



# MONTHLY

*December 2016 Issue #97*



## Thank you

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We want to thank all our friends and supporters as we come to the end of another year. Thank you for your interest in the RTC, for your many prayers and for your financial support. By God's grace we've achieved a huge amount and we are excited by what is in store next year. We wish you every blessing this Christmas and for the new year.

We are currently working hard to see the Melbourne campus fitted out in readiness for classes in February. There is still a lot of work to be done, so please pray that God would enable us to complete everything on time. Work is well underway on the Child Care Centre that is being built on the front of our property in Geelong:



We continue to look for financial support for the new ventures. If you would like to donate, please see the *Partner With Us* section of our website.

One big prayer request is to ask the Lord to send us new students for 2017. We'd love to see many students enrolled in the various modes of training we offer and to see people in Melbourne take up the opportunity to study at the RTC.

## Melbourne Campus Open Days

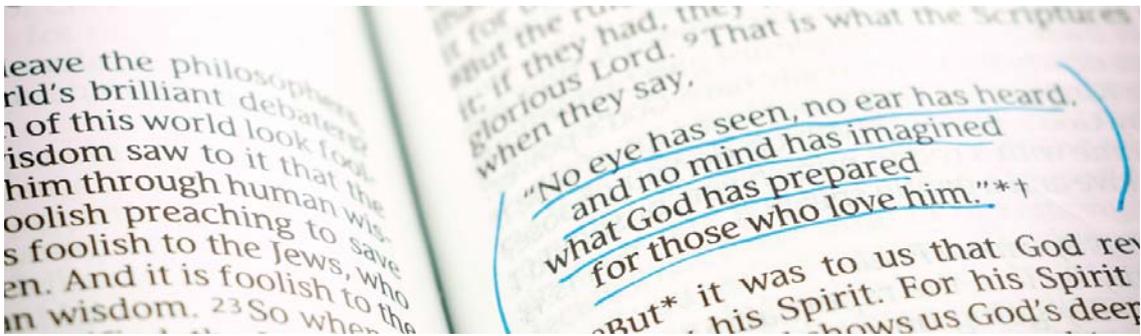
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We had our first Melbourne Campus Open Day last week and look forward to further Open Days in the new year. If you are interested in study at the RTC in 2017, come along and see our new facilities at Level 3, 221 Queen Street on:

- Tuesday 24 January, 3pm – 7pm
- Thursday 9 February, 3pm – 7pm



While these days are for potential students and their families only, once our building is fully ready there will be a public open day on Saturday 18 February, 1.00pm – 4.00pm. Anyone who would like to see our new facility is most welcome to come and visit us then.



## 2017 Flexible Study Options

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RTC is offering an exciting range of study options for next year. Here are some study ideas you might want to consider:

- learn *Biblical Greek* this year, with classes on Wednesdays in Melbourne and live online
- come to an after-work class in Melbourne. *Old Testament Foundations* will be offered from 5.45 – 7.45pm on Tuesdays and will be great for people who live or work in the city
- attend one of the Intensives in May when most of the lecturers are given in one week and the rest is done online. Intensives are being offered on *Christian Worship* and *Christian Ministry in Islamic Contexts*

There are many other units available in class or by distance in subjects like *Evangelism*, *Christian Worldview*, *John's Gospel*, *Jesus and the Gospels* and *Church History*. For all course options please see the *Study With Us* section on our website.

All units are accredited by the Australian College of Theology and can be taken toward a diploma, undergraduate degree, graduate degree or graduate diploma. If you are not wanting a degree or diploma, you could consider being an "audit" student (with no assessment or academic credit) for just \$300/unit.

## Ministry Spot: Preaching the Bible's Stories

by Dr. Murray Capill

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Not infrequently, when visiting a church, I preach from an Old Testament (OT) narrative, and I am then told by people that they don't hear much preaching from Old Testament stories. While OT stories are often the mainstay of the Sunday School curriculum, many preachers avoid them like the plague. They are regarded by many preachers, for good reason, as difficult to preach. But although they are challenging, they are also some of the most enjoyable and exciting parts of the Bible to preach.

It is clear that narrative matters to God. In his wisdom, he has chosen to give over 40% of his OT self-revelation in the form of story. But how should preachers handle OT narrative? What are the keys to preaching stories well? I'd like to suggest six things preachers need to avoid if they are to open up the God-intended purpose of an OT narrative.

