They couldn't wrap their heads around the fact that this hot-shot Teacher from the backwoods of Nazareth was acting so contrary to the teachings of their beloved Moses. [John 5](#), likewise, brings this to bear in alarming degrees. Once again, Jesus heals a man who was "blind, lame, and paralyzed" ([John 5:4](#)). Once again, this was done on the Sabbath, which got the Pharisees all

worked up, leading to a confrontation between them and Jesus himself, where the Lord calls them out for their misplaced loyalty to Moses.

Jesus declares: "The Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that *in them* you have eternal life, and *it is they that bear witness about me*, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life...Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me" ([John 5:37–40, 45–46](#)).

The Pharisees, the leading religious leaders, and experts of the day, reckoned themselves as the most righteous of all men. No one could rival them in religious fervor or fortitude. They rigorously pored over the words of Moses for insight, knowledge, and wisdom; for the most exact ordinances by which their lives, and others, were to be governed. As the "disciples of Moses," the Pharisees were staunch in their belief that true religion — "eternal life" even — was found within "the law of Moses" itself. As such, their ministry was all about how human beings could work their way into a "right standing" with God, so long as they studied the right words and did the right things. For them, "being right" was merely a matter of "doing right," and the only thing necessary for that was knowing the "right information." But, as Jesus has just revealed, they were gravely mistaken. "You've missed the point!" he says. "Those Scriptures speak of me!"

All of Scripture, including that of Moses ([Heb. 3:5](#); [Luke 24:27](#); [John 5:46](#)), is not meant to be seen as a manual by which we work our way to heaven. Rather, [as Luther puts it](#), all Scripture is pure Christ. All of Scripture, every last syllable of it, is meant to drive us to "consider Jesus," to "focus intently on Jesus", the One who comes to "make us right" by gifting us his righteousness, no less than the righteousness of God ([Rom. 1:16–17](#)). By rejecting Jesus and clinging to Moses, the Pharisees had abandoned the founder and

builder of their faith for just another man ([Heb. 3:2–5](#)). Moses, to be sure, was faithful in his role as a "servant in God's house" ([Num. 12:6–8](#)). He fulfilled his calling as the one through whom God's law was transmitted to God's people. But, even still, he was just a servant in the household of God. He was a member of the family, not the builder of it. The "builder of the house" was God, who, as the writer says, is Jesus ([Heb. 3:3–4](#)).

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And this is every bit as relevant today. Moses was never meant to be a receiver of glory. Rather, he was meant to serve as a forerunner or precursor to the One who is "the radiance of the glory of God" in bodily form, Jesus Christ ([Heb. 1:3](#)). It may sound obvious but distinguishing between Moses and Jesus is still one of the most essential quandaries within the Protestant church. The allure of Moses, of the law, is still very much alive and well. Regardless of our church backgrounds, there exists an abiding temptation to trade our discipleship with Jesus for discipleship under Moses; and that's because we are all attracted to the idea that we can work our way to glory. That makes more sense to our limited human way of thinking.

There are far too many preachers today preaching sermons that result in more "disciples of Moses." It's the sort of preaching that makes your problem of sin "solvable" by you and what you can do. Churchgoers are being conditioned and encouraged to scour the Bible for spiritual tidbits and insights all about how we can better ourselves and our lives by "doing more," "trying harder," and "being better." The wisdom of much modern pulpitering is nothing more than the "gospel of fixing" — fixing marriages and fixing relationships and fixing parenting and fixing our devotional life and fixing sinful habits, etc. — as if that's all we need to have a right standing with God. If that's what we think, like the Pharisees, we've missed it.

While we might be given to think that way, all that really does is make our problem of sin incredibly small, which, likewise, makes the salvation that Jesus offers small, too. We minimize the gospel when we downplay how bad we are. The Scriptures reveal that

our truest, deepest problem is the blunt fact that we are "dead in trespasses and sins" ([Eph. 2:1](#)). "The way in which we are brought unto the Lord Jesus Christ," [writes Adolph Saphir](#), an eighteenth-century Jewish Presbyterian missionary, "and united with Him is not by building, but by believing" (Pink, 1:158). You see: You are dead in your sins.

- You don't need a crutch to help you walk better; you need a defibrillator to bring you back to life.
- You don't need more instructions to help you behave better; you need to be born again.
- You don't need right information; you need resurrection.

Who offers that? Only one man - "Consider Jesus." Nothing more or less than Jesus. "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" ([John 1:17](#)). Where Moses revealed God's heart through the word of the law, Jesus reveals God's heart through the word of the gospel, and that's the word that reconciles and redeems wayward sinners to God the Father. The church's confidence, that in which we boast ([Heb. 3:6](#)), is the objective truth that the Christ of God, Jesus of Nazareth, has made atonement for us by living and dying in unyielding faithfulness on the cross, thereby securing our hope of glory and righteousness and sanctification ([1 Cor. 1:30–31](#)).

The law of Moses was never meant to be used as a means of salvation, as a way of "being right." Rather, the law of Moses was meant to expose how utterly incapable we are of keeping it, which drives us to our knees, in order that we might cry out, like Paul, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" To which the gospel says, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Although we could never in a million lifetimes live rightly enough to work our way into a right standing with God, there is One who has lived rightly for us, and his offer of righteousness, of life in his house, will never be rescinded.

Thanks be to God!

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus, come and stand among us this morning. Open our minds to the Scriptures so that we may be your messengers, proclaiming how you suffered, died and rose from the dead on the third day. You alone bring us to God, the Father. Through our repentance and Your forgiveness we are healed. As the father in Mark cried out "I do believe; help my unbelief! so, too, help us to believe. In Your name we pray. Amen.

### **Consider Jesus - Bradley Gray 1517.org**

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14–18 minutes

<https://www.1517.org/articles/consider-jesus-hebrews>