

## Seeing the Images in the Bible

### *An Exercise for individuals or small groups*

So you've read the book, and even begun using some of the exercises in the back. Good: Working with the material you already have is the best way to be ready for more. And there is more; I've tried to be clear that Picturing the Gospel is only a beginning. The Bible is full of images that help us grasp what God has done for us in Jesus. And, if you are reading this, I take it you are not satisfied just to read what other people see in the Bible. You want to read the Bible yourself and learn to see beyond what you've seen before, letting the writers there show you their images clearly.

You could, of course, just dive in. Already, your eyes will probably catch more of the vibrant language in the Bible, now that you are looking. But here I'm offering a first step back into the Bible. Rather than the lecturer I was in the book, here I'll be the tour guide. I'll walk you by some good examples of the architecture and ask you to observe it, so you can get a feel for it yourself. We'll take a look at two passages from the New Testament, and let them speak about Jesus in their own voice. We'll note what images the authors paint for us, and how each gives us distinct angles on what God has done for us in Jesus.

### **Galatians 3:36 – 4:7**

First we'll see a passage in the letter to the Galatians. Here Paul is writing to Christians who are being lured into another way of being right with God; They are being told that being Jewish is the way, when they are already God's people. And here we are listening in as Paul passionately pleads with them to remember the gospel. (We tend to think that the New Testament letters are just theology, and that the Gospels are the stories. But the letters are deeply embedded in the drama of life, and to hear them rightly we need to enter into their story.) So, let's see what picture Paul wants his people to get as they face this temptation.

Read through the passage, and note (perhaps even mark or jot down) the terms that build images for you.

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

*What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.*

*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. (Galatians 3:36-4:7 NIV)*

Here are some questions for you to think through:

- How does Paul build his main image, that of the son or heir? Be thorough, go back and note all the terms that help bring this image to life.
- How does the image of redemption from slavery come in? What does it add that helps to round out the sonship picture?
- Now, think about how this image speaks about what God has done for us. How would you summarize what it is saying about 1.) where we were, 2.) what God did, and 3.) where we now stand?
- What about this image makes you grateful for what God has done? (Thank him!) What is it offering that you need? (Ask him for it!)
- Who else do you know that could hear this as good news? Think about how you might tell them. But for now, start praying for them, that this word might become true in their life.

Notice that none of the questions above is particularly brilliant or original. In fact, that's the beauty of them; They are just ordinary questions that will help you mine out extraordinary treasure for life. Being brilliant is sometimes a matter of persisting in the right direction, and asking the right questions until you get a good answer. So let's practice one more time carrying these questions with us as we encounter another passage in the Bible.

### **Luke 13:10-17**

We'll move on to a passage in the Gospels. When we read the Gospels we have to be careful, like when we read the epistles; If we sometimes mistake the letters for bare theology, we can sometimes mistake Gospel accounts as simple stories. We can assume they have less theological depth than the letters. This is not true at all, they are deep and rich tellings of the gospel – they just preach in a different style.

The Gospels preach the gospel beyond their telling of Jesus' death, too. It is right to focus on the cross – the whole story of Jesus comes to a climax there. But it is also true that as we see the Savior live and act, we see his true nature and the nature of the salvation he brings. So as we see him live and teach here, we can find true language that paints images of the gospel for us.

So again, read through the passage, and take note of the terms that build images for you.

*On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.*

*Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."*

*The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"*

*When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing. (Luke 13:10-17, NIV)*

Some questions for you to think through:

- What images are suggested by the language here? How is each image built, using what terms, and by whom? (Note how Luke helps frame the scene, and how Jesus interprets what is going on.)
- How do the images here work together? What does one add that helps to round out the other?
- Now, think about how this picture speaks about what God has done for us. How would you summarize what it is saying about where we were, what God did, and where we now stand?
- What about this image makes you grateful for what God has done? (Thank him!) What is it offering that you need? (Ask him for it!)
- Who else do you know that could hear this as good news? Think about how you might tell them. But for now, start praying for them, that this word might become true in their life.

Well, that's it. Hopefully this has been a helpful exercise for you, but of course, it's just a start. Just like a quick jog around the track, it might have been invigorating and a promising beginning, but it won't do much for you by itself. First tries must be followed by disciplined work, which becomes a maintained habit, which builds a settled pattern. So try making it a habit to ask, as you read your Bible, How is this passage preaching the gospel to me? How do I need to take it in? The more you look, the more you'll see. Carry on – I wish you all the best.

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