***It is clear that narrative matters to God. In his wisdom, he has chosen to give over 40% of his OT self-revelation in the form of story.***

First, *avoid ignoring the story and just preaching the theological truths that underlie it.* In preaching narrative, the stories themselves matter. They are not a disposable husk that we should dispense with as soon as possible in order to preach the key theological truths the story

embodies. The story itself is important. This is God's chosen way of conveying the truth and we should follow the story, enjoying its dynamics, following its plots, getting to know its characters, observing the twists and turns, the tensions and resolutions. We need to live in the story, not just extract three propositions from it, as if we were preaching on an epistle or some more didactic portion of the Bible. Get into the story because it will make the truths it contains fresh and striking. It will also make clear that God acts in history, in our lives and in this world.

Having said that, however, we must *avoid merely re-telling the story*. While we want to live in the story we must do more than re-tell it in our own way, fleshing our cultural and historical details and helping people picture what was happening. That is great, but we must also interpret the story and preach its main point.

The intended meaning of a story is not always clear. Stories can be taken in different ways and they are not all valid. Preachers need to interpret the story, saying what it really means, showing why it matters and demonstrating how the story is to impact our lives. Often the best way to do that is to work progressively through the story, casting light on it, explaining it, and working toward its main message. One of the clues to discovering the main message is to read the narrative through the eyes of the first readers. What did it mean for them? Why was it recorded for them? What would they have taken from the story in their situation? That becomes the basis for interpreting it today.

As we look for the main message, a third thing we should *avoid* is *making the characters in the story the heroes rather than preaching God as the hero of every story*. The story is never chiefly about Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David or Elijah, but about the God of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David or Elijah. We always need to take a God's eye view of the passage, asking, what is God up to? What is he doing? What does this show us about his character and his plan? Only as we see what God is revealing about himself can we determine what we are meant to take from the story. God is always at work in this world and among his people, keeping his promises, shaping his people, advancing his mission and bringing about his purposes. We need to observe God's ways, highlight his character, show his plan. We must proclaim God so that those who hear us come away with a grand picture of what it is to know and follow the God of Israel.

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As well as refusing to make the main characters of the story the heroes, we must *avoid proclaiming moral lessons that are not anchored in the gospel*. Both OT and NT stories provide examples for us to follow and supply lessons for life. James points to the example of Elijah, Hebrews 11 has countless examples of faith, 1 Cor. 10 gives warning from the experience of Israel, and Jesus warns us saying, "Remember Lot's wife." But while we must note these warnings and examples, we are never meant to merely preach moral lessons.

It is easy when reading OT stories to identify with the main character and then have a "be like them" or "don't be like them" message. But it can become rather arbitrary as to whether a character is a good example or not, and most frequently the biblical narrator never says. It can also be dubious to align ourselves with the king, or judge, or priest, or prophet of God's people instead of with God's people themselves. We are best, then, to proceed by making observations from the story not only about the main character, God's people and God's purposes, but also about human nature. As we observe human nature we will be driven again and again to the gospel. We will be drawn to preach Christ and his saving, transformative grace.

In preaching Christ there is another thing we must avoid. We should *avoid contrived ways of preaching Christ rather than simply seeing the stories as part of the bigger gospel story which reaches its climax in Jesus*. In Christocentric preaching it can seem at times as though preachers use hermeneutical magic and exegetical smoke and mirrors to suddenly find Jesus in an OT text. Or preachers can be painfully predictable so that the congregation is thinking, "Here comes

the Jesus bit.”

Christocentric preaching at its best is quite different. We simply preach the realities of the text in the light of the gospel. We can't adequately speak of sin, or grace, or salvation, or future hope, or enemies, or despair, or idolatry or any other spiritual reality, without speaking of God's ultimate solution to that in the gospel. The Old Testament cries out for the New, the law paves the way for the gospel, the ancient promises of God find their fulfilment in Christ, and every OT story leads ultimately to the greatest story of all – the story of Christ the Redeemer.

When we are committed to theocentric preaching (God is the hero of every story) and Christocentric preaching (preach the gospel every time), there is one more danger we must avoid. *Avoid hovering so high above the narrative that every part of the story (and the OT as a whole) has basically the same message* We need to dig down into the details of each narrative, rather than floating high above and preaching biblical theology every time. Such preaching is not only boring but deficient. It fails to deal with the richness of God's revelation. While we must always have an eye to God and the big picture, we must preach the particulars of each chapter. What is God doing with these particular people? What particular sins is he addressing, what needs is he meeting, what truths is he revealing? Who is he using, why and how? God-centred gospel preaching should not be vague and predictable but specific and fresh as we preach the unique dynamics of each story.

If we avoid these six shortcomings we will be on the way to preaching OT narrative well. And we just might find that both we and our congregations enjoy it!



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